The Guardian

by Emily_F6

Summary

Guardian: a person who guards, protects, or preserves.

When a terrible accident claims the life of May Parker, Tony Stark steps up as Peter's guardian. But it's not just a traumatized super-teen he'll have to worry about when he receives a transmission from Thor.

Notes

I've never written a Marvel fanfiction before, so I'll admit to being a bit nervous. Not to mention, this has been done before, probably better than I could ever do it. But I enjoyed writing this so maybe someone will enjoy reading it.

Also, for this story, despite how excited I am for Infinity War, this story ignores Infinity War.
It took Tony three days to hear about what had happened. Three days. Three days where the kid could have been getting the best medical care in the world, rather than laying in a regular Queens hospital ill-equipped to handle his particular...needs. Mutation. Whatever. Three. Days. And he had no idea how to forgive himself for that.

Things had been...fine. Normal. Heck, good. Things had been good! After the kid turned him down for a spot on the Avenger's, or what was left of them, he started having the kid over every couple of weeks for suit upgrades, reinstalling the parachute the kid absolutely could not remember to tell Tony needed reinstalling, no matter how many times Tony all but begged him to, and general mentoring. At least, it started out that way.

The first time Happy had delivered the kid to the compound for one of these meetings, Peter had stared, mouth agape, at the lobby and the living quarters and the training room, all of which he had been shown on a brief tour meant more to fill time than familiarize him with the place. Honestly, Tony had had no idea what to do with the teenager. There were only so many upgrades he could install in a suit. He'd introduced him to Rhodey properly, and Vision who had smiled at the kid while he'd asked a million questions, answering them all patiently. Then Peter had stood in the middle of Tony's private lab, turning in slow circles as he took it all in and Tony worked.

So for Tony, despite the twinge of amusement he got watching Peter Parker stare in awe at everything Tony took for granted, it had been kind of...awkward. Impersonal. Any Tony Stark didn't really do awkward. He was used to being in charge of situations, but this kid...this kid that so obviously idolized him but also feared him a little...this kid made it really hard to feel in charge of anything. He was gonna let this kid down. It was inevitable. He let everyone down at some point or another.

At first, he'd thought that had already happened. He'd taken the kid's suit away, then Peter had crashed a plane on the beach wearing only sweatpants and a hoodie, and then he'd turned Tony down when he'd offered the kid what he'd thought was the one thing he'd wanted. He'd been almost ready to give up when he'd come up with the idea. Let the kid come over twice a month and work on his suit. Be...something to him. A mentor. A...mentor. He'd start with mentor. He knew he had no business trying to be the kid's parent. So mentor it was.

Happy had taken the kid home a few hours later, and after waving halfheartedly in the kid's general direction, Tony Stark had decided that he couldn't stand the thought of working in awkward silence for several hours while this over-eager, painfully-good, usually-impossible-to-shut-up Spider-kid sat in awkward, awed silence twice a month. And there was no way he was gonna cancel...call the kid up after one visit and tell him it wasn't working out...that he'd just have a drone pick up the suit when it needed fixing. So the next time, he'd had food and juice ready for the kid like some kind of soccer mom, ignoring the snort from Rhodey when his friend had walked by and found him putting plates of sandwiches out.

The bewildered but grateful look on the kid's face when he'd arrived to find Tony in the kitchen offering him food had reminded the man that this kid had to eat practically every hour thanks to his spider-mutation...and that he hadn't fed him last time. So from then on, there had been a mini fridge in his lab filled with juice, a counter devoted to snacks that he would occasionally partake in so the kid wouldn't feel bad eating alone, and slowly but surely, Peter had started to relax. That had
reminded him that this kid basically worshipped him and that maybe, just maybe, they could be something more than an eccentric billionaire and the kid he was mentoring.

The bi-monthly meetings had turned into weekly ones after a few months. Tony had gotten the idea on a Thursday, the week the kid wasn't supposed to come over. Well, maybe not an idea. An impulse. Half of his inventions had come from impulses. It had been Thursday afternoon and he'd been wondering what the kid was up to. It happened more and more as the weeks went on. He would be in the middle of a meeting or messing around in his lab, and he'd wonder what Peter was doing. If the kid was okay. If he was alone in that apartment, or if he was out being Spiderman, or spending time with the Ned kid who'd hacked his suit. So he'd pulled out his phone, opening the last text message Peter had sent him and writing a new one.

"I think I may have some new ideas for suit upgrades. You busy tomorrow after school?" It had been 1:30, so Peter had been in class, but he hadn't been surprised when his phone had buzzed after only a few seconds.

"Yeah! That sounds great! Are you sure, Mr. Stark?"

"I'll have Happy pick you up."

And that had been that. From then on, every Friday night after school you could find Peter and Tony working in the lab. Then, when they were done with upgrades and repairs, during which Peter had begun to tell Tony all about his week at school which the older man listen to with an indulgent smile that, over a few weeks, turned to real interest, they would head upstairs where there would be homework and science talk. Then, one day, Rhody, who had briefly met Spider-Kid a few times, was waiting for them upstairs with a movie queued up, and it was during this movie that Tony realized he wouldn't know what to do without these weekly meetings. He liked this kid. A lot. Him and Rhody and Pepper were the closest thing to family he had.

So if the accident had happened on a Thursday or a Friday, he would have known sooner. Happy would have gone to pick him up and he wouldn't have been there. But a Monday night? Despite growing more and more attached to his little spider-friend, he did have actual work to do. Dealing with the accords. Ross. Worrying about the other Avengers. His company, which Pepper ran and yet somehow he still had a whole shit-ton of paperwork to deal with. Being a superhero. Charity events. Dinners. Meetings. Pepper had once bought him a paper planner which had run out of space so fast he'd tossed it after a week and a half. Sure, he still listened to the voicemails that Peter left Happy after patrol, having FRIDAY play them while he was working on his suit or putting Ross on mute during their phone conversations. But he didn't always have the chance. And Peter seemed to understand that just fine, more than happy to catch his mentor up on Friday evenings.

On Tuesday night, he'd had a charity event with Pepper. Who the hell decided to put the event on a Tuesday, he didn't know, but his fiance was gorgeous and he only drank one glass of wine...everything was fine. Instead of going down to his lab to work, he stayed upstairs with Pepper. On Wednesday, he had a meeting in DC that lasted the whole day and almost put him to sleep. Instead, he crashed at a hotel and flew back in the morning. Thursday was spent on the phone with Ross, Steve, and five other people who all wanted meetings with him. So he was glad to escape to his lab that evening. He was looking forward to seeing the kid the next day and wanted to be caught up on his voicemails.

Peter's suit monitored his vitals at all times, and anytime certain things happened...too much blood loss, broken bones, loss of consciousness, he got an alert. But there was nothing he could do when Peter wasn't in the suit. Couldn't exactly implant the kid with a tracker...well, he could, but that was crossing even his moral boundaries, especially since he'd have to do it without telling the kid, since
he doubted Peter would go for it. He'd planned on getting Peter a new phone for his birthday in a couple of weeks. One with a tracker. And maybe some other cool new features, like Karen. His aunt didn't like Tony spending too much money on Peter, so he figured he could get away with it if it was a birthday present.

"FRIDAY, play all voicemails from Peter Parker."

"Yes, sir." He didn't think Happy even bothered listening to them anymore, but he still skimmed the texts which, thankfully for Happy, had become a lot less frequent. Maybe twice a week. Sometimes Happy even responded. "Monday, 6:29 pm." The recorded voice told him, then Peter's voice filled the lab while Tony pulled up a holographic display, flipping through suit upgrade ideas.

"Hey, Happy! It's Peter...Parker." Tony snorted. "Just got done with patrol...I stopped three grand-theft bicycles! What is it with people in Queens and stealing bicycles? I mean, it's not like they're even that expensive. I mean...maybe that's insensitive. Maybe those criminals can't afford bikes for their kids...still, they could try to save up or something." Tony scrapped one idea, balling it up in his hands and throwing it behind him, the virtual crumpled ball of paper swishing through a basketball hoop that disappeared in seconds. "I helped a little boy find his mom. She was really worried. Guess he wandered off while they were at the park. Oh, and some guy was trying to mug this kid from my school. He's kind of a jerk but I helped him anyway. And...that's about it. I'm finishing up early since me and May are going out to dinner. She loves this Thai place but it's all the way on the other side of town, so..." He trailed off, and Tony wondered if he was distracted or searching for something to say. "Yeah, sorry. Anyway, we're going out for dinner, and I've got midterms next week so I probably won't be able to patrol as much. Anyway, have a good day!" Tony grinned, finally choosing a screen.

"End of messages." The AI told him. Tony blinked, turning back to the screen that displayed Happy's voicemail and telling himself again that he ought to just give the kid his personal cell.

"What? FRIDAY, play any messages from Peter Parker from this week."

"There are no more messages, sir." Tony stared at the screen, unseeing for a moment. No new messages two nights in a row. Maybe he was studying. Maybe he suddenly decided to stop calling Happy...maybe..."Call Happy. Video call." He commanded, dropping down into a rolling chair at his desk, not giving the man a chance to say much more than 'hello' before asking if he'd spoken to Peter.

On the screen, Happy frowned, looking around the lab where Tony sat. "Uh...no. Not since Friday. I quit checking those voicemails since you started hacking my phone to listen to them. Why not just let the kid have your number, boss?"

Tony ignored that, along with the pit in his stomach as he brought up the display for Spider-Man's suit. Nothing. "Check last footage...last five minutes available." He demanded.

"What? Boss, do you..."

"Hush. Wait..." He waved a hand at the monitor that showed the phone call, watching the bright blue sky appear...Peter was swinging from building to building, the constant movement making Tony dizzy. He checked the time stamp. "Monday...6:37 pm." He murmured.

"Boss?"

"He hasn't been in the suit since Monday night." Tony watching on the monitor along with Happy...watched Peter reach his window, climb up the fire escape, and step into a messy bedroom
before he pulled off the mask and the feed went dark.

"The kid's probably been studying for midterms. You're gonna see him tomorrow…"

"End call." He barked, pushing himself to his feet and telling himself that he was worrying for nothing. Happy was probably right…Peter would have called him if something was wrong…except he didn't have Tony's number. Then Peter would have called Happy. "Call Peter Parker." He told his AI, resigned to worrying until he talked to the kid.

The phone rang and rang, eventually prompting him to leave a voicemail. "Hey, kid. It's Tony. Call me back." He ordered, gesturing for FRIDAY to end the call. She did. Staring for another minute at the blank screen where the Spider-Man Baby Monitor footage had been, he groaned, running a hand through his hair. "FRIDAY…call Ned Leeds. Voice call."

The phone rang three times before the kid picked up. "Hello?" His voice was soft and hesitant…like he was at school or something. Tony checked the time. It was 7:13. Surely their nerd club was out by now.

"Ned? This is Tony Stark." He expected some gasping…maybe some stammering. Instead, there was a long, painful silence.

"Prove it." Tony sighed, running a hand down his face.

"FRIDAY, switch call to video." He commanded, and a few seconds later, Peter's friend's face filled the screen. He'd never seen the kid before, just heard Peter ramble on about him. Apparently, the kid was 'great' and 'really smart' and had hacked Peter's suit. And Tony made it a point to keep the phone numbers of the kid's friends, just in case.

When he looked more closely at the teen whose eyes had widened upon seeing the billionaire's face, he felt his stomach drop. He was sitting against a white wall, eyes red-rimmed. "Mr. Stark?"

"Yeah. Hi. You talked to Peter?"

"You…Mr. Stark…I thought…I thought you would have…"

Tony frowned, crossing his arms. "Would have what? What's going on? He hasn't called Happy since Monday, and he's getting worried."

"Mr. Stark…I thought you knew." Ned murmured, looking around nervously and lowering his voice. In the background, Tony heard a voice…like an intercom.

"Ned, where are you?"

"I'm at the hospital…sir…you didn't know?"

Tony dropped his arms, moving closer to the screen and feeling what little patience he had begin to evaporate. Fighting to keep his voice level, he spoke. "Know what? Ned, what's going on?" From what he'd heard from Peter, usually the kid would be losing his shit about now. He idolized Iron Man nearly as much as Peter. But this kid looked like he was on the verge of a breakdown.

"He…Peter was in a car accident with his aunt Monday night."

Tony's world greyed out at the edges and he felt his hands start to shake. No. No…not Peter. The kid was fifteen years old. He…he was Spider-Man! There...there was no way.
"FRIDAY, give me Ned Leeds' location." He forced his voice to remain even...sort of. The coordinates flashed on the screen next to Ned's face. "I'm on my way." The kid just blinked at him before his face disappeared, everything going black.
Iron Man shot through the sky, following the path straight to Queens Memorial Hospital. It took less time than driving, but it was still too long. He was too far away. Why had he sold the tower? He was so far away from the kid...when had proximity to Queens become so important? Of course, he knew the answer to that. "How far, FRIDAY?" He demanded.

"Ten minutes, boss." On the display in his helmet, he watched himself as a dot, getting closer and closer to the hospital.

"Faster." His thrusters responded and he pushed his suit to the limit. Nine minutes. Eight minutes. He remembered Ned's face...the kid's red eyes and the way he'd just stared at him. 'I thought you knew.' That's what the kid had said. He thought Tony knew that Peter was in the hospital? It didn't make sense. Didn't that kid know that Tony would have been there? Of course he would have! Peter couldn't be in a hospital...he needed private medical care...medical care by a team that knew who he was...what he was. From people that Tony trusted. Helen. He needed Helen. He barked out the order for FRIDAY to call her, and the phone in his suit rang five times before she picked up.

He filled her in, practically begging her to come, but when she asked for a little more detail, he admitted that he had no idea what had happened to the kid...only that he was in a car wreck. "Find out what's happened and send me the information as soon as you can, Stark. I'm on my way. You have a team waiting?"

He swore, shaking his head in the suit. Three minutes. Maybe he was overreacting. Maybe Peter was fine. Ned had been crying...three days after the accident. Hadn't offered to let him talk to Peter.

"No...I just found out."

"I'll take care of it. I'll send a team to the compound...you'll want to move him there?"

"Yes. His aunt, too." One minute.

He folded the armor into a suitcase he could roll behind him and hurried down the hall, following the path on his phone that led him to Ned Leeds who sat with a woman who must have been his mother, and another girl with her hair in a messy ponytail and red eyes. The girl glared up at him, then went back to staring at him clenched hands in her lap, apparently deciding to ignore him. "Mr. Stark..." Ned seemed bewildered, and Tony dropped the suitcase, coming to stand in front of the kid who jumped to his feet.

"Nice to finally meet you, Ned. Pete's told me all about you." The billionaire held a hand out, more worried when Ned just shook it before glancing back at him mom who had also stood.

"Um...this is my mom, Mr. Stark. Mom, this is..."
"Tony Stark." He interrupted, holding his hand out to her. The woman took it, barely managing to meet his eyes. She was exhausted...he wondered how long they had been waiting.

"It's nice to meet you, Mr. Stark. May, she...she told me a lot about everything you've been doing for Peter." Tony nodded, dropping his arms to his sides and looking down at the girl who had remained sitting, wiping at her eyes and refusing to look back up at him.

"Um...that's Michelle," Ned muttered. As if that explained everything, Tony nodded again. He vaguely remembered that name...maybe she was in that nerd club with Peter.

"Where are they?"

Ned went pale, glancing back at his mom who opened her mouth, then closed it again. It was Michelle who spoke, though. "You really don't know?" She snapped, ignoring the look Ned shot her. Tony took a deep breath, reminding himself that yelling at a crying teenage girl in a public waiting room might give him even more bad press than the crap with the Accords.

Instead, he spoke patiently. Softly. Like he was talking to a toddler. Maybe that wasn't the right move. "Michelle, right? I hadn't heard from Peter for a few days, and no one called me…"

"We tried!" She all but snarled at him, jumping to her feet and balling her fists, getting so close that he had to fight not to take a step back despite Ned grabbing her arm. "He wouldn't shut up about how great you were, and how cool it was to hang out with you, so we thought you'd want to know that he almost died! That he could still die! So we tried, and we tried! And your fucking secretary hung up on us every time!"

"MJ…" Ned reached out, grabbing her arm and pulling her back. "I'm sorry, Mr. Stark…" Tony swallowed hard, waving a hand and shaking his head while Ned pulled her away.

"It's fine." He managed to get out without choking on his words. They'd tried...and someone had hung up on them. To be fair, no one calling the public company line could be expected to actually reach him. "His phone?" Tony asked, afraid he already knew the answer.

"Destroyed." Ned murmured.

"Ned, why don't you two go to the cafeteria...get some dinner." His mother suggested softly, a hand on her son's shoulder.

"Hold up a second, Ned. Give me your phone." Tony held out a hand, stubbornly not looking at the girl. The kid only hesitated for a second, glancing at Michelle before reaching into his pocket and handing it over. An android...he needed to get these kids StarkPhones. Opening up the contacts list, he typed in his name and cell number, handing it back. "Now you've got my cell. You need me, you call me."

For the first time since he'd met the kid, Ned looked properly impressed...like the super Iron Man fan Peter was always telling him his friend was. For a second, he wanted to take it back...or warn the kid that if he used his personal connection to Tony for a party trick, he'd come after him in the Iron Man armor. But Ned was already pulling his friend down the hallway, and Mrs. Leeds was staring uncomfortably at the floor.

"Where's Peter? And May?" He asked, realizing that they were starting to get some curious looks. Wishing he'd worn a hat or something, he turned his back to the others sitting in the waiting room. Thankfully, it wasn't that busy, and they were tucked into a corner close to the receptionist's desk.

"Mr. Stark…"
"Tony." He corrected her immediately.

"Tony, May died on impact." She murmured, arms crossed tightly, one finger coming up to wipe her eyes. Once more, his world seemed to gray out. He felt sick, his stomach turning over, but he refused to be sick in the middle of a public waiting room in front of Ned's mother. "Apparently, Peter realized what was happened and tried to shield her...he took the brunt of the impact. But...May was pronounced dead at the scene." Tony dropped his head into his hands, taking a deep, steadying breath, and trying to ignore the tightening in his chest. May was Peter's last living relative. There was no one left. The kid was alone.

No. The kid was not alone.

"Where's Peter?"

"In surgery...his second one so far. He hasn't woken up..." She broke off, running a tired hand down her face. "We've been up here every day after school...they let us see him for a few minutes yesterday."

"Okay...okay." He shoved the heels of his hands into his eyes, nodding to himself. Peter was alive. He could work with that. He could fix this. "I can fix this." He said it out loud, like that would make it true. It was what he did. He fixed things. Mrs. Leeds watching him hesitantly, like he was going to snap at any moment. Her next words made that a real possibility.

"The State sent someone...he doesn't have any living relatives." She said it softly, sadly, like that was the end. Like Peter had already been taken into foster care and there was nothing left to do. That he was lost to them.

"No...not happening." Not to Peter. Not when he had already lost his parents and then his uncle and now his aunt. Not when Tony could fix this. "Excuse me for a second." She nodded. Pulling out his phone, he took a few steps away, leaving Ned's mom to sit back down while he dialed Pepper.

She answered on the first ring, sounding almost frantic. "Tony? What's going on? Happy said..."

"I need my lawyers."

"Oh no...no...Tony, what did you do?" He couldn't even be offended. She wasn't wrong. He had a long history of...impulsive decisions. This was one of them...that didn't make it any less right.

"Peter's gonna live with us...I need the lawyers to make that happen. Don't care how...we'll work it out later. I'm gonna need to be his legal guardian."

"What about his aunt...you can't just..."

"She's...they were in a car accident. She didn't make it." Pepper sucked in a breath, but he kept going. "Peter's at Queen's Memorial. I want him moved to the facility upstate. Helen's already getting a medical team together..."

"Tony, I'm so sorry." She murmured. He shook his head, as though she could see him.

"He's going to be fine. He's in surgery. He'll be fine."

"Okay. I'm sure he will be." She spoke softly like he was a wounded animal or something. He hated it. Hated that he wasn't sure. He had no idea how bad it was. No idea if Peter was going to be okay. He thought about the kid that came to his lab every week, practically bouncing in place as he worked alongside Tony and chattered about school, and he felt like throwing up. He should have known...he
should have checked his messages earlier. He should have made sure someone was keeping a closer eye on him. Had cameras set up in their apartment...put a tracker on the kid. Something. Anything. "I'm going to call your lawyers, okay? We'll...we'll figure this out."

She was about to hang up, the 'I love you's' already exchanged when a thought occurred to him. "Wait...I also need a memo sent out to every secretary, tech support, public service worker...everyone from SI that might ever have to answer a public phone call."

She was quiet for a moment, confused. "...okay."

"If anyone so much as mentions Peter Parker in a phone call, I want the call sent directly to me."
Someone had hung up on those kids when they'd been trying to reach him. And sure, Ned had his personal cell number now, but he didn't want to risk that happening ever again.

He sat back down beside Mrs. Leeds, neither of them speaking until Ned and a much more subdued Michelle returned. In Ned's hand was a bag, and he pulled out a sandwich that he handed to his mom. She took it with a soft 'thank you' and then, after a long moment of hesitation, he reached into the bag again, pulling out another sandwich that he hesitantly held out to Tony. "I, uh...didn't know what you'd like…"

"Thanks, Ned." He reached up, clapping the kid on the shoulder and opening the plastic wrap on the sandwich, barely tasting it even as he took a bite. Still, the kid had bought it for him, and he was Peter's best friend. He guessed he owed him that much. Beside Ned, Michelle curled up in a ball, her feet resting on the edge of her chair, refusing to speak to anyone, not that anyone else was speaking anyway. He wanted to tell the kids he was sorry, but he didn't have the words. What was he supposed to say? That he'd been busy and hadn't been able to text Peter or even ask Happy to check on him? That he was having memos sent to every employee who'd ever get near a phone that they were to send all phone calls involving Peter straight to him? What good did that do?

The ringing of a cell phone startled all of them, and Michelle pulled hers out of her pocket, shoving it against her ear. "Yeah?" She asked, her voice a hoarse whisper. Tony stared at the floor at his feet, trying not to look like he was listening. Ned was scrolling through his own phone, not seeming to be looking at anything in particular. "No, I'm...I'm at the…" She sighed, and Tony glanced up when she closed her eyes, jaw tight. "Dad, I'm at the hospital." There was a long silence, and she swallowed hard, shoving the phone in her pocket. For a long minute, she was silent, a hand over her mouth, and Tony felt a twinge of concern he tried to push away. He already had one teenager to worry about. Dropping the hand and pushing herself to her feet, she brushed some hair out of her eyes. "I'll see you at school tomorrow, Ned. Mrs. Leeds."

"Michelle, wait." Mrs. Leeds checked her watch, lips pursed, and Tony realized it was almost 9. "We'll give you a ride home. Ned, we should get going too." She glanced over at Tony who nodded. "Go ahead. I'm gonna stay here." The kid's friend looked like he was thinking about arguing, but his mom put a hand on his arm, pulling a little.

"Mr. Stark, if anything happens…" Ned started, hesitating at his mom's side.

"Don't worry, kid. I'll call you if they tell me anything." He promised.

"Thank you, Tony." Mrs. Leeds murmured, and he nodded to the woman, forcing something similar to a smile on his face.

And then he was alone, staring at the white tile beneath his feet. Alone with his thoughts, it all flashed by again. Three days. Car accident. He tried to protect her...of course Peter had tried to
protect her. Pinching the bridge of his nose and taking a long, deep breath, Tony stood, walking over to the receptionist's desk. "Yes, sir?" She asked, looking up and obviously recognizing him.

"Hi. Tony Stark. Can you tell me anything about Peter Parker?" She hesitated, glancing around the waiting room.

"Is he...any relation?"

"He's my intern. And...I'm going to be his guardian. As soon as the paperwork is done." She nodded slowly, glancing around again, then typed something into her computer. Her eyes darted from him to the screen, then she was leaning forward. He copied her, leaning in as well.

"I'm afraid I can't really tell you much. He's in surgery. And since you're not family…"

"That kid is my family." He corrected, jaw tight as he reminded himself that it wasn't her fault...that she had to follow the rules he was more than happy to break. She glanced at the screen again. "When the doctor comes out, can you tell him I'd like to speak to him?"

"Yes, sir." He nodded, thanking her, then going back to the chair he'd claimed for himself to wait...to wait for his lawyers to call and for the doctor to come out so he could tell Helen something. To wait for his kid to come out of surgery.

He was going to take in a kid. It hit him, suddenly. But not just any kid...Peter Parker. Spider-Man. The kid he'd been starting to care about anyway...starting to love like his own family. But now that kid had just lost the only family he had left. Would he even want Tony? Rubbing a hand over his eyes, he made lists in his head. He'd need to read books...learn to help Peter cope with this kind of loss. Heaven knew he hadn't coped with his own. He wanted better for Peter. And they'd need real groceries...and he'd have to figure out how the kid could go to school. And he'd need to get Peter's stuff from his apartment.

On and on the lists were written in his head until a pair of shoes came to a stop right in front of him, a hand coming to rest on his shoulder. "Pepper told you?" He asked without even looking up.

"Yeah." Rhodey sat with a grunt, the braces on his legs adjusting so he could bend his knees. "How is he?"

"All his friend's mom could tell me was that he's in surgery...his second one. They won't give me any information yet...my lawyers are working on it."

"You're gonna adopt him?"

"For now, I'm gonna sign guardianship papers, if my lawyers ever show up." He grumbled, figuring the lawyers were fixing things from afar until it was time for him to sign.

Rhodey didn't know Peter really well...as far as Tony knew, the two had never had much of a conversation, other than discussing what movie they should watch. But Rhodey was always talking about how good the kid was for Tony. How he always knew his old friend would make a good dad. So Rhodey sat with Tony, hand on his back, while Tony tried to sort through his own thoughts. He was gonna take Peter in. The kid was going to be okay and he was going to stay with Tony and...he had no idea what he was going to do. No idea how to raise a kid or look after one for more than a few hours. He liked Peter...the kid was like his family. But he didn't know how to be a parent. He didn't even know if Peter would want Tony to be his parent.

Tony Stark paid a lot of money for lawyers to be on standby every second of every day, so it was no real surprise when a packet of papers was held out to him, one of his lawyers and someone from the
State asking him to read through everything and sign. He hadn't even noticed them coming in. Without hesitation, he signed. Because he paid those lawyers a lot of money and all he wanted was to get his kid to a doctor who knew enough about him to help him. His kid. He was Peter Parker's guardian. The kid had lost everyone else and all he had was Tony and Tony had no idea how to be a father to this kid.

The doctor came out to speak to Tony around midnight after having been directed to him by the receptionist. Rhodey had long since found them coffee and had been sitting vigil with his friend since the lawyers had left. Pepper had called several times to check on him and to ask about Peter, but every time he had to tell her that he had no new information. Of course, he could have hacked into the hospital's records to find out exactly what was going on, but he didn't want to start his guardianship of this kid with a possible lawsuit. So when the doctor asked for the family of Peter Parker, Tony was on his feet before Rhodey could even start to stand.

The doctor blinked, looking confused and frankly exhausted. "Um...Mr. Stark?" He asked, squinting at the billionaire like he wasn't quite sure. He was sure the receptionist had known who he was...maybe the doctor hadn't believed her.

"Tony, please." Tony held out a hand, shaking the doctor's hand. "I'm Peter's legal guardian. We signed the papers about an hour ago. How is he?" He demanded, literally holding his breath.

The doctor nodded. "Dr. Johansson. They mentioned someone had signed for him...Peter took the brunt of the impact...it's a miracle he's alive." He told Tony, gesturing for the man to follow him as they headed down the hallway, leaving Rhodey in the waiting room chair. Tony swallowed hard but gestured for him to continue. "The head injury is what's concerning us the most. He hasn't shown any signs of consciousness since he was found on the scene. His right shoulder was dislocated and his right arm is broken in three places. However, there was something...strange about that." He turned and looked closely at Tony who clenched his jaw. "We had to take him into surgery to reset his arm...it was already healing." Tony didn't say anything. He'd have them sign a nondisclosure agreement as soon as his lawyers could draw one up.

"Is he out of surgery?"

"Yes. We just finished up. There was a puncture wound on his right side. We think he saw the other car coming and attempted to shield his aunt. The car hit on her side...the driver was drunk." Tony felt his chest tighten and had to fight the urge to demand a name...to know who was responsible for taking everything from his kid. "He lost a lot of blood." The doctor kept talking, probably still listing injuries, but then they were standing outside a room that Tony assumed was Peter's. "Broken leg but it looks like that is healing rather quickly as well. He had three broken ribs when he came in…"

"Is he in there?" The doctor paused, then nodded.

"Yes."

"I'm having him transferred to another facility. I have a medical team standing by to transfer him as soon as it's safe to move him."

"I see..." He crossed his arms. "Mr. Stark, I have a few questions..."

"And my lawyers are going to have some questions for you. In the meantime, I want to see my kid."
Waking Up

Things came back slowly. Hearing was the first thing...a voice. Several voices. He didn't recognize any of them. His brain wasn't working, so he couldn't manage to put more than one thought together. All it was managing to do was recognize that sounds were happening, which was less than helpful. Sounds. Voices. Beeping. Something...he didn't recognize all of them. Then he could feel...something. Pain, first. That made him make noises that he didn't mean to make, but then there were voices again...louder voices. Then he was woozy and floaty like he was made of air. He couldn't move, which would have worried him if he could have made his brain worry about anything.

He couldn't remember why he felt floaty and tired and sick, or why flashes of pain would make his whole body seize as though he'd been electrocuted before the floaty feeling came back. Hell, half the time he couldn't remember his own name. It didn't seem to matter. But sometimes, when the pain came and he'd shake and gasp for breath, a hand would card through his hair, or clasp his hand, and he'd calm down a little. It felt nice, having someone squeeze his hand and make noises at him that he couldn't manage to decipher.

Then, one day, he could understand. It was like magic...like the sounds suddenly made sense. "...and you better wake up soon, kiddo. Tony's losing his mind, you know? And your friend's been calling him every day, asking how you're doing." That...that didn't make sense. Wake up? Tony? He frowned a little. "Peter?" Was he asleep? He couldn't tell.

He tried to remember. His brain was like a cloud he couldn't quite catch. Misty. Fill of holes. Desperate, he tried to find the last memory. He was Peter. That was clear now. The person talking to him was...someone. Someone he'd met before. He reached, his head giving a sharp throb when he fought for the memories. Dropping it, he let go, letting himself fall back into sleep.

The next time his brain was working again, someone else was talking. "Come on, kiddo. Just for a second. Please?" He knew that voice. Mr. Stark. If Mr. Stark was talking to him...was he hurt? He tried to force himself to focus. A large hand carded through his hair, and another hand held his. "Peter? It's been over a week, buddy." Why did Mr. Stark sound so tired? And...sad?

He tried again to remember. Mr. Stark's lab. He went there every week now...on Fridays after school. The two of them would work on their suits and Mr. Stark would ask him questions about school. Sometimes they'd go to the living room and watch movies with Rhodey and eat dinner. He remembered upgrading his suit. Working on his webshooters with Mr. Stark. Then...nothing else. "Pepper came by today. Said she missed you." The hand holding his squeezed. "You're mostly healed up...just your head." The hand on his head disappeared and Peter decided to try communication. "So...you think you could wake up?"

He managed a noise. He couldn't open his eyes yet, but the noise came out. "Peter? Hey, can you hear me?" He made another noise...more a groan than anything, his fingers managing to curl around Mr. Stark's. It wasn't much, but it worked. The hand went back to his head, brushing gently over something that felt like a knot that throbbed even under his gentle touch. "Pete?"

"M....sr....Srk?" His mouth felt disconnected from the rest of his body, and the hand squeezed his again. When Mr. Stark spoke, it was gentler than he'd ever heard him. Something must be really wrong.
"Yeah, Spider-Kid. It's me. Open your eyes, would you?"

"Msr...Strk...wha…?" His mouth felt like it was full of cotton like he couldn't form words, but he tried. He had to try...for Mr. Stark.

"Open your eyes, Peter. Come on." He urged again, and Peter figured it must be important.

"Why?" He muttered instead of actually opening his eyes.

"You've been asleep for over a week, Peter." Mr. Stark told him. He was still holding Peter's hand which was...odd. Mr. Stark was always pretty nice to him. He'd pat him on the shoulder or throw his arm around him...but holding his hand...that was new. Was he that upset? What had they been doing? Had he gotten hurt on a mission or what? He couldn't remember a mission. Not since...the Vulture, right? There had been no big missions since then.

So Peter tried. Squeezing his eyes then relaxing, he did his best, fighting for a moment, then managed it for about a second before the lights were too much. Groaning, he slammed them shut again. "FRIDAY close the curtains." Mr. Stark commanded. "Try that, Peter." He obeyed, not wanting to let Mr. Stark down. This time when he opened his eyes, he could just make out his mentor sitting beside his bed. "Hey, kiddo. There you are." He let out a breath, looking more relieved than he'd ever seen him.

Mr. Stark looked...bad. His hair was a mess of waves and was fluffed up like he'd been running his hands through it, and his eyes had dark bags underneath, his facial hair patchy and unkempt. He was wearing a sweatshirt with a stain on the front, eyes tight and worried. Peter couldn't focus on much, but he knew that Mr. Stark usually looked better than this. Even when he'd taken Peter back home after Germany, he'd been more put-together.

"You...okay?" Peter asked, fighting to get the words out. Why was it so hard to talk? Mr. Stark huffed out something like a laugh.

"Yeah, Pete. I'm fine. You, on the other hand...you've looked better, kid." Mr. Stark was being...gentle. Careful. Peter's stomach clenched...something big was wrong.

"I...what hap'nd?" He muttered, bringing up a clumsy hand to try and wipe at his face, then froze when he saw the cast. Flexing his fingers, he dropped the cast back on the bed beside him and started to move when Mr. Stark put a steadying hand on his shoulder.

"Woah. Stay still, Peter. Your arm's pretty much healed...the cast is a precaution. It can probably come off tomorrow."

"Wha...wha hapn'd?" Peter asked again, speaking slowly and struggling to find the words. Tony sighed, bringing up a hand to his mouth and rubbing it over his face.

"How's your head?" He asked instead of answering. Worried now, Peter tried to sit up, but Tony held him down. "Just...stay there, okay? Until Helen can look you over."

"Who...who's Hel'n?" He asked, blinking away the exhaustion that tugged at him and feeling his frustration grown with his inability to talk. He was so tired. More tired than he'd ever been, and his head gave a sharp stab of pain.

"She's your doctor. Well, she's...she's on my payroll...she's the Avengers' doctor." The exhaustion was pulling harder and harder and when he blinked, it was too hard to open his eyes again. "Peter? Hey, don't..." But it was too late...he was gone again.
The next time he woke, it was sudden. His eyes flew open in the dark room, and he looked around to find himself in a small room in a hospital bed, albeit a comfortable one. Thick curtains covered the windows, and beside him was a machine beeping steadily that he assumed was tracking his heart rate. There was an IV in his arm that he grimaced at but decided to leave alone in case it was important. His head ached, the constant pounding in the back of his skull a reminder that something was wrong. Had he hit his head? He didn't remember.

He lifted his arm, frowning at the cast still on his arm, then looked around the room again...and found Mr. Stark in a chair, slumped over, his head on his own shoulder. Blinking a few times, he tried to push himself up. This time, it worked. Putting his weight on his arms, he sat himself up and leaned against the pillows. "Mr. Stark?" He asked hesitantly, hating how weak he felt.

The man jumped to attention, huge eyes taking in Peter who was now sitting up and scratching at the faded bruise on his forehead. "Peter? Shit...how long have you been up?"

"Uh...just a few seconds. I think..." He rubbed at his head, blinking heavily. The exhaustion still pulled him, but he fought back. At least he could talk now. "What happened, Mr. Stark? Where am I?"

"Medical bay. Avengers facility. You were at a hospital in Queens...I had you transferred here as soon as it was safe to move you...as soon as I found out." He put his hand over his mouth and was uncharacteristically quiet for a moment. "What do you remember, kid?"

"I...nothing, really? We were in your lab on Friday, right? What day is it?"

"Wednesday."

"Wednesday...it's been...five days?"

"It's been about nine days...you've been unconscious since last Monday night."

"Monday...but...what happened? Was it Spider-Man? Were we on a mission?" Mr. Stark gave a faint, strained smile, shaking his head.

"Um...no..." He took a long moment, clenching his hands in his lap and suddenly looking grim. "You...there was an accident. You...you and your aunt. A drunk driver hit your car."

He felt like he'd been doused by cold water...like his blood had turned to ice. He didn't remember. None of it. "An accident?" He repeated faintly. He was Spider-Man. How had he been in an accident? What did that even mean? His brain ran in circles but he couldn't make it connect.

"Yeah, Peter...you guys were, um...you were on your way back from dinner."

"Where is she?" He asked, his voice suddenly weak. But he knew...somehow he knew. She would be there. If he was hurt and she was able to, she would be there. She was always there when he was hurt or sick...always. After she'd found out about Spider-Man, she'd been even more protective, even though he hadn't been seriously hurt since she'd found out. She'd started calling Tony at all hours, demanding updates that the man had patiently given her. She always wanted to be involved. So where was she?

Tony's face dropped a little, eyes struggling to meet Peter's. He opened his mouth, then closed it, taking a deep breath. Mr. Stark didn't really do emotions...he knew that. So why did the man look so sad? "Pete..." His mentor started, but Peter shook his head, his stomach in a knot. If he didn't hear it, it wouldn't be true.
"No. No...no...Mr. Stark..." He wanted to back away...to run, but he couldn't even get out of bed. "She's okay, right? She's okay. She's gotta be..."

He'd never seen Mr. Stark look so sad, the way his jaw got tight and his eyes softened. "I'm so sorry, Peter."

"No...please." He looked up at his mentor, desperate as his eyes filled. An irrational thought passed through his brain. He's Iron Man...he can do anything. "Please. Not her...please."

"Oh...Peter..." Mr. Stark reached out and gripped his shoulder.

"Not her too..." His voice broke and Mr. Stark grabbed both of his shoulders, pulling him close as he sat on the bed beside him. "Not her too...please..." A hand rubbed up and down his back, a cheek on his hair as he hid his face in Mr. Stark's chest.

"Peter...buddy, she..." Mr. Stark sighed above him, still rubbing his back. "She died on impact."

His whole body jerked like the man had hit him. "No!" He choked on the word, sobbing into his mentor's sweatshirt, the pounding ache in his head only making it all worse. He felt sick...like his world was spinning, and the only thing that kept him grounded were the hands firm on his back, one holding him close and the other making circles.

"It's okay, Peter."

"No, it's not!" He sobbed, one hand curling into a fist, bunching up the material of Mr. Stark's sweatshirt and nearly ripping it. His mentor didn't seem to mind. When he spoke, it was gentle. Persuasive. Calm. Self-assured. Mr. Stark was always so self-assured. He was a superhero.

"No...no, it's not. I know. But, it will be...it will be okay, Peter. I promise. I'm gonna make it okay." He didn't know how to argue with that voice. The voice of an adult, of Iron Man, telling him everything was going to be okay because they were going to make it better. But the pain was like a tangible thing in his chest, gripping his heart in an icy fist and squeezing until he was breathless, gasping and sobbing, unable to calm down no matter what the man sitting beside him murmured. It was like Uncle Ben all over again, only worse. She had been it. The last one in his family left to take care of him. He was fifteen and he was alone. And yeah, he had Tony who looked after him and mentored him, but he'd lost his parents and lost his uncle and now his aunt...he didn't have anyone left to take care of him. He was only fifteen! He needed someone...someone that cared.

He stayed there for a long time, his head against Mr. Stark's chest until someone else came into the room and started asking soft questions he didn't bother trying to understand. His head hurt so bad, and he was gasping for breath that he couldn't quite catch. The gentle hand rubbed up and down his back, Mr. Stark urging him over and over to breathe. But he couldn't...couldn't stop crying for long enough to try.

Then something changed...his head spun even worse and he slumped bonelessly against Mr. Stark, barely noticing when the man laid him back down on the bed, covers being tucked around his shoulders. "...need to rest...Spider-kid...worry...right here..." The words came to him like he was under water, but he found he didn't mind too much anymore. He knew he'd been upset, but found himself drifting off again. A hand brushed his hair back and he let unconsciousness take him.

The third time he woke, it was slow. Hazy. Still painful but not quite as bad. His head still hurt. But the rest of him was fine. The cast on his arm was gone. There were no more IVs, and the curtains were pulled back a little to show a cloudy, overcast New York day. Upstate. He was upstate. At the Avenger's facility. Because May was dead. He waited for that to hurt more...for the pain to overtake
him again, but he just felt numb. Staring dumbly out the window at the trees that surrounded the Medical bay, he wondered how long Mr. Stark would keep him until the social workers came...how long until he was put with a family of strangers and had to figure out how to keep Spider-Man a secret from them. He knew he couldn't stop being Spider-Man...but at the moment, the thought of going out in a suit and fighting crime sounded absolutely exhausting. As did everything else.

He was tired. Not like he wanted to sleep, but like his whole body wanted to remain just the way it was. Horizontal. Motionless. He couldn't make himself focus on any one problem. Trying to remember what had happened, figuring out what would happen to him next...it was all beyond him at the moment. Instead, he stared at the ceiling, looking for minute cracks or imperfections in the paint that he counted. One. His aunt was gone. Two. He didn't want to think about it. Couldn't. Three. If he could just focus on counting, nothing else would matter.

He was up to 31, eyes raking up and down the visible ceiling in tight lines when the door opened. He thought about closing his eyes and pretending to be asleep but figured whoever it was would know he was awake. After all, FRIDAY monitored everything in the building and had probably alerted someone.

"Good morning, Mr. Parker." He glanced over to find a tall woman with black hair pulled tight in a ponytail and assumed she was his doctor. Helen Cho. Mr. Stark had mentioned her, but he couldn't remember much about that. He had a feeling he'd been on some painkillers or something that had messed with his mind.

"Hi." He murmured, unable to ignore her. It would have been too rude. Still, he didn't know if he could manage conversation at the moment.

"How are you feeling?"

"Fine." She hummed, seeming to give up on the idea of having a conversation as she shone a penlight in his eyes and looked at what looked like a StarkPad, scrolling through something as she glanced at him once or twice. The bright light brought a stab of pain to his head that he ignored.

"Any headaches? Nausea?"

"Not really." His head hurt, but it would be fine. It wasn't as bad as it had been. She nodded, reaching out and placing a hand on his shoulder for a moment.

"Mr. Parker, I was so sorry to hear about your aunt." She murmured, and he had to fight not to shrug her off. That would be rude. She worked for Mr. Stark, the last person he wanted to offend, especially now. "It looks like your injuries are healing very well. The break in your arm has healed completely, and your head injury is nearly healed. You had a crack in your skull and there was some swelling, but thanks to your advanced healing, you're doing just fine. You may experience headaches for a while, but those should pass. Let me know if they get worse."

Wondering how he was supposed to do that when he'd probably be put in foster care any day now, he nodded. Surely Mr. Stark could only keep the people from the State away for so long...and he had no idea how long he'd been asleep. He thought about asking but didn't. Couldn't. He didn't really want to know. Didn't want to face it. Ever.

She gave him a tray with a glass of orange juice, a sandwich, and a cup of jello on the little hospital-style tray beside him. He ignored it, staring at the ceiling again, recounting the cracks and dents in the paint. He'd lost his place before.
A Room

Tony eased the boy down on the pillows as his eyes drooped, his body limp on the bed as Tony covered him up, tucking the quilt over his shoulders. Glancing up and making sure Helen was facing the machine and messing with her StarkPad, he wiped the boy's eyes with his thumbs, brushing away tear tracks. He hadn't wanted to drug the kid...but Peter was still in a lot of pain, and Helen was worried about him getting too worked up. "How's his head." Tony fought to keep his voice even, needing to know how to fix this.

"He had a pretty serious skull fracture when they brought him in. According to the hospital records, his brain was swelling, but we've got that under control. I upped his nutrition. They weren't giving him nearly enough. The healing takes a lot out of him, and if he doesn't get enough calories, his healing slows down and may even come to a stop. "I'll remove the IV tomorrow so it's important that he gets enough to eat."

"Make sure he eats. Got it." She nodded, lips pressed together in a tight line.

"His arm had begun to heal incorrectly. They took him into surgery and reset it. We spoke to the doctors involved and all have signed nondisclosures...Pepper went to the hospital herself to make sure of it." Tony felt himself smile, chuckling a little. It wasn't like they thought the doctors would tell the press or anything, but it was always better to be safe than sorry.

It was no secret that Pepper was fond of the boy she'd barely spoken to...she'd only been to the compound once or twice when he was there after the initial press conference when their engagement had been announced. She'd been planning the wedding ever since, and he wondered, between world savings, if they'd ever actually get to have a wedding. And now they would have to talk about how she really felt about him taking in a kid.

She liked Peter. A lot. Of course, it was hard not to. She was the one that kept lists of his favorite foods on Tony's computer and had his room at the compound redone. Tony had walked by it one day and had found that the walls had been painted a deep blue and covered in Star Wars and Avengers posters, and that a new TV completely with some kind of video game system had been installed. It looked like a teenage boy's room...and Tony had to admit, he had liked the idea of having Peter stay the night sometimes. But he'd never asked, figuring he had plans with his nerd friends or something.

Now it was his room. Peter's room. Because Peter was his kid. Tony was Peter's guardian. His...parent. He hadn't adopted the kid. Not yet. But he was sure he was going to...it was a conversation he wanted to have with Peter first, though. Not when the kid was drugged and exhausted and too grief-stricken to form a real sentence. He reached out, brushing some of Peter's hair back, the curly brown mess on his head making him want to take a real brush to it. The thought made him roll his eyes. The kid didn't need him to brush his hair for him. Teenagers didn't like that...he didn't think. Then again, what the hell did he know about teenagers?

Rhodey knocked on the Med Bay door, which was ridiculous since the room was huge. Peter's bed was one of twelve, all of them curtained off in their own private little cubicles. All were open, and he'd pulled the curtains around Peter's bed open as well. Helen excused herself and he waved his friend over. "How is he?" He wondered, waiting until he was right beside Tony to ask, his voice low like the boy was just sleeping.
"Um...he's been better." Tony murmured, hands useless in his lap. He'd moved to a chair beside the boy's bed, and Rhodey dropped a hesitant hand on his shoulder. Usually Tony would have brushed him off, but he didn't have the energy. He'd been by his kid's side for what felt like days, only eating whatever Helen gave him and barely leaving unless Pepper told him a meeting was mandatory. Even then, he'd blown off at least one of those.

"Tony?"

"Mostly healed. Just...the head injury is taking longer to heal than anything else."

"It's a miracle he survived." His friend murmured, glancing at the machine the kid was hooked up to. "Did you tell him..."

"I told him about his aunt, yes."

"How did he take it?"

"Helen had to drug him...he couldn't calm down." Rhodey sighed, running a hand over his face.

"What about the guardianship?"

"I didn't really get the chance to bring it up. He wasn't in any shape to have a conversation."

Rhodey was quiet for a second, then he squeezed the shoulder under his hand. "Come on, man. You haven't had a shower in days."

"Rhodey..."

"He's asleep. Helen's monitoring him. So is FRIDAY. He shouldn't wake up for a while. You need a shower, some real food, and you need to sleep. Plus, Pepper told me you weren't answering her calls and I need to talk to you about something. Something big."

Tony blinked. He had been ready to argue, but that last part got his attention. "Something big? Something that might interfere with the fact that I just took on the guardianship of a super-powered teenager who just lost the last family member he had left? Rhodey, I don't have time for something big right now..."

"It's Thor."

"Thor?" Tony frowned, looking around the room like the Asgardian might appear. "Thor...here?"

"Not yet. We received a message from him last night...him and Banner."

"Bruce..." That didn't make sense. The Hulk had disappeared...two years ago? More? He was gone. Dead? He didn't know. It was something he tried really hard not to think about. First, things with Cap had gone south, then Peter had come into his life and he'd been looking after the kid ever since. Looking at the sleeping boy on the bed for a long time, he tried to figure it out. Bruce. Thor. He hadn't heard from Thor for just as long. Was it Loki? Something else? Some other threat from space they'd have to deal with?

"I think you're going to want to hear this, Tony." Reaching out, he patted the kid's hand, squeezing for a second.

"I'll be right back, kiddo." He assured Peter, knowing Peter couldn't even hear him. That he was in a drug-induced sleep and that even when he woke up, he'd just gone through a traumatic event and
had lost his entire family and it would probably be months before the kid was even remotely back to
normal. If he was ever back to normal. What the hell did he know about being a father? Especially to
a kid who'd just lost everything? But now Thor was trying to contact them and Bruce was
alive...patting Peter's hand and telling FRIDAY to alert him as soon as Peter woke up, he followed
Rhodey to the elevator and down into the lab.

The message was simple. Thor was on his way to Earth. With Bruce. And Loki. And a lot of
Asgardians. A lot...apparently there had been an apocalypse or something. Tony was having trouble
concentrating. He glanced over at the screen that showed Peter asleep in the Med Bay after it had
played through once. "How is he, FRIDAY?"

"All vitals stable, sir."

That was his kid. Thor was coming. Bruce was alive. Thor and Bruce were bringing Asgard to
Earth…and Loki. Loki was coming to Earth. And he'd just taken over the guardianship of a
traumatized kid.

Tony let Rhodey shove him towards the shower, and after he'd changed, he ate the Chinese takeout
Rhodey had ordered on Tony's credit card. Shower, new clothes, food. Coffee. He insisted on the
coffee. If he was gonna figure this out he was going to need it. But the next order from his friend was
sleep, so, despite the coffee, he lay down in his bed, ordering FRIDAY to turn off the lights. She did,
and for a long moment, he stared at the dark ceiling. "FRIDAY?" He asked after a few minutes.

"Yes, sir?" The blue light on the sensor by the door brightened, a visual representation of his AI. The
speakers filled the building, all of them invisible.

"Bring up the Med bay camera. Peter Parker." The hologram appeared, the screen showing him a
slightly blue image of Peter asleep in the bed. He hadn't moved...Helen was going to remove the IV
in his arm in the morning, and he would need to eat. A lot. She hadn't been kidding about his
metabolism. His body was healing itself, but it would also starve if he didn't have enough food. And
his temperature was a little elevated. Tony waved a hand, having the screen come closer as he flicked
through the screens. Elevated temperature. "FRIDAY, has Dr. Cho..." Before he could finish
speaking, Helen walked into view, glancing at something on a screen beside his bed, then she fiddled
with a wire and the tubes at his side.

"Yes, sir?"

"Nevermind." He muttered, flicking through the kid's readings again. He was fine. Peter was going
to be fine. Physically fine. And Thor was...coming to Earth. With lots of friends. Friends who would
need places to live and maybe jobs and probably some kind of education on living on Earth...or
something. He hadn't known Thor before the man...Asgardian...had basically adjusted to Earth,
thanks to his girlfriend. Loki, on the other hand...he didn't even want to think about Loki, but soon
he would have to. Estimated time to Earth was a week. He had a week. A week to talk to Peter and a
week to figure out what to do with Thor and his insane brother and the rest of the people from
Asgard. A week. He didn't have time to sleep.

He slept anyway. Until ten in the morning, longer than he ever slept. Groaning as the alarm in his
room went off, he made a gesture with his hand. The alarm shut off, and the screen appeared again.
"Peter Parker is awake, sir." He brought up the display, showing Peter staring at the ceiling. The cast
was gone, the IV too. The kid looked rough as Helen Cho left the room, leaving the tray of food on
the table. It wasn't much, but Peter didn't even touch it. He watched for a long minute...watched
Peter stare at the ceiling, watched Helen Cho type on her StarkPad until a message popped up on the
display.
All vitals stable. It appears his head injury is healing very quickly. All other injuries have healed. It would be safe to move him out of the medical bay and may improve his morale. He appears withdrawn and depressed.

Tony jumped to his feet, throwing the blankets off and grabbing the first clothes out of the closet he could find. A Stark Industries T-shirt and jeans. Well, he didn't have any plans to leave the house that day, so it would be fine. Brushing his hair and teeth, then grabbing shoes, he hurried to the elevator, instructing FRIDAY to take him to the Medical Bay.

Peter was still staring at the ceiling when he reached the kid's bed. He barely looked at the man, just muttering a 'Hi Mr. Stark' before turning his attention back to the ceiling. Tony sat on the bed beside the kid, taking a deep breath and folding his hands together. "You gonna eat that, kid?" Peter just shook his head. Grabbing the jello cup, Tony peeled off the plastic lid and took a bite. Swallowing, he looked down at the boy that had barely looked away from the ceiling. "You've got to eat. You know that right?"

"I'm not hungry." That wasn't going to work. Peter had to eat. He might not know how to be a father or even a very good mentor, but the doctor had told him that the boy had to eat, so he'd focus on that for the moment. Tony took another bite of the jello, trying to figure out what to say. He could force it...tell him he had to eat or else. But he could already tell that wouldn't work. Not with Peter. He knew his kid better than that.

"How about we get you out of here? Head up to the kitchen and get you some real food, huh?" He didn't wait for Peter to respond, holding out a hand that the boy took after a second, letting Tony pull him up. Steadying the boy with one hand, he tossed the empty jello cup into the trash. "How's the head?"

"Fine."

"Good. Tell me if it's not, okay? Helen already tell you that?"

"Yeah."

"Good." Peter stumbled a little, the blue pajama bottoms too long as they caught under his foot. "We've got some real clothes for you upstairs, too," Tony told him, putting an arm around him to help steady him. Peter didn't object, following along dumbly into the elevator, then up to the living area which was, thankfully, empty. Passing the kitchen, he led Peter down the hall, past his own room and to the bedroom Pepper had set up for him right next to Vision.

Peter just stared at the floor when they reached the bedroom. "This is your room. There are clothes in the closet and the dresser...we had all of your stuff brought over too." Peter frowned at that, looking around the room and then up at Tony, then back at the room. "Clothes. In all the normal clothes places. Feel free to rearrange them later. Change clothes, then join me in the kitchen. Okay? He clapped a careful hand on Peter's shoulder and the boy nodded slowly, obviously taking longer than normal to process. "Kid? Verbal confirmation required." He spoke directly, his tone almost as snarky as usual, but he was being gentle too.

"Yeah...change. Then meet you in the kitchen." Peter had been to the compound plenty of times...he could find the kitchen. Right? Well, FRIDAY would tell him where to go if he got lost.

"Good. Alright." He patted the kid on the shoulder again, then headed to the kitchen to wait.

Mentally, he went through a list of things he knew how to make. Hot dogs. Pizza pockets. Actually, any kind of pizza product you just threw in the oven. Surprisingly, Thor had always been the best
cook. Steve, too. Even Natasha was better than him. He braced his hands on the counter, pushing the others out of his mind. He needed to focus. Breakfast foods. Bagels. He could put bagels in the toaster oven. And...maybe pancakes. Surely they had frozen waffles. Opening the freezer, he hunted for them and finally found a box. Checking the box for an expiration date, he threw four in his toaster, pushing down the lever and hoping it popped back up eventually.

It did, right as Peter emerged from the hallway, wearing NASA t-shirt and a pair of sweatpants. "Right on time, kid. How do you like waffles? And don't tell me you aren't hungry. Spider metabolism and super healing mean you need to eat more if you don't want to pass out. No one wants that. Got it?" Peter nodded, dropping onto a stool by the counter and staring at the plate in front of him. They were only slightly black on the edges, so Tony took it as a victory. Pushing over the syrup and butter, he made his own plate. "Eat first, then we'll talk. Okay?" Peter nodded, taking a bite of waffles without saying anything.

The kid practically inhaled the two waffles on his plate, then the next four that Tony put on his plate without speaking. Tony thought about making a comment about him not being hungry but decided not to jinx it. The kid was eating. It was a start. So he waited for a few minutes while the kid ate the waffles and drank a glass of chocolate milk, then urged him to leave the dishes in the sink, leading him to the living room and sitting on the ottoman in front of where Peter had dropped onto the couch, his eyes dull and hazy as he stared at his own lap.

"How's the head, kiddo?"

"Fine." Tony wasn't sure if he believed him, but decided not to push it.

"Okay. Remember, you gotta tell someone if it's not. Okay?" Peter nodded, wringing his hands in his lap. "Alright..." He sighed, clasping his own hands and leaning in, elbows on his knees. He didn't know where to start...how to bring this up in conversation. But he had to. And the kid was gonna be upset, but he wasn't sure if it was just grief, or if he wouldn't want to live with Tony. There were so many logistical issues, not the least of which was his schooling. Also the fact that Vision still hadn't quite grasped the concept of 'doors.' He'd have to have a serious conversation with Vision about that.

"Okay...um, first things first. Is your room okay? Pepper had the walls painted and did all the decorating, but we can change anything you want. Got enough clothes? Books?" He didn't give him a chance to answer, just kept talking. "I had your old laptop brought over, but there's a new one in there too...if you need help transferring the files...never mind, you build computers. You know how to transfer files. Anyway, it's top of the line...I even installed Karen. I know you love her. And..."

He snapped his fingers, searching for the other thing he needed to tell him. "...your phone! Your phone was destroyed so I went...ahead...kid?"

Peter was crying. Not sobbing or anything...just...tears dripped from the corners of his eyes and down his cheeks, lips trembling just a little. When he took a breath, it shuddered. "Shit...I mean...eh, I heard you in Germany. You already know that word. What's wrong? What is it? You don't like the room? That's fine. No sweat, kid. We'll change it. Whatever you want. Or...clothes? Did we miss something? I...I don't...talk to me, okay?" He put a hand on the kid's knee. On his kid's knee. Peter met his eyes, looking...bewildered.

"I...I don't...I don't understand, Mr. Stark." Peter admitted after a second, not seeming to notice his own tears. "I mean...I don't..." He shook his head, eyes pleading with Tony to explain. Ignoring a twinge of alarm at the fact that the kid who had worked on his Iron Man suit and who built computers couldn't understand the concept of redecorating (had there been some kind of brain damage?) he nodded, forcing his voice to stay even and patient.

"Okay...okay. That's fine. What don't you understand? The room? Pepper painted it and decorated it,
"You brought...my stuff?" He asked, and Tony nodded again.

"Yeah. Happy and a couple of my guys went to your apartment and got everything. All your stuff...all your aunt's stuff too. Everything but the furniture. I paid the landlord to keep it empty so if you want any of the furniture we can get that too. Or have someone bring it. I just wasn't sure what all you'd want to keep. Everything's in boxes in an empty room. No one will bother them. Not that many people are still around..." He trailed off when the tears didn't stop. "You with me, Pete? What's wrong?"

"You brought my stuff?"

"Okay, I'm getting worried, kiddo. Fill me in. What am I missing? Do you not want your stuff? We can get rid of it. That's fine."

"I don't..." Peter just shook his head and Tony sighed, standing and moving to the couch beside his kid, putting a hesitant arm around his shoulders. Physical contact might help...might calm him down.

"Talk to me. Explain. I once heard you talk for forty-five minutes straight without taking a breath, Pete. Go ahead and talk." That got a small smile out of the crying boy.

"You did not."

"Did too. I clocked you. You were talking about the difference between Star Wars and Star Trek. Ask FRIDAY. Right, FRIDAY?"

"No, sir. You are exaggerating to make a point. In fact, Peter spoke on the difference between Star Wars and Star Trek for fifteen minutes and paused often enough to breathe normally."

"Traitor." He grumbled, making Peter smile through the tears again. "Alright, Pete. Tell me. Is something wrong with the room?" Peter shook his head. "Okay, what's wrong?" Apart from the obvious, he wanted to add but didn't. This seemed like something else.

"I don't understand."

"What don't you understand?" He asked, wondering if he'd ever escape the labyrinth of this conversation but willing to talk in circles all day if it kept his kid engaged and talking. Tony couldn't stand that dead look in his eyes...the way he'd stared at the ceiling for almost half an hour without seeming to notice. That wasn't his kid. Peter was alive...he was endless chatter and laughter and constantly trying to impress Tony and he couldn't stand the picture of him just laying there, silent.

"Why do I have a room?" Peter finally asked. Tony blinked at that.

"You've always had a room. Remember? When I offered you a spot on the Avengers and..."

"No, why...why is my stuff here?" The kid cut him off, and Tony could have shot himself in the face with his own repulsor. Of course, the kid was confused. He hadn't started with the most important piece of information.

"Because I'm your legal guardian. Signed the papers at the hospital and everything, so, uh...guess you're all mine now." He flinched at how that came out, but Peter was just staring at him, dumbfounded. "I mean, you're my kid, legally, so you'll live here."

"You...you adopted me?"
"Not yet." That came out before he had time to think about his answer, and Peter just kept staring. "I didn't want to sign anything like that before I got a chance to talk to you. So, um...that's a discussion we can have later. For now, I'm your legal guardian, you're my kid, you'll live here, and all your stuff is here."

He was crying again. Tony thought about throwing himself out the window for a moment...obviously, he sucked at this. What made him think he could be a father to this kid when the first conversation they had after he took over his guardianship made him cry? Repeatedly. "I don't have to go?" The boy asked, and Tony flinched a little at his lost tone.

"No. You don't have to go anywhere, buddy."

"You didn't have to do that," Peter whispered after a second, shaking his head. Tony frowned at that, putting a hand on his shoulder again.

"You're right. I didn't." He wanted to be incredibly clear about that or the kid would start some kind of shame cycle on top of the depression and trauma. "I did not have to take you in. No one forced me or even asked me. I found out what happened and asked my lawyers to make sure I was able to get custody of you. I didn't want you going to some strangers. Hey..." He put a finger on the kid's cheek to get him to turn his head, finally facing Tony head on. "You're my kid, okay? Hell, you've been my kid for a while, since I kind of built you a multimillion-dollar suit and make sure you get home on time and feed you and got custody on Fridays..." Peter snorted a little at that. "Now it's legal, okay? You're my kid. I know there are a thousand things you're worried about right now, but where you're gonna live...that doesn't have to be one of them."

Peter nodded, biting down hard on his lip, the tears coming again, and Tony put his arms around him, pulling him close and rubbing his back. He was out of his element...sure he'd been spending more time with Peter. And yeah, he'd gotten to know the kid. He'd never cried in front of Tony...never sobbed in his arms, gripping his shirt so tightly that it ripped...that was the second shirt Peter had ripped, not that Tony cared.

Leaning back against the sofa, he held the teenager silently while the boy cried. There was more they needed to discuss, but he had a feeling Peter wasn't up for any more serious conversations, so instead he had FRIDAY turn on the first mindless sitcom she could find and let it play quietly in the background while his kid let it out.
It was a while before Peter was able to stop crying. He felt awful, knowing that Mr. Stark had basically adopted him...kind of...and that he was giving him a place to live and cooking for him, and yet Peter was taking up so much of his time, sobbing in his arms and ripping his clothes. He was going to regret it, and then Peter would be a burden on him and then their mentorship/friendship would be over and he'd lose him too. That thought just made him cry harder as Mr. Stark rubbed patient circles on his back, never saying anything or acting like he wanted to pull away.

"I'm sorry." He finally got up the nerve and the strength to say it, but Mr. Stark just kept rubbing his back.

"Don't be sorry. You're fine." He spoke so nonchalantly like he really meant it. Like he really didn't mind having a teenager sob into his sweatshirt.

"You probably have meetings or…" His mentor shook his head.

"I've got nowhere to be today, kiddo." Mr. Stark assured him, voice calm and even. He was almost always calm. Sure of himself. Everything Peter wasn't. Surely he wouldn't lie about this...any time he had meetings or emergency phone calls, Mr. Stark was always honest about it. If they were tinkering in the lab or watching a movie, he'd step away, sometimes disappearing for an hour or more, but Peter understood. He was busy... he and Pepper ran a company and had meetings and he was Iron Man and an Avenger.

But it felt so good to have someone holding him and telling him it would be okay. That he wasn't inconveniencing the billionaire who had just...adopted him? Gotten custody of him? He wasn't 100% sure what the correct phrasing was. Either way, his aunt was gone. She was gone. May was gone. It played in his mind like a broken record. He'd lost his aunt, the only family he had left. And now...now Tony Stark was stuck with him. I mean, yeah he'd said that he'd wanted to take Peter in. He'd wanted custody. Right? He knew that they'd gotten closer...that after his homecoming, it had seemed like Mr. Stark had actually wanted him around. Still...Mr. Stark was really busy and now he had to take care of Peter who couldn't even assure the man that he'd be no trouble because he couldn't stop crying!

He managed to stop sobbing into the man's shoulder after what felt like forever. Dropping his head back, he finally took in the sitcom playing. He couldn't place it, but people in the background were laughing and the characters in the scene were laughing and it made his chest loosen a little. Mr. Stark kept his arm around him, not pushing him away or getting up like he'd assumed the man would. Mr. Stark usually wasn't so great at emotions. Any kind of genuine moment between them would usually be cut with a sarcastic joke. Peter didn't mind. He knew the man liked him at least a little...otherwise he probably wouldn't have had him coming to the compound every week. But now, he rubbed a hand over Peter's shoulder, both of them staring at the TV in silence.

It took him a minute, but he was able to identify the sitcom. Friends. "Aunt May loved this show," he murmured, watching two characters carry a sofa up a flight of narrow stairs with some difficulty.

"You want to watch something else?" Mr. Stark asked, but Peter shook his head, wiping at his eyes. He was still crying. He wasn't sure how to make it stop...nor could he get a clear timeline in his head. What day was it? Did...did he have to plan his aunt's funeral? Had it already happened? He couldn't make himself ask.
"No." He murmured. Mr. Stark just nodded, leaving the sitcom on until the episode ended and the next one started. Peter couldn't let himself feel actual amusement, but it was...comfortable. He remembered getting home from his Spider-Man patrols and listening to the laugh track as he tried to fall asleep. It was familiar.

Around noon, Mr. Stark got up and left him on the sofa. Peter didn't ask where he was going, just stared at the TV mindlessly until Mr. Stark brought two containers of Chinese takeout over to the couch, sitting and handing him a container with a fork, keeping the chopsticks for himself. He'd remembered that Peter couldn't use them. Peter wiped a hand over his face, sniffing a little and taking a bite of the sweet and sour chicken and noodles. They'd eaten the same thing for dinner a hundred times, and like the sitcom playing on the TV, it was comfortable. Familiar.

He ate the chicken, polishing off every bite of food and finding he was still hungry, but not wanting to bug Mr. Stark, he kept quiet. The man took their empty containers to the kitchen and came back with a second one, handing it to Peter with a faint smile. Usually he would have made a joke, something along the lines of 'human garbage disposal' or something about a spider needing more flies or something, but he seemed to know that Peter couldn't handle jokes at the moment, so the man just sat back down next to him. Peter thanked him softly, finishing that container too.

When he was done eating, he took it to the kitchen himself, throwing it in the trash and rejoining his new...guardian? Not...not father. Right? He shook the question off. Mr. Stark. He rejoined Mr. Stark, feeling surreal and out of place. "How you doing, kid?" Said man asked, turning and putting a hand on his shoulder. "Still with me?"

It was a strange question, but Peter understood. He wasn't entirely sure if he was still with him. Everything felt so far away...like he was miles away from the man sitting next to him on the couch. But he had a feeling that if he told Mr. Stark that, he'd just worry more. "Um...yeah. I'm...thanks for lunch, Mr. Stark."

"Sure thing. You want anything else?"

"No...no thanks. I'm...I'm fine." Mr. Stark nodded. "Actually...can I...can I ask you...um..." Mr. Stark waited, not looking even remotely put out by the stuttering. "My...her...Aunt May..." Even saying her name was hard, and he blinked hard, wiping furiously at his eyes. "Is...um...do I have to plan...anything? I mean...I don't know how..."

"Hey, don't worry about it. It's all taken care of. Unless you want to..."

"No." Peter shook his head, not caring that he'd cut the man off. "I don't want to."

"No problem." The man nodded, throwing his arm around the back of the couch behind Peter's shoulders again. "Any more questions?"

"Um...I...I'm sorry..."

"Don't apologize." He shook his head, sounding so normal. So...calm. Sure. Like nothing in the world was wrong. It was surprisingly grounding. "Take your time."

"School? I've missed a lot...and it's midterms...or...it was midterms. I...did I miss midterms?"

"Yeah...you missed them. But I called your school and they're going to let you take everything late. They're going to send your late work and you can work from here until you're ready to go back. If you need a tutor, Vision would be happy to help, I'm sure. Or me, unless it's English. I was never any good at writing papers on things not related to science." Peter nodded, trying to take it in. He had
a feeling the man had made some kind of joke but he couldn't feel amused yet. His emotions were still on mute...except sadness. Grief. Disbelief. Those were still plenty loud.

"Ned?"

"Your friends Ned and Michelle have been calling me nonstop since I had you moved here. Their numbers are in your new phone...I know you kids nowadays don't have anyone's number memorized." Peter gave a half smile at that, trying to feel actual amusement instead of faking it. He didn't quite succeed. "You have the same number and everything."

He needed to call Ned. And MJ. And do his homework. And...and...he clenched his jaw and fought the tears for what must have been the tenth time that day. "I'm sorry." He whispered.

"Hey, new rule, okay?" Peter nodded a little, waiting. Rules, he could follow. He could show Mr. Stark that he'd stop being so much trouble...just as soon as he figured out how to stop crying. "No more apologizing. Not for...um…" He snapped his fingers, then pointed at Peter. "A month. No apologizing for a month unless I give you express permission. Deal?" Peter sniffed, nodding again and feeling a faint smile touch his lips. Mr. Stark smiled a little too before turning grim. "I get it, kiddo. This sucks. A lot. I remember, believe it or not. But you're not alone, and you don't have to pretend it's all okay. It's not. I know. It won't be for a while. I get that. That's why I'm here, okay?" Peter just stared at his lap, wiping at his eyes as Mr. Stark squeezed his shoulder a little. "You can take care of all that stuff later. For now, we can just watch TV. Sound good?"

"Yeah...that...yeah. Thank you, Mr. Stark." His mentor...guardian...whatever, hugged him a little, an arm around his shoulders squeezing. Peter remembered the day not that long ago in the limo, when the same man had reached over to open his door and Peter had hugged him, resulting in a humiliating couple of seconds before he'd hurried upstairs to try and forget how awkward he was. Now the same man was holding him while they watched mindless TV. It was almost nice.

They sat like that in the living room for hours, during which Mr. Stark never even glanced at his phone, nor did he pick up the StarkPad that sat on the coffee table. He just watched Friends. On the sofa. With his arm around Peter. It reminded him of Aunt May, and Peter had to fight back the tears more than once. Mr. Stark didn't seem bothered, though. Peter had never seen the man sit still for that long, but he seemed perfectly at ease, hand firm on Peter's shoulder, keeping him there on the couch. Grounded.

Peter went to bed early...around nine-thirty, and Mr. Stark seemed to be fighting his concern, just nodding and showing him where his own bedroom was, instructing him to get him or ask FRIDAY if he needed anything. Peter agreed, then stood in the middle of his bedroom, looking at the walls, all painted his favorite color, the thick carpet that felt soft and comfortable under his bare feet, and the Star Wars posters. A faint smile tugged at the corner of his mouth when he spotted the Iron Man figurine on the dresser. Apparently, most of his stuff was still in boxes, because he didn't recognize much of the stuff in the room that was now his. His old laptop sat on the desk, next to what he assumed was his new phone.

The dresser was full of new clothes. Pajamas. Socks and underwear that he tried not to think about Mr. Stark picking out. Some t-shirts, all with either Stark Industries, NASA, science puns, or Iron Man logos on them. He smiled at the Iron Man ones...there were at least five of those, all with Iron Man in different poses, and one with the original Avengers team, along with a pair of Iron Man pajamas. He put them all back, picking out a pair of plain red pajamas, and grabbed his phone, crawling into bed.

He should have been excited. Or impressed. Or something. He just knew that there should be some kind of emotions about this cool room that Mr. Stark and Miss Potts had set up for him. Iron Man
had helped decorate his room at the Avengers Compound. That was cool! But Peter didn't feel anything. Just...tired. He was so tired. And empty. And sad. Dropping his head on the pillow, he closed his eyes.

Even the sheets felt new. Everything was new...his room had a balcony! And a huge TV with a new PlayStation and a cabinet full of video games. And he'd spied at least three never-been-opened Lego sets in the closet. He couldn't manage to care about any of that, though...just pulled the blankets up over his head and turned on his new phone.

There was only 1 voicemail. No missed calls. No missed texts. He guessed that Ned and MJ didn't know that Mr. Stark had gotten him a new phone, and no one else from school had his number or texted him. He opened the voicemails, finding that it was from Mr. Stark. He pressed play. "Hey, kid. It's Tony. Call me back."

It was a quick voicemail...Mr. Stark never left long messages. Not on Peter's phone, anyway. But this was different. Mr. Stark had sounded...worried. Had that been after the accident? He couldn't remember any of it. Deleting the message, he opened a new text to send to Ned. "Hey."

He couldn't think of anything else. Closing his eyes and holding the phone in a limp hand, he waited until it buzzed in his hand.

"Peter?! Is that you?! I thought your phone was destroyed! Are you okay? Holy shit!"

Peter smiled, sniffing and taking a deep breath, refusing to cry again. "It's me. Mr. Stark got me a new phone. I'm..." He sat with his thumbs over the keyboard, trying to figure out what to say. Was he okay? "I'm not okay." He decided on honesty, hitting send.

"Are you hurt? I mean...I know you were hurt but...are you still hurt?"

Peter sighed, dropping his head on the pillow once more. "I'm not really hurt anymore." He left it at that. He felt absolutely exhausted, but the second he closed his eyes, he was wide awake, his body practically vibrating like he'd been drinking coffee, even though Mr. Stark never gave him coffee. At least, not after one incident in the lab where Peter had been unable to use a screwdriver because his hands had been shaking so badly. After that, Mr. Stark had refused to give him coffee ever again.

"I'm so sorry. You wanna talk?" He stared at the message, sighing before he answered.

"No. I can't. I'm sorry." He could always talk to Ned...but not now.

"Don't be sorry. Let me know when you're ready." Peter put the phone on his nightstand, plugging it into the charger already plugged into the wall. Then, he spent the next several hours trying to force himself to relax. It didn't really work, and he only managed to sleep for a few hours before the nightmare woke him.

He couldn't remember much of it. A horn...a loud horn that made his ears hurt. A crunch...metal on metal. A scream. His own? His aunt's? He couldn't tell. But it made him jerk awake in the middle of the night, the numbers on his phone telling him it was two in the morning. It was two in the morning and he was in the Avengers' facility in upstate New York and Mr. Stark was his new guardian and Aunt May was gone. Closing his eyes, he rolled onto his back to face the ceiling, feeling the hot tears fill his eyes and drip down the sides of his face. It wasn't fair. He wanted her back. Biting down on his hand, he sobbed.

"Mr. Parker, as per Mr. Stark's request, I have notified Mr. Stark that you are awake." The sudden soft voice coming from the ceiling made him jump a little before he realized what she'd said.
"No...um, FRIDAY, don't do that."

"I'm sorry Mr. Parker. I am under strict orders to wake Mr. Stark if you are in emotional distress throughout the night." Feeling his cheeks flush, he rolled over, pulling the covers up over his head and sobbing into the pillows, desperate to be quiet. A few seconds later, there was a soft knock at the door.

"Peter?" Closing his eyes, he hoped that Mr. Stark would just assume his AI had been mistaken. No such luck. The door opened slowly, and he heard Mr. Stark hesitate for a second before heading over to the bed, a hand dropping on his back between his shoulders, firmly pressing him into the mattress. Mr. Stark knew that with his enhanced senses, he couldn't stand it when people touched him too lightly...Mr. Stark always remembered things like that. "Pete? C'mon, kiddo. I know you're awake." There was a faint smile in his voice, but it disappeared when Peter couldn't bite back a sob. "Oh, kid..." The hand rubbed his back, squeezing his shoulder and rubbing circles. "I know, buddy. But it's gonna be okay."

Peter just shook his head. It wasn't going to be okay. Mr. Stark had never lied to him before, but this couldn't be true. It couldn't be okay. Not when his Aunt May was gone. Not when he'd survived and she'd died. It wasn't fair. How was that ever supposed to be okay? After a moment, Mr. Stark took a seat on the bed beside him, the hand still on his back. "You can...go...back to...bed..." Peter fought to keep his voice even, the sob catching in his throat and making him stutter.

"I'm fine right here, buddy." He assured Peter, the hand on his back the last thing he was aware of before he eventually fell asleep again.
Funeral

His kid wasn't sleeping, so neither was he. Tony vaguely remembered something similar happening to one of his employees when they'd had a kid. Babies didn't sleep through the night, so neither did their parents. But of course, that all usually passed by the time the kid was a year old or something...maybe two. What the hell did Tony know about babies anyway? Wiping his face roughly with his hand and swinging his feet over the side of his bed, he waved a hand at nothing. "Yeah, yeah FRI. I got it. I'm going." He muttered, and the alarm that had woken him was silenced.

"Peter has once more asked me to stop alerting you when he wakes up in distress." She told him. He ignored that, as he had for the last few nights. It had started that first night with the nightmare, and continued every single night for three days...the day of the funeral. Sunday. That morning at three am, he found the room empty, despite FRIDAY telling him that Peter had woken up in distress less than five minutes ago. Looking around, he finally noticed that the balcony door was open and felt his heart leap into his throat. No...surely not. He knew the kid was upset. Maybe depressed...he was doing his best here, but he didn't know what to do other than sit with the kid when he woke up every night, feed him during the day, and just try to be there in between. But he hadn't thought it was that bad.

Hurrying out to the balcony, Tony froze when he found the kid perched on the railing, feet hanging off the sides. "Peter?" He asked hesitantly, not wanting to startle his kid, but of course, Peter had heard him approach.

"I thought if I left my room, she might not wake you." The boy murmured.

"I told her to wake me if you woke up at night in any kind of distress."

"You don't have to do that." Peter told him, sounding dead. He hated it. Hated hearing his kid sound that way. "You should sleep...you're busy."

"I can get by on less sleep." He told him with a shrug. Peter didn't answer, just stared out at the trees that surrounded the compound. "Why don't you get down from there?"

Peter snorted just a little, the sound startling him. "Are you afraid I'll jump?" It was said in such a foreign tone...he hated it. Hated hearing his kid talk like that. "I don't think a fall from this far would kill me." His heart dropped, throat closing as the boy stared down at the six-story drop.

"Please get down. Please, Pete?" Peter turned to look at him then, blinking like he was coming out of a trance, then nodded, looking vaguely ashamed. Putting his weight on his hands, he spun around, lifting his feet up and over the railing with the grace of a gymnast, and hopped off the railing. Reaching out, Tony put an arm around his shoulders, leading him back inside.

"I wasn't gonna jump or anything..." Peter murmured, and Tony nodded, faking an assurance he didn't feel.

"I know."

"I can't sleep."

"I know, buddy." He squeezed his shoulder. "Here...lay down." He pushed him toward the bed, and Peter crawled under the covers, slumping on the pillow. Tony straightened the blanket, patting him
on the back. "Try to sleep...I'll wake you if you have a nightmare."

"But you need to sleep." Peter shook his head. "I'm not a baby. I don't need you to sit up with me." As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he looked ashamed again and spoke before Tony could open his mouth. "I'm sorry...I don't mean..."

"It's fine, Pete. Just close your eyes, okay. I'll go back to bed as soon as you're asleep. How's that?" Peter just muttered something that sounded like a 'yes' and was asleep in less than five minutes, his breathing deep and even. For a few minutes, Tony just sat there, staring down at this kid...at his kid, who'd woken up crying every night for days...who struggled through the days and did his best to act normal while Tony struggled to figure out how to take care of him. "FRI, if he has another nightmare, wake him up. Me too."

Standing up, he tucked the blankets around the kid and headed out the door, shutting it firmly behind him. Peter couldn't sleep with the door open...he'd learned that the first night. "And wake me at 7...the funeral's at 10." With that, he finally managed to get back to sleep.

The alarm went off at 7 sharp, and Tony groaned at the noise, yanking his covers over his head. "Shut it off, FRI!" He barked.

"I'm sorry, sir, but per your orders, I am not permitted to shut off the alarm until you are out of bed, and you told me to remind you of the very important meeting with the President you missed last year because you shut off the alarm before you..."

"Okay! I get it!" He snapped, rolling over and putting his feet on the floor. "Shut it off."

"Yes, sir." Stumbling to the bathroom to splash water on his face, he leaned against the wall for a second, trying not to count up how many hours of sleep he'd gotten. "Is Peter awake?"

"No, sir."

"Good."

For about an hour, he answered emails and tried to rearrange his schedule. He was free until 3, but after that it was a solid day and a half of meetings, an event he had to go to with Pepper that he'd already tried to blow off, and then they only had one more day before Thor and Co. were scheduled to arrive...something he was still trying to work out. Where would they stay? Would the government work with them? How many people were actually coming?

He had just managed to get the majority of the Accords repealed (or at least reworded) and he didn't know if he was up for another government battle. His lawyers were going to get one hell of a Christmas bonus, that was for sure. A few of the best were working out details for the Asgardians. Thor and Bruce could stay with him, wherever he ended up living now that Peter was his. The tower again? He wasn't sure. He had time to figure it out.

Tony headed out to the kitchen, wondering briefly where Vision was. He'd been staying in his room for the most part or at least staying away from the main living areas where Peter spent most of his time. Tony had sought his kid out the day before and had found him at his desk staring at a textbook, and so had left him alone to get some of his own work done. He'd been doing his best to be there for Peter during the day, watching TV together and ordering food and trying to get the kid to talk, but mostly Peter just sat quietly, doing his best to act normal. Tony wanted to tell him he didn't have to...that he could mourn and grieve and that he was safe at the compound. Instead, he let the kid pretend and did some pretending of his own.
He'd told Peter that he could take his time getting back to his homework, but let the kid do it whenever he wanted to. Peter had mentioned a brief conversation with his friends, and the teenagers from the hospital had stopped calling him asking for updates, so he counted it as a good thing.

He wanted to make a full spread for breakfast, but burned the first batch of bacon and lifting his middle finger when Rhodey emerged and asked why he was trying to burn the place down. "What's going on? Where's the kid?" His friend asked, opening the freezer and pulling out more bacon. Swearing, he threw the burned bacon in the trash and let Rhodey take over, grabbing some eggs and starting on those instead.

"Still asleep."

"Another nightmare?"

"Yeah." He grabbed some bread then, putting some in the toaster and stirring the eggs. Peter liked them scrambled. For a while, they worked in silence, until his friend spoke again.

"Was it bad?" Rhodey asked quietly, staring down at the bacon that was nearly done.

Tony was quiet for a long time, finishing up the eggs and taking the bread out of the toaster. Was this something he should be telling Rhodey? Was it serious? Did he need to watch Peter even more closely? "I found on sitting on the balcony railing. He asked if I was afraid he was going to jump."

Rhodey left the bacon, turning and crossing his arms, waiting for more, his face solemn.

"Are you? I mean...should we be?"

"No...I don't know. I...really don't. I mean...he's trying, I'll give him that. He's trying so damn hard and..."

"It's only been a few days, Tones. I'd say he's doing pretty good, all things considering." Rhodey reminded him gently.

"Yeah, he is. Or, I think he is. And then he says something like that..." Tony sighed, spooning some eggs onto a plate with toast he'd thrown into the toaster. "I don't remember much about...about the days right after..."

Rhodey gave him a look, then dropped a hand on his shoulder, somewhat surprised when he didn't pull away. "We almost had to force feed you...and I had to lock up the bar."

"Well at least he hasn't chosen that particular coping mechanism." He paused for a second. "FRIDAY, lock the minibar. Actually...lock any cabinet that contains any alcohol. And tell me if Peter tries to access any of it." He had never seen Peter even attempt to take a drink, and he hadn't had a drink since Peter had come to live with him, but there was no reason to tempt either one of them. Putting the plate on the counter and drumming his fingers on his pants, Tony checked the time. "I should...I need to wake him up."

"Go ahead. I was going to get dressed...that is, uh...I wasn't sure if he'd want me to..."

"I'm sure he'd appreciate you coming," Tony told him quietly, reaching out and patting his friend's shoulder as he passed. "So would I." Rhodey nodded and disappeared down the hallway and into his own room.

Peter was buried under a blanket, his face in a pillow, and Tony gave himself a second to wonder how the kid could even breathe like that. Reaching down, he shook the kid. "Pete? Hey, Peter. Time to wake up, kiddo."
"Time is it?" He murmured, face barely turning from the pillow.

"A little after 8. We need to leave in about an hour." The kid didn't move, but he could see him deflate, his jaw tightening just a little.

"Do I have to?"

"Well, no. I guess you don't have to." He told Peter, sitting down on the bed and putting a hand on the kid's back. "But if you don't, I think you'll regret it for the rest of your life. And I'd rather you not have to carry that on top of everything else."

"She doesn't know the difference." He murmured, sniffing and bringing a hand up to rub his eyes.

"Maybe not. You do, though." He rubbed Peter's back then. That usually calmed him down some. "You've got a new suit in your closet, and I made breakfast. Well, mostly Rhody, but I helped." That got a faint smile out of the kid...Peter hadn't exactly been smiling much, so it was nice to see the kid looking something other than miserable. Clapping his hands together, he patted the kid's back. "Alright, bud. You ready?" Sighing, Peter nodded, pulling himself out of bed, and Tony led the boy to the kitchen.

Breakfast was a rushed affair, Peter barely seeming to taste the food. Tony watched him eat, making sure he cleared his plate. Rhody emerged from his bedroom, dressed in a nice suit as he sat down across from Peter. "Hey, Pete. How you doing, kiddo?"

"Hi, Colonel Rhones." Peter murmured, offering him a smile that, though a little weak, was still genuine.

"How many times do I have to ask you to call me Rhody?" He asked, patting Peter on the back as the boy took another bite.

"You can chew, Pete. You've got enough time." Tony assured him. Peter slowed down a little, but not by much. He let it go, and when the food was gone, Tony ushered the kid to his room to get dressed while he did the same.

When Peter emerged from his bedroom, Rhody and Tony were both dressed. To Tony's surprise, Peter's tie was decently tied, and the suit was only a little rumpled. Tony reached out and straightened the black tie a little. "Watch a youtube video to learn how to do that?" He asked, brushing invisible lint off the kid's shoulders. Peter gave a half smile while Rhody chuckled.

"Yeah," Peter told him, something passing over his face, but Tony didn't ask. Instead, he guided his kid to the garage, Rhody following behind as they took the elevator down. Happy was waiting downstairs...Peter hadn't seen the man since before the accident as far as Tony knew, but he didn't even make eye contact with their driver, just dropping into the back seat, his eyes back to that dead, listless stare as he stared at the back of Happy's seat.

Rhody sat up front while Tony sat beside his kid, not sure if an arm around his shoulder would be welcome. Instead, he clasped his hands in his lap, glancing at Peter every few seconds as they drove back to Queens where the funeral would be held. Tony had asked for the funeral to be held there. A quick service...he didn't want Peter to have to sit in a church and listen to someone talk about his aunt for any longer than necessary. He'd thought about asking Peter to say something, but had changed his mind. Peter could barely fit two sentences together, much less give a speech.

When they arrived at the church, Tony guided Peter to sit in the front of the room, him on one side of his kid and Rhody on the other. Peter clutchted his hands in his lap so tightly Tony worried they
would bruise, and then he realized Peter was staring at the closed casket, jaw tight, eyes too wide. He reached up a hand and put it on the side of Peter's head, pulling it down so that it rested on Tony's shoulder. He wanted to say something...to comfort him or something, but honestly, he had no idea what he was supposed to say. For a minute, the boy just rested on his shoulder, letting Tony rub his arm, then took a deep breath and sat back up, stiff as a board.

Peter didn't move during the funeral. From the moment the Reverend stepped up to the pulpit, the kid was made of stone. It was a nice service, but Tony was more focused on the boy beside him. Rhodey was giving the kid looks too, patting Peter on the knee once. Peter didn't react. Didn't glance up or fidget or anything the kid used to do. For the first time in days, he didn't cry either. It was like he wasn't even there...like the boy next to him was just an empty shell, and Tony hated it.

It wasn't until the service was over when a woman around May's age came up to Peter, ignoring the two men sitting at either side, that he seemed to snap out of it. For a second, Tony worried that Peter would break apart...but then he pasted a calm smile on his face, pulling himself to his feet and letting her pull him into a hug and tell him how sorry she was. He thanked her, squeezing her hand and thanking her as Tony and Rhodey stood as well, standing back but keeping an eye on Peter.

She was the first in a long line of women and a few men, all of whom had worked with May or known her in one way or another. Then, at the end of all those people, were Ned and the girl who'd yelled at Tony. Michelle. He braced himself, ready for the girl to start yelling, but she didn't even glance at him. She, Ned, and Peter all stared at each other for a second, then Ned pulled Peter close, patting him on his back and murmuring something Tony couldn't hear. Then Michelle stepped forward, pulling Peter into a tight hug that he returned, and Tony wondered if there was something there. He dismissed the thought. Peter's love life was at the very bottom of things he had time to worry about...at the moment.

"Um...Ned, MJ, you guys know Mr. Stark and this is Colonel Rhodes." Peter introduced once he seemed to realize that the two men were still standing behind him.

"Woah...War Machine?" Ned asked, and Rhodey nodded, chuckling and greeted both kids. Michelle obviously liked Rhodey a lot more than Tony. Peter took a step back, giving his friends a half smile and muttering the word 'bathroom' as he slipped past Tony.

It took Tony less than a minute to realize that something could be wrong. Getting Rhodey's attention and jerking his head toward where Peter had disappeared, he followed his kid, managing to catch up to him outside of the sanctuary. Peter passed the bathroom door, but before he could make it to the side door exit, a woman caught his arm, saying something Tony couldn't hear. Peter nodded, touching the hand she had rested on his arm. But Tony could tell something was wrong...the kid's hands were shaking, the smile falling.

Tony hurried over to the boy, putting an arm around his shoulders and squeezing, making some kind of BS excuse to the woman trying to offer her sympathies, and the led him toward the side door. "Mr. Stark..." Peter started, but Tony cut him off.

"It's okay, kid. Let's get some air." As soon as the door shut behind them, leaving them in a quiet alley behind the church, Peter buckled, and Tony grabbed him, trying to lower him carefully to the ground. "Pete?! Talk to me, kiddo. You feeling okay?"

"I can't...I can't breathe." Tony felt an icy stab of fear in his chest...Peter couldn't breathe. He couldn't breathe. His kid couldn't breathe! Peter was wheezing, gasping for air, a hand clutching his chest, and Tony fought his own panic as he eased them down to the ground. "Don't..."

"Easy, Peter. It's okay. Here, lean on me."
"No, don't…" Peter started to pull away, but Toy held him steady.

"Peter, stop." He murmured, fighting to keep his voice gentle through his own panic. "This is a panic attack. It's going to be okay, I promise. I'm right here."

"You'll...you'll get dirty." The kid gasped out, and it took Tony a second to realize he was talking about his clothes.

"Oh, Peter." He murmured, his nose touching Peter's hair as he took a steadying breath. "I don't give two shits about this suit, okay?" Placing a hand on Peter's chest, Tony leaned back against the brick wall of the church, pulling Peter back with him. "Listen to me breathe. Can you feel it?" He asked, taking one of the kid's hands and pressing it against his own chest. After a second of Tony exaggerating his breaths, Peter nodded. "Good. Breathe slow. Ready? In through your nose." He coached, waiting for Peter to obey. The kid sobbed when he breathed in, one fist clenched in his pant leg. "Then out through your mouth. Good." He murmured. "Again."

The boy obeyed, managing a few breaths before he was able to talk. "I'm sorry…"

Tony shook his head. "Nope. What's my one rule, kid?"

"Mr. Stark…"

"I only gave you one rule. What was it?"

"Don't apologize...or something?" He gasped out. Tony snorted.

"Yeah. 'Don't apologize or something.' You got it." Peter gave a half laugh, slumping against Tony as he finally caught his breath, his shaking hands stilling a little. "Better?" He asked, a lot softer. Peter nodded. "Good. You ready to get home?"

Peter hesitated. "I...um...shouldn't we...I mean...I haven't talked to everyone yet. And they haven't...I mean...they still have to...to..." The boy couldn't even get the word out, and Tony could feel him start to shake again.

"Yeah, I'm more worried about you staying upright, kiddo." Tony murmured. "Do you want to go to the grave right now?"

"No," Peter whimpered, quiet like he was ashamed.

"Okay. Let's just go. You can go back and visit anytime you want, I promise. But right now, we can just go back home."

The kid turned to look at him, head tilted back, eyes so big and hopeful that it made his heart ache a little. "Really?" He asked.

"Definitely. Let's go."
Peter couldn't believe how nice Mr. Stark was being. Well...he could. From the day he'd woken up in that hospital bed, Mr. Stark had been great. He'd gone out of his way to make Peter feel welcome at the Avengers Facility, even when Peter found it almost impossible to actually talk to anyone. Or do anything other than watch TV and do homework. Still, Mr. Stark had sat with him, watching whatever movie or show was playing on the TV in the living room. Once, Peter had told him sheepishly that he could change it, but Mr. Stark had waved it off, telling him in no uncertain terms that if he had wanted to watch something else, there were plenty of TVs to choose from.

And yeah, Mr. Stark had always been pretty good to him. He'd built him 2 suits and kept an eye on him and given him backup anytime Peter needed it and had invited him to his lab and made sure he ate...he was a nice guy and he'd been great to Peter. But this was different. Mr. Stark was acting...almost like a dad. Well, how Peter assumed a dad would act. Kind of like how Ben had acted. He was taking care of him.

Of course, as the days had gone by, Mr. Stark had started answering emails and taking phone calls during the movies and TV shows, but Peter didn't mind. He got it...Mr. Stark was very busy. That had never been a surprise to him. Honestly, it was more of a surprise that Mr. Stark had any time for him at all, especially with the stuff with the other Avengers and something else that he and Colonel Rhodes were whispering about sometimes. Peter didn't try to eavesdrop...he couldn't focus on his own problems, much less whatever Mr. Stark was stressed about.

Since waking up in the Avengers Facility, Peter had felt like everything was on mute. He was trying. So hard. He tried to make jokes like usual with Mr. Stark and have conversations with Colonel Rhodes and even interact with Vision. He tried to focus on homework and movies and having the occasional text conversation with Ned and MJ...but he couldn't sleep and he couldn't focus and everything felt wrong. Less vibrant. Dead. Like he should have died instead of his aunt. No...he already knew that. He knew that he should have died. He was Spider-Man! How had he not protected her?

He shut that thought down, leaning against the back of the seat, eyes closed, vaguely aware of Colonel Rhodes and Mr. Stark talking to Happy who had been waiting by the car. He was so tired...so exhausted. He couldn't remember his last full night's sleep. Then he remembered sitting on the railing, asking Mr. Stark if he was afraid he would jump. What an idiotic thing to say! Mr. Stark had been so great and now he was probably worried. More worried. He'd known that Mr. Stark was worried about him for days. He didn't want to add to that.

He knew he needed to go back to school soon, but he didn't know how to bring it up or ask Mr. Stark how that was going to work...he couldn't figure any of it out. "You okay there, kid?" Colonel Rhodes asked him softly. Peter just shook his head, closing his eyes, and felt a hand on his forehead. He couldn't make himself lie...or even nod. His aunt was dead. May was dead. Gone. Forever. He'd failed her. It was his fault. He couldn't remember anything about that night...but it had to have been his fault. He should have saved her. Why didn't he save her?

The hand moved away, then squeezed his shoulder. It had to be Mr Stark...Colonel Rhodes was in the front seat. "We'll be home soon, buddy." Mr. Stark told him quietly. Peter reached up, wiping irritably at his eyes, but honestly, he barely had the energy. He'd slept some the night before, but every night it was the same. Metal crunching. Screaming. Tires squealing. His aunt, begging him to
save her. Screaming for him. Screaming for Spider-Man. He swallowed hard, ignoring the hand that
patted his knee. "We'll have some lunch, then you can lay down. What do you think, Pete?"

He tried to nod. He tried to play along. But the sob tore out of his throat, and he clasped his hand
over his mouth, leaning forward and dropping his head against the seat in front of him. "Peter…" Mr.
Stark murmured, and before this, Peter wouldn't have thought that he could sound that gentle. He put
a hand on Peter's back, rubbing circles over his suit jacket. He couldn't stop. Couldn't stop sobbing,
biting down on his hand to keep quiet. Then he felt a hand at his throat. He stiffened, but Mr. Stark
was leaning forward too. "Hey, easy, kiddo. Just taking the tie off. It'll be easier to breathe."

Peter let him loosen the tie, then remove it altogether. "There. Better?" Peter nodded, still crying and
feeling his cheeks heat up. He was sobbing in the back of a car with two superheroes. And Happy.
He didn't know which was worse. He wanted to jump out of the car while it was still moving...and
preferably land in front of another car.

A hand on his shoulder pulled him back, leaning him against Mr. Stark's side. He could only resist
for a second...then he let himself slump against his mentor, face hidden in his neck as he sobbed. Mr.
Stark shifted and the partition between the back seat and the front went up. He took a second to be
grateful that Mr. Stark seemed to understand his embarrassment, but then he just felt miserable again.
"It's my fault." He whimpered, clutching the man's suit jacket so tightly that he felt the fabric tear.
"Shit. Sorry…" He let go, but Mr. Stark's hand covered his.

"It's okay. I don't care about this suit. And it's not your fault…"

"I should have saved her!" He pulled away then, gasping as the pain hit him anew...it was like
everything was loud again...too loud. Like someone had turned the TV off mute and it was loud and
bright and he didn't know how to deal with it. "Why didn't I save her!?!"

"Peter, listen." His mentor murmured, hands on Peter's shoulders. "First, breathe." Peter did, sobbing
a little, but trying to get it under control. "I'm not...I know I'm not the best at...this. But you can cry.
It's...it's normal. It's probably healthy, hell if I know. But she was important to you, and you lost her
and you are allowed to cry about that. For as long as you need to. And believe me, if you had been
able to save her, you would have. I know that. You know that. The only reason you wouldn't
have...is because you couldn't have. You threw yourself on top of her. You took the brunt of the
impact. If you weren't Spider-Man, you'd be dead too."

Mr. Stark wouldn't lie to make him feel better. He knew that. But he didn't know how to believe this.
How could he have not saved her? "The other driver was drunk. He ran a light and hit on the driver's
side...he was going at least 80. Probably faster. Dr. Cho thinks you saw the headlights and threw
yourself on top of her. But you could not have saved her."

"What...what happened. To him? The other driver?"

"He died on impact. Same as your aunt." Peter just nodded, dropping back against Mr. Stark's chest.

"I'm so tired." He admitted softly, feeling the world go back to mute. It stayed that way until they
pulled back into the Avenger's Compound drive. Mr. Stark probably answered him, but he didn't
have the energy to take it in, or even try to figure out what he was saying. Instead, he was silent until
Happy opened their door and reached a hand in, pulling him out of the car. Mr. Stark jumped up,
getting an arm around Peter's shoulders and supporting him as he led him into the building, into the
elevator, then into the communal living area.

"Think you can eat something?" He asked. Peter just shook his head. "Okay. Go lay down for a bit,
then we'll have lunch. Okay?"
Peter just nodded, stumbling into his room and managing to sleep for almost an hour before he started screaming, hands bunched in the covers, head thrown back. This was how Mr. Stark found him, waking him gently and pushing his hair back, hands carding through his hair. Dropping his head into the pillow he'd been sleeping on, he gave in and just sobbed, feeling Mr. Stark sit on the bed beside him.

"I can't do this," Peter whispered, trying to smother himself in his pillow. He couldn't...he didn't know how to cope with this. It was too much. Losing his parents had been...bad. Losing Uncle Ben had been painful. But this...it was worse. She was it. She was the last person he had. And he knew that Mr. Stark cared about him and was going to take care of him. But Aunt May was his family...the last member of his family. They were all gone.

"I know it feels that way, kiddo. Really...I do. After my parents...after they died…” He sighed, apparently struggling for words. "I know it feels like you can't...but...I'm right here. Okay? I'll be here."

It helped more than Peter had expected. Mr. Stark couldn't really fix this, and every single time he thought about May, he felt like there was a vice around his chest. He was so tired...so exhausted, but he couldn't sleep. And Mr. Stark couldn't do much about that. But the man was there. He was sitting on the bed with him, pushing his hair back and assuring him that he was there. That he wasn't leaving. It hurt, but at least he wasn't totally alone.

"Why don't you try to eat something?" Mr. Stark asked, his voice still soft. Peter didn't want to. Didn't want to keep living when his aunt couldn't. It wasn't fair. It wasn't fair that he got to get out of bed and go eat food and live in this fancy place when she was dead.

"It's not fair." He knew he sounded like a baby...only little kids whined about how things weren't fair. But Mr. Stark didn't laugh or make a witty comment. Instead, he reaching down and put a grounding hand on his shoulder.

"I know, buddy. Shit...I know. It's...it's not fair. And I know this is the last thing you wanna hear, but you've got to keep living. Which means you need to eat. You need more food than the rest of us, remember?"

"I don't want to...I don't feel good." The hand on his shoulder squeezed.

"May wouldn't want this." Mr. Stark's voice was still gentle, but firmer this time. Peter flinched, sniffing and forcing himself to keep it together. It worked for about five seconds before a tear dripped down the side of his face. "I didn't know her all that well. She wasn't overly fond of me, but I know that much."

"She did call you 'that rich asshole' once...but that was right after she found out…” Peter felt himself smile through his tears and Tony snorted.

"I've been called worse. Heck, I've been called worse by May. She yelled at me for almost an hour, you know? I thought that would be the end of your vigilante days…”

"But she didn't make me stop." He murmured, smiling just a little. Tony shook his head, speaking incredulously.

"She didn't make you stop." He chuckled a little. "Guess she figured you wouldn't. Was she wrong?" Peter managed another wet laugh.

"No. I wouldn't have stopped."
"Didn't think so." He was quiet for a second. "She loved you so much." Mr. Stark hesitated. "Did I ever tell you about my mom?"

Peter felt himself start, blinking in surprise at his mentor in the dim lights of the room, wondering at the subject change. "Um...not really...no."

"No...I haven't really talked about her at all...not for years. But she loved me. And...shit, I was a mess. A pompous, drunk mess." Peter blinked at him, bringing a hand up to wipe at his eyes. "And my dad...I never told him I loved him. Never heard him tell me he loved me. Didn't know he gave a shit about me until he was dead and I found an old video he made...I mean, sure, it was nice to hear it, but it would have been nicer if he'd told me while he was actually around." Peter watched in concern as Mr. Stark let out a long, sad sigh. "But my mom...she told me a lot. Every time she saw me." He was smiling a little, eyes far off before he returned to looking at Peter. "Her and May would have gotten along. They loved their kids. More than anything."

Peter wiped at his eyes again, sitting up a little and leaning against the wall. "I wasn't, though." He admitted in a whisper. "I wasn't even related to her. My uncle...he was my dad's brother, but May..."

He stumbled over her name. "I wasn't hers..."

"You were her kid." Mr. Stark corrected gently. "And...you're my kid." Peter started a little, looking up at him in surprise. "I'm your guardian and you are my kid." He hesitated, then gave Peter a grin. "And I love you, kiddo. My old man, he was pretty smart, but he was a crappy father. I don't...I don't want to make that mistake. Okay? So...you're my kid. And I know this sucks and you're gonna miss May for a long time, but we're going to get through this. Promise. You're not going to be alone. Okay?"

Peter swallowed hard, feeling his eyes sting. "Thank you." He whispered, and Mr. Stark patted him on the shoulder, nodding awkwardly. It was almost funny...he'd never seen the man so emotional.

"Alright. Let's go have lunch. Helen gave me strict instructions to make sure you ate, and she scares me when she's angry."

"Doesn't she work for you?"

"Yeah. Try telling her that." Smiling, he reached out a hand and pulled him up and the two headed into the kitchen.

Peter still didn't have much of an appetite, but he sat at the kitchen island, nibbling at the sandwiches Rhodey had ordered. Peter wanted to thank the man, but he was nowhere around. When he asked Mr. Stark, the man put his own sandwich down. "He's in a meeting with Ross. Actually...I also need to be at that meeting."

"Oh...oh! Mr. Stark, you should go to your meeting! I mean, I don't want you..."

"Hey, easy kid. Breathe. You weren't keeping me from anything. If anything, you gave me an excuse not to go." He checked his watch. "I just wanted to let you know that I'm going to be pretty busy for...well, the rest of the day. And tomorrow." He took another bite of his sandwich and Peter nodded.

"Yeah, of course. I mean..that's fine."

"My last meeting tomorrow should be over by 6, so we can get dinner or something. Sound good?"

"Yeah, definitely. I mean...if you want..."
"I want." He smiled at Peter, nodding toward the kid's sandwich. Sighing a little, he took a bite, feeling his stomach turn. "Still not feeling good?"

"Not really," Peter admitted softly.

"Alright, kiddo. You can wrap it up if you want. But, uh...before I go...there is one more thing."

"Yeah?"

"I got a call...well, Rhodey and I did. From Banner."

"Like...Bruce Banner! He's okay!?” Bruce Banner hadn't been seen for almost two years! Since before the Avengers had broken up!

Mr. Stark gave him a weak nod. "It seems like it. I don't know much...but he's coming back. With Thor. And Loki. And...well, a lot of other Asgardians. So...that's going to be keeping me pretty busy." Peter felt his mouth drop open, blinking rapidly as he tried to make sense of that.

"Thor...and...Loki?" He asked, his voice breaking a little. Mr. Stark didn't make a joke or even point it out...just nodded. "He's...he's bringing Loki here?"

"Yeah." Mr. Stark gave a weak laugh, not looking entirely amused. "I didn't get the whole story, but something happened to Asgard and they have nowhere else to go. But Thor assured me that his brother could be trusted, which I don't believe for a second, but I'm dedicated to not worrying about that until they land."

Peter nodded a few times, trying to take that in. It didn't really work. May was gone. He lived with Mr. Stark now. That was about all his brain was willing to take in at the moment.

"Do...I mean...do you want me...stay somewhere else or…"

"No." Mr. Stark shook his head, his voice firm. "No, Pete. This is your home now, okay? I'll be busy but you still live here. Besides, don't you want to meet the rest of the Avengers?" Peter tried to smile, but he was just too tired. "Kid?"

"Um...yeah. I just... " He brought a hand up, running it over his face and blinking at the table.

"Here." He blinked in surprise when a bottle of water was pushed in front of him. "Drink this." Mr. Stark ordered. Peter did as he asked, taking a drink, then another until the water was gone. A hand was pressed to his forehead, and for a second it reminded him so much of May that it hurt. "C'mon, Pete." Mr. Sark urged, getting an arm around him and helping him to his feet, then leading him to his bedroom.

Peter realized he still hadn't really looked around the room much. He couldn't bring himself to. Instead, he let Mr. Stark lead him to the bed where he collapsed. His mentor...guardian pulled the blankets up around his shoulders and ruffled his hair. "You need some sleep, kiddo. I've got to go but just ask FRIDAY if you need anything. Or text me. These meetings are really boring, so you'd be doing me a favor." Peter smiled weakly, eyes already closing. "I'll be home around 10." He ruffled his hair one last time, then squeezed his shoulder. Peter was asleep before Mr. Stark had even released his shoulder.
When Peter woke, it was getting dark outside. He realized that he felt better...sort of. Still, everything was so surreal...it was almost like this was a normal day. He'd never slept over at the compound before, but he'd spent lots of time there. His mind still didn't want to accept what was going on...like there was a glitch in his brain or something and it wouldn't accept that this was his new life. This was his home. This was his room. Sitting up and rubbing his eyes, he looked around the dim bedroom. They'd buried his aunt a few hours ago. He'd cried in front of two superheroes and Happy and he'd broken down at his aunt's funeral and now he lived with Iron Man. "Um...FRIDAY?"

"Yes, Peter?" She asked, the AI's voice gentle. Peter wondered if Mr. Stark had programmed her to sound nicer when she talked to him. It was kind of a nice thought.

"Um...what time is it?"

Automatically the lights started to come up, going from dim to just bright enough to be comfortable. "It is currently 6:31 pm. You have been asleep for almost four hours."

"Oh...thanks, FRI." He looked around his room, eyes landing on the desk, which he'd sort used a few times, and then the rest of the room. The dresser was full of clothes that weren't his, and he knew his own clothes were in boxes somewhere with the rest of his stuff. The only things from his apartment that were in the room were his old laptop, the files of which he still hadn't transferred over to his new one, and his backpack that sat in the corner. "Is...um...hey, FRIDAY?"

"Yes, Peter?" She asked, sounding like she was smiling. Could AI's smile? He didn't think so...but Mr. Stark could program anything, so if anyone could program an AI to smile it was Mr. Stark.

"Is anyone else here? At the compound, I mean."

"Vision is currently on a phone call in the training room. Would you like me to get him for you?"

"Oh...no thank you. That's...I'm fine. Um...am I...can..." He brought his knees up to his stomach and sighed, rubbing his head. "Nevermind." He murmured.

"Mr. Stark wanted you to know that you have full access to the compound and are welcome to explore. The only restricted areas are the armory, Mr. Stark's private lab when he is not present, and the private rooms of other residents with the exception of Mr. Stark's room."

Peter blinked at that. He could go in Mr. Stark's room? Not that he wanted to. He didn't want to snoop or anything. Still, it was nice to think that Mr. Stark would let him into his personal room. Rubbing his eyes, he stood up, looking around the room once more. "Thank you, FRIDAY." He threw in, not wanting to seem rude.

"You're very welcome, Peter. Please let me know if you need anything else." Right. Let her know...he needed a lot of things. He needed his aunt back. He needed to understand what was going on and get his homework done and really talk to Ned and so many other things. But FRIDAY couldn't help him with any of that.

Moving toward the desk, he opened his backpack, contemplating homework, then decided against it. He'd tried to do homework several times over the last few days, but mostly he'd just read the same stuff over and over, solved a few math problems, and had managed to write two lines of an English
paper...both of which were terrible. But he'd sat there, trying to force himself to focus, for several hours at a time, sometimes taking a break and texting Ned instead, because he hated the thought that Mr. Stark felt like he had to spend all his time watching Peter.

The man had been so nice...sitting with him, watching movies, cooking food. Peter didn't want to take up all of his time, especially since he knew his mentor...guardian had meetings and work and events and all sorts of stuff that was way more important than babysitting him. Plus he knew that Mr. Stark was losing sleep because of him and he didn't know how to get FRIDAY to stop waking him up.

"Hey, FRIDAY?"

"Yes, Peter?"

"Can you shut off the alarm...the one that wakes Mr. Stark if I have a nightmare?"

"I'm sorry, Peter. Mr. Stark is the only one who can shut off that alarm." He sighed.

"Right." He murmured, scratching his head and sitting down in front of the new laptop. Opening his phone, he looked at his last text from Ned after the funeral...Ned had asked when Peter was coming back to school, but Peter didn't know how to answer. As he was booting up the new computer, a new text popped up.

"You okay?"

"Hello, Peter." He jumped, looking back at the laptop where Karen's voice had come from. "How are you today?"

"Um...hey, Karen." He waved a little at the computer screen, feeling like a moron. He really had missed her. Then, plugging a flash drive into his old computer, he started to copy things over. He wondered if he had a private server here like Mr. Stark, but he wasn't sure how to access it, and he didn't want to assume, so he transferred everything the old fashioned way. Opening a file already on the new laptop, he grinned a little when he found the prototype for his webshooters. There was another for his suit, and another for his AI, all protected by Karen who required him to verbally verify his identity.

Once he'd glanced through those, he opened his school email and looked again at the list of emails from his teachers, and one or two from his fellow students that offered their sympathy. From his teachers, he received the assurance that he could take his time with the make-up work and that he could take his midterms when he came back to school. When he was going back to school, he wasn't sure, but he felt a growing anxiety at the thought of missing even more. He'd already missed so much... "Peter, your heart rate is rising. Would you like me to contact someone?" FRIDAY asked, voice on a low setting.

"No...I'm fine, FRI." He sighed, leaving the laptop open and grabbing his phone as he looked around the room. Tucking the phone against his ear, he started to make his bed while it rang in his ear. Mr. Stark hadn't asked him to keep the room clean or anything but it was the least he could do. Aunt May had always wanted him to make the bed...said it made his whole room look better. He felt his throat close up a little at the thought.

"Peter?" Ned asked, sounding surprised. "Man, are you okay? I barely got to talk to you...Mr. War Machine said you weren't feeling good…"

'Yeah...sorry. I just, um...I'm better now." He lied a little. "I'm sorry I ran out like that...without
saying goodbye."

"It's fine! You don't have to apologize. I just wanted to make sure you were okay." He finished putting the pillows at the head of the bed, not sure what to say. "So...um...how...how are things? With Mr. Stark?" Ned asked.

"Fine. He's great. He's been...he's been great, Ned. And I'm worried that he's missing meetings because of me and..."

"Hey, you shouldn't be worrying about that, Peter. He's an adult. He knows what he's doing. Just...let him look after you, okay?" Peter sighed, running a hand through his hair. "Do you know anything about school?"

"No. I haven't asked. Haven't really had the chance." He walked over to the closet and opened it, looking through the brand new, still with tags, clothes and the four new pairs of shoes, not including the dress shoes, lined up at the bottom. Science t-shirts and NASA t-shirts, along with a few with the Avengers on them were alongside new jeans and khakis and slacks. At the top of the closet were a LEGO Millennium Falcon and a LEGO Imperial Tie Fighter, both of which had to have been expensive. There were more behind them but he couldn't find the energy to explore the closet anymore. He wanted to go back to bed...close his eyes and pretend none of this was happening.

He browsed the rest of the room while Ned caught him up on what had been going on at school. The dresser was still mostly full of new underclothes, with the top drawers empty. And then there was the TV. Turning it on, he quickly realized that FRIDAY had access to almost every TV channel he watched. Except for HBO. Apparently, age locks were something Mr. Stark was very familiar with. Peter figured he'd have to go to Ned's to watch Game of Thrones. There was also an incredible selection of movies, but anything was nudity was also blocked. Peter smiled a little, surprised at the lengths he'd gone through. There were tons of video games in the cabinet under the Playstation, from first-person shooters to RPGs to world builders, with a few LEGO games thrown in.

Peter hated to admit that none of it was appealing at the moment. Just a few weeks ago, he would have gone nuts, tearing open the LEGO sets and trying all the video games while attempting to build the Millennium Falcon. Now, he just felt...tired. Empty. Every few minutes, he'd remember why he was there, and it would be like there was a vice around his chest, squeezing until it was hard to breathe. "Peter?"

"Yeah." He muttered, sitting in the chair across from the TV.

"You okay, man? I mean, of course, you're not okay...is Mr. Stark there?"

"He's at meetings all night...and all day until tomorrow night."

"Oh...why don't you come over? Maybe tomorrow after school?" Peter frowned, not sure about that. He'd need to get a ride there and a ride back.

"I'm...I'm not sure I can. No one's really here and I don't know if I could get a ride."

"Oh. My mom probably wouldn't mind driving you."

"I don't know...can I try to text him first and ask?"

"Yeah. Call me back if you want me to ask my mom."

"Thanks, Ned."
They said their goodbyes and hung up. Peter leaving his room to head to the kitchen where he found his sandwich and started eating. When he opened the fridge, he found it full of every type of soda imaginable, along with three different flavors of Gatorade and grabbed a Pepsi. When he shut the refrigerator, he finally noticed the note pinned to the door.

"Peter,

I'll be back tonight around 10. There's food in the kitchen, or if you want to order something, use the card in the drawer to your right. If you order out, go ahead and get enough for me, would you? If you need anything, Vision should be around or ask FRIDAY. Or text me.

Tony."

Swallowing the rest of his sandwich, he guzzled the soda, then headed over to the living area, standing in the middle of the room and trying to shake the emptiness. He knew he couldn't just lay in bed...May wouldn't want that, and it was worrying Mr. Stark. It was why he'd moved himself from the sofa to his room, opening his textbooks and trying to convince the man that he was feeling okay...that every time he thought of May, of her coffin in front of a church...of waking up and having Mr. Stark tell him that she was gone, he felt like he couldn't breathe anymore.

Peter dropped onto the sofa, head in his hands as he breathed through it, fighting back a sob. He didn't want to cry anymore. Didn't want to feel his throat close up and feel his stomach turn into a knot. It didn't work. The sobs came anyway. He wondered if it would ever stop. Would he ever be able to function again? A hand clamped over his mouth, he tried to stifle it, glad no one was at home.

"Peter?" He startled, jumping to his feet and whirling around to find Vision, who had somehow learned to alter his appearance so that he had hair and human-looking skin, standing behind the sofa, wearing a sweater and khakis. The...android...man...tilted his head, looking worried. "Are you alright?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm fine. Sorry. I'll…" He pointed at his room, starting to move, but Vision shook his head.

"You do not need to leave." He hesitated. "Tony told me that your aunt's funeral was today. I'm very sorry for your loss." Vision had told him this before when he'd first moved to the compound. That didn't make it any easier to hear. It was what everyone at the funeral had been saying...how sorry they were. How wonderful May had been. How much they would all miss her.

"Thanks." He muttered. "Um...what are you up to today?" Peter asked, desperate to change the subject as he wiped at his eyes. "FRIDAY said you were on the phone...not that I'm trying to ask...I mean...I didn't know if you had a... a family or...I guess not because Mr. Stark made you...right? I didn't really get the whole story. But um...I was just wondering if you had plans because if you did I didn't want you to think you couldn't go. Not that you couldn't...I mean...shouldn't. Because of me. Because I'm fine. I'm fine by myself if you want to go somewhere..." He ran a hand through his hair, realizing that Mr. Stark would have interrupted his rambling a long time ago, but apparently Vision was too polite. He left his sentence hanging, catching his breath and trying not to look like an idiot. "Sorry." He murmured.

If anything, Vision looked almost amused. "There is no need for you to be sorry. To answer your questions in order, I am not 'up to' anything. I was on the phone. I do not have a family per se...I was speaking to a friend. Tony did create me, in a way. I do not have plans this evening. And I am sure that you would be perfectly fine by yourself here at the compound, but Tony asked for me to stay here with you until he came back."
He blinked a few times, nodding. "Oh. Um...but you don't have to."

"I know that. I am happy to stay here at the compound with you until Tony and Rhodey return."

He didn't know what to say to that. So he decided to change the subject again. "So...who's your friend? The one you were on the phone with?" He wondered. Vision's expression changed, and Peter wished he'd kept his mouth shut. "Sorry...I didn't mean to be nosy."

"Do not be sorry. Do you have plans for the rest of the day?"

Peter shook his head, noticing how Vision ignored the question but not pressing it. "No. Not really." He looked around the room, wondering if it would be rude to just leave. To go back to his room and get in bed and hide under the covers. Then he got an idea. "Actually, I was going to ask Mr. Stark if I could go to a friend's house tomorrow."

"Ah. Well, I'm sure if you sent him a text message, he would respond."

"Thanks, Vision. Um...Mr. Stark said I could order food. I was going to order pizza later. Did you want some?"

"I do not eat, Peter, but thank you." With that, Peter nodded and hurried back to his own room where he spent the next few hours on the attached balcony, either sitting on the railing or on one of the chairs, flipping through a textbook or a novel he'd checked out from the library. He hadn't been able to focus on anything, though, and had finally given up, dropping his head back against the chair and closing his eyes, trying not to think. It almost worked.

He ordered the pizza with Mr. Stark's card at 9:15, timing it so that, hopefully, the pizzas would arrive just before Mr. Stark. Ordering two large pizzas so that he'd have enough for both of them, he waited in the living room, the TV turned to a sitcom he'd never seen before. The pizza arrived at ten, and a few minutes later, his guardian came home. When the elevator opened, a tired but surprised looking Mr. Stark stepped out, eyes widening as he took in the kid sitting at the kitchen island. "Hey, Pete. I thought you'd be asleep." He draped his coat on the hook by the elevator door and glanced at the pizza. "You already eat?"

Peter shook his head. "Thought I'd wait up."

"Not tired?" Mr. Stark asked, ruffling Peter's hair as he passed, grabbing plates and paper towels. Peter shrugged, and thankfully the man didn't push. "Thanks, kiddo." It felt too normal...like he was just visiting on a weekend like he always did. But it wasn't normal. May was gone.

"How were the meetings?"

Mr. Stark gave an irritated groan. "Awful. Boring." Sighing, he opened one of the pizza boxes and grabbed two slices of Hawaiian pizza. Peter opened the other box, taking a slice of pepperoni and nibbling at it. "How about you? What did you do today?" Peter shrugged.

"Slept. Did some homework."

"You know you don't have to work on homework if you don't want to." Mr. Stark told him almost gently, looking seriously at Peter. Peter shrugged again.

"I need to catch up." Hesitating, he stared down at his food when he asked his next question. "Um...I was wondering..."

"Yeah?"
"Can...I mean, I was wondering if I could...Ned was asking..."

"Pete." He looked up then, trying to meet Mr. Stark's eyes.

"I was wondering if I could hang out at his place tomorrow. After school...I mean, it's no big deal...but if I could just get a ride to the city...I can take the subway and..."

"Sure." He blinked, cutting himself off when Mr. Stark interrupted. The man took another bite and swallowed before answering. "I'll have Happy give you a ride to his place. I can pick you up on my way back from the meeting unless you want to stay later."

"That...if he wouldn't mind...I mean...that would be...um...thank you, Mr. Stark. I'll just call to make sure it's okay..."

"Maybe call tomorrow. It's a school night, right?" Peter nodded, taking another bite, and Mr. Stark finished up his pizza before speaking again, his voice quiet and serious. "You don't have to be scared to ask me things like that. Or to ask me anything else. I won't bite. Okay?" Peter nodded, staring at his pizza. "How about verbal confirmation, huh kiddo?"

"Okay. Sorry."

"Don't be sorry." He reached out, clapping a hand on his shoulder. "You want some more pizza?" Peter shook his head, knowing he was worrying the man and hating himself for it. "Alright. What are we watching?" He asked, hopping from the stool and, once Peter had done the same, he led him over to the sofa.

"I don't know. Just turned the TV on." Mr. Stark pressed the information button on the remote.

"How I Met Your Mother. Huh. Sounds good to me." Dropping onto the sofa, he pulled the boy down with him, arm still around his shoulders. Peter let himself be led, hesitantly leaning against his side. Mr. Stark squeezed his shoulder, and Peter let himself be held until his eyes were drooping. Every once in a while, Mr. Stark would chuckle at something happening on the screen, and Peter would feel the man's laughter from where he was leaning against him.

"Hey, bud, ready for bed?" Mr. Stark finally asked, and Peter managed to nod against the man's shoulder. "C'mon." He hauled him to his feet, leading him to bed, where Peter had done the same, he led him over to the sofa. "Night, Pete."

"Goodnight." He murmured, and then his door was shut. Metal on metal. His aunt screaming. A coffin. Hot gasoline and oil and metal and screaming. Screaming. Someone was screaming. He couldn't breathe. He couldn't breathe!

"Peter! Hey, it's okay. It's okay. Wake up, kiddo. Peter." A soft, soothing voice accompanied by a thumb wiping gently under his eye. "You're safe. You're in bed. Wake up."

"May? May!" He called. Lights. There were lights and something was coming...something was wrong. He unbuckled his seatbelt, moving faster than ever before, and threw himself over the middle console, arms wrapped around her just as the car hit.

"C'mon, kiddo. Wake up."

"No...May..."
"Peter!" The voice was louder, insistent, and Peter's eyes snapped open, gasping for breath as he looked around the dark room. A hand on his chest steadied him, and Peter found himself sobbing.

"I tried to save her. Mr. Stark, I tried!" The man was sitting beside him on the bed and his lips pressed into a firm line, eyes sad.

"I know, buddy. I know." He tried to assure him.

"I saw the car. I was trying to protect her but…"

"Kiddo, there was nothing more you could have done." He put his hands over his face, sobbing as Mr. Stark eased a hand under his neck and another behind his back as he pulled him up. Once he was sitting up, Mr. Stark put his arms around the boy, letting him hide his face in his shoulder. "It's okay. It's alright, Peter."

It took him a long time to catch his breath, but Mr. Stark never showed any signs of impatience. As he calmed down, something occurred to him, making him stiffen. "What time is it?" He asked softly.

"Almost three in the morning." The man told him.

"What time is your meeting?"

Mr. Stark rubbed his back, shaking his head. "Don't worry about that, Pete."

"FRIDAY?" Peter asked, and Mr. Stark sighed.

"Mr. Stark's first meeting begins at 7:30 am." The AI told him.

"I'm sorry. Turn off the alarm. Please, Mr. Stark."

"No way, kiddo. You don't need to worry about that."

"But I keep waking you up and…"

"And nothing. Stop worrying about it, Pete. You think you can go back to sleep?"

Peter wanted to argue, but already he was feeling his eyes close. "Can you?" He asked as the man lay him back down on the bed.

"Yeah. I'll go back to sleep. Don't worry." Peter nodded.

"Thank you." He mumbled, eyes closing against his will, and Mr. Stark pushed his hair back.

"Don't worry about it, kiddo. Get some sleep. Text me if you need me to pick you up tomorrow."

"Thanks." He knew the word didn't come out quite right, but he couldn't care.

"No problem, kiddo." And he didn't feel the man leave, the hand carding through his hair until he fell asleep.
Ned stared in awe at the LEGO Millenium Falcon box that Peter dropped on his bed, jaw actually dropping. Peter found himself smiling, the vice around his chest loosening just a little at that familiar look on his friend's face. He'd missed Ned more than he'd thought.

"Did...Holy crap, Peter, did Iron Man buy you a Millenium Falcon?" He chuckled a little at the thought, imagining stepping outside the compound on his sixteenth birthday and finding that Mr. Stark had actually bought him a Millennium Falcon rather than a car. The man was probably rich enough. Sitting cross-legged on the floor by his friend's bed, he nodded.

"Yeah. Well, Mr. Stark did. I think. Or Miss Potts. It was in my closet. I doubt he was in the armor when he bought it though." He grinned, but Ned was too shocked to catch his friend's teasing tone.

"Holy crap." His best friend whispered again. "Can...can we build it? I mean...unless you'd rather...talk or something? I mean...I know you said you didn't want to but..."

"Ned?" Peter interrupted his rambling friend.

"Yeah?"

"Let's just build it." Ned grinned, eagerly grabbing the box and tearing off the plastic wrapping, and Peter let himself smile, doing his best to dismiss the thought that the last time he'd been here, May had been alive. He felt like he'd been crying nonstop for days, and he still felt like crying, but he wanted to focus on something else, and building a LEGO Millenium Falcon with his best friend was a good start.

He'd slept until almost noon when the light from his window had woken him. For a moment after waking, he'd just looked at his bedroom. Before moving into the compound with Mr. Stark, he'd never slept in such a fancy place. And it was all decorated just for him. Despite the constant pain in his chest that fluctuated, going from manageable when he was distracted, to unbearable when he woke from those nightmares where he heard his aunt scream, he felt warmth in his chest at the thought. Mr. Stark and Miss Potts had given him a room in their home. And not just any guest room...they'd decorated a room just for him and filled it with stuff they knew he'd like.

Figuring that it was time he'd gotten up, Peter had pulled himself out of bed, checking his phone out of habit before muttering a 'good morning' to FRIDAY. He didn't know if AI's slept or powered down or anything, but she wished him a cheerful-sounding good morning right back. Dragging himself to the kitchen, he'd found another note on the refrigerator, this one written in somewhat messier handwriting than the one before, making him wonder if Mr. Stark had been in a hurry.

"Peter,

If you want a ride to Ted's, just call Happy. I told him to be on standby. If you need anything, text me.

Tony."

After grabbing a glass of orange juice and making eggs for a late breakfast, he went back to his room, not sure if he was up for going to his friend's house all afternoon...pretending to be feeling better and probably failing. But if he stayed home all day, Mr. Stark would probably worry more. So
he'd texted Ned to double check that it would be okay, then texted Happy to ask very nicely for a ride. And then he'd opened his backpack, pulling out the thing he'd left at the bottom.

The red suit lay in a pile and he pulled it out, staring at the eyes of the mask. He laid it on the bed, wondering. Wondering how he was going to be the friendly neighborhood Spider-Man if he wasn't anywhere near a neighborhood? Wondering if he'd be able to pull it on and save people when he hadn't been able to save his aunt. Wondering if he was strong enough.

Pulling out his textbooks, he'd refolded the suit and replaced it in his backpack, then put the LEGO set inside as well before wasting the next two hours in his room, wishing he had the courage to go explore the compound more. But he didn't want to have another awkward conversation with Vision where he just embarrassed himself even more, so he'd stayed in his room until Happy had texted him to tell him he was there.

He hadn't spoken to happy since before his aunt had died, really. They'd briefly seen each other on the way to and from the funeral, but he hadn't said much of anything at all to the man. So when he'd gotten down to the garage where the man was waiting, he'd tried to force a smile, vaguely worried at how hard that was. "Thanks for driving me, Happy." He'd murmured, and, to his shock, the man had reached out and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Any time, kid. You need something, you text me, okay?" Peter had nodded, hating that his eyes were heating up, but thankfully the man with him didn't seem to notice, and they'd climbed into the car in silence. Happy had turned the radio on, keeping it pretty soft, and Peter had stared out the window until the familiar landscape of Queens surrounded him. "If you need me to give you a ride home, just text, alright?" Happy had asked, and he'd nodded, trying again to smile. It had almost worked.

"Peter?" He jumped, jolted back to the present where his friend was dumping little colorful building blocks onto his floor. The instructions fell out of the box as well, and Peter wondered how long it would take to build this thing.

"Yeah...what?"

"I asked if you were hungry. We could head over to Delmar's...before we get started?" Ned was looking at him, the concern getting stronger by the second, and Peter didn't know how to tell him that since he'd woken up, he barely had an appetite. Logically, he knew he had to keep eating or his crazy metabolism would bite him on the butt, but he never felt hungry. Briefly, he wondered what would happen if he just gave in and stayed in bed all day. But Mr. Stark would worry, and he hated the thought of making him worry even more. The man had already given up several days of his life to look after Peter. He lost sleep every night because of those stupid nightmares. He couldn't worry him any more. If that meant choking down food two to three times a day, then so be it.

"Sure, yeah. Sounds good." He made sure his wallet was in his back pocket, glad he still had a few dollars left. Dollars that May had given him. Shoving that thought away and ignoring the icy feeling in his stomach, he followed his best friend out the door. As they were taking the stairs down to the street, his phone buzzed in his pocket, and he pulled it out in surprise.

"Hey, Pete. You with Ted?" He felt Ned gazing over his shoulder and shot a quick reply back as they walked, glancing up every once in a while to make sure he didn't run into anything.

"Yes. And you know his name. You have his number!" He imagined Mr. Stark grinning at his phone in his meeting and pocketed his own cell.

"Is that Mr. Stark?" Ned asked.
"Yeah."

"Did he call me Ted?" He couldn't tell if his friend sounded affronted or just concerned, but he grinned either way.

"He's joking," Peter assured him, their feet taking them toward Mr. Delmar's place without much thought. Mr. Delmar seemed surprised to see him, coming out from behind the counter to put a hand on his shoulder, and Peter worried that he wouldn't be able to keep it together if the man kept that up.

"Peter. I'm so sorry...I heard about the accident. Are you alright?" The man asked, looking at him too closely. He swallowed hard, throat aching as the tears threatened to fill his eyes. No more. He couldn't keep falling apart every time someone spoke to him!

"I...yeah. Thanks…"

"You have a place to stay?" He checked, squeezing Peter's shoulder.

"Yeah." He left it at that, not sure if he was allowed to tell people that he was staying with Mr. Stark.

"Good. Alright." He seemed to shake himself, smiling as he headed back to the other side of the counter. In the blink of an eye, he went from sympathetic and worried to his normal cheer which helped Peter pull himself together. "What can I get you boys? On the house." Peter was about to argue, but Ned gave both of their orders, nudging Peter a little, and Peter thanked the man when he handed them their food, reaching over to pet Murphy.

"So...what's it like living with Iron Man?" Ned asked him once they were back at his apartment on his bedroom floor, eating their sandwiches and building the Millenium Falcon piece by tiny piece. Peter was grateful for the distractions...it was a relief to get out of his own head.

"Um...it's fine. He's been great and everyone is really nice." He shrugged. Ned leaned in, lowering his voice.

"Is it...you know...is it weird? Living with the Avengers?"

"It's just Mr. Stark and Colonel Rhodes and Vision...mostly just Mr. Stark." Ned was quiet and Peter shrugged. "Yeah. It's kind of weird. He's nice and everything...they all are. But...yeah. It just feels...surreal. You know?"

"Yeah. I mean...I get it. It's awesome, don't get me wrong. And I'm dying for you to invite me over...are you allowed to have people over?"

"I'm not really sure," Peter admitted. There was so much he needed to ask Mr. Stark, but with everything coming up with Thor and Doctor Banner and all the people from Asgard, he didn't want to bug him. The man had told him he was busy...and Peter already knew that. "I don't want to bother him right now. He's really busy with meetings and stuff." Ned nodded, looking concerned but not saying anything. He was a good friend...he knew not to push, and together they worked on the LEGO sculpture in silence until 5:45 when his phone buzzed.

"Got out of the meeting early. Are you ready to go?" Ned glanced over, and Peter showed him the text.

"Would it be alright if I leave the LEGOs here?"

"Yeah! Definitely! And I promise not to work on it until you get back." Grinning and doubting that promise very much, he texted Mr. Stark. "I'm ready. But you don't have to pick me up if you're
"I'm on my way. Be there in 10." Ned laughed a little over his shoulder.

"Mr. Stark's really cool." He offered, nodding his head toward Peter's phone.

"Yeah. He's been great." Peter murmured.

"Hey, are you sure that you're okay there? I mean...if you want to stay here instead, my mom wouldn't mind."

"He's my guardian now." Peter reminded his friend, staring a hole into the carpet.

"I just...wanted to make sure you were okay."

"Yeah. I am. It's not him...or the compound or anything. I just...you know." He shrugged, zipping up his backpack and pocketing his phone. "He's been really nice and patient and everything. And Colonel Rhodes and Vision...they're all really nice. I..." He ran a hand over his face, hating the tightness in his throat. Hating that he couldn't shake the pain.

"Peter..." Ned murmured, putting a hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Sorry...I should..." He gestured at the open door but Ned shook his head, leading him over to the bed and sitting down beside him. He'd done so well...he'd smiled and joked around with Ned and built a LEGO model with him and now he was crying again. "Sorry." He choked out, and Ned put his arms around him.

"You don't have to be sorry." His friend assured him, rubbing his back while Peter buried his face in his shoulder. "It sucks."

"I want her back, Ned." He admitted in a small voice.

"I know, man."

"I've lost everyone. My parents and my Uncle Ben and now her too."

"Not everyone, Peter." Ned reminded him softly, both of them failing to notice the man standing in the doorway, hand over his mouth as he stepped back a little out of view. It wasn't that he wanted to eavesdrop...Mrs. Leeds had been pretty surprised to see him at her door, and he assumed the boys hadn't informed her who exactly was coming to pick Peter up. Still, she'd smiled and invited him in, offering him milk and cookies like he was just getting home from soccer practice or something. Then she'd pointed the way toward her son's room, apologizing as she'd hurried off to get back to making dinner.

He'd suspected that Peter wasn't as okay as he'd seemed at first. The boy was trying so hard, but the nightmares still happened every night and he still got that look on his face most days, staring off into space and seeming to crumble a little more every day. The kid wasn't okay. "You've still got me," Ned told Peter weakly, then went on. "Besides, Mr. Stark's like your family now."

"I still don't get why he did it" Peter admitted. "I'm just causing him trouble and I wake him up every night and..."

"Man, you didn't see him in the hospital. He called me and as soon as I told him what had happened, he was flying over in his suit. He made sure to get the guardianship papers that night to make sure he could take care of you. He was a mess, Pete. And then MJ was screaming at him..."
"Wait, she...what?" He pulled away, horrified. "She yelled at Mr. Stark."

"Yeah. Because we tried calling after the accident and his secretary hung up on us. So he gave us his personal number...like, his cell phone. I have Tony Stark's personal cell phone number, Peter." Peter managed a little laugh at that, and the man in the hallway found himself grinning. He said it like it was the greatest accomplishment of his life. "And he made sure they got all your stuff and moved it to the tower and he even texted me so me and MJ would know what was going on."

"Was he mad? About her yelling?"

"No. He even brought us up to the Avengers Facility the day after he brought you there and let us stay for hours. Ordered food for us and everything. Then he had a driver take us home." Peter let his friend pull him in again, his head resting on Ned's shoulder. "I know you miss her. Everyone misses her. But Mr. Stark knew what he was doing when he pretty much demanded his lawyers get guardianship of you. He doesn't regret it or anything."

"How do you know?" Peter asked, his voice weak, and Tony put a hand over his mouth, closing his eyes. Surely the kid knew he didn't regret it. Right? "If he regretted it, he could let you live with someone else. He wouldn't be picking you up from my place or buying you cool LEGO sets..."

"To be fair, Pepper picked those out." Both boys jumped, eyes huge as they turned to find the man in the hallway. Peter looked away, trying to wipe his eyes without his new guardian seeing. If Mr. Stark noticed, he didn't say anything. "But I think I did mention that you liked them, so I should still get some credit."

Ned grinned, waving a little. "Hi, Mr. Stark."

"I'm sorry...were you waiting outside?" Peter asked, jumping off the bed and grabbing his backpack. Mr. Stark waved him off.

"Hey, Ned. And no, I just came on up. Mrs. Leeds let me in. You all ready, Pete?"

"Yeah...um...sorry. Yeah, I'm ready." Mr. Stark patted him on the shoulder, waving to Ned.

"See you around, Ned. Maybe next time you can come over to the compound. And you can bring your other friend...Michelle?"

"Oh, yeah...that...that would be awesome, Mr. Stark." The two friends said goodbye then, and the billionaire led Peter outside to the car, waiting for Peter to put his backpack in the back and climb in the passenger seat to speak.

"You're welcome to have your friends over if you want...wasn't sure if I'd made that clear. You guys finish building the spaceship thing?" He waved his hand, even though Peter was pretty sure he knew what the Millenium Falcon was.

"Uh, no...we're not even halfway done. It'll probably take a while." Feeling awkward and wondering how much of that conversation Mr. Stark had heard, he stared down at his lap. "Um...how were the meetings?" He asked, hoping to change the subject.

"Long. Boring. Got to see Pepper, so that was good. She's coming to the compound this weekend. We'd planned on going to California for the weekend but with everything going on, she's just going to take her vacation at the compound instead."

"I can stay with Ned, if you want." Peter offered. "With everything..."
Mr. Stark pulled to a stop at a red light, waiting until his car was fully stopped to turn to Peter. "I don't want you to stay anywhere but your home, kiddo. That's your home now. Okay? You live there. You're not in my way, or anyone else's. You're not causing problems. I promise." He reached out, squeezing Peter's knee. "You have a home there for as long as you want."

Peter didn't know what to say...or if he could say anything without crying again like a baby, so he just nodded and offered the man a weak smile. "Now." Mr. Stark said, clapping his hands together briskly. "Tomorrow we're having some guests from outer space. Not sure what time they'll be arriving, but Thor has a room, and so does Bruce. As for the rest of them, we have some guest rooms...heck, we have a guest floor, but he didn't give me a whole lot to go on when it comes to planning. I'm not sure how we're going to fit all of them at the compound. I had some trailers moved to the back that should be able to fit some people...I wish there was a way we could get in touch with them. Pepper has been in contact with some local hotels, so that should help."

"You can't just answer their...message? Transmission?" Peter asked, glad that the subject was on something other than him, and that the man seemed to be willing to move past whatever he'd heard at Ned's.

"Nope. Communications from space to Earth aren't exactly like phone calls, kiddo. At least, not for us. Our technology isn't quite up to par. More like...mail. The old kind, before emails. And before UPS. Like the Pony freaking express. Even if I'd had multiple hours to dedicate to figuring out where to send whatever transmission asking for more information, who knows how long it would take for them to get back to us. It's not something we've ever been able to study or anything."

"And...Loki's coming too?"

"Yeah, that's what they said. Here's hoping Thor can keep his crazy brother in check."

They pulled up outside a fairly nice restaurant, and Peter was surprised when Mr. Stark handed off the keys to a valet. "Um...did you want me to wait in the car?" He asked hesitantly. Mr. Stark gave him a look, blinking in surprise as though he couldn't quite comprehend the question.

"No...of course not. You honestly think I would go into a restaurant to eat and leave you in the car?" He asked, incredulous and almost angry. It was the closest the man had been to angry since Peter had come to live with him, and he felt his stomach drop, cursing himself for being stupid.

"No...I mean...I'm not really dressed for..." He gestured weakly at the restaurant, trying to ignore the valet who was waiting outside Mr. Stark's door. His guardian sighed, shaking his head.

"You're fine, Peter. It's not black tie or anything. Come on." Hesitantly, Peter climbed out of the car, following the man into the restaurant. At first, no one looked up. The hostess didn't look surprised to see them, just smiled briefly at Mr. Stark and gestured for a waitress to lead them to a table in the back behind some decorative plants.

Two menus were set in front of them, and Peter waited for the waitress to step away before leaning in and whispering. "Mr. Stark, is this your secret table?" The man snorted, putting a hand to his mouth and shaking his head.

"No," He responded with a chuckle. "It's not my secret table. I just asked for a more private table away from the windows. I haven't done anything interesting enough to warrant paparazzi for a little while, but you never know when someone's going to snap a picture on their cell phone and sell it to the papers or the blogs or whatever. Next thing you know, I have a secret love child and you have some new shadows." He said it all with a wave of his hand and a roll of his eyes, but Peter felt his stomach drop a little.
"I...do you..." He found himself stuttering a little and Mr. Stark frowned, going serious again.

"Don't worry about any of that, kiddo. I'll take care of it."

"I mean...I don't...in public...I can sit somewhere else and..."

"No." His tone was firm then, and the man leaned in, looking even more serious. "I'm going to have a press conference sometime in the next few days...with Thor coming and...well, with all that happening, I doubt anyone will care soon, but Pepper will announce that I've...that I have a kid, and she'll ask them to respect our privacy. They won't, but it won't matter because all of Asgard will be stopping by and that's going to be the dominant news story for a while."

The waitress came then, apparently seeing the lull in the conversation, and as soon as they'd ordered, with Peter doing his best not to look at the prices, he leaned in again. "What are you going to do, Mr. Stark? I mean...with all those people coming here?"

"I've been in contact with King T'challa of Wakanda. Apparently, Wakanda has been planning to open their borders to refugees. These people will hopefully qualify. It all depends on how many there are, honestly. I'm not sure if that's where they'll stay for good, but it's a start."

"Are you going..." Peter shut his mouth, cutting off the question, and stared down at his plate.

"Am I going..." Mr. Stark trailed off, gesturing for Peter to continue.

He shook his head. "Nothing. Sorry...I shouldn't...it's nothing."

Mr. Stark didn't accept that. "Go ahead and ask, Peter. I won't bite, remember?"

Realizing the man wasn't going to drop it, Peter sighed and spoke in a rush, his words tripping over one another. "Are you going to call the other Avengers to help?" He only let Mr. Stark process that for about two seconds before rushing on. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked that. I'm sorry..."

"One rule, Pete. I give you one rule." It sounded like the man was teasing, but Peter was afraid to look up and find out. Sighing, Mr. Stark continued, "I hadn't planned on it, no. But if the situation requires it, then...I will do whatever is necessary." Then there was silence between them before he heard the man clear his throat, going back to his usual easy tone. "That wasn't so hard, was it? Told you I wouldn't bite. And stop apologizing. You have nothing to be sorry for. You're allowed to ask questions, Peter. If I don't want to answer something, I'll just tell you. Okay?" Peter nodded, wishing his emotions would stop swinging back and forth.

The food was some of the very best he'd ever had, and he found himself practically inhaling it. No one really gave them a second glance, and Peter managed to relax a little. Then Mr. Stark ordered dessert despite Peter trying to assure him that he was fine. He ordered them cakes anyway, and after hesitating for a few seconds, he inhaled that too, much to the older man's amusement.

It wasn't until after Mr. Stark had paid the check and the two were headed out that Peter heard a click. He glanced over, frowning a bit when he saw the older guy holding up his phone, pointing it at them. Peter felt himself stiffen, and behind him, Mr. Stark paused, putting a hand on his shoulder.

"Kiddo?" He asked quietly. Peter just gestured at the guy holding up the phone, obviously still taking pictures. Giving the guy a look, Mr. Stark put a hand on the back of Peters neck and led him toward the door, moving between him and the man with the phone to block him from view. Hoping that the pictures that the man was taking didn't end up on the internet and make Mr. Stark regret taking him in, Peter followed the man out to the car and was quiet all the way back to the compound.

"You feeling okay, kiddo?" Mr. Stark asked as he was pulling into the garage. Peter nodded,
stomach clenched in anxiety. What if the man sold the pictures? What if they caused trouble for Mr. Stark? Wasn't that all he'd done for the last week? Cause the man trouble?

"Yeah," Peter muttered, about to climb out once they'd pulled into a parking space.

"Pete?" That made him pause, turning back to his guardian who hadn't shut off the car yet. "What's wrong?" He asked, voice soft as he reached out, resting a hand on Peter's shoulder.

"I just...I'm...that guy was taking pictures and...I'm..."

"Nope." Mr. Stark interrupted him, making him blink in surprise.

"Wh...what?" He asked, started when Mr. Stark smiled a little.

"I know that face. That was your 'about to apologize' face. You don't have to apologize. I forbided it." That made Peter's mouth turn up at the corners against his will.

"Forbade." He corrected quietly, torn between sheepish and amused. Mr. Stark waved a hand, grinning.

"I'm Tony Stark. It's forbided if I say it's forbided." He squeezed the hand on Peter's shoulder, still smiling. "So someone took a picture. We're going to have a press conference soon. I don't care if people know you're staying with me. You're my kid, Pete. I'm your guardian. Hell, I'd put it on a blog myself if Pepper hadn't taken away my blogging privileges."

"You have a blog?"

"My company has a blog that I am no longer a part of." He corrected, shrugging. "Apparently calling Norman Osborne an 'unethical shithed' on Twitter was the 'last straw' or something." He shrugged, dropping the hands he'd been using for finger quotes, and Peter was started at the chuckle that escaped. "Anyway, my point is, he can post those pictures or sell them to TMZ or print them out and mail them to the New York Times for all I care. I'm glad you're my kid, Pete. The way it happened sucks, but you've been my kid for a long time. I don't really care who knows it. Okay?"

That warmth was back, and Peter nodded, sniffing a little and grinning right back. "Okay."
Arrival

The spaceship was...huge. Gigantic. The biggest ship he'd ever seen. Of course, the Quinjet was the only other real ship he'd really seen...and it wasn't even a ship. More of a plane. A really cool plane that looked sort of alien but wasn't. But this was a real live spaceship! Standing beside Mr. Stark on the back patio, he watched the gigantic ship lower itself onto the grass, feeling the man grip his shoulder comfortingly. On Mr. Stark's other side was Colonel Rhodes who stood almost at attention, back stiff, his jaw tight as he too stared at the ship. On Peter's other side was Vision who, like Peter, had not really met Thor...although JARVIS had and he wasn't sure if Vision still remembered all the stuff from when he'd been JARVIS. It didn't seem polite to ask, so he hadn't.

Miss Potts had arrived that morning before Peter had woken up...well, woken up the second time. The first time it had been the nightmare...metal on metal. Screaming. He'd woken up gasping, tears dripping from his eyes, and only a few minutes after waking, Mr. Stark had been there, knocking quietly on the door then coming in, sitting on the bed next to him and putting a hand on his shoulder. "You're okay." The man had murmured, rubbing his arm. Peter had apologized, asking the man again to just turn off the alarm but once more, Mr. Stark had refused, insisting that it was fine and that Peter didn't need to worry.

He'd woken up again around eight in the morning when the light had come in through his balcony window. He had a balcony. He still couldn't quite believe that. Throwing off the blankets and dragging himself tiredly to the kitchen, he'd frozen in place when he'd seen the beautiful blonde woman sitting at the counter dressed in jeans and a sweater, eating scrambled eggs and bacon. He must have stood there for at least five minutes, wondering if he should just go back to his room when she happened to look up.

"Oh...Peter." She had smiled softly, standing from the counter and walking over to him, reaching out and putting a hand on his shoulder. For a second, with a hand on his arm and one on his head, it was like Aunt May was there...he swallowed hard, looking down at the ground when she pulled him close. For just a second, he closed his eyes, letting her pull him into a hug and rub his back. "I'm sorry I wasn't able to come on Sunday." She had murmured, and he'd managed to nod, jaw tight as he tried not to start crying before breakfast.

He liked Miss Potts a lot. At first, she had seemed kind of intimidating. Mr. Stark's fiance, the CEO of his company, and the only person that seemed to be able to reign his men in, she was a beautiful, obviously brilliant woman who never seemed to need anyone's approval. But the first time she'd met him, she'd softened, quickly adopting May's habit of dropping a hand on his arm or squeezing his shoulder. She was unfailingly kind and always seemed happy to see him, and he could understand why Mr. Stark loved her so much.

Then he wondered...was she okay with Mr. Stark taking him in? The man had mentioned adoption...how would Miss Potts feel about that? Sure, she liked him, but to have him living under her roof, a child to her soon-to-be husband? What if she didn't want kids? Or what if she wanted her own kids? He was a teenager...what if she thought he would be too much trouble? He didn't think she would tell Tony to get rid of him or anything, but what if it caused Mr. Stark problems? At the moment, though, she seemed perfectly happy to see him, so he took that as some comfort.

"I, um...thought you weren't coming until this weekend." He'd tried to change the subject, and she had led him back to the counter, gesturing for him to take a seat and placing a full plate of eggs and
bacon in front of him. When he picked up the fork, she sat beside him, a hand on his back. It felt familiar...like his aunt was in the room. She'd always ruffle his hair or put a hand on his back when she would walk by...Miss Potts seemed to feel him stiffen a little and pulled away.

"I finished up with my meeting early and was able to get in this morning." She told him, taking a bite of her own food. For a while, they had eaten in silence, Peter picking at his own food as Miss Potts finished hers.

"Is Mr. Stark awake?" He had finally asked, uncomfortable with the silence, and she had smiled gently down at him.

"No. He was asleep when I got here a few hours ago. I think I'm going to go wake him up." With that, she had put her empty plate in the sink and had headed off toward Mr. Stark's room while Peter went to his own room to get changed. With no idea how long it would be before the Asgardians showed up, or if he was even supposed to be there for it, he pulled out his phone and texted Ned and MJ who both texted back despite both being at school. He could hear Mr. Stark and Miss Pott's quiet voices but tried not to listen. He didn't want to be rude. Instead, he had opened up his biology textbook again, staring blankly at one of the pages until there was a knock on his door.

Mr. Stark had stepped inside after a few seconds of silence, and from where he'd sat, he'd heard the older man sigh softly. "Give it up, kiddo. We both know you haven't actually done any homework." His voice had been gentle, but Peter had flinched a little anyway.

"I need to."

"And you will. Give yourself some time, kiddo. Were you able to get back to sleep?" Peter had nodded, and Mr. Stark had taken a seat on his bed, hands clasped on his lap. It had taken a minute, but he'd finally given up on pretending to do homework, swiveling in the chair to face his guardian. That word still seemed strange to him. "Pepper said you already ate. You want anything else?" He'd shaken his head, and Tony had stared down at the floor for a minute, seeming to gather himself.

"They should be here sometime today. Didn't exactly get a time frame. Do you want to wear your suit?"

Peter had blinked at him in confusion. "My...my suit?" He'd asked, thinking about the one he'd worn to his aunt's funeral. "I mean...if you think I should...he is a god or something…"

Mr. Stark had snorted just a little, seeming to fight a grin. "Not that suit, Pete. Your Spider-Man suit. You know, secret identity?"

Peter hadn't forgotten about his superhero alter-ego. He hadn't forgotten his responsibility...he was Spider-Man. He saved people and gave old ladies directions and helped kids find their lost pets...but he hadn't saved Aunt May. He hadn't saved the one person that mattered more to him than anyone in the world. And how was he supposed to be Spider-Man from upstate? He didn't even know the way back to Queens from the compound. "You don't have to." Mr. Stark had continued, obviously trying to reassure him. "I can just introduce you as my kid. We don't have to tell them anything about your secret super-heroing. They can keep a secret, though. Well...Thor and Bruce can."

The boy had been too taken aback by the words 'my kid' to respond for a moment. Mr. Stark had just called him his kid. Not son...that would have been weirder. But still. His kid. That...that meant Mr. Stark thought of him as...well...his kid. It just didn't quite compute.

He'd done it before when he'd told Peter that he loved him, which had been a whole different level of surprise. Sure, he'd hoped that Mr. Stark was somewhat fond of him. The man had taken him in, after all. He'd hoped that they were...friends? But for Mr. Stark to just come out and say he loved
Peter...and now he was going to tell other people that he was Mr. Stark's kid...and he'd mentioned a press conference. And maybe adopting him.

It wasn't that he didn't want any of this. Mr. Stark was amazing and smart and he obviously cared a lot about Peter. And that was awesome. Peter knew that. And he was grateful. "Kid? You okay? You with me?" Mr. Stark had asked, and Peter had no idea how to express what he was feeling without possibly offending the man, so he had just nodded.

"Yeah…um…can I just wear regular clothes?"

"Sure thing, Pete. You can tell them you're Spider-Man whenever you want, okay? I won't say anything." Reaching out, Mr. Stark had ruffled his hair, resting that hand on his head for a second. It was nice. He really liked Mr. Stark...probably loved him. He was like a father figure even before all this...a mentor. A friend. But this was different. This was...more. And Peter didn't know how to handle that considering his aunt had only been gone for…a week? Had it been more than a week yet? He didn't want to go back and count.

Peter wondered if the other Avengers knew about this. He knew that Black Widow had fought on their side, but Mr. Stark hadn't said anything about her. King T'challa was supposed to be coming the next week according to Mr. Stark, and as for the others, he had no idea how things were going with the 'rogue' Avengers. He knew that Mr. Stark had been trying to get the Accords amended and that he and Colonel Rhodes were fighting with that Ross guy that Mr. Stark insisted he never meet.

He wasn't sure why he didn't want Peter to meet Ross. Mr. Stark didn't seem too scared of him. Usually, when the man called, Mr. Stark would just put him on hold. Still, he hadn't heard anything about Captain America or the others. He knew they'd gotten out of jail or wherever they'd been but wasn't sure if they knew that Thor and Dr. Banner were coming back to Earth.

The first one out of the mouth of the huge ship was Dr. Banner. He'd seen the man in photos before, but not too many. There weren't a ton of pictures of Dr. Banner online...mostly they were pictures of the Hulk destroying New York. But Dr. Banner headed straight for Mr. Stark who caught the man by the shoulders, both of them grinning. "Tony…” Dr. Banner shook his head, laughing a little incredulously. "I never thought I'd see you again."

Peter had to admit he was surprised when Mr. Stark put his arms around Dr. Banner, patting him firmly on the back. He knew, of course, that the two of them were friends, but he hadn't really seen Mr. Stark around many of his friends. Just Colonel Rhodes and...well, Miss Potts, but Miss Potts didn't count because she was his fiance. But he was hugging Dr. Banner and then two more people were exiting the spaceship.

Thor was bigger than Peter had expected. With short hair and without his hammer, the man looked...different. But he was grinning when he reached out a hand, gripping Mr. Stark on the shoulder. "Stark! It's good to see you again."

Miss Potts left his side for a moment and hurried over to greet Dr. Banner, who's shoulder she squeezed, and Thor, who pulled her into a surprisingly gentle hug, his smile soft and fond. He had never really thought about Pepper knowing Thor...but he supposed they'd all met before. The Avengers had worked together for a long time before Dr. Banner and Thor had disappeared. The four of them huddled together for a moment before Rhodey joined in, shaking Dr. Banner's hand, and Peter found himself alone on the back patio before meeting the eyes of a man dressed in green, the long black hair familiar. The man was giving him a strange look, lips pulled into an almost-smile before Dr. Banner spoke up again.

"I'm sorry...who's this?" He asked, and Peter realized the man was talking about him. Tearing his
eyes from the man that he'd realized was Loki, the god of mischief, he was suddenly aware that everyone was staring at him, Dr. Banner looking confused and Thor looking friendly if not also confused. Mr. Stark headed back over to where he was standing, reaching out and putting a friendly arm around Peter's shoulders.

"Right. This is Peter." He squeezed Peter's shoulders and then turned back to the three new men, the third of whom still hadn't spoken. "Pete, this is Dr. Bruce Banner, also known as the Hulk but he doesn't like to talk about it..." Dr. Banner rolled his eyes with a half smile but still seemed confused. "And that is Thor, minus the hair. And the hammer. What's the story with that?" Both Dr. Banner and Thor still looked confused, but Peter realized that they weren't going to ask. At least, not in front of him, and he felt a wave of gratitude toward Mr. Stark. He didn't want to explain who he was to Mr. Stark...he wasn't even sure how he would.

"Nice to meet you, Peter." Dr. Banner held out a hand that Peter took, wide-eyed as he realized that he was shaking hands with the Bruce Banner. Before he knew it, he was speaking, stammering a little as he tried to explain to the man how big of a fan he was.

"You...you too, Dr. Banner. I'm...I'm a huge fan! I've read all your papers and especially the ones on gamma radiation and Mr. Stark even let me borrow your last book because they didn't have it at the regular library and it's super expensive and...um...it's really nice to meet you." Peter managed to cut himself off when he heard Mr. Stark snort behind him, his cheeks going a dull red. Dr. Banner was smiling though, not like he was laughing at him the way most adults did when he couldn't stop talking. It hadn't happened in a while, but this was Bruce Banner! Instead, the man just looked friendly and somewhat flattered.

"Wow...it's hard to find people your age that actually enjoy reading my work...actually it's hard to find people any age." He chuckled a little, although Peter noticed that something was wrong. He glanced back at the ship, wondering how many people were on it...if they were okay. What had happened on Asgard that made everyone evacuate? Where had Dr. Banner even been for the last couple of years?

"So, how many people are we talking?" Mr. Stark asked, stepping in and crossing his arms. Thor took a step forward, and everyone turned serious at once. Peter fought the urge to take a step back and fade into the background. This was big stuff...over his head kind of stuff. What was he even doing here?

"Nearly six hundred." Tony blinked a few times, then nodded, running a hand over his face, sighing softly. "Mostly women and children, orphans, some wounded, although Banner was able to help most of them on the way over...nothing critical. Most of our warriors are...gone." He told them, his voice dropping a little at the end.

"What happened?" Rhodey asked, his voice soft and incredulous, and Thor looked between all of them, jaw tight.

"How about we try to get everyone situated first." Miss Potts asked, joining the conversation for the first time. "We set up the gymnasium, and there are more tables set up outside around the side of the building. The catering company just finished setting up, so there should be enough food. The trailers should fit...maybe a hundred...if some of the children can share beds. We bought out two hotels nearby, so that's another four hundred, and we have room for maybe fifty here at the compound." Thor nodded, looking grim still.

"Thank you, Pepper. Stark." He didn't look like the Thor Peter had been expecting, although, with all that had happened, he hadn't been thinking about Thor much. The Asgardian looked...tired. Sad. But he smiled, obviously putting on a brave front. Peter knew a little about that.
"Alright." Mr. Stark clapped his hands together smartly, nodding. "Pep, can you show them where the food is? They can take it and eat it on the ship if they want. Or we have tables set up...not sure if we'll have enough. Then our people can start taking some of them to the hotels. Thor, Banner, come with us inside to the kitchen. We can figure out what our next steps are. Thor, you can even bring your crazy brother if he promises not to try and kill anyone for at least two hours." The man with the long black hair sighed, closing his eyes then rolling them.

"You have my word, Stark." Mr. Stark grunted, turning to Thor with a lifted eyebrow.

"You have my word as well." The huge blond man assured him.

"That I'll take."

From there, there was a flurry of activity. Miss Potts and Thor, along with Loki, went back to the ship, maybe to tell everyone what was going on, and Mr. Stark led Peter inside. Colonel Rhodes came along, him and Mr. Stark talking softly, but Peter could feel himself phasing out. Before long, he found himself at the dining room table between Mr. Stark and Rhody, both of whom were talking in soft, serious voices, and then, it felt like he blinked and there was Thor...and Loki. And Dr. Banner. All three of them were sitting at the dining room table and there was a plate in front of him. Lasagna. He usually liked lasagna, especially since Mr. Stark always ordered from the best places.

He picked at his food while the conversation went on around him. Normally, he would have been in fanboy heaven. He was sitting at a table with Thor! And Loki! And Dr. Bruce Banner! And they were eating dinner together! How lucky was he? Ned was going to go nuts when he found out, especially since he was barely paying enough attention to catch any of what was being said. They were probably talking about cool space stuff, and no part of him really cared. Sure, meeting them was cool. But everything felt wrong. Empty. Blinking hard, he stared at his plate, one hand clenched in his lap as he tried to make it stop shaking. This was awesome. He was so lucky to get to meet these amazing people and he was almost an Avenger and this was his dream come true...but in the back of his mind, the words were like a mantra. 'May's never coming back.'

He would never get to tell her about this. Never introduce her to the other Avengers. After finding out that he was Spider-Man, she'd been pretty upset. Well...really upset. But after a lot of long talks and some crying and a lot of lectures, she'd seemed...well, not okay with it, but resigned. And he knew that she'd been proud of him. She'd told him so plenty of times. She'd also been scared out of her mind. But one thing she'd joked about was getting to meet the Avengers, especially Captain America, who she never believed was a war criminal. And Thor. She thought Thor was 'very handsome.'

Now, seated at a table across from the god of thunder, he had to admit, the guy was handsome. And big. His biceps were bigger than Peter's head. But Peter couldn't feel anything but deep, painful grief when he looked at the man. May would never get to meet him. He'd never get to bring her to the Avenger's Compound and watch her chat with Miss Potts and meet the heroes she'd admired so much.

Someone was staring at him. His spidey sense was good at telling him that, so he glanced up and found himself meeting the eyes of the god of mischief. Strangely enough, he didn't look all that mischievous. Or dangerous. More...mysterious. Forcing a weak smile, he nodded to the man, remembering those manners, and then went back to staring at his food, taking a bite every now and then, despite the fact that everything tasted like sawdust and ash in his mouth. He wanted to feel lucky. Happy. Excited. Inspired. Something. Anything! Anything would be better than this numbness that just barely covered his grief. He was witnessing history from the front row, and all he could do was stare at his plate and tune out the adults around him.
"So, Peter. What grade are you in?" Peter blinked at his plate once more, taking a second to realize that the Dr. Bruce Banner was talking to him. Looking up, he met the man's friendly gaze, wondering if he looked as awful as he felt. Judging from Mr. Stark's worried expression, he did.

"Um...I'm a sophomore, Dr. Banner." He told the man, and in some part of his brain, he was awed. Amazed. Beyond grateful to have this opportunity to meet one of his idols. 'May's never coming back. You'll never get to tell her any of this.'

"A sophomore?" Thor repeated the word, head tilted, smile soft and curious.

"Second year of high school. So he's only got two more years left until he graduates." Dr. Banner explained. "How do you like it, Peter?"

"It's...um...it's fine." He managed, forcing a polite smile. 'May's never coming back.' Loki was still staring at him, differently than the other two.

"Where do you go to school?" Dr. Banner seemed hellbent on including him in this conversation and Peter wondered what they'd been talking about before.

"Midtown Science and Technology."

Dr. Banner whistled, nodding his head. "That's a good one. Tony, didn't your dad donate a lot of money to that school?"

"Sure did. Pretty sure they named the cafeteria after him." Peter managed a weak smile while Dr. Banner and Colonel Rhodes chuckled.

"The gym, actually." Peter corrected, not wanting Mr. Stark to worry about his silence too much, and the man ruffled his hair.

"Even better." Peter took another bite of lasagna, then Dr. Banner was quizzing him some more.

"You said you'd read my stuff. So are you interested in genetics and gamma radiation?"

"Genetics, gamma radiation, robotics, engineering, physics, what isn't this kid interested in?" Peter felt a wave of gratitude as Mr. Stark took over part of the conversation, despite the fact that the man sounded more like a proud father than...well...whatever it was the man was now. His guardian. "He even helps me with the Iron Man armor sometimes." Peter managed another bite, then decided he'd better quit. His stomach was rebelling, and he didn't think he could swallow anymore. 'May's never coming back.' The conversation kept going around him and he wondered if the world would ever be back to normal.

"Peter?" He blinked down at his lap then jerked his head up, finding the concerned gaze of Dr. Banner on him again. And his eyes were wet, tears dripping down onto his cheeks. 'May's never coming back.'

"I...I..." He felt his cheeks flush, humiliation washing over him in a hot wave as he looked from the renowned scientist to the two Asgardians and finally to Mr. Stark, the former three all staring at him in surprised...worry? Concern. Or something like it. He was embarrassing Mr. Stark in front of his friends, all because he was crying like a baby over lunch. And suddenly he couldn't do it anymore...couldn't sit at that table with his heroes and talk with Dr. Bruce Banner about how much he loved science when he'd never get to tell May about it. "I'm so sorry." He murmured, pushing himself away from the table and all but running down the hallway, shutting his door behind him and dropping onto the bed. Staring down at his hands, he fought the tears. He was fine. It had been long enough. Why couldn't he stop?
The knock on his door didn't even surprise him, but he made no move to answer. It didn't matter, as the door opened after a second anyway. He wondered if he even could lock the door. Not that he saw himself ever trying to lock Mr. Stark out of his bedroom. This whole place belonged to the man...besides, FRIDAY would probably just override it if he tried.

Mr. Stark stepped into the bedroom, and Peter heard him shut the door behind him. Then the man was sitting on the bed next to Peter, an arm wrapping gently around his shoulders. He bit down on his lip, feeling his face heat up again. "You know, kiddo...it's only been a couple of days." Peter felt himself tense, eyes heating up again, but the arm around his shoulder didn't move. "And already you've managed to break my only rule how many times now?" Peter put a hand against his mouth, shaking his head and fighting the sob that eventually won. Squeezing him tightly, Mr. Stark pulled him over to lean against his side. "It's alright, Pete. You don't have to be sorry, or embarrassed...no one's upset with you." He murmured, all teasing put aside.

"I didn't mean to be rude to Dr. Banner." He choked out.

"You weren't. Hell, he gets it, kid. We've all lost people. You should have seen me after my parents. I don't even remember it...so you'd have to ask Rhody. But to hear him tell it, it was bad."

"She said Thor was handsome...she wanted to meet him. And the others...I thought...I just...I always thought one day…"

"He would have loved to meet her." Mr. Stark told him softly, patting his back. There was nothing more to say...nothing the man could do. And Peter knew that. Mr. Stark was already doing so much.

"You can go if you need to...I'm fine," Peter told him, clasping his hands in his lap. He didn't want Mr. Stark to stay in his room, cooped up, while he had so much to do.

"You sure, Pete?" The man didn't sound like he believed him, but Peter just nodded, not up to trying to convince him. For a moment, he thought the man would argue. Then he sighed softly, squeezing his shoulder. "Alright, kiddo. I'm probably going to be in the lab with Bruce if you need me. Okay? Just come on down if you want. Or tell FRIDAY to get me if you need anything." Ruffling Peter's hair, he stood. "You can come out anytime you want."

Peter couldn't help the way his cheeks heated up, tears pooling in his eyes again. "They all probably think…"

"They think you're a kid who just lost someone, which is all that I told them." Mr. Stark interrupted, speaking firmly. "And they all understand."

"Even Loki?" Peter asked, managing a smile. Mr. Stark seemed relieved at the sight of it, snorting.

"Sure, kiddo. I'm sure he understands too, though why you care what he thinks is beyond me." Patting him on the shoulder, Mr. Stark stood, heading for the door. "Get me if you need me. Okay?"

"Okay."

"You promise?"

"Yeah, Mr. Stark. I promise." With one last nod, the man opened his bedroom door, disappearing and closing it softly behind him, leaving Peter to try and pull himself back together.
Guests

Toy hesitated for a long moment outside Peter's door, leaning against the wall and breathing heavily, wondering for the tenth time just that day if he was doing the right thing. He tried again to remember the stages of grief. Shock. Denial. Anger. Bargaining. Depression. Acceptance. At least, those were the ones listed in the book he'd asked FRIDAY to download for him and that he'd been reading on his tablet on nights when Peter woke up from nightmares and he couldn't get back to sleep. The kid seemed to be going back and forth between shock and depression, seeming fine at times, and then dropping back down into a numbness that he couldn't seem to fend off.

So Tony had been doing his best, reading that book and trying to give the boy space when he seemed to need it while reminding him over and over that he was available if Peter needed him. He had FRIDAY programmed to get him any time Peter asked for him, no matter what he was doing, even if FRIDAY was on mute. He'd also kept the liquor cabinets and minibar locked at all times, never grabbing a drink for himself. He'd all but stopped drinking except during special occasions or celebrations, and even then he limited himself to one drink a night. But he didn't want to risk it...didn't want the boy to finally seek him out only to find the man drunk off his ass.

He remained where he was for a while, closing his eyes and putting his brain to work. It had been nearly two weeks since the boy had woken up. Just a nearly two week since he'd learned his last living relative was dead. All things considered, he was doing pretty good. He made conversation sometimes. He'd spoken to his nerd friends. He'd even had a conversation or two with Vision. Rhodey had mentioned that the boy had talked to him a couple of times, but usually, Peter kept to himself. Which was fine. If he needed space, he could have space. If he needed someone to talk to, Tony was always around...except when he had meetings and charity events with Pepper and all that other crap he had to deal with. Even then, FRIDAY had been instructed to get him if Peter asked for him. Pepper knew...she understood. Had told him that it was okay to take some time off, and he had. But he couldn't avoid work forever.

Tapping his fingers on the wall for a second, he left the boy alone, heading back down the hallway to the kitchen where he'd left Bruce, Thor, and Loki. When they'd all sat down to eat, it had been obvious that Peter had retreated back into himself, picking at his food and staring down at the table most of the time. He'd noticed Loki giving the boy strange looks, and had to stop himself from snapping at the Asgardian ass. Thor had assured him that Loki was safe, and as much as he wanted to argue, he was already fighting with half of the Avengers. No need to add Thor to that list. So Loki ate his food in silence and Tony did his best to ignore him.

Finally, after exchanging some brief pleasantries where Tony had blurted out a question about Thor's new eyepatch and Bruce had asked about Pepper, the scientist had turned to Peter, everyone quieting down as they seemed to notice the downcast expression on Peter's face. He'd asked Peter about school, keeping his voice light and friendly, and Peter had done his best to answer, voice strained but polite. Still, Tony could tell the strain was getting to him, and he'd jumped in, trying to communicate with his eyes that Peter wasn't up for conversation at the moment. Usually, once the kid got started, he wouldn't stop until he was forced to stop for breath. He'd seen a glimpse of it with Bruce earlier...how excited the boy had been to meet him. How much he admired Bruce and wanted to learn from him. But then something had happened...a switch had been thrown and the kid had seemed to deflate in front of their eyes.

It was a lesson he'd learned himself several times over since Peter had come to live with him.
Sometimes he could talk to the kid and he'd hold a conversation just fine, sometimes even smiling or laughing, picking movies and TV shows and just being present. Then something would happen...usually something Tony didn't even catch, and he would shut down like someone had yanked his batteries out. Then, despite his best efforts, it would be like he couldn't put together a thought or keep his attention on anything, and Tony would quiet down, letting him process. Letting him grieve.

Despite his best efforts, he'd caught the shocked, worried looks on Bruce's and Thor's faces, and the contemplative look on Loki's before turning to find large tears dripping down Peter's cheeks. The kid hadn't even seemed aware of it at first, just staring down at his food, jaw tight, and Bruce had opened his mouth, then shut it, turning to Tony who had started to reach out to the boy but had thought better of it. Just as he'd been about to try and change the subject, Peter had looked up, seeming to realize where he was and what was happening. And then he'd been apologizing, looking between the four men before taking off.

For a moment, there had been silence, the three visitors staring at Tony who was watching the boy all but run to his room. At least he felt safe in his room, he'd thought, exhaling softly and feeling the familiar worry build in his chest. "Is...is your son alright?" Thor had asked, his voice soft, and Tony had nodded, not quite taking in the question until Bruce had spoken up.

"So... he is your son?" He'd asked, bewildered.

"What? No...he's not...not biologically. He's just...I'm his guardian." He'd muttered, pushing himself to his feet. "He just lost his aunt a couple of weeks ago...car accident. The funeral was on Sunday." Bruce had nodded, staring back down at his feet, and Loki, of all people, had gotten a contemplative, somewhat concerned look on his face. "Excuse me." And then he'd found the boy in his room, still crying, and had wondered if he was doing this right.

Rejoining his guests at the dining room table, he took his seat, taking a long drink of his water and wondering if it was too early for wine. But he wasn't drinking, he reminded himself. Not for a while...until Peter was better. "Is he alright?" Bruce asked, and Tony gave a slow, sad nod.

"He's...he'll be fine." He told the man simply.

"Is he your...relative?" Bruce asked tentatively, and Tony shook his head, smiling a little.

"He was my intern."

"You have interns?"

"I had one. His aunt and I spoke fairly regularly. She was his last relative, so she asked me to look after him if anything ever happened to her." It wasn't exactly the truth, but it was as close as he was willing to get, considering the kid didn't want to tell them he was Spider-Man. Not that Tony blamed him. He was a kid running around fighting crime...there might be a few people that didn't approve. Like Ross, who was never getting anywhere near his kid.

"Are you going to adopt him?" Bruce wondered.

"I haven't asked him about that yet. Thought I'd give him some time." For a moment, there was silence around the table. Then they all went back to eating. Tony lost in thought until Pepper came back into the room, StarkPad in hand, eyes on the screen as she typed away, always busy. He briefly felt bad, as this was supposed to be a vacation for her. He'd have to take her somewhere nice...her and Peter. They could get away somewhere. Peter had probably never been to Paris.
"Several of the Asgardians are on their way to the hotels. The rest are being settled into the guest floor and the trailers out back. Also...there is a...rock...man? He says his name is Korg..."

"Yes. Korg." Thor nodded, apparently unaffected by her tone. Tony blinked, looking up at his fiancee and then back at Thor.

"Rock man?" He repeated slowly.

"Yes. Korg is made of rocks."

He nodded. "Right." Tony sighed, wiping a hand over his face. "Any other strange friends?"

"Well, there's Miek." Tony blinked. "He has knives for hands."

"Of course he does. Keep those two in the trailers. Away from the media." He decided to skip over that, dealing with something he could actually control. "We're going to have a press conference soon. Pepper?"

"Yes. Next Tuesday. And King T'Challa should be here by next weekend. He would like to set up a video conference sometime this week." She read this from her StarkPad, only glancing up occasionally. "The majority of the Asgardians are women and children...quite a few orphaned from what the woman...Valkyrie told me. It seems that most of the injured are have already been assisted. Doctor Cho and her team are on their way to help. For now, we have a med team at the hotels."

Suddenly she paused, looking around the table, then back at Tony. "Where's Peter?"

"He wasn't feeling very well. He's in his room." Pepper paused, her face dropping. "He'll be fine," Tony assured her, and she sighed, nodding and glancing toward his bedroom door. For a moment, he thought she was going to check on him, but she just put a hand on his shoulder, her brief smile telling him that they could talk about it later.

"I'm going to go over the list of reporters for the press conference on Tuesday with Happy. Are you still planning on having Peter there?"

"Yes. I think...I need to ask him about it." She nodded, making a note on her tablet and grabbing an apple as she headed down the hallway, phone already pressed to her ear. He added it to the list of stuff he needed to talk to Peter about, including school. He hadn't forgotten. The kid would need to go back to school soon or child services would be sniffing around. He supposed homeschooling was an option. But Peter's school was a good school. And the kid liked it.

"Hey, Pep?" He called, making her pause in the hallway. "What's the status on the tower?"

"The new owner isn't exactly happy with us." She told him, turning from concentration to exasperation. "There's been some resistance."

He waved a hand. "Offer them more money." Pepper sighed, rolling her eyes as she left the room once more.

"The tower?" Bruce wondered.

"Avengers Towers. Stark Tower. I sold it a few months ago."

"Sold it?" The man shook his head. "Tony...why...what exactly happened?"

"You missed a lot, Bruce." He told him simply, pushing his food away, appetite gone. Exhausted, he thought about just going to his room and laying down. Peter probably wouldn't sleep for a while.
The alarm would be quiet for a while and he could get some real sleep. Thor leaned in.

"The Avengers?" He asked, apparently needing more information. Tony sighed, running a hand over his face.

"We broke up."

"Broke up? What? Like...like a band? Like the Beatles?" Bruce cried.

"The Beatles?" Thor repeated.

"They were a rock band. And no, not like the Beatles." Tony shook his head. "It was bad, Bruce. After Sokovia and Ultron...things went to shit. And none of knew how to fix it and the UN drew up something called the Sokovia Accords which...they were shit too. And we all picked sides and things got bad."

"Bad? Bad like...like an argument? Like...like some of them moved out? Like you don't fight together anymore?"

"Bad like Cap and his nutcase metal-armed war buddy trying to kill me and leaving me for dead in Siberia." He snapped, voice dropping as he stared down at the table, too aware of the sudden silence.

"Metal-armed...what..." The man shook his head, apparently trying to catch up, and Tony remembered that Bruce had left before all that. "How long ago was this?" The doctor wondered, his voice much quieter now, and Tony drummed his fingers on the table. He wanted to get back to Peter...make sure he was okay. Maybe try and talk to him. But the kid wanted some space and so he would give it to him.

"Less than a year. They've been pardoned from all crimes, and the Accords are being revised, but it's been tough." He admitted.

"Who's left?" Bruce asked softly, and Tony pushed back from the table, crossing his arms.

"Me. Vision...Vision was JARVIS. Well, sort of. He's an android. Don't worry about it. Um...Rhodey. The rest are...somewhere. After they were pardoned, they didn't exactly stop by to chat. Natasha started off on my side and switched halfway through. Haven't heard from her since. Cap left a phone to get in touch if I need him." Bruce blinked, eyes narrow as he seemed to try and catch up.

"Okay...okay, so...you sold the tower? Now you're buying it back?"

"Right. Peter's school is too far away from the Compound, so I was going to move back to the Tower. If we can get the new owners to sell it back to me." He grumbled a little.

"You're...you're moving back? To the tower. Because of Peter?" Tony lifted an eyebrow at the tone. Was it really so hard to believe? Thor had finished his food, and he and his brother were sitting silently at the table, apparently content to listen, both looking just as confused as Bruce. Tony supposed their story would have to wait.

"Yes. Because of Peter." He agreed, wondering how many times they were going to go over this.

"Peter, who was your intern?"

"Correct."
"And now you're adopting him?" Tony shook his head.

"It's complicated. We haven't talked about it yet. It hadn't been long since the funeral...he needs time. Just...don't ask him about his aunt. Or me adopting him. I want to talk to him first."

"Of course." Bruce nodded, apparently ready to change the subject. "So...the Avengers. Are you going to...call them?" Tony crossed his arms, jaw tight. He didn't want to. Peter had asked the same thing and he had had to fight not to get upset at the thought of calling Steve Rogers. Did he need to? He figured Bruce would want to talk to Natasha. The two had been...something.

"King T'Challa of Wakanda is coming after the press conference next week to discuss temporarily relocating the Asgardians to Wakanda. They've started taking in refugees. Maybe after we speak with him, we can discuss getting the band back together." He'd admit to missing them. Missed living in a house full of people...friends. People he'd trusted. But the thought of letting them back in...after what Steve had done...it was hard. He wasn't sure how long that trust was going to take to build back up...if it could ever be built back up.

One step at a time. First, get that tower back. Move back to New York City. Get his kid back in school and maybe in therapy. He wasn't sure yet. Maybe he just needed to get back to a normal routine. He wondered if the kid would like to have his friends over, then mixed the idea. Not with Loki lurking around. Maybe once they moved back to the tower. Or maybe he could ask that Ned kid if Peter could go to his place. But he didn't want Peter to think that he had to go, or that he was in the way. He knew how Peter was. The kid would think he was trying to get rid of him. Sighing, he took his plate to the sink, leaning against the counter while Bruce and Thor did the same, scraping the scraps into the garbage and then turning to face him.

"Thor, I can show you where your room is going to be. Your brother's room is right next door. Peter's room is right beside me, so..." He happened to glance at Loki who looked more contemplative than he should. "...leave him alone." He snapped, getting everyone's attention. Thor looked between Tony and his brother, brow furrowed. "The kid just lost someone. He's not even sixteen yet, and he's lost his whole family. So don't even think about playing some kind of shitty mind games with him, you understand me?"

Loki almost smirked, his eyes more amused than malicious. "I will not harm your son, Stark. You have my word." Tony started to say that Peter wasn't his son but figured it was close enough.

"He will not hurt Peter," Thor assured him, voice soft.

"Good." Tony pretended to brush off his sleeves, aware suddenly that his three companions were giving him strange looks...almost...proud? Affectionate? Surprised. He didn't like it. "Alright. Food, check. Bruce, let's get down to the lab. Point Break, you and the wonderful Wizard of Oz over there going to be okay on your own. Promise not to touch anything?" Thor chuckled, nodding a little, and Loki rolled his eyes.

With that being said, he led the two to their rooms, right next to each other's and across the hall from what would have been Nat's room. "FRIDAY can let me know if you need anything...tell you where the extra food is and all that. The training room is on the second floor. You remember how elevators work, right?" Thor nodded.

"I do. I need to speak to Valkyrie, however, and if possible, I would like to speak to this T'Challa."

"Right. Sure. I'll see if I can get him on the phone tonight. Actually, FRIDAY, can you ask Pepper to try to reach him. Tell him the god of thunder wants to chat." He kept his voice light, trying not to think of all the people...all the children. Orphans. He thought of Peter and shook that off. He needed
to focus. Get this taken care of. The boy was his top priority, but these people needed help. "Tell your people that they're welcome to use the compound. There's a pool out by the trailers and an indoor pool in the 1st-floor basement. We can get extra clothes, food, toys...whatever you need. Just give FRIDAY a list."

Thor met his eyes with the one not covered by an eyepatch, reaching out and clasping his shoulder. "Thank you, Stark."

"Yes, well...Bruce, I think we have some catching up to do, and my lab has only improved in your absence." And, done with the emotional conversations for the night, he led Bruce down to his lab, reminding FRIDAY to get him if Peter asked for him, as though FRIDAY needed reminding. For a moment, he'd thought the Bruce would bring it up, or ask again about the boy now living with Tony, but he didn't say anything about it, just admired the lab for a moment, trailing his fingers along the worktable.

"So..." Bruce started. "What have I missed." With a tired sigh, Tony sat down at his workstation and filled him in, on everything from the fight with the Avengers in more detail to the issues with the Accords and James Buchanan Barnes and his parents, then skipped right over Spider-Man to his recent attempts to have the Accords rewritten, which had just been finished not too long ago. Ross still had some say, but less than before, and he intended to keep it that way. The only thing that had really remained the same was the UN having some say in Avenger activities, but much less than originally proposed. "Oh, and Wakanda. You totally missed Wakanda coming out of the closet."

"You mean...the country in Africa? You said their king was going to take in refugees."

"Yep." He played with a screwdriver, trying to keep his mind on this conversation and not on the boy upstairs still presumably in his room. He could have asked FRIDAY but didn't want Bruce to accuse him of babying the kid. No...that wasn't it. He was the kid's guardian, and he loved him. There was no reason Bruce shouldn't know that. No...he was more worried about the man finding out about his kid's alter ego.

Not to mention...he'd gotten used to not performing. Since the Avengers had moved out, there had been no one to put up a front for...no one to convince that he was still a snarky...well, whatever they were calling him these days. He loved Peter. Loved being with the kid and working with him in the labs and having him at the compound. It made the place feel like home. And Peter never teased him for acting like a dad. Never made jokes about him getting soft or made him feel self-conscious for showing affection the way he knew Clint and Sam and maybe even Natasha would. Well...maybe not Nat. He didn't even know anymore. The boy just accepted him. Loved him.

There was no reason to keep up the facade for Bruce. Bruce was one of his best friends, and he'd love the boy just as much as Tony did. But it was hard...those old habits didn't want to let go. So he waited until Bruce had told him most of his own incredible, unbelievable story, which took up at least another hour, then looked at his own ceiling. "FRIDAY, time?"

"It is currently 8:51 pm." She told him.

"How are our guests?"

"Thor and Loki are each in their own rooms. The Asgardians on the guest floor have had dinner and the children have, for the most part, been put to bed. There are some adults in the common area. The guests in the trailers are all well, and some of the older children are playing outside." There was a video feed brought up then, showing a few kids that looked to be about Peter's age but could have been anywhere from 10 to 6,000 for all Tony knew about Asgardians, kicking a ball around in the back yard. A few women watched, one sorting out clothing from plastic bags that he assumed
Pepper had had someone go out and buy.

Bruce came to stand behind him, watching the footage as well, and Tony heard him sigh. "It was bad, Tones." He murmured, crossing his arms, and Tony turned in his chair to look up at the man. "So many people...their whole planet..." He ran a hand over his face. "Barely any of their warriors survived. She killed them all."

"We'll find them homes. All of them." Tony promised him softly, jaw tight. "Food, clothes, medical...we'll get them taken care of." Bruce nodded, clapping him on the shoulder.

"I don't doubt you." Tony ran a hand through his hair, looking back at the computer monitor.

"FRIDAY, how's Peter?" He finally asked, letting just a little of the worry bleed through.

"He has been watching TV and using his laptop for the last several hours. He seems to have completed some of his homework as well, and emailed a few assignments to his teachers." He sighed again, letting the air out with a soft huff. Should he go check on his kid, Tony wondered, or keep giving him space? Risk driving the kid away or risk leaving him on his own for too long?

"Hey, Tony?" He glanced over at Bruce who was staring at him kind of closely.

"Hm?"

"You know...if he really is your son...I won't tell anyone." Tony snorted, rolling his eyes.

"He's definitely not mine. Ever heard of Richard Parker?"

"The scientist?" Bruce's eyes went huge. "Is that...Peter is Richard's son?" He cried. "We worked together before...I mean, not for long but...before the plane crash..." Tony nodded.

"I never met the man...at least, not that I remember, but I'd heard of his work. Peter went to live with Richard's brother Ben after the plane crash, then he lived with Ben's wife May until a couple of weeks ago."

"His wife brought Peter to work once." Bruce all but whispered, eyes still wide and unbelieving. "I can't believe I forgot...I'd just gotten out of college and was working in this lab. We just did grunt work but one day his wife brought him lunch and she brought enough for both of us. She had Peter...I can't believe...that's Peter." He was actually whispering at the end, shaking his head. "I didn't connect the name but...damn, he does look like his father."

Tony nodded, surprised despite himself. He'd figured that Bruce might have worked with the man...but he'd met Peter as a baby. He had to fight the urge to ask questions. What was Peter like as a baby? Was he happy, like Tony assumed he had been? What had Richard and Mary been like? There was no way Peter could remember them...he'd hesitantly brought up the topic once back when the kid had first started coming to the compound every week.

His father, Richard, had been studying gene mutation, which seemed like too big of a coincidence to Tony. He'd stumbled upon the information one day while trying to find a painkiller that worked for the kid and had found himself staring at the familiar name. Richard Parker. He'd turned to the boy who seemed to perpetually be tinkering with his web-shooters and web formula, always sure he could improve them. "Hey, kid?" He'd asked, all too aware that his own voice had been quiet and hesitant. Peter had turned, face eager as always.

"Yeah?"
"Mind if I ask a question?" Peter had been confused at that...and for good reason. Tony rarely hesitated when asking him questions.

"Uh...sure, Mr. Stark."

"You, uh...you know anything about the stuff your dad was researching?" Peter had blinked in surprise, and for a moment, Tony had worried that he’d overstepped...that Peter was going to fall apart, and that it would be his fault. But to his own surprise, the boy had smiled a little.

"Not really. He was a scientist, and I know he was looking at DNA or something." He'd shrugged. "How come?"

Shrugging off his surprise, Tony had gestured for the boy to join him at his own workstation. "Take a look." He'd invited, bringing up the web page. Peter had been as shocked as he had.

"Gene mutation...that's...do you think that's a coincidence? I mean...it has to be, right? No way anyone could have known...it was a field trip. No one could have planned for me to wander off during a field trip ten years after he died, right?"

"I don't know, kiddo. It seems like it would have to be but...that's one hell of a coincidence. The son of a scientist studying gene mutation gets bit by a radioactive spider and gets his own DNA mutated." There had been a long silence then, and they'd gone back to their own work, Tony promising to look into it, when he'd turned back to Peter. "Hey, kid?"

"Hm?" Peter had glanced up again, and, emboldened by the fact that Peter hadn't been upset by the question, he asked another. "Can you remember them?" That had made Peter pause, his eyes darkening a little, and once more, Tony had regretted his question. "I'm sorry, kid. I shouldn't have…"

"No, it's okay, Mr. Stark. It's just...uh...no. Not really. I mean, I remember some things. Like, I remember going to the zoo with them when I was really little. And Mom reading to me before bed but..." He gave a weak shrug. "Mostly, it's just May and Ben. I can't...I can't remember their faces, except from pictures." He'd trailed off, and Tony had moved over to his side, squeezing his shoulder and changing the subject to his web-shooters, managing to distract the boy with some suggested improvements.

No way would he remember Bruce. Hell, if he couldn't remember his parents, he couldn't possibly remember a man he'd met once in passing when he was a baby. But would he want to know? Would he want to ask Bruce about his father? The kid was kind of emotionally fragile at the moment. Maybe now wasn't the best time to bring it up with him. "Maybe don't mention that to him just yet." He suggested, not wanting to give orders but also...he kind of did. Peter had so much to get through...he'd lost so much. Tony didn't want him to be reminded of even more loss just yet. Maybe later...when he was better. When he was back to the kid Tony knew.

"Of course." Bruce assured him. "I won't say anything."

It was almost midnight when Tony made his way back to his own bed, Pepper waiting for him against the pillows, book in hand. "Everyone in bed?" He asked, referring to their guests, and she nodded, setting the book down on the table beside her. It was so good to have her home.

"Yes. Everyone has settled down for the night. Breakfast is scheduled to be served from 7-10, and everyone has been given clothes, toiletries, any anything else they might need. They also know how to reach FRIDAY, should anyone need us. How's Peter?"
He hadn't checked on the boy before bed...hadn't wanted to bother him if he was still feeling overwhelmed, which was a decision he was regretting. "FRIDAY?" He asked.

"Peter had dinner at 9:32 and spoke to his friend on the phone earlier tonight. He is currently in the training room." Tony sighed, shaking his head, and Pepper put a hand on his arm.

"He's blowing off some steam...exercise can help with grief and anxiety...anything he might be feeling." She reminded him softly. "Do you still have that alarm?"

"I can sleep in another room...he's probably going to have nightmares."

"No." She scooted closer, resting her chin on his shoulder. "Stay. I didn't come all the way up here for you to sleep somewhere else." He turned his head, resting his forehead on hers.

"The alarm is loud."

"I can get back to sleep." She told him with a shrug. Smiling, he glanced up at the ceiling.

"FRIDAY, mute unless Peter needs me."

"Yes, sir."
Interactions

Interaction

Peter finally managed to convince himself to leave his room around nine-thirty after a long conversation with Ned. He'd called his friend after watching The Walking Dead for a little while, but had been so distracted by his own embarrassment that he hadn't really been paying much attention to the actual plot, so he'd have to watch those episodes over anyway. It was one of the shows he'd never watched with May...she couldn't stand all the violence. He wondered if Mr. Stark had ever seen it...he figured the man was too busy for TV.

For the last couple of days, Mr. Stark had spent a lot of his time with Peter, the two of them watching sitcoms and HGTV or the food network and whatever else was on, but the man never expressed a preference. When Peter would offer to change it, his guardian would wave him off, shaking his head and assuring him that whatever he was watching was fine. Sometimes he'd chuckle at the sitcoms or comment on the food they were making but usually, he was content just to sit, usually with an arm around Peter's shoulders. More and more, that gesture was more comforting than strange.

He'd decided to call Ned after his disastrous meal with their new guests, working up the courage for a long time before finally grabbing his cellphone and scrolling through his contacts. His thumb had hovered over his friend's name for too long until he'd finally managed to hit the call button. Ned had answered on the second ring, voice soft and anxious. "Peter? Are you okay?" He'd asked immediately. Peter had to admit, he missed the days when his friend had answered the phone with 'hello.'

"I'm okay." Peter had told him softly, leaning back against the pillows on his bed. Sure, he still felt awful and stupid, but just hearing his friend's voice sent a wave of relief through him. "Just...it's crazy over here and I made a complete idiot of myself and…” Ned had cut him off, voice still oddly gentle.

"I'm sure you didn't, man. What happened?" So Peter had told him. About the new arrivals, and about the Asgardians (with a warning not to breathe a word of that to anyone or he'd sick Thor on him, which was an empty threat, but it still made Ned promise not to share that particular secret) and finally, his humiliating scene at the table. Throughout, Ned was asking him breathless questions about Thor and Loki the Asgardians. Peter did his best to answer them until he got to the part about their lunch together and his friend got really quiet.

"Then...I just started crying like an idiot in front of everyone and Thor and Loki and Doctor Banner were all there and I just ran off…” Ned had made a sympathetic noise, and Peter knew that his friend wasn't going to try and change his mind. It had been embarrassing, no matter what Mr. Stark said about no one being upset with him. Even if they weren't mad or anything, they probably just saw him as some dumb kid that cried over nothing. Great first impression he'd made.

"That sucks, Peter." Ned had told him quietly, and Peter had smiled a little.

"Yeah."

"That...wow. That's rough. But hey, they've got so much on their minds, maybe they didn't really notice."

"I made eye contact with Thor...while I was crying."
"Shit." Peter had snorted, putting a hand on his mouth and fighting a hysterical laugh.

"Yeah. Shit." He'd whispered back.

"Was Mr. Stark alright?" Ned had asked carefully. Peter had nodded, even though Ned hadn't been in the room to see him.

"He was really nice...like...he wasn't mad at all." Peter had told him, voice hushed just in case the man was nearby and heard Peter talking about him. "He's being so nice and I'm causing him so much trouble..."

"You're not causing him trouble, Pete." Ned had assured him, his voice soft to match Peter's. "He volunteered for this, remember? He cares about you. Didn't you tell me that he told you he loved you?"

"Yeah, Peter had muttered, feeling his face heat up a little. It hadn't been talked about since, but he knew that Mr. Stark had meant it. Mr. Stark cared so much about him, and he was crying in front of his guests, literal gods from Asgard and making people uncomfortable and probably offending the Bruce Banner.

"He knew this was going to be hard for you, Pete." Ned had reminded him, voice still gentle. Peter had hummed noncommittally, and, like any good friend, Ned had changed the subject to the new video game he'd gotten. For a while, they'd talked about their video games just like before. When that was done, he had asked Peter about school, and once more Peter admitted that he hadn't asked. It wasn't like he hadn't had time. Peter had had plenty of time to ask Mr. Stark what he was going to do about school. Sure, Peter could probably be homeschooled, but that wasn't what he wanted. He wanted to go back to his friends and the teachers he already knew...he missed the decathlon team and eating lunch with Ned and MJ...all of it. But how was he supposed to do that when his school was a couple of hours away and Mr. Stark had just sold his tower in the city?

He didn't want to ask...didn't want to inconvenience the man any more than he already had, despite what his friend said. So he had let Ned scold him a little, telling him he needed to know this stuff, then they compared notes on the homework Peter had managed to do...which wasn't much. By the end of that phone call, his stomach had been growling, so he'd gathered his courage, stood by his bedroom door for so long that FRIDAY asked him if he needed assistance, then finally opened it, heading to the kitchen down the hall.

He knew that his bedroom was next to Vision's and across from Mr. Starks all the way at the end of the hall, far from the elevator. He guessed that each bedroom was as big as his with its own bathroom, but he couldn't be sure. He just knew that there were a lot of closed doors that he had never tried to peek into. So he had no idea which rooms their new guests were staying in, or how to avoid them. So, hoping he could get in and out of the kitchen without drawing any attention, he all but ran down the hall.

The kitchen was, thankfully, empty, and he appeased his growling stomach by putting a hunk of leftover lasagna on a plate and microwaving it. While it was heating up, the soft humming of the microwave filling the room, he heard footsteps and had to fight the urge to duck under the counter. Instead, he kept his back to the open area of the living room, facing the microwave and waiting for it to beep. Finally, it did, just as the footsteps behind him came to a faltering stop, and Peter grabbed the plate from the microwave, pretending he hadn't heard it.

Keeping his head down, he started to head back to his room, but he couldn't ignore whoever it was, so he finally looked up, blinking at the shorthaired Asgardian who was staring at him from across the counter, black eyepatch covering one eye. "Um...hi...Mr. Thor...sir." He murmured, hating the way
his face heated up and wondering if he'd stared too long at the eyepatch and offended the man.

"Good evening, Peter." The man nodded a little, his smile soft. "Are you well?" He had a deep, gentle voice, and it almost put Peter at ease.

"Yeah...I'm...uh, I'm fine." He swallowed hard, wishing he was anywhere else. "Um...are you...well?" Peter asked hesitantly, and Thor nodded with a chuckle.

"I am well, thank you."

"Um...there's...there's more in the fridge if you need...if you're hungry," He offered, feeling dumb. Of course, the man probably knew that there was more food...Mr. Stark had probably told him all that stuff. Plus he was Thor...he could figure out where they kept leftover food. He had lived on earth for a long time. Heck, he'd probably stayed at the compound before. Or maybe he hadn't...Peter wasn't sure.

The Asgardian nodded again. "Thank you"

"Right. Sure. I'm...uh...I'll go...so...um...goodnight." He gave a pathetic wave and hurried out of the kitchen and hid in his room. Thankfully, Thor didn't call after him, because if he had to talk to the man and have him possibly ask if he was alright, he might die of actual embarrassment. He'd cried in front of the superhero. Actually sat there and cried. And he'd made eye-contact!

"Hey FRIDAY? Where's Mr. Stark?" He asked, putting his plate down on his desk and wishing he'd grabbed something to drink.

"Mr. Stark is currently in his lab with doctor Banner. Would you like me to get him for you?"

"No...no, that's okay." He waved the AI off, sitting down for a moment, then pausing.

"Um...FRIDAY?"

"Yes, Peter?" She asked, and he was grateful for her endless patience.

"Is Thor still in the kitchen?"

"Yes, Peter. He is currently reheating a plate of food. Would you like me to get him for you?"

"No...no, don't get anyone for me. I just...nevermind. Thanks, FRIDAY."

"Of course, Peter." He sighed, leaving the plate and going back to his door, hesitating for a long minute before opening it and forcing his feet to take him to the kitchen where, just as FRIDAY had told him, Thor was pulling a plate from the microwave. Feeling his cheeks heat up, he swallowed hard and stepped into the room, heading toward the refrigerator. The man turned to him, the puzzled smile back on his face.

"Hi...Mr. Thor, sir...just...I forgot...need to grab..." He pointed at the refrigerator and the man inclined his head, apparently realizing that Peter was uncomfortable and turned back to his own food while Peter grabbed a Gatorade. "Um...did you want...it's..." He held one out, trying to keep eye contact, and the Asgardian took the offered drink. "It's Gatorade. Like...a sports drink...like, fruit juice, but..."

"Peter." The man interrupted, and Peter felt the words die in his throat. "I have had Gatorade before. Thank you." He felt his cheeks heat up again, and he dropped his hand.

"Right. Of course. I'm sorry..."
"There is no need to be sorry, Peter," Thor assured him, and Peter couldn't help but notice how kind he looked, his one eye gentle. Briefly, he wondered what had happened to the other one, but of course it would be too rude to even consider asking. "However, I did wish to tell you how sorry I was to hear about your aunt. I recently lost my father... I understand that it is very difficult." Peter stared up at him dumbly for a moment before remembering the correct response to that.

"Oh...um...thank you, Mr. Thor. I'm...I'm sorry about your dad...about your father." Thor reached out, clasping him on the shoulder, and Peter realized that if he hadn't been as strong as he was, the weight might have made his knees buckle.

"Thank you, Peter." The Asgardian hesitated, then grabbed his plate of food. "I should…"

"Um…" Peter started, accidentally interrupting the man. Thor paused, waiting with an open, tired smile, and Peter remembered that this man had just lost his entire home. "I'm sorry, Mr. Thor. About Asgard and your people and...I'm…" He trailed off, dropping his eyes to the floor.

"Thank you." Thor looked sad for a moment, the smile dropping as he sighed, looking for once like a man with the weight of the world on his shoulders.

"It'll be okay. Mr. Stark and...everyone here...they'll do everything they can."

"Yes...they will." Thor nodded, clutching his plate for a moment, but that tired look had been replaced with a kind one, and Peter wondered what he looked like when he was angry...on second thought, he never wanted to find out.

"Well...I'd better get back...um...goodnight, Mr. Thor."

"Goodnight, Peter."

Peter all but sprinted back to his room, sure he'd made an idiot of himself, but hoping that maybe, just maybe, he'd been able to make Thor feel better. Opening his laptop, he scrolled through social media as he ate, trying to catch up on what everyone at school was talking about through Ned's posts with the occasional post by MJ or Flash thrown in. There was very little mention of him. But they would know soon...everyone would know.

He closed his eyes, rubbing a tired hand over his eyes. He wanted to sleep...his body wanted to go to bed. But if he went to bed then he'd have nightmares and if he had nightmares then FRIDAY would wake Mr. Stark and Miss Potts was in the room with him too, probably, and the alarm would wake both of them. He couldn't bear the thought of waking Miss Potts.

So he stayed up until after eleven, draining the Gatorade and eating his food, then took it all to the thankfully empty kitchen to wash his dishes. Then he headed back to his room where he straightened up, making his bed, then sat back down at his laptop to scroll mindlessly through social media once more. It was nearly midnight when he realized that he was practically shaking with energy. He hadn't been out as Spider-Man in so long and he knew that he couldn't...not yet. There was probably an alarm if he left the Compound too. Actually...maybe there wasn't. "Hey, FRIDAY?"

"Yes, Peter?"

"Can...can I leave the Compound?"

"During the day, you are welcome to wander the property of the Compound. After 10pm, there is an alarm that will alert Mr. Stark if you leave the building."

"Right." He grumbled, sighing softly, then he got another idea.
"Hey FRIDAY?"

"Yes, Peter?"

"You have to tell Mr. Stark when I wake up at night because of a nightmare, right?"

"That is correct, Peter."

"So...if I didn't go to sleep...you wouldn't need to wake him. Right?" There was a pause, almost as though she was trying to figure out how best to answer.

"I would not."

"And...can I leave my room?" He asked.

"Of course, Peter." Wondering if Mr. Stark had programmed her to be nice to him, as she was usually snarkier with his guardian, he stood.

"Hey, FRIDAY, can I go to the training room?" He asked the ceiling. He had seen the training room briefly on the tour but hadn't spent much time there.

"Yes, Peter. You have access to the training room and the pool, as well as the bowling alley and the theater room." He paused at that. Bowling alley? Why did the Avengers Compound need a bowling alley? Brushing that thought aside, he went back to his main goal...getting rid of some of this energy and staying out of bed.

The pool was tempting, but he didn't have a swimsuit...he didn't think. There might have been one in his room somewhere, but he didn't want to search the room. He liked his room...it was amazing and really cool, but he felt awake and aware for the first time in a while and it hurt...his aunt was gone and he missed her so much, and he needed to get out of that room.

He grabbed a bag from the closet and stuffed a change of clothes into it, then stepped out of his room, looking back and forth at the empty hallway, then all but tiptoed toward the stairwell. He still wasn't sure where everyone's rooms were except for Mr. Stark's, but he didn't see anyone in the hallway as he crept through toward the stairwell. Not wanting to wake anyone with the elevator, he took the stairs down to the floor that housed the training room, which he'd been in a handful of times before. Usually, when he visited the Compound, he spent most of his time in the lab or in the living area with Mr. Stark. There was still a lot of this place he'd never seen.

The room was full of punching bags and dumbbells, most built for Captain Rogers, presumably, as a few looked like they might present an actual challenge. But he didn't want to lift weights. He wanted to get out as much energy as possible, so he went over to the cardio equipment...treadmills and ellipticals and stair climbers, and climbed onto the treadmill furthest away from the door and hit the start button.

The treadmill hummed softly, and Peter tried to lose himself in the steady thumps of his feet hitting the moving belt. Thump, thump, thump, thump. Rhythmic. Steady. He usually listened to music when he ran, which he didn't do all that often. Before the spider bite, asthma had made running kind of hard, but afterward, he got most of his cardio by swinging between buildings and chasing bad guys. But he couldn't clear his head by going out into the city at the moment...he doubted Mr. Stark would like it if he slipped out at 1 in the morning, and FRIDAY would definitely tell on him. Besides, it was way too far from the city unless he had a car, which he didn't.

So he ran...as fast as he could. Well, nearly as fast as the treadmill would go. There was a track that went around the compound that he thought about checking out during daylight hours, but for the
moment, the treadmill would do. When it wasn't hard enough to just run, he turned the incline up as far as it would go, and finally, it was a challenge. Managing to empty his mind, he pumped his arms, nearly gasping for breath as he ran uphill. He couldn't think about anything but keeping his feet on the moving belt, which was perfect. He didn't want to think. He wanted to exhaust himself. And so, for almost an hour, he ran as hard as he could until he had to jump onto the sides of the treadmill, turning the machine off, then hopped down to the floor. Gasping, he put his hands on his knees, eyes closed as he tried to catch his breath.

There were shower stalls in the bathrooms connected to the training room, so he stepped into one, letting the hot water pound over his face and wake him up a little. He was feeling himself flag...usually his patrols were over by one or two in the morning, and then he went to bed. Now, he closed his eyes and leaned against the cold tile wall. After rinsing off, he switched the water to cold so he wouldn't get too comfortable and get sleepy, then dressed in the spare clothes he'd brought down with him, taking a while to towel off. With a huge yawn, he stepped out of the bathroom and stood in the middle of the training room.

According to the clock on the wall, it was past 2 in the morning, but he still didn't want to go to bed. Miss Potts was home, so if he woke up with nightmares, he'd wake both of them, and maybe other people...he wasn't sure how loud the alarm was. The thought of waking Thor, or the Bruce Banner, because he'd had a nightmare was too humiliating to consider, so he figured he'd have to stay awake and maybe take a nap the next day. Or...later that day. Maybe Mr. Stark would be so busy then, he'd ignore the alarm. Or maybe he wouldn't have nightmares.

Throwing the bag with his clothes over his shoulder, he took the stairs on shaky legs back up to the floor where the living room and his room were, dropping his duffle bag off in his room as quietly as possible, then went back to the kitchen and grabbed a can of Mountain Dew. May never let him drink soda after ten, but he figured Mr. Stark wasn't around to say anything, so he was in the clear unless FRIDAY ratted him out. Would Mr. Stark even care? The man drank more coffee than Peter had thought possible, so maybe not.

Taking his drink to the living room, he dropped onto the sofa. "Hey FRIDAY, can you turn on the TV...but really quiet?"

"Of course, Peter." She answered, her voice set to what must have been the quietest setting, and the TV flickered to life in the dim room. He looked around for a light switch, his eyesight going blurry for a second. Yawning, he wiped a hand over his face. "What would you like to watch?"

"Um...the Walking Dead? I haven't seen the latest season." Well, he had, but he hadn't been able to focus. Heck, he still couldn't focus. But it was worth a try. The TV switched to the show and within seconds the intro was playing. Leaning back into the back of the sofa, he watched two episodes before a quiet voice had him jumping to his feet, nearly flinging himself into a wall to get away. Of course, that would blow his cover, so he settled for freezing in place.

"Are Midgardian children not usually asleep at this hour?" Gasping for breath once more, he took a step away from the long-haired man standing behind the sofa whose eyes flickered from Peter to the TV behind him where one of the characters was being eaten alive by a horde of zombies. Lifting an eyebrow, he looked back at Peter.

"I'm not a child." He grumbled, hating how young and whiny his voice sounded. Then, feeling sheepish, he crossed his arms, trying not to yawn. "Did...I'm sorry. Did I wake you up? I mean...do you sleep? Like...do Asgardians sleep?"

The man...Asgardian, blinked again, not looking particularly invested in the conversation, but making no move to leave. "Yes, of course, I sleep. And no, you did not wake me. I am an early
riser." Peter just blinked at that, not sure how to respond. Standing in front of him was the god of mischief...the man who'd nearly destroyed New York when Peter had been just a child. In his living room...well, Mr. Stark's living room. And yet he was getting nothing from his Spidey senses. Not even a twinge. According to his body, he wasn't in any danger...and he could almost always trust his body.

The silence went from awkward to downright uncomfortable, and Peter found himself talking once more, the words forced out of his mouth from some kind of compulsion to fill it. "I can't sleep. I mean...I can...I just...I don't want to. I mean...I want to. I really want to sleep. But I can't...I can. I just...I'll wake up. I keep having nightmares and waking up and Mr. Stark told FRIDAY she had to wake him up when I had a nightmare which is really nice of him but he shouldn't because he needs sleep and Miss Potts is here and if I have a nightmare and wake him up she'll wake up too because they're in the same room and I don't want to wake him but he won't turn off the alarm and FRIDAY won't listen to me...so I went to the gym and was running and that helped but I'm tired so I was watching TV so I wouldn't fall asleep..." He trailed off, cursing himself for the word vomit, but the man only blinked at him.

"You wish to sleep without nightmares?" Loki summed up his unprompted explanation, both eyebrows raising as he stepped closer. Peter found himself looking up at the man who had come to stand in front of him. Somehow he hadn't noticed Loki coming closer, but his brain didn't seem to be functioning all that well. "So that you do not wake your father."

"He isn't...he's not my father." Peter corrected him softly. "He's...he's my guardian. He has custody of me...cause my aunt died...a few weeks ago." If he had been more awake, he might have been a little more reluctant to share his life story with the god of mischief, or maybe remembered Thor mentioning his aunt and the fact that the two of them probably already knew, but anyway, the man didn't seem to pose any kind of threat.

"I see." And then Loki was lifting a hand, pressing two fingers against Peter's forehead. "Sleep." And that was the last thing Peter knew.
The light streaming in through the windows woke Tony in the morning. He groaned a little, blinking and stretching, feeling more well rested than he had in weeks. The other side of the bed was cold and he turned to find a note on his nightstand. Sighing, he reached out, blinking furiously to focus his eyes on the small neat cursive.

"Tony, I had to take a call, and there is a meeting in the city that was moved up. I should be home this afternoon in time for lunch. Love, Pepper."

He tossed the note back onto the nightstand, rubbing a hand over his eyes and sitting up. He was surprisingly awake...for a minute, he wondered if he would even need coffee. Then he paused, the reality catching up to him. Had Peter actually slept through the night? Were they done with the nightmares? "FRIDAY, where's Peter."

"Peter is currently asleep on the sofa in the living room." That was odd...he wondered why he would sleep in the living room. But if it let him sleep through the night, the kid could sleep wherever he wanted. Hell, he'd make him a hammock on the ceiling if the little spider preferred it, although their guests might have some questions. He thought about asking when the kid had gone to bed, but decided he could just ask the boy himself. It was nearly ten in the morning, so he pulled himself out of bed, stretching once more, then throwing on a pair of sweatpants and a tank-top. He'd change into nicer clothes later if he had to.

"Friday, itinerary." He requested as he ran a brush through his hair, wondering how much he cared about styling it considering he'd be at the Compound all morning.

"There is a video conference call with King T'Challa at one o'clock. You have a conference call with the board of investors at three."

"Can't Pepper take that one?" He whined a little.

"She will be on the call as well. She insisted you join the call."

He sighed, putting the comb down on the bathroom sink and reaching for a bottle of hair gel. So much for being lazy. "I thought this was supposed to be a vacation."

"That was before the inhabitants of a foreign planet arrived, sir." He glared at the ceiling for a moment.

"Enough sass. Next item."

"The social worker assigned to Peter's case has asked for a meeting."

"Schedule it for four. Where are we on the tower?"

"The final paperwork should be going through Monday, sir."

"Good. Make it happen faster if you can. How's the kid's homework?"

"Peter is beginning to fall behind, but attempted to work on some homework yesterday."
"Alright. I'll try to talk to him today. Maybe I can help. I need to talk to him about school…"

"Should I schedule that, sir?"

"No. Contact the social worker. Tell her I'll come to her office at 4. Tell Pepper that the meeting will have to be short. Where is it?"

"It's a video call, sir." FRIDAY reminded him.

"Right, yeah...I'll take it on my way to the city. Does Peter need to come to the meeting?"

"That would be preferable."

"Right. Okay. Yeah. I'll take care of that. Anything else?"

"Secretary Ross is waiting for you to return one of his calls."

"How long did he wait last time?" He asked, opening his bedroom door.

"Three days, sir."

"And how long has it been?"

"Two days, sir."

"Good. Let's see if we can break our record."

Heading to the kitchen, he decided to wait until after breakfast to wake the kid. Glancing into the kitchen, he froze a little when he saw Loki sitting in one of the chairs, flipping through a novel. Peter was sprawled out on the couch, covered in a blanket, one arm hanging off the side. Tony nodded at the man, uncomfortable with having him so close to Peter, but figuring he wasn't going to hurt him. Not with Thor in the building, anyway. Thor seemed to like Peter, and he doubted Point Break would let Loki harm a kid in the home where they were staying.

It wasn't that he trusted Loki. Or that he forgave him for any of the destruction and pain he'd caused. Just the word 'wormhole' was enough to send him into a panic some days. But Thor and Bruce...they were all that was left of the Avengers at this point. And as much as he wanted to stroll up to Loki and blast him in the face with one of his repulsors, he wanted Thor to stick around more...wanted some semblance of his old normal back. Even if just for a little while. Besides, he couldn't afford a fight with two more people, not when he had a kid to take care of. So he'd be civil until Loki pissed him off.

The breakfast for the Asgardians and company was another catered affair, but for Peter, Thor, Bruce, himself, and, he supposed, Loki, he decided to make waffles. They were easy enough to whip up, which Pepper had taught him after finding out he could barely boil water. Now they had monthly cooking classes. If she came home in time, she could have leftovers. Or he could make lunch. Maybe Peter would want to help. That could be something to get the kid engaged. He had done okay the day before...well, before the crying. That had been kind of rough. The boy had been humiliated, and Tony felt for him. Not that Thor or Bruce would ever have said anything. Loki either, if Tony had anything to say about it.

When the waffles were done, looking delicious if Tony did so himself...after he flipped them over so the burned side was on the bottom, he put them on the stove to keep warm and headed into the living room once more. No one else was around except for Loki, and the man didn't do more than glance up when Tony passed on his way to get to Peter who hadn't so much as rolled over, hand still
dangling over the sofa and brushing against the carpet.

Kneeling beside the boy, he reached out, touching his shoulder, not wanting to startle him. "Hey, bud? Pete?" He called quietly, shaking his shoulder just a little. "Time for breakfast." Nothing. Not even a flinch. He frowned, shaking him a little harder and feeling his heart speed up, probably for no reason. His kid was sleeping. He was probably tired. No need to freak out. "Peter? Come on, you gotta eat, remember. You can take a nap after breakfast if you want." He teased, knowing that would usually get the boy up. He didn't like it when people suggested he needed naps. Or bottles. Or blankets. Tony had had a good time with that bit. But now, nothing.

Hand shaking, he reached out and pressed gentle fingers against his kid's throat. "Peter." He spoke louder, feeling his heartbeat under his fingers. "Peter, wake up. Come on. Get up." He shook him harder, and the boy's head flopped. Tony's heart all but stopped and he turned to Loki. "How long have you been in here?" He asked the man, fighting to keep his voice even.

"Since roughly four in the morning." The Asgardian told him, sounding bored as he turned a page.

Resting a hand on Peter's forehead, Tony frowned. He didn't feel warm, but he also hadn't so much as twitched when Tony had shaken him. "Pete? Buddy, wake up." He urged again, shaking his shoulder. Still, the boy didn't move. "Was he asleep when you got here?" He demanded, forgetting for a second that he did not for one second trust Thor's brother.

"No." The god of mischief answered, still staring at his book.

"Peter," Tony said the kid's name louder, shaking him even harder. "Peter, wake up." He ordered in a voice that his kid would never disobey, but still nothing. "Come on, kiddo." Sitting him up a little, Tony felt his heart drop when the boy's head fell back limply against the sofa once more. "FRIDAY get Bruce." He ordered, wondering if there was anyway Bruce could examine him without figuring out his secret. Of course, Bruce had never heard of Spider-Man, but he would soon enough. Still, all that was the least of his problems. He had to wake up...but he'd had a concussion. But that had been a week ago! More! No way that could be the problem. Unless he'd hit his head in the training room or something? Hadn't FRIDAY mentioned him going down there? What if he'd fallen and hit his head? But FRIDAY would have alerted him! Right? He had a protocol for that!

"Doctor Banner is in the lab, sir. He wanted you to know that he will be up in just a moment."

"Tell him to hurry."

Before Bruce could reach them, Thor entered the room, looking between Tony, who knelt beside Peter, and the boy on the sofa. "Tony." He greeted, frowning. "What's the matter?"

"I can't wake him," Tony told him simply, hands starting to shake from where they hovered over Peter's shoulder. His voice cracked a little, but he was too focused on Peter to notice. Thor, on the other hand, narrowed his eyes, growing more concerned at the fear in the man's voice. "He...he was fine yesterday. He's not sick...he's not hot or anything. FRIDAY, what's his temperature?"

"Temperature is 98.9, boss." She told him. It was a little warm, but Peter always ran a little warm. For the first time in a long time, Tony couldn't think. Couldn't focus. The boy was breathing but he wouldn't wake up.

"Peter? C'mon, kiddo..." He shook the boy again, squeezing his shoulders too hard, but the kid was still. "Please, Pete..."

Thor approached, looking concerned now, and crouched beside the boy, reaching out and putting a
careful hand on his cheek. Then with one finger, he lifted one of Peter's eyelids. Peter's eyes, which were usually a warm, golden brown, were bright blue, and Tony felt his stomach clench. Thor pulled away, standing and glaring at his brother who hadn't looked up from his book. "Loki!" He barked, and Tony spun so fast he nearly fell, pulling himself upright with clenched fists as it all came together.

"What the hell did you do to my kid?" Tony snapped, Thor's hand on his shoulder the only thing holding him back...not that he could have taken the Asgardian bare handed, but he did have an Iron Man suit downstairs that might have done the job.

"Loki, we talked about this…" Thor sounded almost sad which gave Tony hope. It would be okay. Thor would make Loki fix this.

The man on the chair sighed, rolling his eyes and putting the book down. "The boy said he was unable to sleep because of nightmares and did not wish to wake you, Stark. So I put him to sleep. I did not harm your son. He's perfectly fine."

"Wake him up," Tony demanded, ignoring the part where Loki had called him Tony's son, and the Asgardian sighed again, seeming more bored than anything. Had Peter asked Loki to help him sleep? Did he not want to come to Tony? He knew Peter didn't want to bother him, but to go to Loki? The kid didn't even know Loki!

"Very well." Standing, he moved past his brother and Tony, pausing when Tony grabbed his arm. "If you want me to wake him, you will need to allow me to touch him." Reluctantly, Tony dropped his hand, crossing his arms instead and waiting. Loki reached out, placing two fingers in the middle of Peter's forehead. "Wake." He ordered, and the boy shot up, eyes back to brown, and Loki moved out of his way, hand dropping back to his side, expression unreadable. Tony lunged forward, catching his kid's arms and holding him upright, meeting the boy's bewildered eyes with his own hopefully calm ones.

"Mr...Mr. Stark?" He asked, gasping as he looked around the room, shrinking back as he caught sight of the other two occupants of the room. "What...what...what happened?"

"It's okay, kiddo. You're fine." He assured him, voice soft and even despite his own panic. Loki had said he hadn't hurt Peter...but what if he was lying? "Pete, you with me?"

"What...what..." For a moment, the kid seemed stuck, unable to figure out what was going on. He blinked rapidly, still looking between the three before stopping on Loki. "What did you do to me?" He demanded, sounding more confused than upset. Tony held onto his arm, not missing how Peter was leaning against him. He moved a little closer, squeezing Peter's shoulder.

"I put you to sleep." The Asgardian told the boy.

"How?"

"Magic," The man answered dryly, and Peter's eyes went huge, mouth dropping open.

"Are you okay?" Tony asked softly, trying to get the kid's attention, but Peter was fixated on Loki.

"You...magic? You can do magic?" He almost whispered, finally looking back at Tony. "Magic?" He repeated.

"Yes, I can do magic," Loki told him, voice dry and bored. For a second, Tony thought the kid might be broken again, because he just sat there, letting Tony hold onto his arms, but then he jumped to his feet, Tony half a step behind.
"What else can you do?" He asked, a huge impressed smile lighting up his whole face. Loki blinked, and apparently, it was his turn to be surprised.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Like...can you do tricks and stuff?"

"I am not an animal, child. I do not do tricks." The man scoffed.

Tony didn't want Loki doing magic. Hell, he didn't want the possible lunatic anywhere near his kid. But the way Peter's face went from bright and excited to despondent and embarrassed once more made his chest ache. Did he want Peter near Loki? No. But he hadn't seen Peter smile like that since before his aunt had died.

"Oh...right. I'm sorry, Mr. Loki...sir. I didn't mean...I wasn't trying...I just thought it was...I've never seen anyone do magic before and I thought...I mean..." Tony was ready to cut him off, sure the kid would go on stammering out apologies and half sentences forever, but surprisingly, it was Loki who cut him off, lifting a hand that made Peter shut his mouth with a snap. The man hesitated for a minute as if reconsidering something, then, rolling his eyes, he rotated his hand, holding it palm up, and for just a second, it glowed green. Peter's eyes went huge again, mouth dropping open. Then, in the air right above his hand, a dagger appeared, materializing from nowhere piece by piece until it floated just about the Asgardian's hand.

Silently, Loki caught the handle of the small blade, holding it out to Peter who took it reverently by the end. Holding it up, the boy examined the handle and the blade, both of which were carved with symbols that must have been from Asgard. He brought up a finger, tracing one of them, and then Loki snapped his fingers and it disappeared without so much as a trace.

Peter jumped, staring at his empty hands, then up at the Asgardian with an unreadable look that melted back into that shocked, exuberant smile, giving an incredulous laugh and breaking the silence. "How...that...that was so cool!" He cried, whirling to face Tony. "Did you see that? It just...and then..."

"Yes, I saw." Tony couldn't help the chuckle, reaching up and ruffling Peter's hair. The boy barely seemed to notice, just batting him absently away the way he always had before.

"He...he made it appear and then...where did it go?" He asked, whirling back to Loki who only raised an eyebrow. Apparently not bothered by the fact that the man wasn't going to answer, he went on. "Can you make other stuff appear? Can you make people appear? What if you made me disappear? Where would I go?"

Loki lifted as hand as though to try it, lips turned up into a smirk, and Tony jumped in. "Don't you dare." He snapped, pointing a warning finger and pushing himself in front of Peter. The boy didn't seem impressed with his attempts to protect him, however, poking his head out from around Tony's arm.

"Come on, Mr. Stark! I wanna know! He can do magic! Can all Asgardians do magic?" Then he gasped, turning to Thor who, up until that point, he'd barely seemed to have the courage to look at for longer than a few seconds. "Can you do magic, Mr. Thor?"

Thor smiled, face soft as he shook his head. "No. I am not as talented as my brother in that regard. He is the sorcerer of the family."

"But, like, you can make lightning and stuff! Is that magic too? Or do you use the hammer to
conduct the electricity? It doesn't come from your hammer, right? Where is your hammer? Did it get destroyed on Asgard? If you don't have your hammer, can you still make lightning? Why are you called the god of thunder if you can control lightning?" Peter would have gone on, and Tony could tell from Thor's increasingly fond smile that he would have let him, but Bruce chose that moment to come running in, looking around wildly.

"Tony? I came as fast as I could. What's wrong? FRIDAY said there was a problem...oh...good morning." He nodded to the Asgardians and the boy who waved a little.

"Hi, Doctor Banner."

"Tony?" Bruce asked, still looking around.

"Um...false alarm. Everything's fine. Want some breakfast?" The scientist blinked a few times, wide eyed and confused, then nodded slowly, apparently deciding not to question it just yet. Tony clapped his hands, trying to both distract his kid and disguise his gratitude that Bruce wouldn't have to examine Peter. That would have been the shortest lived of all his secrets...he'd even managed to keep Iron Man a secret for longer than a day.

The Asgardians were all welcome to have breakfast wherever they were staying, which Pepper had told the responsible parties in each group. Tony's people had brought an abundance of food to the hotel that already served complimentary breakfast, and the gymnasium had been set up as a cafeteria, but Tony and his guests ate at the dining room table off the kitchen. This time Peter ate his food in silence, stealing awed glances at Loki, seeming to have lost some of that shyness he always had around new people. Tony wondered if he was trying to suppress the urge to ask more questions and figured that was probably it. Bruce, too, looked like he had some questions, but apparently, he remembered the night before because he didn't say anything to the boy. Tony wondered how he was going to explain all this...explain why he'd begged the man to hurry and come to the living room for no apparent reason.

"So, when will King T'Challa be arriving?" Bruce asked instead, and Tony wished that Pepper hadn't had a meeting and could answer all this so he could focus on Peter...on trying to talk to the boy and figure out what was going on. Or on trying to come up with an explanation.

"Sometime next week...probably by the end of the week. We have a video call with him today at 1. Pepper's set up a press conference for Tuesday to explain what's going on here. We've already talked to the government officials, and Shield is working with us to help out." He told them, noticing how both Thor and Loki looked up. "We'll find a place for your people, Thor. Don't worry." Thor smiled, nodding.

"Thank you, Tony. We are in your debt." Tony waved it off, uncomfortable.

"Nope. Not in my debt, Point Break. Just helping out the team."

"Speaking of the team..." Bruce started, and Tony found himself glancing at the kid before lifting a weary eyebrow. Peter, too, seemed to be suddenly paying attention, having paused in devouring his waffles. His appetite wasn't completely back yet, but it was getting there, and Tony was grateful. "You said the team broke up."

"Yeah, after the...disagreement," Tony admitted, not sure how much he wanted to get into it. He'd given them the basics yesterday. What more did they want?

"So...are you going to call them?" Peter, too, was staring at him, apparently wondering the same thing, and Tony took a long drink of his orange juice.
"I hadn't planned on it." He told them, putting the glass down. "I'll give you the phone Rogers left me...you're welcome to give him a call."

"Can I invite them here?" Tony couldn't say he wanted the team back in his home. It had been nice, just him and Peter and Pepper for a while. But no one was saying they were going to move back in. Just...visit, maybe. And who knew. Maybe this could get the team back together after everything.

"Yeah. That's...that would be fine."

When they were finished eating, Tony went to his room and opened his top drawer, pulling out the phone and staring at it for a minute. He hadn't called after everyone had been pardoned. Or when the Accords had been amended. But this...this was bigger. All of Asgard was now living on Earth. Who knew if that would draw attention. Squeezing the phone, he headed back to the living room where his guests all waited. He handed Bruce the phone, speaking before his friend could.

"Where's Pete?" For a moment, Bruce just stared at him like he wanted to ask...to ask about Peter and the Avengers and all of it. Instead, he took a deep breath, smiling a little and jerking his head toward the doorway.

"Kitchen," Bruce told him, opening the phone. Leaving them to their phone call, he went back into the kitchen where he found Peter doing the dishes. He almost stopped him...almost told the kid that they had a dishwasher. But if the kid wanted to wash dishes, he guessed he didn't need to stop him. Instead, he joined him at the sink, grabbing a towel and began drying. He figured it was better than listening to Thor and Bruce talk to Steve Rogers on the phone.

Peter glanced up at him for a moment, unsure, then went back to his cleaning. "How's it going, kid?" He finally asked, putting a plate away.

"Um...fine. Everything's fine, Mr. Stark." Tony nodded, wondering what his chances were of getting the kid to call him 'Tony.' Probably not great. He figured that if the kid was more comfortable with the formal address then he'd leave it for the moment. They would have plenty of time to address that.

"We've got a meeting with a social worker today at four. You mind tagging along?"

"Oh...no, that's...that's fine. You don't have to..."

"Actually, as your legal guardian, I do. But it's fine. I don't mind. They're going to want to know about school, though." The boy suddenly looked sheepish, dropping his eyes to the sink.

"Oh...right. I worked on some of my homework. I'm trying, Mr. Stark, I swear, but..."

"Hey." He put the dish rag down, turning to put a hand on Peter's shoulder. "I know. I get it. You don't have to worry about that, Pete. Hell, you can do homeschooling if you want. Go straight to college, take a year off, I don't care. You're a smart kid...smart enough to work for my company. I don't need to see your report card to know that."

He let the kid process that for a second, and let out a breath when Peter relaxed. "So, what'll it be? Do you want to go back to your old school?"

"If it's too much trouble..."

"It's no trouble at all. Do you want to go back?" Peter nodded, and he squeezed his shoulder. "Alright. I'll call your school Monday. How about you take another week, then you try to go back? If it's too much, you can work from home for a little while."
"Yeah, that...that sounds great, Mr. Stark. Thank you." Tony waved him off.

"Of course. Now, I bought the tower, so…"

"You bought it back!?" The boy cried, his voice squeaking a little, and Tony grinned.

"Yeah."

"Why? Because…was it because of me?" Peter asked, and Tony knew where this was going...he was going to be upset that Tony had spent money because of him. But he supposed it couldn't be helped. So Tony shrugged.

"Yeah. Barely made a dent in the bank account, honestly. The Compound will be for Avengers business and we'll live in the Tower."

Peter was silent for a moment, just staring at him, then spoke in an almost whisper. "Mr. Stark...how much money do you have?" Tony laughed out loud, ruffling his hair and going back to the dishes.

"Plenty. Don't worry about it, Pete."
Conferences

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much to everyone who has read and commented on my story! You’ve all been so nice and I really appreciate it.

Conferences

The TV monitor in the front of the conference room that Peter hadn’t even known existed until a few minutes ago was turned on, a blank black box taking up most of the screen, and a small box in the bottom right corner showed the people in the room milling around. To be fair, he probably didn’t know about most of the rooms in the Compound. He knew it was big and full of conference rooms and bedrooms and floors he’d never been to. At some point, he figured he’d actually go exploring. FRIDAY had assured him that he was allowed, and he figured that any rooms he wouldn’t be allowed into would be locked.

Mr. Stark sat in the center of a long, u-shaped table, Miss Potts on his right, with Thor on his left. To the left of Thor was Doctor Banner, then Loki, and someone else from Mr. Stark's company that Peter had never seen sat on Miss Potts' right. Miss Potts had come back a little after eleven, and Peter hadn't been able to help the way he'd stiffened when she'd put a hand on his shoulder, smiling and asking how he was. He didn't want to offend her or Mr. Stark or hurt anyone's feelings...he just...he couldn't. Couldn't take her soft smile and her gentle hand that would sometimes run through his hair. He liked her a lot, but being near her reminded him so much of May that it hurt. Mr. Stark hadn't said anything, and neither had Miss Potts, so he wasn't sure if they'd noticed. With his luck, they had.

His Guardian had offered to let him come into the conference room during the meeting, which had surprised him. He'd thought he was going to get sent away until it was time to go meet the social worker. Instead, Mr. Stark had given him a chair at the back of the room and assured him that it was fine. They weren't talking about anything Mr. Stark didn't trust him with. That thought made Peter smile a little at his feet as he sat in the back of the room, well out of the way. His spider senses went off then, just a twinge that told him someone was looking at him, and he glanced up to find Mr. Stark twisted around in his chair.

"You good, bud?" The man asked softly, not drawing the attention of anyone else. Peter nodded and smiled, giving a quick thumbs up. Mr. Stark nodded, pointing to the door beside Peter. "Good. If you need to leave, you can go and come back whenever you want. Okay?"

Peter nodded, and Mr. Stark turned back, reaching out and taking Miss Potts' hand and squeezing. Peter couldn't help catching the quick, quiet, 'I love you' the man whispered in her ear, but he looked down and away when she leaned in to kiss him. He hadn't been meant to hear that...he hated his powers sometimes. He tried to focus on his hands instead, or the conversation between Doctor Banner and Thor who were discussing...something. He didn't quite understand...something to do with someone called a "Valkyrie." he wondered if he'd ever get to meet the Asgardians.

The screen came to life after a few minutes at 1:00 on the dot. The man in the screen was unfamiliar, and he appeared to be sitting at a small table by himself, hands clasped in front of him on the table. "Mr. Stark." He greeted, the accent soft and melodic. The man smiled, inclining his head toward
Peter's guardian. "Miss Potts."

"Tony, please." Mr. Stark waved him off.

"Pepper." Miss Potts introduced herself.

"Of course. Thor. It is nice to see you again. And this must be your brother. Loki. And Doctor Banner."

Everyone in the room said hello to the man who Peter assumed was the king of Wakanda, and beside him, the door opened, Colonel Rhodes stepping through. He grinned down at Peter, ruffling his hair, and Peter stood, offering his chair since there were no more at the table. Colonel Rhodes sat down, murmuring his thanks, and when Peter looked up once more, all eyes were on them. He felt his face heat up, eyes dropping down to the floor.

"Colonel Rhodes. Nice to see you again." The King greeted, and Peter wondered when they'd met him. He remembered that the Black Panther had been in Germany. But had any of them had time to talk to him. He knew he hadn't.

"You too, your majesty."

"Please. T'Challa." The man insisted. Then his eyes met Peter's and the boy fought the urge to slip out through the door. "And who is this? I do not believe I have had the pleasure." He observed, glancing back at Mr. Stark.

"This is Stark's son," Thor spoke up, voice booming in the small room, and Peter felt heat crawl up his cheeks. He waited for Mr. Stark to deny it, or to finally set Thor and Loki straight. Surely he'd told them that he wasn't Mr. Stark's son. Right? They knew his aunt had died...that he'd lived with her.

"Tony...I was not aware that you had a child." King T'Challa observed, eyebrows lifted in surprise.

Mr. Stark was great. He'd ben his mentor and friend and now he was his guardian. He'd called Peter his kid. And even though some part of him liked the idea of being related to Mr. Stark...of having him as more than just a mentor, it still hurt. On one hand, he missed his aunt. He felt like he missed her every second of every day. He dreamed about her and sometimes thought he heard her voice...there were times during the last week when something would happen, and just for a second, he'd think 'Wait until I tell May!'

On the other hand, he knew Mr. Stark was going to wave the man off and assure him that Peter wasn't his son. Yeah, the man had said he loved him. And he'd told Peter that he was his kid. And Peter knew he wasn't Mr. Stark's son! So why did the thought of his guardian publicly telling everyone once and for all that Peter really wasn't his son, that he was just his...his ward make his chest twinge a little? Even if most of them already knew!

But Mr. Stark didn't say that...didn't tell the king of Wakanda that Peter was just a kid he felt responsible for. Instead, the man scooted back from the table a little, gesturing back at Peter and grinning almost proudly.

"This is Peter." Mr. Stark introduced him simply. "Pete, King T'Challa."

"Um...it's, uh...it's great to meet you, your majesty." Peter stammered, wide-eyed as he realized that the man hadn't corrected them at all...and that he was now addressing possibly the most powerful man he'd ever met...maybe. It was kind of hard to tell these days, considering Thor was in the same room. Still, he nodded his head in an almost bow, not sure what the protocol was. King T'Challa
"And you as well, Peter." And then the king was turning back to Mr. Stark and Thor, leaving Peter in the back of the room where he stood beside Colonel Rhodes.

For a while, the King spoke to Mr. Stark and Thor about the Asgardian people, and to Pepper about the arrangements that had already been made for everyone. He took down notes on the numbers and explained that they would be sending transports the following Friday morning to pick up the Asgardians. There were new hotels and host families in Wakanda who would welcome the people until Wakanda could work with the world’s governments to find a more permanent home for them if they wanted one. Or, the king told them, they were welcome to stay indefinitely.

Once they'd covered all of that what felt like a hundred times, making Peter wonder how long this meeting would run, T'Challa turned solemn. "As I'm sure you are all aware, the last time Loki was on our planet, an entire city was nearly destroyed." T'Challa turned to face the man in question, jaw tight. "Many deaths are on your hands."

Peter couldn't see Loki's face, but his tone was soft and serious. "You have my word that I will not harm anyone on Earth."

"You have mine as well," Thor spoke up. "This is our home now. We would not want to jeopardize our welcome here."

"Your word holds weight, Thor, and you have my trust. However, it is not only my decision. I will need to speak to my council...and I am sure you are also aware of the protests in New York."

Peter frowned at that, turning to Colonel Rhodes who caught his gaze, seemed to hesitate for a second, then leaned in. Peter crouched down a little so the man could whisper in his ear. "People are protesting letting Loki stay here. They’ve been gathering outside the tower."

"But...Mr. Stark doesn't live there."

"They don't know where the compound is." He explained. Peter glanced up at the Asgardian who sat rigidly at the table, hands clasped in his lap, and at Thor, who seemed just as tense as his brother. "There are protests all around New York, and the UN wants to meet with Thor and Tony."

"What do they want to happen to him?" He asked Colonel Rhodes. The man sighed, running a hand over his face.

"They want him to be punished."

"My brother already served time for his crimes on Asgard," Thor spoke sharply, arms crossed, and Peter leaned back against the wall.

Peter had to admit, he was conflicted. He doubted Thor would have let his brother get away with what he'd done without any kind of punishment. When Thor said that Loki had served time, he believed him. It seemed that T'Challa did too, from the way he nodded. But Peter could also understand that people wanted justice for what had happened. Of course, it wasn't like Peter had any say in it. He trusted Mr. Stark though, and Thor too. And after the night before, when Loki could have hurt him, but instead just helped him sleep, he was inclined to trust Loki.

"I do not doubt you." The king told him quietly. "There are others who do, however, and this must be taken into consideration."

"The Wonderful Wizard of Oz over here can stay at the Compound." Mr. Stark broke in, waving a
careless hand. "Thor says he's safe, and I trust him. They can both stay here as far as I'm concerned."

After the meeting with King T'Challa, Thor and Loki left to speak to their people and Doctor Banner went to his lab, a flip phone in his hand. Peter didn't ask...he assumed it had something to do with contacting the rest of the team, and he wasn't sure how he felt about that. Not that it was any of his business.

Still...he lived with Mr. Stark now, and if the whole team of Avengers was going to move back to the Compound...or the tower...they'd find out who he was, right? Did he want to live with the Avengers? He remembered how Mr. Stark had looked after returning from Siberia. He remembered the airport and the fight...the entire team turning against one another. They had all been his heroes. Now it was only Mr. Stark, Colonel Rhodes, Thor, and Doctor Banner left. Well, and Vision, but he was still kind of new.

Peter wasn't sure what he thought about the entire Avengers team living with them. It just sounded so...overwhelming. Just running into Thor and Loki in the compound had been strange...before it had only been him and Mr. Stark most of the time...sometimes Colonel Rhodes or Vision.

"Alright, kiddo." Mr. Stark put an arm around his shoulders, leading him over to the door. "We've got a meeting with the social worker in a little less than an hour, so we need to leave. You wanna grab some homework to do on the way? I've got to take a conference call." Peter nodded, heading back to his bedroom and grabbing his backpack, and then followed Mr. Stark out to the car.

On the way there, he managed to finish his math homework while Mr. Stark talked on the phone to several people about...something. Something to do with the company. Peter tried to focus on his work instead of eavesdropping and sort of succeeded. When they pulled up to the office building in the city, Peter put his stuff back into his backpack and Mr. Stark hung up his phone.

"This is just a follow up to make sure all the paperwork was filed correctly and that your living situation is all taken care of. She'll probably ask about school, but we've taken care of that. How are you on homework."

"Uh, I just need to email some of it to my teachers."

"No problem." Happy waited out in the car as Mr. Stark led the way toward the building. "She'll probably ask some questions. You don't have to talk about anything you don't want to. My lawyers are on standby." And with that, they were entering the building.

An older woman around Mr. Stark's age held out a hand, smiling politely at Peter and his guardian. "Hello, Mr. Stark. Peter." Mr. Stark shook her hand, then Peter followed suit, and before he knew it, they were all sitting at a table in her office which was in the corner of the building, large windows looking out onto a busy street that he could see through the slats of her wooden blinds. "My name is Katherine Walters. Peter, I'm the primary social worker assigned to your case."

"Nice to meet you." He murmured, looking away from the street and trying to ignore the hum of her fluorescent lights. The only bothered him when he was stressed or fighting sensory overload, so he tried to steady his breathing and not let it get to him. She smiled, a professional, but friendly, an expression that did nothing to put him at ease. They couldn't take him away from Mr. Stark, right? Surely the man had a ton of lawyers...heck, he probably had a whole law firm. No way he'd let someone take him away.

"You as well, Peter. How are things going? It looks like you've completely healed from the accident." He nodded, feeling a twinge of worry. Did she know? Had Mr. Stark told her? He glanced at his guardian, and Mr. Stark gave the woman a press-worthy smile.
"We have top of the line doctors at the Avengers compound." Mr. Stark told her. Surprisingly, she left it at that, nodding and giving a little laugh.

"I'm sure." She pulled out a folder from a briefcase at her side, placing it on the table, and leaning forward. "So, Mr. Stark, how would you say things are going, considering the situation with the Asgardians?"

"Everything's great." Mr. Stark assured her. "Pepper is handling the transfer of the Asgardians to Wakanda."

"I see. And have you spoken to his school?" She asked, eyes still on his guardian.

"Yes. He's been keeping up with his homework assignments and will be returning to Midtown on Monday."

"Are you planning on staying at the Avengers Compound?"

"No. I bought back the tower. We'll be living there."

She made a note on one of the papers, nodding to herself. Mr. Stark seemed perfectly at ease, and Peter wondered if he was even going to have to talk. For a while, she asked Mr. Stark some more questions, mostly about the tower and the compound, and about school and stuff. She asked a couple of questions about the Avengers, and Mr. Stark answered everything with the air of someone who had done a million interviews which, of course, he had.

"And if the 'rogue Avengers' return, will they be staying with you?" That was a question Peter also wanted an answer to, and he looked up at his guardian, waiting for the answer.

"They have all been pardoned, and the Accords amended, so they are no longer the 'rogue Avengers.'" He corrected, not mean, but firm. "If they would like to stay at the Avengers Compound, they are more than welcome. Anything further we will discuss whenever it comes up."

She wrote that down, then placed her pen on the table, hands clasped in front of her.

"Alright. Peter, I'd like to speak to you privately if that's alright." Peter got the feeling that it wasn't really a question, and he glanced over at Mr. Stark who was pushing his chair back from the table.

"I'll wait out in the hall, bud." His guardian told him, patting his shoulder. "I'm going to have Happy bring me a coffee. You want anything, Pete?" Peter shook his head, mouth suddenly too dry. "Alright. Just call if you need me." It sounded like that was almost a warning with the way he looked at the social worker, but with a pat on his shoulder, Mr. Stark was out the door.

After his parents had died and he'd gone to live with May and Ben, he'd talked to plenty of social workers, therapists, and school counselors, so he was no stranger to this kind of thing. After his uncle Ben had died, he'd had to talk to someone else, and it was no surprise that he would have to meet with a social worker now. But he wasn't sure what she would want to know. "So, Peter." She began, voice much softer than when she'd been talking to Mr. Stark...like he was a little kid or something. Immediately it rubbed him the wrong way, but he tried not to let is show on his face.

"Yes, ma'am?" He told her, knowing his voice sounded a little flat, but not sure how to fix it.

"How long have you known Mr. Stark?"

"Uh...a little more than a year...I think. Maybe more?" He tried to think back to Germany and how long ago that had been...not that she needed to know anything about that.
"I see. And how would you have classified your relationship with Mr. Stark when you first met?"

"He got my application for one of his internships and accepted me."

"Yes, it says that a few months ago, May Parker added him as an emergency contact for your school." He shrugged. "That wasn't a question. Did you spend much time with Mr. Stark before coming to live with him?"

"Um...I went to the compound every Friday after school for internship stuff..."

"And what was this 'internship stuff'?" He hesitated. The details of his pretend internship had never been super clear. Still, he went with a generic answer.

"I got coffee. Made copies of stuff and did some filing. Sometimes Mr. Stark let me help in the lab."

"Now that you are living with Mr. Stark, are you continuing your internship with his company?" Not sure if that was allowed, he shrugged.

"We haven't really talked about it." He smiled apologetically.

"That's fine. I'm sure you've been busy. What has it been like? Living with Mr. Stark in the Avengers Compound?"

"It's...it's good. Mr. Stark is really nice, and sometimes Miss Potts is there. She's great. Colonel Rhodes is nice too. And Vision."

"What about the other Avengers. Have you met them?"

"Just Thor. And Doctor Banner." He lied, doubting that stealing Captain America's shield or webbing Falcon and The Winter Soldier to the floor counted. "They're both really nice."

"And Loki? Was it interesting meeting him?" He wondered if she was just looking for gossip or if she genuinely needed to know. He decided to stick to a generic answer once more.

"Yeah, uh...it was crazy. But he's nice. I mean, he's nice to me." She nodded slowly, leaning in. "It's nice, living at the compound. I mean, I miss my aunt, but everyone's been really nice." He immediately regretted bringing her up and prayed that she wouldn't ask about May.

"Good. I'm glad. It sounds like Mr. Stark is providing a good home for you. Now tell me about the environment there. It must be hectic with the Asgardians arriving. What do you do there?"

"Um...I, uh...I work on homework. Mr. Stark watches TV or movies with me sometimes. I look at his books or, uh...I talked to Doctor Banner a little about his research. And I've got lots of stuff to do in my room...and I went to my friend's house for a while."

"So you have plenty of things to do. That's good. And he allows you to spend time with your friends?"

"What? Yeah. Yeah, of course. He got Happy to drive me and gave me a ride home."

"Good." She made a note. "So, has Mr. Stark mentioned adoption?" He froze, hands shaking when he clasped them in his lap. Suddenly the fluorescent lights were too loud again, the humming filling his head. And they were too bright...he wished FRIDAY were there to turn them down. And the traffic out on the street was too loud. It all worked together to make his head pound.

"I...he didn't...no." He shook his head. "I mean...he..." He tried to think back. No...no, Mr. Stark
hadn't really brought it up. Well...he'd called Peter his kid. He'd been great...a great guardian and really nice...but adoption?

"That's alright. I'm sure that is something he'd rather speak to you about if it is on the table."

"Right." He murmured.

"Why don't you go sit in the waiting room and send Mr. Stark back in." Peter nodded, pushing himself up from the table, shaking her hand in a daze, then all but stumbled out into the waiting room where Mr. Stark was drinking a coffee. He looked up with a smile that dropped as soon as he saw Peter, and Peter wondered if he looked as pale as he felt.

"Kid?" He asked, standing and reaching out, a hand immediately going to his shoulder. "What's the matter?"

"Uh, nothing...I just...um...she said she's ready to talk to you."

"Okay...you sure everything's okay?"

"Yeah." He assured Mr. Stark, nodding and trying to pull himself back together. Sure, it had been a surprise, but not necessarily a bad one. He knew Mr. Stark loved him. And he loved Mr. Stark. The man was like...like a parent. But surely it was too soon to be thinking that...especially since May had just died. He'd just lost her and he was already trying to replace her. He felt his stomach twist at the thought.

"Alright. I shouldn't be too long. Here." He reached over to the table beside the chair he'd been sitting in, holding out a cup. "I had Hap get you a hot chocolate."

"No coffee?" Peter asked with a weak grin, making Mr. Stark chuckle and ruffle his hair.

"Yeah, no. You never get coffee again, kid. Not after last time." He pointed to a chair, pushing Peter toward it with the hot chocolate in his hands. "I'll be right back"

And then he was stepping into that office, the door shutting behind him while Peter sat with his hot chocolate in the waiting room, trying to figure out whether or not Mr. Stark wanted to adopt him, and how he felt about that.
It took about an hour to get from the city to the compound, and Mr. Stark turned to Peter as soon as they were sitting down in the car. "What do you want to eat, kiddo? You're probably hungry, right?" Peter hesitated, not sure if he should just play it off...try not to inconvenience the man any more than he already had. Mr. Stark had given up plenty of his time already that day to meet with a social worker...they'd left the compound and driven for an hour and... "Pete?" He jumped a little, meeting his guardian's concerned gaze.

"Uh...you don't have to..." Mr. Stark was giving him a look.

"Kid, I'm gonna order food for everyone. I'm letting you chose what Thor, god of thunder, is going to eat. You get to choose what the Bruce Banner is going to have for a late lunch." Peter couldn't help the smile, and Mr. Stark chuckled, waving a hand and obviously waiting.

"Um...pizza?" He suggested.

"Sounds good." And then he was quiet, pulling out his cellphone and apparently bringing up the pizza place's website. So Peter turned and stared out the window, mind whirring. Without something to focus on, his mind wandered back to the social worker. She'd been fine...nice enough. But...adoption? Being adopted by Mr. Stark. His brain ran itself in circles until his phone buzzed in his pocket. Jumping a little, he pulled it out and opened his texts, expecting a text from Ned. Ned was fascinated by Thor and wanted to know all about him, and had been texting him since right before he'd gone into the conference room. So he checked his texts only to find one from Mr. Stark. 'What's the matter, kid?'

Peter glanced up at Mr. Stark who was staring straight-faced down at his phone and snorted. "Are you...did you just text me?" He asked, fighting to keep from laughing. His guardian lifted an eyebrow, shooting him a brief, distracted smile.

'Not now, bud. I've got to order enough pizza for everyone. Need to figure out what kind of toppings Asgardians would like. You won't believe how much Thor eats, so I can only imagine the rest of his countrymen...and countrywomen...will be eating just as much." Peter blinked a few times, then turned back to his phone, typing up a response.

'Nothing's the matter.' He lied. It wasn't like the man would be able to tell over text.

'Liar.' Mr. Stark's reply was almost instant. The boy sighed, glancing back up at the man who was still on his phone. Briefly, Peter wondered how he managed to multitask so well, then remembered that he was Iron Man.

'How long does it take to order pizza?' He typed, fighting a smile.

'For over a hundred people? A while.' Peter chuckled, running a hand through his hair and glancing back out the window. For a while, they were quiet. Peter watched the trees and buildings flash by, reminded of how it felt to swing through the city as Spider-Man. He missed it...missed swinging around the city and that feeling...that absolute freedom that came with it. But that wasn't his real problem. Not at the moment. His problem was that social worker and her question. Was Mr. Stark going to adopt him? Did he want Mr. Stark to adopt him?
There was an obvious solution to getting the answer to the first question. Sure, Mr. Stark was on his phone, but he'd texted Peter first. He was obviously fine with answering questions. But did Peter want to know? He debated that for a while, ignoring Happy's gaze in the rearview mirror. Finally, since it was somehow easier to type his concern than to say it, he touched the screen once more, tapping out the letters carefully. He wrote and rewrote the message at least five times before he finally hit send.

'The social worker asked me if you were going to adopt me.' It wasn't a question, but it was the best he could do. Peter could feel the man go still in the seat beside him, and he wondered if he could throw himself out of the car before Mr. Stark could catch him. Maybe he would fall under a passing semi-truck and it wouldn't matter anymore. Mr. Stark wouldn't have to deal with social workers and Peter wouldn't have to continue to live in this awful, awkward moment. 'I'm sorry.' He wanted to keep typing...to explain that he didn't have to say anything and that Peter wasn't expecting his guardian to adopt him. He changed his mind at the last second, then hit the send button.

Peter waited for a return text. He knew that Mr. Stark had mentioned it before...sort of. He'd called Peter his kid. When he'd asked Mr. Stark if the man had adopted him, he'd replied 'not yet.' So...Mr. Stark wanted to adopt him. Maybe. But...what about May? And Ben? They'd been his family. And they hadn't adopted him. Would he have to change his name? Would he still be a Parker if he joined Mr. Stark's family? Would Miss Potts be upset? Would Mr. Stark be his...father? His dad? The thought of calling Mr. Stark 'dad' made his stomach flip a little.

Peter couldn't remember ever having a dad. Sure, he'd had one...when he was really little. But he didn't really remember him which he hated, but couldn't change. As long as he could remember, he'd had his Aunt May and his Uncle Ben. That was it. Not a mom or a dad, even though he would put them in the same category. Parents. Kind of. But Mr. Stark... he was...he was in that category now. Peter wasn't sure when that had happened. But he thought of Mr. Stark as a parent. Still, thinking of him as a parent when the man was acting as his guardian didn't seem like such a big deal. Thinking of him as a father though? A dad?

"You don't have anything to be sorry for." The man's soft voice startled him a little, and Peter turned away from the window, swallowing back the lump in his throat. "That's not something she should have asked you. That's something that you and I can discuss if and when you're ready." He was quiet for a moment. "Are you ready?" Peter managed to shake his head. He wasn't ready. He was afraid. "Okay. That's fine." Peter swallowed again, trying not to meet his guardian's eyes. Mr. Stark shifted, lifting his arm and draping it over Peter's shoulders. "C'mere, kiddo." He murmured, not commenting when Peter sniffed.

Peter hesitated for a second, then scooted over just a little, and Mr. Stark put his hand on Peter's hair, fingers carding through his curls as he pulled the boy down to rest his head on his shoulder. Mr. Stark shifted and then the partition between the front and back seat was going up, hiding Happy from view. He was glad...didn't want Happy to see him crying too. "I'm sorry," he murmured again, not sure what else to say, and Mr. Stark ran his fingers through Peter's hair, the repetitive movement calming him down.

"It's okay, kiddie. It's fine." He leaned his head sideways, and Peter felt the man rest his head on his own. "I've gotcha."

"I'm sorry you have to..."

"Ah, hold it right there, Petey. I don't do anything I don't want to." The man reminded him. "You're my kid, okay. So I have to have a meeting with some lady in the city to make sure you can stay with me? Hell kid, that's the least of my problems. Did you not just see me attending a meeting during
which I attempted to negotiate the status of Loki, god of mischief, with the king of Wakanda?" Peter had to smile a little, head still resting on Mr. Stark's shoulder, and the man reached his arm around, rubbing up and down Peter's arm.

"Yeah...almost forgot meeting the king of Wakanda, somehow."

"You met him before." Mr. Stark reminded him.

"Not really." Peter realized he was still smiling...that he felt safe here, his guardian's hand rubbing up and down his arm, the soft movement of Mr. Stark's chest and the sound of his breathing putting him at ease. But he didn't want to move. The man was comfortable. Besides, Mr. Stark didn't make any move to make him get up. "I mean, I saw him in his catsuit..." The man snorted. "And I saw him fight, but I didn't really talk to him or anything. Plus he didn't know I was Spider-Man."

"No one does...except Rhodey and Pepper. And no one else has to know. Not until you want them to. But you know, Thor and Bruce can keep a secret." Peter nodded, wiping his eyes and then closing them. "And, um...whenever you're ready to talk about, well, about the next step in all this, if you want it to be, just let me know, okay?" They were pulling up to the compound and Mr. Stark squeezed his shoulder. "Because you're my kid. No matter what the documents and the lawyers say...to me, you're my kid. Okay?" Peter nodded, letting Mr. Stark hug him one last time before sitting up, tucking his phone back into his pocket and grabbing his backpack as Happy opened the door on Mr. Stark's side.

Happy patted him on the back as he climbed out of the car. "How's it going, kid?" Happy asked, causing Peter to pause as he followed Mr. Stark up to the compound.

"Um...it's okay." He shrugged.

"Let me know if you need anything." He told him seriously. "You still got my number?"

"Oh, uh...yeah." Peter nodded, and Happy ruffled his hair.

"Alright, kid." Nodding, he got back into the car and drove it around to the garage while Peter entered the building behind Mr. Stark.

"Okay, Pete. I'm gonna go down to the lab with Bruce. Pizza should be here in about an hour. I'll have FRIDAY get you when it gets here if you want to work on your homework in your room" He hesitated. "Or you can grab your stuff and come down to the lab with us. There's plenty of room for you to work."

Peter thought for a moment. He'd been hiding in his bedroom a lot...but he loved Mr. Stark's lab. Loved working down there, with ACDC blasting...even if he was just doing homework. Loved being surrounded by Iron Man suits and seeing blueprints for new projects. Loved watching Mr. Stark work. So he smiled, nodding. "Yeah, if you don't mind." Mr. Stark grinned, reaching out and ruffling his hair.

"Of course I don't mind. Grab your stuff and head on down. I'll be down in just a minute...I just need to meet with Thor first."

Peter hurried up to his bedroom, grabbing his backpack and throwing his homework inside, grabbing the laptop too. He'd already emailed a lot of his assignments to his teachers, and had responded to most of their sympathetic emails with brief 'thank yous.' That had been all he had been up to at the time. Now he finished up sending in his assignments and threw his bag over his shoulder, hurrying through the empty common area to the elevator.
"Hey FRIDAY?"

"Yes, Peter?" If FRIDAY had a face, it sounded like she would have been smiling.

"Can you take me down to Mr. Stark's lab?"

"Of course, Peter."

When he stepped off the elevator, he found that he wasn't alone in the lab. Someone stood with their back to him, leaning over a computer screen and writing something in a spiral notebook. Doctor Banner. Peter hesitated, wondering if he maybe wasn't supposed to be down there after all. Of course, Mr. Stark had personally invited him, and it was his lab after all. For a moment, Peter stood against the wall, arms crossed tightly across his chest. He debated going back upstairs and waiting for Mr. Stark to come down so he could come down with him...but that would make him feel too much like a baby. He didn't need a grown up to come with him everywhere. He was fifteen years old! Practically a grown up, although he was sure Mr. Stark would disagree. So, taking a few deep breaths, then stepping forward...then stepping back, he took two more more breaths, and finally walked into the room.

Then the man looked up from his work and immediately smiled at Peter, crossing his arms and dropping the pencil onto the table. "Hey, Peter. How's it going? I wasn't expecting you guys back so soon." He wasn't sure if Mr. Stark had told anyone where they'd been going, so he didn't volunteer anything.

"Um...hi, Doctor Banner. Everything's fine. How, uh...how are you?"

"I'm fine. Working on a couple of projects. I've been gone so long...I'm getting behind on my research." He admitted, chuckling a little. "You wanna take a look?" He did. More than anything, he wanted to do actual science with the Doctor Banner. He glanced down at his backpack that he'd dropped at his feet and grinned a little.

"Yeah!"

"Come on over." He jerked his head over to the workstation and Peter dropped his backpack in the corner, all but running to join one of his science idols at the computer screen. Pushing the notebook so it was between them on the table, Doctor Banner began explaining his research in simple terms, brightening when Peter immediately understood, asking questions and to get him to clarify, and Peter eagerly pulled out his own notebook, flipping past the pages of calculus homework and finding a blank page to take his own notes.

Neither of them noticed Mr. Stark's entrance until Peter's spidey sense went off seconds before a hand landed on his back. He jumped a little, then grinned at his guardian. "Oh...hey, Mr. Stark!"

"Hey, kiddo. Thought I sent you down here to do homework? Instead, I find you taking my place in the science bros." Peter's eyes widened, about to be worried that the man was serious, but Doctor Banner was chuckling, ruffling his hair and making the boy pull away, laughing himself.

"Sorry, Mr. Stark. I'll go…" He pointed to the corner where his backpack sat, but Mr. Stark grabbed his shoulder, holding him in place.

"No way. I wanna know what you guys are working on." He took Peter's notebook and flipped through the notes, nodding. "This is good stuff." He commented, dropping the notebook and glancing at Doctor Banner's. "Need any help?"

"Always." Doctor Banner grinned, patting Mr. Stark on the shoulder, and Mr. Stark pulled a
container of trail mix out of one of the drawers, holding it open for Peter and Doctor Banner. Peter grabbed a handful and took a step back, letting the two older men get to work and taking notes the whole time.

After about an hour, FRIDAY spoke up from the ceiling. "Mr. Stark, Doctor Banner. The pizza has arrived."

"Perfect." Mr. Stark clapped his hands, making a gesture that caused all of the holographic screens to retreat to the edges of the room. "We'll get back to this after lunch. Pete, you hungry?" Peter nodded, putting his notebook which now had ten new pages of notes onto the table. "Great. FRIDAY, have them bring five pizzas up to the kitchen and put the rest in the Auditorium. Did the rest get sent to the hotels?"

"Yes, Mr. Stark."

"You're the best, FRI." Throwing an arm around Peter, he led the two into the elevator, and Peter found himself leaning against the man's side a little, grinning at the floor when Mr. Stark rubbed his shoulder before letting him go as the elevator doors opened and they found themselves in the common room. "FRIDAY, get Thor and his crazy brother. Rhodey too. Tell them we're having pizza if they want any. Where's Pep?"

"Miss Potts has a meeting in the city. She should be returning to the compound in roughly an hour and a half." Mr. Stark rolled his eyes, pushing the pepperoni pizza box over to Peter and the Hawaiian to Bruce, Colonel Rhodes coming around the corner and taking a seat next to Peter, nodding to the boy.

"Why the hell does she have so many meetings?" Mr. Stark whined.

"Because she runs your company, boss," FRIDAY answered, and Mr. Stark rolled his eyes.

"Right. FRIDAY, take a note. After the Asgardians move to Wakanda, we're taking a vacation. A real one. Like, on a beach somewhere. Start looking into beaches, FRI. Kid, you ever been to the beach?"

"Uh…" He swallowed the food, blinking. "Uh…like…I've been on a ferry…" Mr. Stark rolled his eyes again, snorting.

"A beach not in New York, kid. Like, a warm one. With sand. At a resort?"

"Then no."

"You're gonna love it. FRIDAY, resorts. Look up fancy ones…or I could buy another beach house in California. You never saw my house on the beach, did you kid?"

"I saw it on TV. While that guy was destroying it." He nodded.

"It was nice. FRIDAY, look into California real estate."

"Yes, Mr. Stark."

"You can come too." He invited Doctor Banner and Colonel Rhodes. "You too!" Peter turned to find Thor and Loki coming around the corner. "If you promise not to kill anyone."

"I will not be killing anyone, Stark." Loki rolled his eyes, taking a seat by Doctor Banner on the other side of the table, and Thor grabbed a paper plate.
"Come where, Tony?" Thor wondered.

"I'm taking Peter and Pepper on vacation." He explained. "Somewhere warm and...sandy. I'm thinking southern California. Private beach...that beach house idea is sounding better and better. Pep needs a break. Besides, Pete's birthday is coming up." Peter sputtered a little, swallowing his pizza and taking a drink of soda.

"Mr. Stark, you don't have to…." Mr. Stark waved his hand, dismissing him immediately.

"You'll love it, trust me." And that, apparently, was that. Peter did feel like he had any right to tell the man he couldn't go on vacation...but he didn't know if he'd ever heard of the man taking one. Then again, he'd only met Mr. Stark a year ago.

It was kind of surreal to sit at a table with Doctor Banner and Mr. Stark, paper plates in front of them. It was even more surreal now that everyone else was at the table, minus Vision who never joined them for mealtimes. Colonel Rhodes sat on one side, Mr. Stark at the head of the table, then Thor across from Peter, then Doctor Banner, and Loki at the other end across from Mr. Stark. He was eating with the Avengers...well, the Avengers plus Loki. And they were all eating pizza. He'd never given a second thought to the idea that Thor would need to eat, but of course he would. He wasn't human, but he was still...sort of human? Asgardian? Loki too.

Peter managed a couple of slices of pizza, and it struck him halfway through his third slice that he hadn't thought about May since the car ride back from the social worker's office. Doing science with Doctor Banner and Mr. Stark had completely wiped all thoughts of May from his mind...well, maybe not completely. She was always there, right in the back of his mind. But it didn't hurt. He didn't miss her with an aching longing at the moment...he just thought about how cool she'd think this was, sitting across from Thor. He imagined going into the living room and sitting beside her, her turning down the TV as he told her all about the Asgardian...how his hair was short and he had an eyepatch. How he was so big...like...huge, with biceps that bulged and shoulders more than twice as broad as Peter's, but his voice was always soft. Careful. Kind. She'd love to hear that...love to know that Thor was nice. She always loved it when celebrities and superheros were nice.

After lunch was over, everyone dumped their paper plates into the trash, Mr. Stark put the leftover pizzas in the fridge, then Peter followed him and Doctor Banner back down to the lab. Doctor Banner started to invite him to keep working, but Peter shook his head. "I really do have to work on my homework today." He begged off and headed over to a corner desk he'd worked at before, usually making his web formula, but also doing homework. Mr. Stark turned on the music, but not as loud as he usually had it, and Peter half listened to Doctor Banner and Mr. Stark work and half did his Calculous, then Chemistry. Physics wasn't too hard, but he knew he wouldn't be able to concentrate on his reading for US History if he stayed in the lab, so he packed up his stuff and headed upstairs, finding himself in the empty common room.

Not wanting to be to alone in his bedroom just yet, he curled up on the sofa, opening the textbook and flipping to the chapter on the Civil War. He'd learned about it before in middle school, but they were covering it again, so he began at the first assigned chapter, notebook out to answer the questions from the book.

He'd been working for about an hour when he heard footsteps right behind him and glanced up to find the god of thunder himself looking down at him with pleasant curiosity. "What are you reading?"

"Oh...umm...homework. For History class." He explained. "I have to get it done before Monday."

"I see." He took a seat in the chair by the sofa, leaning forward to get a closer look. "Do all
Midgardian children have this 'homework?'"

"Uh, yeah...pretty much. I mean, it started when I was in middle school and it gets harder every year." Thor nodded.

"And what are you learning about?"

"The Civil War. I mean, uh, we...we already learned about it...back a few years ago but, uh...we learn some of the same stuff sometimes. Just more in depth, you know." He stammered out, feeling his cheeks heat up and feeling like the biggest idiot in the world. But Thor only nodded thoughtfully.

"And what was the Civil War?"

"It was a war a long time ago...the north and the south fought about slavery and stuff." He shrugged. "The whole country was torn apart."

"A long time ago? How long ago?"

"Like, over 150 years ago." Thor gave a surprised chuckle and Peter blinked, looking around the room in confusion. "What?"

"You believe that 150 years is a long time. Sometimes I forget how young all of you are." Peter frowned.

"Um...how old...I mean...if you aren't...if you don't mind me asking…" Thor simply waited, hands clasped, elbows on his knees. "If you don't mind me asking, how old...how old are you?"

"Roughly one thousand years old." Peter choked on nothing, nearly dropping the book.

"One thousand…" He whispered, and Thor chuckled again.

"Yes. And I am quite a bit younger than many of my countrymen…” Thor faltered at that, his soft smile fading. "Rather, I was." He corrected himself, and Peter immediately felt bad, even though he hadn't really brought it up.

"Is Loki older or younger?" He asked, hoping to distract him.

"A few years younger."

"He's adopted, right?"

"He is. Our father brought him home after a battle with the Ice Giants."

"Ice...Ice Giants? There are Ice Giants?"

"There are. My brother is one of them."

Peter's mouth dropped open and he put his book on the couch beside him, homework forgotten. "Your brother isn't Asgardian?"

"No, he is adopted."

Peter thought for a second. "What do Ice Giants look like?"

"Large. Blue." The boy tilted his head.
"So...why does he look like a human...I mean...Asgardian?"

"He has the ability to change his appearance," Thor explained.

"Woah, really! That's so cool! Can he look like anyone? Can you look like you!?"

"Yes, he can change his appearance to look like anyone."

Peter gave him a skeptical look. "So...how do I know you're not him right now?" Thor laughed.

"I can give you my word, I suppose. Or we could go find my brother and ask him." Peter smiled, then paused.

"Wait, is that why he can do magic? Can all Ice Giants do magic?"

"That is one of the reasons. He is uniquely talented."

"Do you think he'd show me? I mean, show me what an Ice Giant looks like?"

Thor smiled but shook his head. "I wouldn't ask. He's a bit...touchy about it." Peter nodded immediately, wide-eyed.

"Right. I won't."

Thor stood fluidly, reaching out and grasping Peter's shoulder. "I will let you get back to your work."

"Oh, sure. Thanks, Mr. Thor, sir. I'll, uh...I'll see you later." The Asgardian smiled, nodding and heading to the elevator.

"Yes, I shall see you later." And with that, the man was gone, leaving Peter to slump against the sofa, trying to wrap his mind around the fact that he'd just talked to Thor, god of thunder, about his homework.
Panic at the Spare Room

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who has been reading and commenting! I appreciate it so much :)
hadn't meant anything...didn't mean to bring up something painful.

"He, uh...he said we could talk about it whenever I was ready but...Ned...I think he might, like...want to?"

"Seriously?"

"Yeah. He wasn't upset or anything. And he just said we'd talk about it when I was ready, not that he didn't want to or anything. I think...I don't...I don't know what to think." He admitted.

"Do you want him to adopt you?"

"My aunt just died, Ned." The words came out soft and sad, and immediately his friend was apologetic, not that that was what he'd wanted.

"I know. I'm sorry, man. I...I'm sorry. I didn't mean…"

"I know. It's fine." Peter murmured, leaning back against his pillow. "I just...I feel bad." He admitted. "It's like if he adopts me...I'm betraying May."

"You're not betraying her!" Ned was suddenly talking in a whisper. "She would have wanted him to take care of you. Didn't she make him an emergency contact for the school?"

"Yeah."

"She'd want you to be happy."

"I know." Ned was quiet for a moment and Peter closed his eyes, the two of them silent.

"Are you okay there? Really?"

"I guess." He shrugged even though Ned couldn't see him. "I miss her. All the time. Even when I'm happy...even when I'm not really sad about her...when I'm doing other stuff and having fun and hanging out with Mr. Stark or Doctor Banner...even Thor."

"You hang out with Thor?" Ned whispered, incredulous.

"Oh, I mean...he's around. But...I still miss her. It's always there."

"She was like your mom." Ned reminded him. "It's probably not going to go away for a long time, man. But...you can still enjoy your life, right? Like...you can work with Mr. Stark and let him take care of you, and hang out with Thor and Doctor Banner. Also, when can I come over?"

"We're going to live there so I can go to school."

"That is so cool..." Ned murmured, his voice dreamy, and Peter laughed.
"Yeah...I mean, the Compound is really cool too. Maybe you can come here some weekend...if we visit. There's just a ton of stuff going on with the Avengers and the Asgardians...I don't know how Mr. Stark keeps track of all of it."

"He's Tony Stark!" Ned cried as if that answered everything. Peter snorted. Ned hadn't seen the same Tony Stark that Peter had..the man that burned waffles and smothered them in syrup to hide it. The man that texted him instead of talking because he knew that it would make Peter more comfortable. The one that sat on the ground in an alley outside of a church and talked Peter through a panic attack. But he had a feeling that Ned would. Probably soon. The man had invited him to come to the Compound sometime.

"Well, the press conference is Tuesday and the Asgardians should be leaving next weekend. Well...maybe not all of them. I don't know about Thor and Loki." He told his friend. "So maybe Sunday? I'll ask Mr. Stark when things calm down."

"That's fine. Just, uh...think you can get me a picture? Of Thor?" Peter snorted.

"I'll try." He promised. He wasn't sure how the Asgardian would feel about that, but maybe he wouldn't mind. He seemed really nice, actually.

"Call back soon?"

"Yeah. I'll keep you updated. Can you tell MJ I won't be back until next Monday?"

"Tell her yourself. She'll take it better from you." He sighed.

"Think she'll be mad?"

"Nah. She'll understand." Peter wasn't sure if his friend was telling the truth but he thanked him anyway, hanging up, then opening a message to MJ telling her that he wouldn't be back for another week. To his surprise, she just told him that was fine and that his spot on the tram was waiting for him whenever he was ready to come back.

Putting his phone on the nightstand and plugging it in, he glanced up at the ceiling. "Hey, FRIDAY?"

"Yes, Peter?"

"Where's Mr. Stark?"

"He and Miss Potts are currently in their suite. Would you like me to get him?" Peter felt his face go red and he shook his head, wide-eyed.

"No...no, don't...no." He stammered a little, not sure what they were doing but also not wanting to interrupt. "Don't do that." He ran a hand through his hair. "Where's Doctor Banner?"

"Doctor Banner is down in the lab. Thor is down there as well. Would you like to know the location of anyone else?" He hesitated.

"Loki?"

"Loki is asleep in his quarters."

"Thanks." He muttered, sitting up and swinging his legs over the bed. "Hey, FRIDAY?"

"Yes, Peter?" He took a deep breath, hands clenched in his lap.
"Do...do you know where my stuff is? Like...from my apartment?"

"Yes, Peter. Your belongings are three doors down on the left. Mr. Stark, Miss Potts, and yourself are the only people in the compound with access to that room. Would you like me to have Mr. Stark show you?"

"No...uh...don't bother him. Thank you, FRI. Just, uh...I was just wondering." And for a few minutes, he just sat in his room, wringing his hands. Then he stood, stepping out of his room and heading toward the room FRIDAY had told him about. Placing his hand on the doorknob, he hesitated for a long time, looking up and down the empty hall. He couldn't hear much...a lot of the bedrooms were soundproof, which he was grateful for, but if he concentrated he could hear sounds from the lab...footsteps and soft conversation, too muffled to understand.

It took him five minutes to finally turn the knob, pushing the door open, stepping inside, and leaving it open just a crack behind him.

"FRIDAY, can you turn on the lights?"

"Of course, Peter." She did, and the soft lights illuminated a row of boxes stacked neatly in rows along the back wall, all labeled with the room they'd come from. 'Living room.' 'Kitchen.' 'Bathroom.' He wondered what they had in the bathroom that Mr. Stark's guys had decided to save. 'Peter's Room.' He figured he would go through that one first. Get some of his old stuff out. There were six boxes with his name on them, and he wondered what was in them. All of his stuff? His clothes? The computer he'd built? He moved over toward them, then paused.

'May's Room.'

He froze in his tracks, feeling his throat close up. May. Her stuff. He didn't even realize he was moving until he was picking up the box on top, easing it down onto the ground and opening the top. His hands shook as he looked down at the box of clothes, flinching at the smell...it smelled just like her. Her perfume. Her soap. Her hair. Reaching out with hands that barely worked, he picked up the sweater on top, holding it up to his face and taking a deep breath.

His legs gave out and his knees slammed into the ground, aching for a while after. Squeezing the fabric in his fists, he dropped his head, curling into a ball on the ground and feeling his tears soak into the sweater. May. It was May. He was holding a sweater she'd worn. She was gone. She was never coming back and he'd never get to go home and she was gone. She was dead. She'd died. A drunk driver had run into their car and she was gone. He bit down hard on his lip, trying to contain the noises that insisted on escaping. He was sobbing and he couldn't stop. Couldn't breathe for missing her, an ache starting in his chest and ripping him open.

Someone touched his back and he nearly jumped out of his skin, jerking backward. His heart leaped into his throat when he saw Doctor Banner kneeling beside him, wide-eyed and almost afraid. He should have heard him. Should have known someone was in the room with him. Peter shook his head, jerking away from the hand the man held out and leaning back. "Peter?" Breathing was hard. He hadn't realized that he hadn't been breathing. Hadn't realized that he could barely hear, that the whole world was muffled. And doctor Banner looked scared, mouth moving...but Peter couldn't understand the words.

"Is he alright?" Someone else was asking...and then that someone was kneeling beside him and another large hand was on his shoulder pressing into his skin and his nerves were fried and he didn't want them to touch him. Everything came into sharp focus, then, and the world was so bright and loud that Peter thought it was going to kill him. He wanted to run...wanted to jump out a window or...or pull his mask over his head and have Karen block everything out. But his mask was in his
room and he was in a room with his dead aunt's things and he couldn't breathe and he couldn't think and he needed them to leave.

"Go away." He gasped out. "Please. Please, go away." He begged, sobbing into his knees, and the hands moved away. "Please. Go away."

"Do you want us to get someone?" He didn't answer, just shook on the floor, wondering when everything had suddenly gotten so loud...when his clothes had started to scratch at his skin and when the dim lights had started to burn his eyes. "Peter?" Why were they shouting?

"Go away!" He didn't mean to scream it. Didn't mean to scream at the Doctor Bruce Banner and Thor. But he couldn't take it...couldn't stand the pressure and the lights and the breathing and the voices and the heartbeats. And then there was another voice.

"Peter? Bruce, what's going on?"

"I don't know...I was walking by and saw him on the floor." There was a short silence, then Mr. Stark spoke again, his voice nearly a whisper.

"Okay. Clear out. Bruce, can you get me a bottle of water?"

Peter clamped his hands over his ears, whimpering again, wondering what the heck was going on. Too much. Everything was too much and he couldn't breathe or stop crying and he was gasping for air and shaking and everything hurt! There were another few seconds of silence, then footsteps, then the soft click of the door shutting. Someone moved to sit beside him before a whisper came from the man now in the floor at his side.

"FRIDAY lights out. Soundproof the room. Don't let anyone else in this room. Have Bruce leave the water on the floor outside." He didn't hear FRIDAY answer but the lights shut off and suddenly it was silent except for his own breathing and the heartbeat and breathing of his guardian. "Can I touch you, or will it make it worse?" Mr. Stark asked, his voice barely a whisper.

"I don't know." Peter has almost forgotten about the sobbing until he tried to talk.

"Okay. I'm going to try. Tell me if you want me to stop." A firm hand landed on his shoulder, then wrapped around him and pulled him against the body beside him. It should have hurt like the other hand, but it didn't. He knew that hand...knew the person beside him only ever helped him. "What's happening? Can you tell me?"

"Senses." He sobbed, half choking on the word. "Eleven. Worse. Too much. Hurts..."

"Okay." The hand rubbed up and down his arm, keeping firm contact. It didn't hurt...instead, it grounded him. He dropped his head against Mr. Stark's shoulder and shuddered, still crying as the man held him close, turning to wrap both arms around him. "It's okay. I'm here." A piece of fabric touched Peter's hands. He couldn't remember dropping the sweater. "Will this help?" Peter shook his head, heart racing. "Okay."

The sweater disappeared and then all he could smell was Mr. Stark. Aftershave and motor oil. That smell calmed him and he slumped against his side, still crying but not sobbing anymore. "I'm sorry."

"One rule, kid."

"I didn't mean to bother you." He thought of Pepper and flinched. If she didn't hate him already, she would soon. He was constantly needing Mr. Stark...constantly needing the man to be close by to bring him back from panic and terror and...nothingness. He hated the nothingness worst of all.
"You're never a bother, Pete."

"It hurts."

"Where?" His guardian's voice got a little more urgent.

"Everywhere. My chest. My skin...my head..."

"Take some deep breaths with me, kiddo. C'mon." He nodded, and for what felt like a long time, he tried to focus on breathing. Every second felt like forever...the feeling had come on him so suddenly, and now it wouldn't leave. He wanted to apologize again but he knew what Mr. Stark would say, so he didn't bother. Reaching up, he wiped at his eyes, surprised to realize that tears were still falling. Mr. Stark kept rubbing his back, breathing slowly to encourage Peter to do the same. By the time he was taking almost normal breaths, he felt somewhat better, but he couldn't even find the energy to lift his head. Mr. Stark kept his arms around him, and Peter felt safe again. Contained. Grounded. Like he had almost floated away, but Mr. Stark had saved him.

"I didn't mean to yell at Doctor Banner and Mr. Thor." He murmured, nose against Mr. Stark's neck. He wasn't allowed to apologize but maybe he could explain.

"That's okay. They aren't mad. They were just worried."

"I'm sorry. I know I'm not supposed to apologize but I'm so sorry. You were with Pepper and you never get to see her and..."

"None of that is your fault." Mr. Stark broke in, shifting so he was sitting more comfortably against a wall and pulling Peter to his side, easing him so his head rested against the man's chest. "None of it. I'm not angry with you. Neither is Pepper. She understands. So do Thor and Bruce. But I accept your apology, okay? It's okay." Just those words, 'it's okay' made him feel better, and his chest seemed to loosen. They sat together for a few more minutes, Peter relearning how to breathe and Mr. Stark keeping firm contact until Peter felt like he needed to explain.

"Ned said that May would want me to be happy. That she'd be glad you were taking care of me." Mr. Stark hesitated, then spoke softly.

"I know she wants you to be happy. She loved you more than anything."

"And...I just...it didn't hurt so much all the time. I thought it was getting better. I could remember her and it didn't..." He trailed off, not sure how to explain, but Mr. Stark just waited, his chin on Peter's head. "I wanted to look through our stuff. Remember her without it hurting. But...it smelled like her." He broke off, closing his eyes, and felt his guardian nod.

"It's going to feel better some days." The man told him. "Some days it's going to hurt like hell. And some days it'll do both." A hand came up to run through Peter's hair, the gentle pressure lulling him to calm, and he closed his eyes in the dark room, taking a deep breath and slouching a little more against Mr. Stark. "Does it still hurt? Your senses?"

"No, it's better. I don't know what happened."

"Panic can do that...give even people with normal senses sensory overload. I've had it before. How do you feel?"

"Tired. Don't know why..." He felt the man nod.

"Panic will do that too. Think you can get up?"
"Yeah." He muttered, letting Mr. Stark pull him to his feet, then the man put his arm around Peter again, leading him out of the room and down the hall to Peter's room where he eased the kid onto the bed, a hand brushing over his forehead. Then he disappeared for a moment, reappearing with a glass of water that he pressed into Peter's hand. Peter took a long drink, barely opening his eyes when Mr. Stark put the glass on the table beside his phone. "Can you turn the alarm off?"

"Nope. Sorry, kid. I can't help you if I don't know you need it."

"I don't want to wake Miss Potts."

"Pepper doesn't mind. I promise." He assured Peter, running another hand through his hair as he dropped his head against the pillow. "I'll tell FRIDAY to make the alarm quieter so it doesn't wake her, okay? But she doesn't mind."

"Will it wake everyone?"

"No. FRIDAY only has an alarm in my room." The fingers trailed through his hair again. "Go ahead and sleep, kiddo."

"I'll have nightmares." He protested, blinking against the exhaustion weighing him down.

"I'll be here when you do." He reached up, wiping tiredly at his eyes, glad to find that at some point, the tears had stopped.

"Thank you."

"Anytime, Pete."

When Peter woke, it was still dark out...he thought. Blinking and letting his eyes adjust, he rolled over, staring at his curtains, but they were all shut. "Hey, FRIDAY?" He murmured, swallowed and wincing at the nasty taste in his mouth.

"Yes, Peter?" She asked, voice gentle as always, but quieter than usual.

"What time is it?"

"It is currently 5:30 am. You have been asleep for nearly 7 hours. It is recommended that children your age get 8-9 hours of sleep every night."

"Yeah. Thanks, FRI." He wiped his eyes, stretching out and sitting up, looking around his bedroom. His bedroom. It was his. He dismissed the thought. He'd cried enough the night before. He was still too tired to even think about another emotional breakdown. Climbing out of bed and figuring he wasn't going to get any more sleep, he brushed his teeth and refilled his glass with water, swallowing the whole thing in one gulp, then ran a hand through his hair. Is everyone still asleep?"

"Boss and Pepper are still asleep, as are Doctor Banner and Thor," FRIDAY told him.

"Thanks." He yawned, checking his phone to make sure Ned hadn't called, then headed to the kitchen to find some food. He hadn't eaten anything since the pizza the night before, and he was starving. His metabolism meant he had to eat a lot more than before, and if he didn't, he got ridiculously tired and his healing stopped working so well. So he decided to find breakfast before it became a problem and Mr. Stark had yet another reason to worry about him.

He was kind of surprised to find the living room light on, and Loki sitting in the same armchair as the morning before, still reading a novel. For a second, Peter wondered what he was reading, but the
angle was wrong for him to see the cover. The Asgardian glanced up after a second, lifting an eyebrow and giving Peter a short nod.

"Morning." Peter greeted, hands shoved in the pockets of his sweatpants.

"Good morning." The Asgardian answered, sounding reluctant to engage in conversation. Peter decided to leave it at that, moving into the kitchen and searching through the freezer to find a box of waffles. Mr. Stark's freezer was immaculate, filled with boxes of food all organized by type, and it was easy to find his waffles. It was nothing like the freezer at his old home...with May. That had been filled with boxes of food that may or may not have been expired, freezer-burned packs of meat, and a few old cans of fruit juice. He ignored that thought and pulled out the box in the front, dropping two waffles into the toaster. Then, remembering his aunt's rule about eating in front of people, he moved over to the island and looked into the living room.

"Um...Mr. Loki?" He called, and he heard the man release a long breath.

"Yes?"

"Do you want some waffles?" He glanced up from the book, meeting Peter's eyes and thinking for a minute.

"Yes. Thank you." Peter stared at him, wide-eyed, then nodded.

"Oh, yeah...right...sure. Um...okay." Loki seemed to be rethinking his decision but just looked back down at his book. Peter waited for a minute for the waffles to pop out of the toaster and, wincing at the heat on his fingers, he dropped them onto a plate, then poured syrup on top. Carrying the plate over, he hesitated in front of Loki's chair, then put them on the coffee table in front of him. "Here, uh...here you go."

The man looked up at him, meeting his eyes and seeming to stare into his soul for a long minute. Peter wondered if he could read minds...if he could read his mind! Would he need to touch him? Loki had put Peter to sleep! What else could he do? Thor had told him that Loki was an Ice Giant...what kind of magic could he do? He wanted to ask but didn't. Not when asking might offend him. He remembered King T'Challa mentioning the protests...that people thought Loki should be punished more for his crimes. Did Loki regret what he'd done? Thor trusted him...so was he really good now? "Thank you, Peter." The man told him simply, giving a small but sincere smile.

"Oh, yeah, of course, Mr. Loki, sir..." He ran a nervous hand through his hair, thought about asking, then didn't. Instead, he turned and went back into the kitchen, making his own waffles that he ate at the counter, then washed his plate. He was still hungry, but more he was buzzing with energy. He hadn't been Spider-Man in so long. Hadn't swung around the city or fought crime or used his powers in what felt like forever. But he knew that FRIDAY would sound the alarm. Besides, he was too far from the city. But they would be moving back to the tower! Maybe then...he pushed the thought away, heading over to the elevator and leaving Loki to his reading.

"Hey, FRIDAY? Can you take me to the training room?"

"Of course, Peter."

If he couldn't get rid of some of that energy by being Spider-Man, he figured he'd have to do it the old-fashioned way.
Thank you so much to everyone who has been reading and reviewing! I appreciate you all so much! Also, Tumblr user Angel-Gidget made a cover for my story! Thank you so much! (no one has ever made a cover or art for one of my stories and I don't know the protocol for thanking you or using it so if it's okay I'll make it the cover on this site!)

"Tony?" The soft voice pulled Tony from sleep and said man groaned, rolling over in bed and throwing an arm over Pepper who laughed out loud, a hand stroking his face and running through his hair. "Tony?" It felt early…or maybe he' gone to bed late. He couldn't remember. Back in the day, that would usually happen after a night of heavy drinking, but he knew that that wasn't the case this time. He hadn't had a drink since he'd taken Peter in. He tried to remember the night before…Peter had had a panic attack. Then he's spent the rest of the night with Pepper, who was still trying to wake him.

"No." He moaned, hiding his face in her neck. "I'm still sleeping."

"But it's time to get up." Pepper reasoned, and he could hear the smile in her voice. "It's almost 8. Time for breakfast." He groaned again.

"It's Sunday." He reasoned. "Sunday is a day for sleep."

"To some people, it's a day to observe various religious beliefs." He grunted. "Is Peter religious?"

"No idea." He admitted, finally opening his eyes and smiling when he found Pepper leaning over him, propped up on one elbow. Her hair was a mess, eyes still half closed, still tired. He reached up a hand, stroking her cheek with his thumb. "Do you have any meetings today?"

She hesitated. "No, but…"

"Nope. We're getting more sleep." He tugged her down, grinning when she laughed, her head resting on Tony's shoulder, a hand coming up to rest on his chest right where the arc reactor had once been.

"What about Peter? Don't you want to check on him?" She asked. "You said he was upset last night." That wiped the smile off of his face, and he remembered the night before. Sitting on the bed with Pepper, her scrolling through something on her StarkPad and him with his shoulder against hers. Her putting the tablet down and yawning, mouth open to ask something, but then they'd heard Peter screaming.

"Go away!"

Peter didn't scream at people. Especially not people that were staying in the Compound with them. Jumping out of bed, he'd found Peter on his knees, hunched over on the floor, hands over his ears, tears streaming down his cheeks. Bruce had been sitting on the ground beside him, hands hovering
uselessly over Peter's shoulder, and Thor had been hovering nearby, jaw tight, eyes worried. The two of them had looked back up at Tony, obviously concerned about the boy, and Tony had taken over, calming the kid down and getting him into bed.

Sometimes Tony worried that the boy would never get over this pain...that he would be unhappy and on the verge of a panic attack forever. Of course, he knew better. He remembered how much it hurt. Well, he remembered Rhodey's stories about his own drinking and blacking out and remembered waking up next to random women and how badly everything had hurt for such a long time. And he knew that Peter was in pain. But he was coping a lot better than Tony ever had.

How could Tony help him? How was he supposed to make all of this better? Should he get Peter a therapist? Try to talk to him more? Do more stuff with him? He knew that Peter liked working in the lab...and Tony had been busy for the last few days. He hadn't meant to be...he'd been trying to spend time with him whenever he could...whenever Peter wanted to. He made a mental note to try and spend more time with him. Find something for them to do. And eventually, they would go through May's stuff and discuss adoption and hopefully, they could do both of those things without any more panic attacks.

"FRIDAY? Is Peter awake?"

"Yes. He has been awake since 5:30 this morning." Tony frowned at that. As far as he knew, Peter didn't usually get up that early, but at least the kid had gotten some sleep.

"Any nightmares?" Of course he hadn't had any nightmares. FRIDAY would have woken him if Peter had been in distress. But still...maybe he'd actually slept through the night. Or maybe Loki had knocked him out again. Just that thought worried him. He'd been fine after the first time, but what if it happened again and he wasn't fine? What if Loki hurt him, even without meaning to? Loki seemed...fond? Was that the word? Fond of Peter. At least, he wasn't outright hostile. Actually, come to think of it, Loki had been nothing but polite since arriving.

"No, sir. He slept through the night." The AI answered.

"Where is he?" Tony wondered, sitting up and taking Pepper's hand.

"Peter is currently in the training room."

"When did he go down there?"

"Since roughly six this morning."

"Is he okay? What's he doing?" He asked. Almost 2 hours...that was kind of a long time. He glanced over at Pepper and saw that she, too, looked kind of worried.

"Peter is currently running on the treadmill?"

"For two hours?"

"He took a brief rest about an hour ago." Pepper met his gaze, sitting up and brushing her hair back.

"That's a little long, isn't it?" She asked. "Even with his...you know, spider stuff?"

He snorted a little at her description but nodded. She, Rhodey, and Vision were the only ones that knew about Peter's 'spider stuff' and Pepper tended to whisper when she spoke about it which always made him smile. "Yeah, that's a little excessive." He swung his legs over the bed, a little surprised at how quickly he felt wide-awake after being ready to go back to sleep. He paused before standing,
though, reaching back and kissing Pepper on the forehead. "FRIDAY, get us reservations tonight for 6:30." He had to stop for a long moment when she kissed him. "6:30 work for you?"

She grinned. "Let me check my schedule."

"6:30. You're free." She laughed. "Pick a restaurant, FRIDAY. Something good. Table for two."

"Three." She corrected softly. "Peter."

He hesitated, pushing her hair back behind her ear. "Is that okay?" He wanted Peter to come, of course. He loved spending time with his kid, more than he'd ever thought possible. But he didn't want Pepper to think he didn't have time for her. Of course, he should have known that Pepper would want Peter to come...she was the most perfect woman in the world, after all. She didn't know Peter very well, but he knew that she loved him...would love him. Everyone loved him when they got to know him.

"Of course it's okay." She caught his hand. "He's your son." It still took him by surprise every time someone called Peter that. His son. Sure, he thought of Peter as his kid. But 'son' was different, somehow. More. Peter was his son. And hearing the woman he was going to marry call him that...it made it all better somehow. So he nodded.

"Yeah, he is." It was true. Whether or not he adopted Peter, the boy was his son. Eventually, one day, Tony hoped that Peter would be her son too.

"Good. Now go get your son before he passes out in the training room, and I'll get started on breakfast." She kissed him one last time, then patted his cheek, jumping out of bed before he could pull her in again. Remembering why it was important to check on Peter instead of convincing his fiancee to spend more time in bed, he hurried to throw a sweatshirt on and headed straight for the elevator, passing Loki on the way.

"Do you sleep?" He wondered idly on his way by the living room. Loki glanced up from his book, an almost smile on his face.

"I am an early riser, as is your son, apparently." Tony's steps faltered and he turned to face the man fully, ignoring the 'son' part. Peter was basically his son. Or close enough. Apparently that was how everyone saw him, and Tony was done arguing.

"You saw Peter this morning?"

"Yes." Loki put the book down. "Do not worry, Stark. I did not touch your child. He did, however, make me breakfast."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Waffles. Do not worry. I washed the plate." Loki gestured toward a lazy hand toward the kitchen but Tony waved that off. That was the least of his worries.

"How did he look? Was he okay?"

"He seemed well to me." Tony nodded, glad to hear it. Then again, FRIDAY had told him that Peter hadn't had nightmares. So why was he up so early? Or did he always get up that early? It struck Tony that there were still quite a few things he didn't know about Peter.

"Thank you." He told the Asgardian softly, nodding and hurrying toward the elevator. "FRI, is he still on the treadmill?"
"Yes, sir."

The elevator stopped in the training room and Tony stepped out to find Peter on the treadmill furthest from the entrance over by the far wall, jogging at a pretty steady pace with the treadmill at a slight incline. The boy's cheeks were bright red, a contrast to his pale face and he was panting, telling Tony that he'd been at it too long. Thanks to his mutation, Peter was in excellent physical shape and could run and climb and do his Spider-Man thing for hours. He also had to eat a lot more often, but Peter seemed to have that part down. But nearly two hours of continuous running was too much for even him.

"Pete?" Tony called, frowning a little when Peter didn't even look up, eyes forward as he seemed to zone out. Then Tony noticed the earbuds in Peter's ears. He took a few steps closer and could hear tinny rock music coming from the headphones. "Pete!" He moved closer, then finally stepped into Peter's line of sight. The boy took a moment to glance up, then went wide-eyed, missing a step, and Tony watched in horror as one knee came down on the belt of the treadmill and he pitched forward, only just catching himself from slamming his face into the floor by grabbing the edges of the treadmill.

Moving fluidly once more, Peter hopped off the treadmill and came to stand before Tony, all in less than ten seconds. Yanking the earbuds out of his ears, he stood up straight, eyes still huge. "Mr. Stark! I'm so sorry...I didn't hear you…I was…"

"Holy shit, Peter, are you okay?" He demanded, reaching out and grabbing the boy's shoulders.

"What? Yeah." He nodded, looking confused.

"You just landed on your knee...are you okay? Can you walk on it?"

"Yeah...of course..." He was swaying a little and Tony held him up.

"Peter?"

"I'm fine. Just...I think I stood up too fast."

"Yeah, and I think you've been running for too long." He reached out, brushing the back of his hand over Peter's forehead. "You dizzy?"

"It's not bad...just stood up..." Tony cut in, concerned.

"Yeah, stood up too fast. Come on, kiddie. Let's get you upstairs. Get you some breakfast."

"I already ate…"

"That was before you ran on a treadmill for 2 hours. That's too long without eating, Pete." The boy was silent at his side, and Tony kept a close eye on him, making sure he wasn't limping. He didn't seem to be. Tony put a hand on the back of his neck, squeezing a little. "Why'd you come down here so early?"

"Just...woke up early. Not nightmares or anything!" Peter was quick to assure him as they stepped into the elevator. Tony just nodded. "I woke up and...it makes me feel better. Just...running. It's like, I don't think about it if I'm running."

Tony nodded again. "Hell, kiddo, you chose a better coping mechanism than I did. Exercise helps...well, that's what people tried to tell me when I was drowning myself in whiskey." Peter smiled a little at his teasing tone. "But you can't overdo it. One hour max on the treadmill from now on."

"But you--"

"Okay, okay, okay. I get it, Peter. I get it. You can't overdo it.太棒了."
on, okay? Then you eat. Rule number 2." Peter nodded. Tony hesitated before speaking again but managed to get the words out. "If...if you want to talk to someone…” Peter immediately shook his head. "Okay. That's fine. If you want to talk to me, I'm here. Any time." Peter nodded a little.

"You're welcome to use the track outside if you want. I'll tell FRIDAY not to sound the alarm if you go outside. Just promise not to leave the property."

"Promise." He ruffled Peter's hair.

"Good." They stepped into the living room where they found Loki still seated in one of the chairs. He glanced up, lifting an eyebrow at Peter, then went back to his book. "Alright, kiddo. Here." Tony reached into the bowl of fruit on the island and grabbed an apple, pressing it into Peter's hand. "Eat this." He stepped around the other side of the counter, opening a drawer and pulling out a protein bar that he tossed at Peter. The boy's hand shot up and he caught it just before it flew past him. "And that. Then go take a shower."

From the stove, Pepper glanced up, then frowned when she saw Peter. He understood her worry. Peter was pale and seemed to have a hard time staying upright without leaning to the side, looking for something to rest his weight on. He was going to have to make sure FRIDAY enforced that 'no exercising for excessive amounts of time without eating' rule when he wasn't around to do it.

"Honey? Are you okay?" His fiancee asked, putting the spoon she'd been using to stir the eggs down and hurrying around to Peter's side, pressing the back of her hand against his forehead, then trailing the hand down his pale face. He jerked away immediately, jaw tight, and stared at the ground beside him instead of at her. Stunned, Pepper dropped her hand, turning to look questioningly at Tony who stepped forward, putting a hand on his shoulder.

"Pete?" Tony made sure to keep his voice quiet.

"I'm sorry..." The boy whispered, biting down on his lip and shaking his head.

"Rule number 1 kid. You don't have to apologize." He reminded him on autopilot. "What's wrong?"

"I uh...nothing...I'm just...I don't fee tool well. Dizzy." He murmured, eyes locked firmly on the floor. Tony didn't believe him, but he decided not to push it just yet.

"Alright, buddy. Eat the protein bar and go take a shower. Then we'll have breakfast. Okay?"

"Okay." Peter murmured, taking the bar and heading toward his room. As soon as his door shut, Pepper put a hand over her mouth, sighing, then headed back to the stove.

"I guess he doesn't like me very much." She murmured, and he shook his head, reaching out to catch her hand.

"Pep..."

"No, it's...it's fine. I...I understand. He just...he doesn't even know me and..."

"Pepper." Tony murmured, pulling her over and feeling his heart crack a little. Peter had never spent an abundance of time with Pepper. She was usually busy and timing usually didn't work out very well. But every time he'd been around Pepper, Peter had always been very polite. Almost excessively respectful. And now? Tony had seen the boy jerk away from Pepper...how uncomfortable he looked around her. But why? "He likes you. He's just having a hard time right now. He was running for too long...made him sick." She nodded but he could tell she didn't believe him.
He thought about going after the kid...asking him what was going on, but he was probably already in
the shower and he didn't want to interrupt. "FRIDAY, change the reservation to two. It's just going
to be me and Pepper tonight."

"Tony, you don't need to…"

"Pete will be fine." He assured her, reaching up and putting a hand on her cheek. "He can hang out
with Rhody, do his homework, talk to his friends." She smiled, leaning in and kissing her cheek. "I
want to be with you tonight. It's been too long."

"Tony, you don't have to…"

"I want to." He murmured, resting his forehead against hers. "I'm going to talk to him. Find out
what's going on."

"What's going on?" He jumped a little, as did Pepper, and they both turned to find Rhody leaning in
the doorway of the kitchen.

"I'm going to finish making breakfast." Pepper excused herself, and Tony and Rhody headed over
to the sofa, throwing Loki glances that the Asgardian ignored. Tony supposed he had been there
first.

"She thinks Peter doesn't like her," Tony explained softly, figuring that Loki didn't care about their
domestic issues.

"That kid likes everybody." Tony snorted. He had to admit, Rhody was right. The kid liked just
about everyone he'd ever met as long as they weren't outright hostile toward him. "They've met
before, haven't they?"

"Yeah. I went down to the training room to get him. He was running himself half to death. When we
got upstairs, he just...it's like he doesn't want to talk to her. He wasn't really rude or
anything...just...evasive." Rhody nodded slowly.

"You guys are going out tonight?"

"How long have you been listening?"

"Long enough." Tony rolled his eyes. He'd have to have FRIDAY start warning him when people
were eavesdropping. Some issues were more sensitive than others around the compound. "I'll keep
him company tonight. Maybe we'll order Chinese. He likes that, right?"

"He does." Tony agreed, clasping his hands and propping his elbows on his knees. "Where's
Vision?"

"He left about an hour ago." That wasn't much of a surprise. He'd spent longer than usual with them
this time. Long enough to meet Peter and lend his support. Tony understood...Vision missed Wanda.
He missed her too sometimes. Sometimes missed having a home full of people. But he thought of
Peter and knew that it wouldn't work very well. It would have been too overwhelming to bring the
boy into a home full of Avengers right after losing his aunt. Still, he'd miss having Vision
around...the last link he had to Jarvis.

Putting that thought right back into the box where he kept such thoughts (which wasn't a particularly
good coping mechanism, but it beat drinking himself to sleep every night) he turned back to Rhody.
"We'll probably leave here around five, and we won't be back until after 8. He doesn't need a
babysitter but…"
"Tones, I got this," Rhodey told him with a chuckle. "I can spend time with a fifteen-year-old for a few hours. How about you tell me a little more about him running himself to death." Tony ran a hand over his face.

"Yeah...he'd been going at it for about two hours when I got to him this morning...and he wasn't looking too good." He glanced up at Loki, not wanting to discuss Peter's mutation in front of him. It wasn't a huge leap in logic from 'mutant spider bite' to 'Spider-Man.' Rhodey seemed to understand so he didn't say anything else about it. "I told him he had to keep running sessions to an hour or less."

"Exercise is a pretty healthy way to deal with grief."

"Yeah, and I'm glad he has a healthy way to cope, but it stops being healthy when he passes out on a treadmill." Rhodey chuckled and nodded, conceding the point.

It was quiet for a moment, then Tony gave in to the urge to check on his kid. "FRI, is Peter okay?" He asked just as Thor entered the room, looking pretty wide-awake for 8:30 on a Sunday morning and Tony wondered if Asgardians had any real concept of Sunday as a day of resting and maybe observing religious beliefs. Did they have religious beliefs? He supposed that was a question for another time.

"Peter is currently in the shower. Would you like me to get him for you?"

Tony rolled his eyes. "No." He told the AI flatly. He could just imagine FRIDAY scaring the kid half to death in the shower.

"Is something wrong with Peter?" Thor wondered, looking warily at Loki who rolled his own eyes.

"Nope. Everyone here's fine, Point Break. How about on your end?"

"My people are all well, and they wish to thank you again for the excellent accommodations." Tony nodded, waving him off.

"Yeah, sure. Just let me or Pep know if they need anything else. They can tell FRIDAY too. Just tell them to ask the ceiling for whatever it is they need." Thor chuckled just as Pepper poked her head out of the kitchen.

"Breakfast is ready." She called, and all four of them stood, joining her in the kitchen. The guests took a seat at the table while Tony helped serve and Rhodey handed out dishes and silverware. As they were sitting down, Peter emerged, hair still damp, and he sat down between Tony and Rhodey.

"Morning, Peter." Rhodey greeted with a grin, and Peter gave him kind of a tired smile.

"Good morning Colonel Rhodes. Where's Doctor Banner?" He wondered.

"Still asleep, I guess. Bruce likes to sleep in." Rhodey informed him. The kid nodded and turned his head back to his plate, then blinked in surprise at the heap of food that Tony had placed on it. He didn't complain, though, just started eating. Tony caught Pepper throwing glances at the boy, but he never looked up from his food.

Tony had no idea how to bring this up. He didn't know why Peter was acting this way around Pepper, and he didn't know how to find out. What if he just assumed Tony was mad at him and did that thing where he just clammed up and apologized. The kid didn't want to talk to a therapist, or anyone really. He barely talked to Tony. And he knew that it hurt Pepper. She was a part of his family and so was Peter and he wanted them to get along. He knew that Peter may never see Pepper
as a mother figure, but maybe a friend?

"All done with your homework, Pete?"

"Uh...yeah. Pretty much." Peter answered after swallowing a mouthful of eggs. "Just some reading to do...and studying for midterms. And, uh...Ned asked if I could come over after school tomorrow. Said he'd help me study." He said that last part softly like he wasn't supposed to be asking.

"Sure," Tony answered without hesitation, hoping that if he acted nonchalant about letting Peter see his friends enough times, then maybe he'd stop being afraid to ask. "Happy can give you a ride. FRI, what am I doing tomorrow?"

"You have a conference call from 2-4, a meeting from 5-8 at the Tower, and Secretary Ross is still waiting for you to return his call."

"Yeah, he's going to have to keep waiting." He turned back to Peter. "If you want to leave before 8, Happy can give you a ride home."

"Oh...okay. Thanks." Peter murmured, nodded. "Um...I can just take a bus or…"

"Happy's giving you a ride." Tony dismissed immediately. "It's a long walk from here to the nearest bus stop, and Happy loves driving you." Peter snorted, and Tony grinned. "Well, he wouldn't admit it if you asked, but deep down, it's his favorite thing to do. Trust me."

They finished up with breakfast and without even being asked, Peter started gathering plates and took them to the sink. Pepper glanced at Tony, but he shook his head. If Peter wanted to clean the dishes, then he could clean them. It wasn't something he wanted to tackle yet, like Peter calling him 'Mr. Stark.' They'd get to it.

Tony started to join him, but Rhodes beat him to it, nudging Peter aside and grabbing a towel. "Colonel Rhodes..." The boy started, but Rhodey cut him off.

"My friends call me Rhodey, kiddo." The man told him simply, drying off a plate. The boy looked up at him, eyes wide, and Tony's old friend smiled. "So call me Rhodey." He clapped Peter on the back, and they continued with the dishes in silence. Tony felt a pang in his chest. It seemed like it was so easy for Rhodey...why couldn't he just tell Peter to call him Tony? Why couldn't he just ask Peter if something was wrong...why he felt uncomfortable around Pepper? Why was it so easy sometimes, and so hard other times?

Tony shook that thought off. Peter was his kid. They were going to get through this. It was going to be fine. Peter was going to be fine. So was Pepper. So he headed into the kitchen and joined them at the sink, grabbing a dry plate from Rhodey and putting it in the cabinet. "You know we still have a dishwasher, right kid?" He asked. Peter shrugged.

"I don't mind it." The boy told him.

"Just so you know you don't have to clean up after every meal. I appreciate it though." He took a couple of cups from Rhodey and put them in a different cabinet. "Why don't you come down to the lab after we finish up here?"

"If...if you don't mind...I mean...I can go...to my room. I can...work on homework or…"

"I wouldn't offer if I didn't want to, bud." Tony assured him, reaching over Rhodey and patting the boy on his back. "You about ready?"
"I can finish up the dishes. You boys go play downstairs." Pepper appeared in the doorway, offering Tony a brief smile.

"Are you sure?" Tony asked.

"I'll make use of that dishwasher." She leaned down, kissing Tony on the cheek and he grinned. "Besides, Rhodey's here to help." Peter gave her a weak smile, dropping the fork into the soapy water.

Rhodey shot Tony a look that somehow told him everything. 'Talk to Peter. Get to the bottom of this. Everything is going to be fine.' He nodded, leaving the two of them to the dishes and heading down to the lab with Peter following like a shadow. When they got into the room, FRIDAY opened the elevator and the two stepped into the lab. Immediately, they headed to Tony's usual workstation and he pulled out some blueprints for an old arc reactor. For about ten minutes, they worked in silence. Tony was trying to figure out how to ask when Peter broke it.

"She reminds me of May." His voice cracked a little on his aunt's name, but when he glanced over, the boy wasn't crying, just staring down at the blueprints in front of him. He was fascinated with the arc reactor...loved looking over Tony's first blueprints and all of his designs. "Miss Potts." He clarified needlessly. "I don't know why. When she touched my head...the way she...she just reminds me of her. When I was sick...that was how...how May acted." Peter shrugged, sighing and putting the blueprint down. "I didn't mean to be rude...or hurt her feelings. I just...it hurt." He murmured, shaking hands pressed flat against the table. Tony put his own papers down, moving over to stand beside him, a hand on the boy's back as he leaned over the table. "It hurt." He admitted again, voice small.

"Pepper reminds you of May," Tony repeated, his own voice soft. Peter shook his head.

"I know it's stupid. I know it doesn't make sense. I just..."

"No, I...I get it." Tony murmured, moving the hand up to squeeze his shoulder. And he did. May had been like Peter's mother, probably the only adult woman in his life who showed him affection...maybe his friend's mom. Ned. It wasn't like he'd been around Pepper very much, but Pepper was great with kids. She'd love Peter. But it made sense that he'd associate affection from adult women with May.

"I hurt her feelings."

"She'll understand if I explain." Peter was quiet for a minute.

"I'm sorry." Tony nodded, squeezing his shoulder again. "Can I apologize to her?"

"I'll allow it. Just this once. The rule applies to everyone." He told the boy with a grin, and Peter managed a little smile.

"So I have to come and get your permission every time I want to apologize to someone?" Tony shrugged.

"Sorry, kid. I don't make the rules." Peter barked out a laugh at that, shrugging his arm off and dodging when Tony went to ruffle his hair, a hand coming up to swat Tony's away.

For a moment, there was an easy silence, but then Peter got serious again. "Do you think..." He hesitated. "Do you think she'll always remind me of May?"

Tony stared at the table, crossing his arms. "No." He finally said, sighing. "No, I think that the more
time you spend with her, and the more time passes, the easier it will get.” Peter nodded, absently flipping through the plans on the table. "It's going to get easier, Pete." The boy looked up at him with so much hope, and Ton put a hand on the back of his neck, bending over a little to look him in the eye. "I promise." Peter nodded, obviously relieved, and the trust nearly broke his heart. This boy was relying on him. He needed him. And Pepper would be a part of that. His future wife was going to be a part of that. And so would Rhodey and probably Thor and maybe even Loki too. So, changing his mind for the third time that morning, he took a step back leaning against the table. "You want to come to dinner with us tonight?" Pete's eyes widened.

"Are...are you sure? Like...won't Miss Potts mind? You guys don't have to...I mean...I know you probably want to..."

"She'd be happy to have you." Tony interrupted. "So would I." One day, the boy wasn't even going to have to ask...he wouldn't doubt it for a second. Until then, he'd have to work on convincing him.

It was time to start piecing his family back together, starting with his kid and his fiancee.
Peter wasn't sure how long they spent in the lab after their talk. He did his best to focus on the arc reactor plans and the proposed improvements to the Iron Man and Spider-Man suits. Mr. Stark knew how much he loved studying them and although he knew he’d probably never get to build his own arc reactor, it was really cool to try and plan out with Ned. Still, he couldn't focus. He thought about Miss Potts instead...about her gentle hand on his face and the memory of May doing the same thing whenever he felt sick...back before the spider bite. He thought about jerking away from her on instinct, and how Miss Potts had looked...confused and hurt.

He'd first met Miss Potts on one of his visits to the compound. Colonel Rhodes too. Rhodey. The man had asked him to call him Rhodey. They both knew that he was Spider-Man. Rhodey had figured it out after hearing him talk one night during a movie. The man had guessed pretty quickly...Peter figured he remembered his voice or something. They had been in the middle of the movie, eating popcorn by the handful, when Peter had said something...he couldn't remember what. But Rhodey had frozen, turning from where he was sitting in one of the chairs by the sofa.

"Are you kidding me?" He'd asked, and both Mr. Stark and Peter had turned to him in confusion.

"What?" Mr. Stark had asked, his voice close to defensive at the man's tone.

"I knew he was young, man, but..." The two had just blinked at him in confusion until Rhodey had rolled his eyes, pointing to Peter. "He's Spider-Man!"

"How the hell did you..." Mr. Stark had started, but Rhodey had just shaken his head.

"I knew I recognized that voice." He'd muttered, throwing his head back against the back of his chair. "Damn it, Tony."

"It's not his fault." Peter had cut in, defending Mr. Stark before the man had gotten the chance to defend himself. "I was doing this before he gave me a new suit." Rhodey had given him a long, incredulous stare, then he'd sighed, shaking his head. Beside him, Mr. Stark had reached out, messing up his hair and grinning when Peter shot him an annoyed look and swatted his hand away. But he had caught a flash of something in Mr. Stark's eyes...fondness. Or gratitude. Something more? The kind of look his uncle would give him when Peter would cover for him with Aunt May over some little thing...giving him candy before lunch or something...stuff he missed every day. That's the way Mr. Stark had looked at him. Like he loved him.

"Right. Of course you were. Because everyone this guy recruits is crazy." Rhodey had murmured under his breath. And, apart from a couple of remarks about the kid being careful and a few jokes about bugs every time he caught sight of one around the compound, that had been that.

Miss Potts had known the whole time. Mr. Stark probably told her anything, which was fine with Peter. If Mr. Stark trusted her, Peter trusted her. Their first meeting hadn't been anything special. Just her popping into the lab to talk to Mr. Stark and him stammering out a nervous hello. She'd been very nice, telling him how nice it was to meet him and offering him something to drink, then she'd left them to their work. It had been the same the next time, and the time after. And slowly he'd gotten to know her and she'd gotten to know him. He was comfortable around her and Colonel Rhodes too. And now...everything was different. Strange.
Eventually, Doctor Banner came down to the lab, yawning and rubbing his eyes, and Mr. Stark chuckled, greeting his friend and inviting him to join them. Peter headed upstairs shortly after, telling them he was going to call Ned to tell him the plan for the next day. Neither man seemed to notice him leaving past a quick wave from Mr. Stark...they were both too wrapped up in their work. He didn't mind...it was nice, actually. Back to normal. Checking his phone, he found that it was 11:30, probably a little before Ned would be out of church. He stepped off of the elevator into the living room and found it empty. Looking around to make sure, he pulled his phone back out of his pocket, stared at it, then stuffed it back where he'd found it. He didn't really need to call Ned...he could just text him. But Ned's mom always had them turn their phones on silent in church and would give them scary looks when they pulled them out during the service.

He wanted to apologize to Pepper before they all went to dinner that evening. Wanted to assure her that it had nothing to do with her and everything to do with him. But he also didn't want to be around her. Didn't want to remember his aunt and feel that ache in his chest that he got when he missed her the most. He missed her so much. And yet he was still alive. Still moving forward while she never would. He had a new life with Mr. Stark and he was Peter's new guardian and these people were like a new family and as wonderful as it was to have a family again...to have people that he admired so much looking out for him, it was still strange.

"Peter? You okay?" He jumped a little, pulled from his thoughts as he found Colonel Rhodes...Rhodey leaning against the kitchen doorway.

"Hey, um...yeah. I'm...I'm fine Colonel...Rhodey." The man grinned, moving over to where Peter was standing, legs just a little stiff. He wondered how the braces worked. The hydraulics were so quiet that he doubted anyone but him could hear them, and he knew that Mr. Stark was always coming up with improvements and he also knew that Rhodey did physical therapy every couple of days. He never asked about it though, and as far as he knew, only Mr. Stark ever went with him to the physical therapy.

"Bruce ever join you guys downstairs?"

"Yeah. Just a few minutes ago. I was going to call Ned, my friend. Um...ask him if I could come over tomorrow after school. But, um...I think he might still be in church. So..." He trailed off, but Rhodey just nodded, calm as ever.

"We went to church every Sunday when I was a kid. My mom took us...me and my brother and sisters." He gestured to the sofa and Peter followed him over, both of them sitting. The braces hissed softly as Rhodey folded himself onto the couch and Peter did his best not to look at them. "It wasn't too bad. There were lots of kids my age. We'd all pass notes during the service until we got caught and my mom would threaten to tell my dad. He worked on Sundays, you know, but he expected a full report." Peter chuckled when Rhodey did. "I still go sometimes, when I don't have to babysit Tony." Peter laughed out loud, wondering if FRIDAY would tell Mr. Stark. "What about you guys?"

"Um...Uncle Ben was Jewish. My Dad too. Aunt May was Catholic. So we...we kind of did a little of everything." He shrugged. "Sometimes we'd go to church with Ned and we celebrated most of the holidays. I think my mom was Baptist or something, but I don't think my parents really went to church or anything. I...I can't really remember." He stared down at his clasped hands. "I mostly just went to hang out with Ned. But after Ben...we didn't go anymore."

A careful hand landed on his shoulder, reminding him of Mr. Stark. It was nice though. Nice to have someone else that cared. It felt like he suddenly had a whole building full of people that were ready to look out for him, and after only having May...after having every other adult in his life...
disappear...die...it was comforting. For a moment, he worried that he was trading Aunt May for this new family...but he wasn't. He hadn't traded anything...he hadn't even had a choice. Of course, he'd give anything to have her back, but he couldn't. Even the great Tony Stark couldn't do that. And with Mr. Stark came Miss Potts, the woman he loved and who he would be marrying.

"Mr. Rhodes, do…"

"Rhodey." The man corrected patiently, and Peter gave a self-conscious smile. It was weird calling him by his first name...well, nickname, but the man had asked him to, so he was trying.

"Right, sorry...Rhodey, do you know where Miss Potts is?"

He furrowed his brow, thinking for a moment. "I think she's with Thor talking to the Asgardians out in the back. She tries to check in every day...make sure they have everything they need. FRIDAY can probably call her..."

"Oh, no...that's okay." Peter shook his head. He didn't want FRIDAY to bother her. "Um...do you think I'm allowed to go out there?"

"I'm pretty sure you're allowed to go anywhere you want, Pete. There's a fence around the property so don't climb that or anything...it might be electrified." The man told him with a wry grin.

"Right. Thanks, Rhodey."

"Sure thing, Peter."

"Oh, um...do you know if Doctor Banner called the other Avengers? Like, Mister Captain Rogers...Mister Captain America?"

Rhodey laughed, shaking his head and crossing his arms as he leaned back on the sofa. "First, his title is 'Captain Rogers.' The 'mister' is unnecessary if you're using 'Captain.' Second, I'm pretty sure he'd be fine with you just calling him Steve. Third, Bruce did talk to him, but I don't know if he's coming here or when that would be happening. I'm sure Tony will tell you if it comes up."

Peter hesitated. "They're not going to...to...fight again, are they?" He asked, keeping his voice soft as though Mr. Stark were around the corner. Rhodey blinked, eyes narrowing just a little.

"They've always had arguments...I don't know if they're too similar or too different." He told Peter, a hint of a smile in his voice, but his tone was serious. When he spoke, Peter's voice was small.

"I don't mean...verbal fighting." Rhodey let out a breath.

"You know about Siberia?" It sounded like a statement, but the man waited for an answer, so Peter sighed, giving in easily.

"Yeah. I mean, Mr. Stark looked pretty rough when he came to take me home after Germany. I...I assumed." There was a pause before Rhodey went on.

"You assumed right. You talk to Tony about it?"

"No." He shook his head. "Mr. Stark never brought it up so..."

"Probably for the best. To answer your question, I don't know if they're going to fight again. But if they do, it won't be two against one again." Rhodey's voice got kind of hard and Peter nodded, jaw tight, eyes dropping to the floor. He was a huge fan of Captain America's, but if it came to protecting
Mr. Stark, he'd kick the guy's ass.

"I'm going to head out back." He told Rhodey who nodded, holding out a hand, and Peter grabbed it, pulling him to his feet easily and making Rhodey laugh.

"Damn, kid. You're stronger than you look. Guess you'd have to be, though. All that climbing and swinging and stopping busses with your bare hands." He jerked his head toward the elevator. "Come on. I'll walk with you if you don't mind." Peter couldn't help the suspicious look on his face, and Rhodey smiled like he'd read his mind. "I'm not babysitting you or anything. I wanted to talk to Thor anyway."

Peter couldn't tell if the man was telling the truth, but didn't see the point in arguing. Besides, he liked Colonel...Rhodey. He liked Rhodey. The man was always nice to him. Never made him feel like he was tagging along or unwanted. "Hey, FRIDAY, if Mr. Stark asks, can you tell him that we went outside?" He asked, not wanting him to worry.

"Of course, Peter." She answered, and then they were taking the elevator to the ground floor lobby, then out the back door.

Peter hadn't really been outside the Compound since coming to live with Mr. Stark, except for his aunt's funeral, and his trip to Ned's house. The second he stepped outside the building, he took a deep breath of the fresh air, staring up at the bright blue sky for a moment, and Rhodey paused beside him. Peter hadn't realized how cooped up he'd been. The urge to shoot a web into the nearest tree was surprisingly strong, and suddenly he missed being Spider-Man with a vengeance. He knew Mr. Stark was moving them back to the tower...once he was back in the city, would he get to be Spider-Man again? It wasn't something he'd talked about with the man yet.

The trailers, if you could even call them that, started a thousand feet behind the back door of the Compound and were lined up neatly. Most of the ones he could see had their doors open, and the huge open spaces between rows were filled with groups of children. There was a pool between them and the trailers, and several women sat around the side, feet in the water while kids swam around, some throwing a huge beach ball back and forth, and others just swimming.

After a minute of just breathing in the fresh air and resolving to spend more time on his balcony, he started walking again. Rhodey followed his lead and they headed toward the trailers. Apart from going up to the nearest Asgardian and saying 'Take me to your leader' he wasn't sure how to find Miss Potts. He supposed he could have asked FRIDAY but he didn't even know if she worked outside. Instead, he and Rhodey made their way through the crowds. "So they're all going to Wakanda?" He asked. The man nodded.

"Yeah, T'Challa is coming on Friday. I think Thor and Loki are staying here though. The Wakandans aren't too thrilled by the idea of having Loki living with them. I gotta admit, I don't know that I'm exactly thrilled myself." Peter thought back to that morning and smiled.

"He doesn't seem to bad…"

"Maybe not yet. I'm just wondering when that crazy switch is gonna flip." Peter started to answer but hesitated when he spotted a familiar face.

"Speak of the devil." He murmured, and Rhodey followed his line of sight to the man himself, snorting and shaking his head.

"You got that right."
Before Rhodey could object, Peter hurried over to Loki who was sitting on a bench, speaking with another Asgardian Peter didn’t recognize. It was a woman with long black hair tied back into a ponytail. She didn’t look thrilled to be talking to Loki, but still, she was sitting beside him, arms crossed, one eyebrow lifted as Loki talked about a grandmaster, whatever that was. When he saw Peter approaching, Rhodey trailing behind, he seemed to sigh, and the woman turned to face them as well, lifting an eyebrow.

"Hey, Mr. Loki!" He waved, grinning, and a couple of kids stopped playing to stare at him and at Loki who simply gave Peter a nod. Then Peter smiled at the woman who stood, nodding to the two newcomers as well. "Hi."

"Right. Well, I'll leave you to your company."

"That really isn't necessary." Loki started, but she was already walking off toward a group of kids kicking a soccer ball around.

"Who was that, Mr. Loki?" Peter wondered, and Loki seemed to resign himself to a conversation. The boy had to fight a laugh at the man's put-out expression. He always seemed like he was just barely hanging on to whatever conversation he was involved in.

"She is a Valkyrie."

Peter gasped. "Woah...seriously?" He cried, glancing back in the direction the woman had disappeared in hoping for another glimpse that he didn't get. He did see a pile of rocks that was walking...and talking to someone, but he didn't have time for that just yet. "Like...the woman warriors who ride winged horses!?" Loki blinked, then leaned in a little, cocking his head to the side.

"Midgardians know about Valkyries?"

"Yeah! We learned about them when we were studying Norse mythology! We learned about you too..." Intrigued, Loki clasped his hands and rested his elbows on his knees. "Trickster God, always messing with Thor."

"Yeah, that's one way to put it," Rhodey grumbled. "Any idea where your brother and Pepper are?"

"I believe I saw them go that way." He gestured vaguely, and Peter sighed, following the direction of his hand and finding what looked like a thousand trailers. They could be anywhere. He turned back to Loki, hoping for a little more, and the man sighed, rolling his eyes and standing. "Come along." He all but grumbled, and Peter grinned up at Rhodey who shook his head with a reluctant smile.

"Told you." Peter mouthed, and Rhodey punched his arm.

"Are you going to use magic to find them?" Peter asked, hoping to see another cool display.

"No. I am going to walk in the direction they went and ask someone." He couldn't see Loki's face, but he was sure he was rolling his eyes. Still, true to his word, he stopped the next adult they passed and asked if they had seen his brother. A few similar encounters later, they found Thor and Miss Potts looking at something on a StarkPad, both sitting on one of the benches littering the place, and Peter wondered if Mr. Stark had had them installed. Peter had to admit, it was kind of strange to be walking around with Loki. The Asgardian drew some attention, but honestly, no one seemed afraid of him or anything. Peter wondered if that was because they were used to him or because of what had happened on their planet. He still hadn't got the whole story of what had happened to Asgard. He wondered if Thor or Loki would tell him.

Miss Potts glanced up from her StarkPad and Thor followed suit, both looking surprised to see Peter
and Rhodey. "Peter...is everything okay?" She asked, standing as they came closer.

"Oh, yeah...everything's fine, Miss Potts. We just, um...actually...I..." Thor came to stand beside her, staring at his brother who interrupted Peter before he could find his way to his point.

"The Midgardian child wished to find you, so I delivered them." He turned to Peter and gestured to the two adults standing and staring at them, and Peter grinned, momentarily distracted.

"Thanks, Mr. Loki." Loki nodded.

"Miss Potts. Brother." He turned then, disappearing between trailers, and Peter wondered where he was going. Figuring it was none of his business, Peter turned back to Miss Potts and Thor, but before he could speak, Rhodey spoke up.

"Thor, think I could talk to you for a minute?"

"Of course." Thor smiled, looking confused but going with it, and that left Peter with Miss Potts. He wasn't sure how Rhodey knew that he wanted to talk to Miss Potts alone, but he was grateful.

He had sort of had a speech planned. He would start with an explanation and then move on to an apology and she would see that he'd never meant to hurt her or offend or cause any type of trouble between her and Mr. Stark. It had been half-developed in the lab and half plotted out on his way to see her. But now, standing across from her, he couldn't make the words work. They all seemed so stupid all of a sudden.

For a moment, she just waited patiently, the two of them standing outside, surrounded by Asgardians. He opened his mouth, glancing around, then closed it. How was he supposed to explain that she reminded him of his dead aunt and that as much as he liked her, it hurt to be around her...and in other ways, it didn't. In other ways, it was soothing and calming and comforting to be around her. "Peter?" She finally asked when he didn't speak, reaching out a hand and resting it on his shoulder. He didn't flinch this time, but he did stiffen and she dropped hand, obviously hurt.

"I'm sorry." He murmured, and she shook her head.

"You don't have to be sorry. What's going on?"

"Um...I just...I wanted to..." He stammered, running a hand through his hair, and she jerked her head toward the bench where she and Thor had been sitting.

"Why don't we sit down?" She asked, and he nodded, following her over and sitting down. In the distance past kids kicking a ball and a few adult Asgardians talking in circles, he could see Rhodey and Thor talking, Thor throwing back his head and laughing at something Peter hadn't heard. "Peter? Are you okay?"

"Yeah...yeah, I..." He trailed off. It hadn't been easy to say this to Mr. Stark, and he'd talked to Mr. Stark a lot. About a lot of stuff. But Mr. Stark loved Miss Potts. He was going to marry her. He wanted Peter to come with him and Miss Potts to dinner. This was important to him. So Peter needed to make an effort. He had to try to explain. "Miss Potts, I...I'm just...I'm sorry." He finally managed to force out, taking a deep breath and staring at his feet.

"You don't have to be sorry." She assured him again, and he forced his eyes up to hers.

"It's not you....I mean...it's not..." He put a hand over his mouth, wondering why this couldn't be easier, and Miss Potts took his hand, the contact surprising him.
"Honey, what's the matter?" She asked, her voice soft as she rubbed her thumb over the back of his hand, and it was like May was sitting with him. Holding his hand. To his horror, his eyes were heating up and he just wanted to get out of the open...away from all the people who could see him, and she squeezed his hand, pulling him as she stood. "Come on. Let's go in here." She murmured, leading him to the nearest trailer and knocked before opening the door and pulling him inside, letting the door shut softly behind them.

He dropped onto the couch, feeling like an even bigger idiot than before and wiping irritably at his eyes as he fought the urge to apologize again. She'd told him not to apologize anymore. "Do you want me to call Tony?" She asked, voice soft as she perched on the sofa beside him, hands clasped, and he shook his head. "Okay." A hand landed on his back, rubbing gentle circles.

It was silent for a moment before he finally choked out the words, wondering if he'd ever stop crying over this...if he would ever be able to talk about his aunt without crying. "I miss May." He murmured, wondering if she could even hear him. Apparently, she could, because the hand on his back stilled for a second before continuing.

"My mom died when I was a few years older than you." She told him, her tone matching his. "Right after I graduated high school...I was in my first year of college. She...she'd been sick. For a long time. But she hadn't told me until...well, until a about a year before she passed. She didn't want me to know. Or my sister. We were all so close and I...I didn't want to go to college. I wanted to stay with her. But she insisted. Told me she was getting better and then..." Miss Potts waved a hand in the air, eyes sad as they stared at the ground.

"I'm sorry." Peter murmured, heart twisting at the thought.

"I got the call right before math class. Algebra. She'd collapsed in the kitchen. My sister found her...she was gone three days later." He didn't know what to say, so he was silent as she continued to speak, her voice soft and measured. "When my aunt came to the funeral, she tried to hug me and I just...lost it." Her voice had dropped to a whisper and he tore his eyes away from the floor and looked up at her, meeting her eyes. She was smiling, just a little. "I pushed her away...screamed at her. It wasn't her I was mad at...it had nothing to do with her. But I wanted my mom. And having someone else holding me like she used to..." Peter felt a sob building in his throat and dropped his eyes again, not resisting when she pulled him close, fingers threading through his hair. "I wanted my mom."

"I want May." He admitted, and the fingers continued to comb through his hair. "I want her back."

"I know." She murmured.

"I keep thinking that I'm okay and then..." He trailed off, leaning his head on her shoulder, and she shifted on the sofa, putting her arms around him when he didn't resist. "I didn't mean to..."

"I know, sweetheart." She assured him, and he wondered how she'd guessed it so easily. "It's okay." Closing his eyes, he relaxed against her shoulder, trying not to think of May as she rubbed his back.

"How long was it...before you..." He let his words trail off, but she knew what he meant. It was no wonder Mr. Stark loved her.

"The more time I spent with my family, the better it got. But I still miss her. Tony still misses his mom sometimes. We all miss the people we've lost. But we keep living." She squeezed him, an arm around his back as she held him. Just like May. He remembered coming home after the ferry incident when he felt like he'd lost everything, and she should have yelled at him more. Should have screamed at him for worrying her and for messing everything up, but she'd just put a hand on his
back, letting him rest his head on her stomach and assuring him that it was going to be okay.

"I'm sorry, Miss Potts." He whispered again, wanting her to know...hoping it wouldn't happen again, but knowing it might. She kept a firm hand on his back, rubbing circles over his shirt.

"You want to make it up to me?" She asked, and even though he could hear the teasing smile in her voice, he nodded. "We're going to be family. Call me Pepper."

"Okay, Miss Pepper." She snorted, ruffling his hair and pushing him away, smiling when he did. "Okay, Pepper." He murmured, and she squeezed his shoulder. "We're really going to be family?" Peter asked after a minute, voice small. She nodded, her eyes soft as she clasped her hands in her lap.

"Tony and I are getting married, and you are…" She hesitated like she was afraid of offending or scaring him away.

"His kid." Peter finished, and she nodded, a smile taking over her whole face, eyes lighting up.

"Yes. His kid." He wiped his eyes, swallowing and trying to wet his dry throat. He was Mr. Stark's kid. Pepper was going to be...what? He didn't know how to ask. How to put it into words. Instead, he smiled at her, standing and reaching out a hand to pull her to her feet. She kept his hand for a moment, squeezing, then led him over to the door. But she didn't open it. Instead, she turned to face him, a hand moving up to his shoulder once more.

"I won't ever try to replace your aunt, Peter. May was a wonderful, good, strong woman. She was like your mother. She raised you, and she loved you. She loves you. I don't think she could ever stop loving you." He swiped at his eyes, tears dripping down his cheeks for the second time that hour. Surely at some point, he was going to stop crying..right? "But we're going to be family. I'd...I'd like to be your family if that's okay."

Sniffing and giving up on the tears, he nodded, giving her a weak smile. "Yeah. Yeah, that sounds great, Miss….I mean, Pepper."

"Good."
"Boss, Miss Potts and Peter would like you to know that lunch is ready." Tony jumped a little, as did Bruce, the both of them glancing up from their work. They'd been looking over Tony's new nanotechnology, which was still in its early stages, but things were looking good. With some help from Bruce and maybe some help from a certain princess genius from Wakanda, he might just have it ready in a few weeks. And then he could get started on making a suit for Peter. Another suit. A better suit. One that would keep him even safer.

"Lunch?" Bruce asked, placing his tablet back on the table. "What time is it?" He asked the ceiling.

"Nearly one-thirty," FRIDAY informed them, but Tony had more questions...questions he didn't particularly want to ask out loud. Like, were Peter and Pepper together? Had they talked? Had Peter apologized to her like he'd wanted to? He understood how upset Peter had been and why. It was going to be hard...Tony had known that when he'd signed up to be the boy's guardian. And he knew that Pepper was more than willing to work with the kid. They could make this work. Hell, there wasn't anything he didn't think Pepper couldn't do. And Peter was practically a kid genius, so if any family could make it work, it was this one.

So, hoping against hope that everything had magically resolved itself, he put his own tablet down, grinning at Bruce but speaking to FRIDAY. "Tell then we're on our way." He ordered, and the two made their way up the elevator and into the living room. For once, his living room was empty, and he winced for the umpteenth time if he actually missed having more people around. Well, not just any people. The Avengers. Then again, he hadn't noticed all that much recently now that Peter was around, along with Rhodey and Pepper, who split her time between the Compound and the city. Now that he was moving back to the Tower, she'd be around more often which was the icing on the cake.

Tony figured that Peter would be happy to be back in school...to be close to his friends again. Ad he made a mental note to remind Peter that he was welcome to have his friends over to the Tower once they got settled in. He was supposed to go to his friend Ned's the next day after school which was fine with Tony...he liked having the kid around, but he knew that Peter needed to be with his friends too. He didn't want the kid to isolate himself...Tony had plenty of experience with that, and all the books he'd read said to make sure he didn't do that.

For the last few days, it had been Loki who had haunted his living room, but the man was nowhere to be seen, nor was his brother. Not that Tony minded having Loki in his living room, reading novels and generally keeping out of the way. It kept him out of mischief, apparently, and anything that kept him from murdering people was fine with Tony...he liked having the kid around, but he knew that Peter needed to be with his friends too. He didn't want the kid to isolate himself...Tony had plenty of experience with that, and all the books he'd read said to make sure he didn't do that.

There were a lot of people, both in Wakanda and in the US taking to the streets, not to mention the internet, and protesting, calling for blood...Loki's blood. And maybe Thor's too. There were a few idiots out there that blamed Thor for his brother's actions. Tony wasn't too worried...they had good security at the tower and the press conference would be attended by Shield. It was more the subject he was worried about. The Asgardians. And Peter. He had to admit, he had his doubts about dragging Peter to a press conference. Pepper insisted it would be better to get ahead of the story...tell the press about Peter before they started investigating. Tony trusted Pepper, but he was still worried.

For a moment, Tony and Bruce stood in the living room, Tony wondering where the others were.
Rhodey hadn't mentioned any plans, so he figured his friend was around somewhere. Maybe the Asgardians were with their people out back. And apparently, Peter was with Pepper, bringing Tony back to the moment at hand. Following Bruce over to the kitchen, Tony found himself smiling, stepping forward into the kitchen and leaning on the counter.

Pepper was standing at the stove, laughing at something Peter had just said. He was shaking his head, pointing a finger at her, and she swatted him in the back of the head, both of them giggling. Pepper reached out, brushing a hand over his shoulder, and Peter only hesitated a little before smiling and stepping away, ducking his head and walking toward the table before coming to a surprised stop, eyes meeting Tony's. "Oh...hey, Mr. Stark." The kid must have been distracted...usually, he would have heard Tony coming a mile away. But now that he was closer he could see the boy's red-rimmed eyes. He'd been crying. It worried Tony...still, the kid seemed okay now.

"Hey, kid. I thought you were going to come back down to the lab after you called Ned."

"Oh, uh...I was...helping with lunch." Tony nodded, still grinning as he moved to the other side of the kitchen counter and clasping Peter's shoulder.

"Grab some plates. I'll help you set the table. Where are Point Break and the angry one?" Peter laughed a little, pulling down five plates and handing them to Tony.

"I think they're going to eat with the others." The kid told him, opening a drawer and grabbing some forks and spoons, then ripping off some paper towels for everyone. Tony had an entire cabinet of actual cloth napkins, but he decided not to tell Pete that just yet.

"Rhodey?"

"Um...he was talking to Mr. Thor earlier. I haven't seen him since."

"Yeah? Where was this?" Tony asked, putting the plates on the table, followed quickly by Peter who was carefully folding the paper towels and putting the silverware on top.

"Out by the trailers." At Tony's raised eyebrow, Peter went on. "Rhodey and I went out to find Pepper." Peter said her name a little awkwardly, stumbling just a little, and Tony had to fight not to let the shock show on his face. "Pepper?" He was calling her Pepper!? Of course, Tony knew that if he showed his surprise or let Peter get any inkling that it was out of the ordinary, or even remotely bothered him, then Peter would never do it again. Still, first Rhodey and now Pepper! Tony was his guardian! Why was it so hard to just tell the kid to call him by his first name? The kid was watching him from the corner of his eye, obviously waiting to see how Tony reacted, and the man fought to keep his face pleasantly neutral.

"Yeah? Well, maybe he's eating with them too. We'll save him a seat just in case."

Bruce chose that moment to step out of the kitchen with a pitcher of water that he put on the table, and Peter headed back into the kitchen to get glasses. Pepper came out with a plate full of sandwiches and Tony smiled when she leaned down to kiss him on the cheek. "The soup is on the stove." She told them, a hand rubbing over Tony's back before they all lined up for soup, then sat down at the table, a seat at the end of the table empty just in case Rhodey joined them.

"Did you talk to Ned?" Tony wondered between bites of soup, and Peter, who seemed to be just picking at his food, nodded.

"Oh, yeah. His mom says it's fine if I come over tomorrow for a few hours after school."

"Alright. Happy can drive you. When we move back to the Tower, you should have him over."
Peter stared at him for a minute, seeming surprised.

"Really?"

"Yeah, kid. We ought to wait until we're settled in, but..." He waved a hand a bit carelessly as he took a bite of soup.

"Oh. Right. Um...thanks." Tony was torn...he wanted to tell the kid that he didn't have to be so grateful but it would be easier to just accept the kid's gratitude. It was who Peter was, after all. A good kid. A nice kid...a kid that would always be grateful and would always appreciate everything Tony did for him. So he just nodded.

"Sure thing, Pete." He told the boy. He hesitated, then pointed at his place. "Eat up, kid. When we're done, you want to come back to the lab and work with us for a little while? That nano tech isn't going to build itself. And I'm pretty sure Bruce is working on some new stuff too..."

"I still have homework to catch up on..." Tony shook his head.

"You've got a whole week to work on that. Take a break." He urged. Maybe it wasn't the best parenting advice. Peter would probably need to get that homework done or the social worker would be wanting another meeting and Tony felt like had enough to deal with. Not that he minded the meetings if it meant he got to keep Peter. As long as Peter got a stable home...and something of a childhood. A family. Pepper and Peter...that was his family.

Peter didn't answer right away, glancing up at Tony, then over to Pepper who only smiled encouragingly at him. "Um...okay. If you're sure." He shrugged, smiling almost hopefully. It broke Tony's heart...did the kid think that he'd take it back? Tell him he needed to work on homework after all.

"Of course I'm sure. Now eat." He ordered, pointing at Peter's plate, and the kid took a bite of soup. He still seemed kind of hesitant to eat, but Tony decided to wait and see how he did at dinner. Peter hadn't been eating enough lately and Tony had to admit, he was a little worried. But he didn't want to freak out...not yet. He'd give the boy some time first.

They were almost finished eating when FRIDAY interrupted the comfortable silence, her voice filling the dining room and taking all of them by surprise. "Sir, you have a call."

"Take a message." He ordered, thanking Pepper who took his plate, and watching Peter follow Pepper into the kitchen where he assumed they were going to do the dishes regardless of how many times he assured them that they didn't need to clean up. He was glad to see Peter making an effort to get to know Pepper...to move past the pain Tony knew he felt every time he saw her...every time she touched his shoulder or smiled at him or reminded him of his aunt.

"Sir, they are insisting." Tony frowned at that. Usually, FRIDAY would just take the message. Glancing over at Bruce, he held up a finger.

"I'll be right back." Bruce nodded.

"Sure thing. I'm going to go on down to the lab. I'll tell Peter to come down whenever he's ready." Tony nodded, then headed into his private quarters, pulling out his phone from his pocket and looking at the screen as FRIDAY rerouted the call to his cell.

For a second, he just held the phone up to his ear, listening to the breathing on the other line. "So." He finally said, dropping onto the bed and squeezing the phone.
"So."

He felt himself rolling his eyes, fighting the irritation that always started to build when it came to things like this. "Can I help you...or?"

"I just...I saw the news...Thor's back?"

"Loki too. And Bruce. Plus a couple hundred Asgardians."

"Wow..." There was a long silence. "They're going to Wakanda?"

"Most of them. There's a press conference on Tuesday. Lots of big announcements, Cap. You're not going to want to miss it." He told him, a little of his usual snark leaking into his words.

"Big announcements?"

"Yeah." Tony sighed. "King T'Challa should be here by this weekend with transport for them." There was another silence, and then Steve spoke again, his voice almost too soft to hear.

"The Accords...you got them abolished."

"Yeah. It wasn't just me...". He started to remind Steve when the man cut him off.

"You were all for them, Tony." Steve reminded him, and Tony rolled his eyes, knowing the gesture would start a fight were they in the same room.

"Yeah, and I still think we need to be held accountable..."

Steve interrupted again. "I don't disagree with that but..."

"But you were too busy..." Tony cut himself off, thinking of Peter and Pepper...of his family in the other room. He didn't want to fight with Steve. Not again. "Look, it doesn't matter. The Accords are all but gone. We're renegotiating with the UN for a better solution. Ross is pretty much out of the picture. And I'm sort of busy, so..."

"Wait...Tony..." Steve sighed on the other line. "I'm sorry. I just...I thought we could meet up. Talk. Now that we're not fugitives anymore." Tony leaned back against the headboard, eyebrows lifting.

"We? You bringing the whole gang back or...?" Steve chuckled a little.

"Um, yeah, actually. Nat, Wanda, Sam...Clint, when we can get him away from his family for longer than a few hours. That Scott guy...Antman. We've been talking..about coming back."

"Coming back?"

"Getting the team together again." Tony took a deep breath, his mind darting back to Peter. The Avengers getting back together...the whole team at the Tower where he was going to live with his soon-to-be wife and kid. They would need to meet him and Tony would have to tell them the whole story. "I mean...if that's okay. The whole team could be there. Rhodey and Bruce and, uh...that guy, the one from Queens." Tony felt his heart stutter. The one from Queens.

"Spiderman." He clarified.

"Right. The kid's a good fighter. He's got heart." Steve chuckled.

"Yeah...you'll probably get to meet him." Tony muttered. "Look, it will have to wait until after the
press conference. Pepper and I bought the Tower back. We're going to be living there."

"Really? I thought you guys just got settled at the compound." Steve sounded surprised.

"Well, a couple of things changed."

"Changed? Is everything alright?"

"Everything's fine, Cap." He told the man wearily, wondering if he expected him to bare his soul or something. "Just...call after the press conference. We can try and set something up."

"Tony, are you sure everything's okay?" Tony thought of finding Peter in the floor amongst his aunts thing and how he'd shied away from Pepper and the nightmares...but all of that was personal. Not Avengers business, if there even was an Avengers anymore.

"I've got it handled, Cap. Call back next week and we'll figure something out."

When Tony stepped out of his bedroom and into the living room, he was surprised to find Peter on the sofa waiting. Then he remembered the enhanced hearing. "So. Eavesdropping?" The boy's cheeks flushed as Tony sat across from his on the ottoman, and Tony thought that he'd need to look into soundproofing the Tower if he didn't want any awkward situations.

"I didn't mean to." Peter murmured, looking ashamed, and Tony reached out and pat his shoulder.

"It's fine, kid. I was going to tell everyone before I invited him over anyway." Peter nodded, still looking a little downcast. "What's up? I thought you were a big fan and all that." Peter shrugged, the quintessential teenage communication technique, and Tony exhaled. "Pete? Remember, I can't help if you don't talk."

"I don't need help." The boy said simply, seeming to bristle a little.

Tony knew how his father would have reacted. A sharp reprimand about his attitude that Tony would always pretend didn't hurt. Howard would have ignored the kid's obvious conflict and gone right for anger...would pick a fight and then shut him down with a "you'd better watch how you talk to me," a thinly veiled threat. But Tony wasn't Howard...didn't ever want to be Howard. He didn't want to break his kid. He wanted to help him. So he bit back the urge to get upset and just waited. Of course the kid didn't last ten seconds.

"I'm sorry."

"Rule number 1." The kid rolled his eyes then but kept going.

"I just...I talked to Pepper and she was really nice. I mean, she's always really nice and I like her and everything and I'm trying and I don't want to hurt her feelings so we were doing the dishes and it was fine but it shouldn't be fine! I...I didn't miss May for a minute and she'd be so upset if she thought I didn't miss or that I was replacing her and I just felt bad so I went to the living room and I heard you on the phone but I didn't mean to eavesdrop and now Captain America is going to come here and I use to like him but then he hurt you and he was such an assh...a jerk and I don't really want him to know who I am because I don't trust him."

"Wow. I don't think you breathed once that whole time." Tony muttered, kind of impressed but mostly teasing. Peter rolled his eyes.

"Mr. Stark...". He whined, and Tony chuckled.
"Alright." He leaned, his elbows on his knees. "Let's take this point by point. First, you are correct. Pepper is great. Very nice. Alway. And she understands. She gets that this is hard for you, and so do I. It's okay. I'm glad you guys talked, but you don't have to rush into this. Okay?" Peter nodded, seeming to take a deep breath, but not looking as convinced as Tony would have liked. "Next, May would want you to be happy. You know that, kiddo. She loves you and she wants you to be happy. No one thinks you're replacing her. You could never do that, no more than May and Ben replaced your parents." Peter flinched a little, and Tony worried for a second that he'd overstepped, but Peter just nodded, eyes dropping a little, lips tightening into a thin line. "Now, about Steve...I don't guess we ever talked about that, did we?" Peter shook his head.

"No." He muttered.

"Look, I'm not going to pretend that Steve and I always got along, or that I'm ready to forgive him for...well, we can talk about all that some other time. But I can tell you for absolute certain, I would not let him hurt you. In any way. And that includes outing you as spiderman. So if you don't want to tell him who you are, that's fine. I'm not going to say a word. When they come by, because they probably will, we'll tell them whatever you want. We can tell them you're Spider-Man. Or my intern…" He trailed off, not sure if he should bring up the other option. His kid. He noticed Peter flinch sometimes when he called him that, and other times the kid seemed to like it, so he wasn't sure if the title was welcome.

Peter hesitated for along minute. "Um…" He started, staring down at his own feet. Tony waited, forcing himself to be patient. Rushing the kid certainly wasn't going to work. So he waited until Peter managed to spit it out. "You can, uh...you can just say I'm your kid. Like you...like you told King T'Challa." His voice was nearly silent by the time the sentence was finished, and Tony had to fight back the feeling of warmth in his chest, and the accompanying smile, trying to keep his face friendly but neutral.

"Yeah?" He asked, squeezing Peter's knee. The boy nodded, cheeks vaguely red. "Sounds good." He paused when Peter's jaw tightened, the way it usually did when he was going to start crying. He'd thought this conversation was going okay. "Pete?"

"Sorry." He muttered, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand, and Tony reached out, touching his arm.

"Don't be sorry, buddy. What's the matter?" He asked gently, standing up from the ottoman and moving to sit beside him, and arm draping around his shoulder. "Pete?"

"I shouldn't...I shouldn't want you to…" He started, and Tony scooted over, the hand moving to his back. There were so many days that he wasn't sure that he was doing this right...that he worried he was messing everything up. So he decided to do the exact opposite as his father and pulled the boy close.

"Did I ever tell you about Jarvis?" He asked, his voice soft. Peter' thoughts seemed to stop in their tracks, and he turned to stare at Tony.

"The...the AI?"

"The man the AI was based on." He corrected, leaning back against the sofa and getting comfortable. Peter followed suit, turning to face him a little. "He was our butler. Well...officially. Practically raised me. Best man I ever knew. He sure would have loved you, kid. Using your powers for good and saving the little guy...you'd have been his new favorite. He died a few years before I was kidnapped in Afghanistan."
Tony paused, staring at the wall behind his kid. Jarvis had never gotten to see him grow up, not really. Never knew him as anything more than an alcoholic asshole...an entitled billionaire whose nickname in the press was the 'merchant of death.' "Anyway, he never replaced my old man, you know?" Peter just blinked, as though he wasn't sure if Tony was actually asking him. "But my father wasn't around. Not really. He was brilliant and he gave me every advantage in the world, but he wasn't there. I don't know if he even wanted kids. He never had any time for me. Never took an interest in anything I liked. Never acknowledged my attempts to be as good as he was. Hell, there were days that I was sure he hated me. Maybe he did. " Tony trailed off, staring over at the glass wall.

"So...Jarvis was like...your guardian?" Peter asked, voice still too soft, snapping Tony out of his thoughts.

"Yeah, he kind of was. He raised me. Took me to his house for holidays most years. Put my tests on the fridge, whole nine yards."

"He sounds great." Tony grinned down at his kid.

"He was. I tried to match his personality when I was making the AI...worked on him for almost two years. Never got it perfect, though." He sighed, trying to get back to his point. "Jarvis called me his kid sometimes. That didn't mean he was my father, or that he could replace my parents. It meant he loved me a lot." He paused, squeezing Peter's shoulder. "When I tell people you're my kid, I'm not trying to replace May. Or Ben. I'm not trying to replace your mom and dad either. But all of those people loved you so much, and they'd want you to be happy. Just like Jarvis would want me to be happy. Just like I'd like to think my own parents would want me to be happy." Peter stared down at his lap, sniffing softly, and Tony watched a tear fall down his cheek.

"It's not fair." The boy whispered, bringing a fist up to wipe his eyes.

"No, it's not. None of this is fair. And I wish I could bring them back for you, buddy. Hell, I wish I could bring all of them back." Reaching out, he pulled the kid closer, rubbing a hand over the back of his head, and Peter pressed his face into Tony's shoulder.

"I'm glad you're my guardian." He heard the boy murmur, sniffing a little, and Tony's heart seemed to clench, a love unlike anything he'd felt before spreading from his chest to his fingertips and toes and filling his whole body.

"I'm glad you're my kid." He rested his cheek against the top of his kid's head.

That was how Pepper found them a little while later, hesitating before sitting on Peter's other side, her fingers going to the back of his head and trailing through his hair. Meeting Tony's eyes, she mouthed the words 'He okay?' and Tony nodded, reaching out with his free hand and catching her's. His family. All there, all in his arms.

They stayed that way for a few minutes until Pepper finally got up, patting Peter on the shoulder and leaning down and kissing Tony on the cheek, then Tony and Peter went down to Tony's lab, joining Bruce who had apparently been working for a while. Peter seemed to enjoy working in the lab, even though he couldn't do much for his Spiderman suit or web shooters with Bruce around...Tony made a mental note to make sure the kid had his own area to work...he could probably turn one of the spare bedrooms into a small lab for him.

Dinner that night was a surprising success. Peter was smiling and chatting with him and Pepper nearly the whole time, answering all of her questions about school and homework and Ned. Pepper was obviously great with kids, and especially great with Peter, and even though there were times that
Tony would notice Peter start to withdraw...the boy's eyes would drop to his plate and he'd go back to picking at his food, Pepper seemed to know immediately when he needed a minute. Even though Peter still didn't eat enough, he was making an effort, and by the end of the night, he could tell the boy was getting tired. It wasn't a surprise. It seemed like he wasn't sleeping enough, and Tony hoped that the kid could get some rest that night.

All in all, Tony would say dinner was a success, and on the way back, Peter nearly fell asleep in the car, head against the window as Pepper and Tony talked softly. Tony hoped that meant Peter would sleep through the night...sadly, that wasn't the case, and at three am, only four hours after Peter had headed to his room, he found himself sitting at the kid's bedside, fingers trailing through the boy's hair. Peter was curled up on his side, hand clamped over his mouth, and Tony stroked his hair, assuring him that it was okay...that everything was going to be okay...he was so tired he barely knew what he was saying. Still, he sat at his boy's side until, the next thing he knew, Pepper was shaking him carefully awake.

Tony blinked, looking around the unfamiliar room in confusion as he met his fiancee's bemused gaze. "Hey...what's...what's going on?"

"Peter had a nightmare." She murmured, and he pushed himself upright on one elbow, glancing down and finding that he had been laying in Peter's bed, head on the boy's pillow. The kid in question was curled up in a ball beside him, hand fisted in his tank top so tightly that the fabric was ripping. His own hand was still resting on Peter's side, and he pulled away slowly, loathe to wake the boy who he now remembered had taken almost an hour to get back to sleep.

He tried to remember what the nightmare had been about as he pulled the blankets up to cover the kid, following Pepper out of the room and nearly running into Thor who paused to see them both coming out of the kid's room, glancing past them to see the sleeping boy before Pepper pulled his door shut behind her. It had been something about May, he was sure. Hopefully, though, Peter wouldn't remember. Heck, Tony could barely remember their morning talk himself...mostly Tony just remembered climbing into the bed, wrapping his arm around Peter and letting the kid curl up in a ball and grab his shirt. He made Peter feel safe. Tony had to admit, that was a pretty amazing feeling, even if he wished the awful nightmares would end soon.

"I apologize, am I interrupting? Is Peter alright?" Tony smiled, not surprised but still glad to know that Thor cared about the kid. He was a good guy to have on your side.

"He's fine. Just, uh...had a rough night." Tony told him vaguely, leading everyone away from the boy's bedroom so he could hopefully get some sleep. "FRIDAY, let me know when he wakes up, okay?"

"Yes, sir."
Your Best Shot

The room was full of reporters, and Peter had to fight not to hide behind Mr. Stark and Pepper both of whom were standing behind a podium the front of the slightly raised stage at the front of the room. Happy stood by the back door to the stage on Peters right, where Colonel Rhodes and Doctor Banner waited. On Peter's left a few feet away were Loki and Thor, leaving Peter somewhat alone in the center of the stage behind his guardian.

He hadn't really wanted to do the press conference. With everything going on...the Asgardians and Doctor Banner returning and Loki being there and Mr. Stark taking him in...it was a lot. And he understood that Mr. Stark was a public figure and wanted to get ahead of the press and whatever ridiculous stories they would write. That didn't mean he wanted to be there when Mr. Stark did it. He'd never been to a press conference before and was pretty happy not knowing what they were like. Reporters made him nervous anyway along with the constant shouting and flashing cameras.

When he'd woken that morning, he'd been too nervous to eat, laying in bed and staring up at the ceiling. He'd gotten maybe two hours of sleep and the alarm on his phone had woken him before any nightmares could occur. Shutting off his phone alarm and trying to keep his eyelids from closing again, he'd lay there dozing for almost a half hour before the knock on his door had come. "Pete?" Mr. Stark had called, and he'd hummed a response loudly enough that the man would know he could come in.

His guardian had come to sit beside him on the bed, brushing some hair out of his face, and Peter had been surprised at how nice it had felt...how soothing the contact was. It was something May had done all the time. That just reminded him of her again...of how desperately he missed her, but he was surprised to realize that it didn't hurt quite so much, especially when Mr. Stark was around. He missed her...he would always miss her. He just had more people in his life that also loved him.

"You awake, Pete?" He'd hummed, nodding and running a hand over his face while Mr. Stark had moved back a little, giving him room to stretch. "We've got about three hours before the press conference, and we're having it at the Tower."

"The Tower?" He'd asked, sitting up a little and rubbing the last of the sleep out of his eyes. He must have looked pretty tired from the way Mr. Stark was staring at him, but he didn't comment on it. He'd spent a lot of the previous evening at Ned's, mostly playing video games and building his LEGO Millennium Falcon. Mr. Stark had picked him up at 9, then he'd grabbed them some fast food from the drive through which they'd eaten in his fancy car.

That night, Peter had woken up with nightmares at 5 am, which meant he'd gotten more sleep than the night before, but even after Mr. Stark had come in to check on him and he'd fallen back asleep, he still hadn't slept very well. The nightmares hadn't woken him again, but he felt like he'd been upset or fighting all night. Apparently ignoring how tired he looked, Mr. Stark had just smiled a little.

"You remember, my tower? Big, right in the middle of New York, used to have the word 'Stark' in giant letters along the top. I was moving stuff from it when you saved my ass and took down that plane? The one I just bought back...the one we're going to be living in?" Pete had grinned then, giggling a little.
"Oh yeah...that tower." Mr. Stark had chuckled, ruffling his hair.

"I knew you went to that genius school for a reason. Pepper arranged for the press conference to be there. After the conference, we can take a look around the tower and see what needs to be done before we move back. And you can see your room."

"My room?"

"Yeah, kid. You're room. I figured we'd keep this one the way it is just in case we stay here sometimes. You can help decorate the new one."

Peter had blinked a few times, shaking his head. "Decorate..."

Then Mr. Stark had look worried again, reaching out to put a hand on his shoulder. "Peter? You with me, kiddo?"

"Yeah...I'm sorry. I just..." He hadn't known how to explain it...how to explain the feeling of suddenly having two rooms in two giant new homes and...it was a lot.

"You okay?"

"Yeah. Fine. I'm...I'm fine. I just wasn't expecting..." He'd waved a hand, and Mr. Stark's face had softened a little, both of them sitting in the not-quite awkward silence for a moment.

"Alright, bud. Go ahead and get dressed." He'd ordered after a few seconds, hopping up and clapping his hands. "Breakfast is ready, and we need to leave soon."

Peter had dressed and eaten in relative silence while Doctor Banner and Mr. Stark had been talking quietly in the kitchen...something about Asgard or something called 'Hela.' Peter wasn't sure what that meant, and he had been trying not to eavesdrop from the dining room. Thor and Loki had joined them in the kitchen a few minutes later, the former gulping down his breakfast while Loki picked at his own food, often shooting Peter looks he didn't know how to decipher. He hadn't interacted much with the man since Loki had taken him to Thor and Pepper on Sunday, even though he really wanted to see more magic. Still, he didn't want to offend the man, so he'd kept quiet and out of his way.

The ride to the Tower had been long and quiet, with Peter in the backseat of a car with Mr. Stark, driven by Happy, and the others following in another car. "It'll be pretty simple." Mr. Stark had told him. "I'll introduce you, briefly, and then I'll talk about Thor and company, and no one will even ask anything about you. Probably. If they do, I'll keep it short and sweet, okay? Promise. You don't have to say a world. Heck, you can wait backstage if you really want." Peter had nodded, staring nervously at his lap as the man had pulled out his own phone, apparently unconcerned with the whole thing. Then again, Mr. Stark did press stuff all the time, so Peter couldn't fault him for that.

When they'd arrived at the Tower, the front glass wall lobby had already been filled with reporters. Happy had led them around back through a side door where they'd emerged into a waiting room filled with chairs and a mini-fridge. Peter had been ushered into a chair while Mr. Stark talked to a couple of people in uniforms that might have been from Shield. He hadn't seen Mr. Fury, who he'd never met before but knew by Mr. Stark's stories, but there were a couple of people wearing guns on their hips. He had averted his eyes...he wasn't a big fan of guns...they always made him think about his uncle...the blood and the alley and his uncle assuring him that this wasn't his fault.

"Kid? You okay?" Mr. Stark had asked after a minute, and Peter had forced a smile, nodding and assuring the man he was fine. He hadn't seemed to believe him, but then his guardian had been leading him out to the stage with the promise that he'd be fine and that he didn't have to say anything.
So he'd stayed back behind Mr. Stark and listened to him talk, trying not to look stupid considering the constant flashes of the cameras. Doctor Banner caught his eye when he glanced over, giving him an encouraging smile which eased his nerves a little.

He really liked Doctor Banner...the man was always nice to him and let him take a look at his research. They’d worked together some in the lab, and he was always really understanding when Peter would withdraw or get quiet. Doctor Banner would just work in silence along with Mr. Stark, neither of them trying to get him to talk or interact. Peter appreciated it...he always felt comfortable with Doctor Banner, and it was comforting to have him standing nearby on the stage in front of all of those people with cameras.

Mr. Stark was talking about Thor and his people, explaining to everyone present that the Asgardians would be staying on Earth. His introduction of Peter had been short and sweet, just like he’d promised, and he hadn't even paused to let the reporters ask questions. He couldn't help but feel grateful. Peter didn't want to answer questions or have reporters following him...he was still worried they would once he was going to school. What if they showed up to his school? Or what if he couldn't hang out with Ned or go to Delmar's or do anything normal ever again? Okay, maybe he was being dramatic, but he was worried. And it wasn't like he could ask Mr. Stark about any of it at the moment. The man had enough on his plate with the Asgardians and the Avengers and the move back to the Tower.

Suddenly, Peter couldn't concentrate on the press conference or his worry about the reporters for the icy feeling going up and down his spine and making his hair stand up. Eyes huge, he looked around the room, desperate to figure out what was wrong, cameras forgotten. He couldn't stop Mr. Stark in the middle of his speech as much as he wanted to. The Shield agents were all standing around the room, but none looked concerned. They were all focused on the crowd or on Mr. Stark, Miss Potts at his side. But then instinct had him turning to Loki who, over his all-black suit, had a red dot right in the middle of his chest.

The world seemed to slow down, and then he was sprinting, moving as though he were running through water, and throwing his arms around the startled Asgardian. Vaguely he heard people shouting and saw cameras flashing, but he couldn't stop. "Mr. Loki! Move!" He shouted, barely able to get the words out as he heard the deafening 'boom' that filled the room, then the burning pain in his shoulder, the two of them dropping to the ground under Peter's momentum, his arms tight around the Asgardian.

They hit the ground hard, Peter's enhanced strength knocking the man well out of the way of the bullet that he was sure was now buried in his shoulder. Then there was chaos, everyone screaming and Mr. Stark yelling too and he thought maybe Happy was pulling Miss Potts out of the room, but all he could feel was the agony in his arm. Gritting his teeth, he dropped his forehead against the shoulder of the Asgardian who was making no move to get up, heart racing. "Mr. Loki? Are you okay?" He asked amidst the chaos, voice weak. He thought he might be crying...he was sure it hurt a lot, but despite his racing heart and shaking hands, he could barely feel it. He hoped he wasn't crying, though...not in front of all these people. Glancing up, he met the eyes of the now even paler-than-normal man who started back up at him, horrified. "Did you get hit?" He didn't think so...he'd only heard one gunshot, but it was possible there'd been another. Still, the man didn't answer.

Then Thor was there, his body blocking them from the crowd of reporters and Shield agents as he crouched down, all of whom were yelling...cameras were flashing but hopefully, Thor was in their way. Peter really didn't want to be in the newspapers half laying on top of Loki on a stage, both of them covered in blood. Heck, he didn't want to be in the newspapers at all. "Loki? Were you hit?" The Asgardian demanded softly, and a large hand came to rest on the back of Peter's good shoulder.
"Just the child." Loki sounded angry but Peter didn't feel up to figuring out why. He pressed his hands into the floor to push himself up, afraid that he was hurting the man, but the hand on his shoulder held him down.

"Be still, Peter," Thor ordered, voice still quiet but firm, too. "It's alright. Just be still. Where were you hit?"

"Arm." Peter bit out, closing his eyes and letting his head rest on the god of mischief who hadn't even shifted. It felt like he lay there for a long time, ears ringing from the gunshot, hands shaking where they were pressed against the wood floor, but he still didn't feel much, just vague burning and his own blood being pumped frantically through his body. Thor didn't ask any more questions but did call for Doctor Banner.

The doctor appeared after what felt like forever but may have only been a minute, grabbing him by his good arm and easing him off of Loki and onto his back on the stage. His heart seemed to skip when he glanced over and saw Loki sitting up, his entire torso soaked with blood, the black fabric an even darker color now. Surely the man must have been hit!

"Peter? Look at me." Doctor Banner murmured, tapping his cheek, and the boy jumped a little.

"It's fine...it's okay. I'm okay." Peter tried to assure him, voice breathless and frantic, but Doctor Banner shook his head, prodding around his right shoulder and looking upset. He had to clench his jaw to keep a scream from escaping, eyes slamming shut when the man poked a little too close to the bullet wound.

"The bullet is still in your shoulder. We need to get you to a hospital." He told Peter softly, pulling off his jacket to stop the bleeding, the pressure making him flinch.

"No." He shook his head, trying to push the man away, but not hard. He couldn't let them find out...he didn't want everyone to know what he was. Sure, it was fine if Doctor Banner knew...probably Thor and Loki too, but he couldn't go to the hospital. Mr. Stark had gotten him out of the last one after they'd started to suspect he was different. Apparently, they'd all signed non-disclosures, even though he'd like to think that doctors would keep that kind of information private. Still, he was a mutant, or close enough, and there was plenty of stuff in the news that made him want to keep that quiet. "No hospital."

"Peter, you've got a bullet in your shoulder." The Doctor started patiently, voice firm, and Peter tried to sit up...to push him away and get up. Then Mr. Stark was beside him, a hand on his chest to keep him still.

"Stay down, Pete. You're alright, kiddo." He was talking quietly, voice sure and calm, but Peter could tell that he was worried. That show-confidence was all over his face, but his eyes were afraid. "Bruce, talk to me. How bad is it?" He demanded softly, and Peter tried to give the man a weak half smile.

"Hey, Mr. Stark. Sorry to interrupt your speech, but it was getting kind of boring."

Mr. Stark just rolled his eyes, a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth as he pushed Doctor Banner to the side and got a closer look at his arm. "It hit him in the upper arm...no exit wound, but it must have hit something...he's bleeding too much." the doctor told his guardian quietly, clamping down on the wound.

"He's a murderer! He doesn't deserve to live!" Peter glanced past Mr. Stark and Thor towards the crowd where a man was being dragged out by three Shield agents, the sudden screams startling him.
He could see spittle flying from the man’s mouth as he screamed, straining against the agents, an accusing finger pointed at the Asgardian who had come to stand behind the group surrounding Peter. "Murderer! He killed my wife! Destroyed our city!" He kept going, and Peter took a deep, shuddering breath, coughing a little and blinking tiredly when Mr. Stark shifted, hiding him from the view of the cameras and the man who was being dragged through the doors. He realized that Loki was watching the man too, an intense, furious expression covering his face before the Asgardian shook his head, teeth clacking together as he clenched his jaw.

"We've got to get that bullet out, bud." Mr. Stark told him softly, brushing some hair back and drawing his attention back to the situation at hand. "Let's get you upstairs, huh?" Peter nodded, starting to sit up over the protests of Doctor Banner who was shaking his head. He didn't make it far though...his shoulder gave a furious stab of pain and he gasped, letting Mr. Stark push him back onto the ground. Now that he'd been still for a while, he was starting to feel it, the burning in his shoulder escalating to full-on agony.

"Only one shooter?" Peter managed to get out, and Mr. Stark gave him a distracted nod.

"Yeah, kiddo. Shield is searching everyone on their way out. They're evacuating the room now, and the police are on their way, which means we need to get you upstairs."

"Tony, he needs a hospital...we can't..." Doctor Banner started, but Mr. Stark didn't seem to hear him.

"Thor, can you carry him?" Peter didn't hear the Asgardian respond...his eyes were closed and he tried not to focus on the feel of his skin trying to heal around the bullet. But he was carefully scooped up against the man who stood fluidly, moving as though he weighed nothing.

"I can walk." He grumbled a little, eyes still closed, but when no one responded, he rested his head against the Asgardians shoulder, figuring there was no reason to fight it while the larger man carried him to an elevator where FRIDAY greeted them, sounding almost worried. He hadn't known FRIDAY was already installed in the tower. It was nice of her to worry, he thought, eyes drifting shut... then snapped awake when Mr. Stark spoke to him again.

"Peter! Don't sleep just yet. Okay?" He urged, and Peter managed a nod, humming a little and blinking against the exhaustion settling on him like a blanket. He'd lost a little too much blood and his healing was making him tired. Plus Thor's bicep was surprisingly comfortable.

"Tony, we need to take him..." Doctor Banner started, but Mr. Stark cut him off just as they stepped out of an elevator. Peter opened his eyes, looking past the shockingly handsome face of the man carrying him and at the room he recognized as a medical bay...the medical bay...the medical bay was still set up? He knew the press conference had been there, but that had been in the conference room...or, one of them. He'd assumed that they still had some work to do before the place was ready to live in.

"I need you to do it." Mr. Stark told Doctor Banner as Thor placed him on something...possibly a bed. He fought the urge to cry out when his arm was jostled. He knew the Asgardian was being careful, but you could only be so careful with a bullet in your arm. They were in a room with sterile white walls surrounded by equipment. A hospital? No...the Med bay, he reminded himself, flinching at the burning in his shoulder. The bullet was still inside...he could feel it.

"What? Tony..." Doctor Banner stammered.

"He's...he's not just any kid..." Mr. Stark told him, Doctor Banner cutting him off quietly, almost gently.
"Tony, I get it. He's your kid. But a hospital would be…"

"It's not...Bruce, he's special." Peter could almost feel Mr. Stark's exasperation and tried to sit up, only to have a large hand on his chest keep him down. Strong as he was, he knew that he couldn't fight that hand.

"Be still, Peter." Thor urged, and he sighed, rolling his eyes.

"I know. He's a great kid, but a hospital would be…" Doctor Banner started.

"I'm a mutant." Peter finally bit out, sure this conversation would be never-ending if he didn't just say it. "Kind of. Enhanced individual or something." He clarified, pushing himself up on his elbow when Doctor Banner and Thor both stared down at him in surprise. "Got bit by a radioactive spider, so now I have an enhanced metabolism, super healing, the whole nine yards." He gave Doctor Banner a weak grin, dropping back down onto the bed. Beyond the doctor was Loki, back against a wall, still too pale. "It's kind of a secret though...so…" He waved a tired hand, hoping they understood.

It wasn't that he'd wanted to tell them, but it was inevitable at this point. Besides, maybe Doctor Banner could get the bullet out of his arm and he could start healing...and take a nap. And maybe eat something. While Doctor Banner gaped at him like a fish, Peter turned back to Thor. "Is he okay?" He asked the man who looked down at him, crouching a little so they were closer.

"Who?" He asked, a hand moving to put pressure on the jacket still covering his arm. It had already almost stopped bleeding, and Peter tried not to think about what Doctor Banner would have to do to get the bullet out.

"Mr. Loki. He didn't get shot, did he?" Thor gave him a smile then, eyes softening.

"No. Thanks to you, my brother was not harmed." Thor said it as though his words had weight...a special meaning or something. But the boy couldn't decipher it at the moment.

"Good." Peter sighed, dropping his head back against the hospital bed. The jacket was pulled off his shoulder and Doctor Banner came to stare down at the nearly closed wound on his arm. "It...it's nearly healed." The man murmured.

"Yeah," Peter grunted, still hating the feeling of the bullet in his arm.

"I'll need to numb him so I can cut…" Then the man faltered. "Tony...he said enhanced metabolism...." While he stood in silence, obviously figuring something out, Mr. Stark came to sit in a chair at Peter's side, gripping his hand. It was comforting, and Peter let himself relax a little against the bed, eyes drooping. He'd barely eaten anything for breakfast, and that super healing was taking it out of him. "Like Steve?" Doctor Banner asked, voice weak.

"Yeah." Mr. Stark bit out, then turned to Peter, shaking him a little, and Peter opened his eyes. "He's gonna be quick, alright bud?" Peter felt his eyes heat up but nodded, refusing to cry. Not in front of all of his heroes, even when Mr. Stark squeezed his hand. It was going to hurt. He knew that. No reason to freak Mr. Stark out by crying about it. He was a superhero, right?

"Tony, I can't cut into a child without anesthetic!" Doctor Banner snapped.

When Mr. Stark answered, his voice was hoarse. "I've been working for almost a year to make something that will work with his metabolism. Nothing. He burns everything off before it can even take effect, and I can't risk an overdose."
"Tony…"

"You need to hurry." Mr. Stark was getting impatient, frowning when Peter pulled his hand away. "Pete?"

"I'll hurt you." He muttered, watching Doctor Banner pick out a scalpel from the countertop. It was only a second later that his hand was engulfed in a much larger one, and he jumped a little when he found Thor crouching on his other side.

"Mr. Thor…" He tried to pull away, but the man held tight.

"You will not hurt me, Peter."

"I'm really strong." He warned Thor softly. The man grinned as Doctor Banner pulled his shirt away from the wound on his shoulder, and he could feel the doctor's hands shake as they cut away the bloodstained fabric.

Thor leaned in a little, speaking quietly as though telling a secret. "So am I." Peter snorted, managing a smile that disappeared as soon as Doctor Banner spoke again.

"Alright, Peter. I'm going to be as quick as I can, okay?" Doctor Banner murmured, and he nodded, staring up at the ceiling and taking a deep breath.

The blade cut into his shoulder then, and it took every ounce of willpower he had not to squeeze the Asgardian's hand, choosing instead to curl his other hand in a fist and clench his jaw so tightly that his teeth ached. A tear did escape, and he felt it leave a hot trail down his cheek. No one said anything, or even acknowledged it as Doctor Banner worked.

Gasping for breath, he slammed his eyes shut, and Mr. Stark put a hand on his hair. "It's alright, kiddo. He's almost done." Peter just grunted, trying to nod or even acknowledge his guardian, but all he could focus on was the feeling of a blade slicing through an already tender bullet wound. "I know, buddy. I know...shit...we're gonna get to work finding something that will work with your metabolism, okay? Now we've got Brucie to help. You're going to love working with the science bros, you know? He knows all about genetic mutation."

Peter opened his eyes then, meeting Mr. Stark's and forcing a smile. "He's smarter than you?" He asked, flinching again when the scalpel cut a little deeper.

"You bet he is, kiddo."

"Alright, Peter. I'm going to get the bullet out now. You doing okay?" The doctor asked softly, a gentle hand on his good shoulder. Peter nodded.

"Yeah. Fine." Doctor Banner grunted a little, not sounding like he believed it, but all he could focus on was the feeling of a blade slicing through an already tender bullet wound. "I know, buddy. I know...shit...we're gonna get to work finding something that will work with your metabolism, okay? Now we've got Brucie to help. You're going to love working with the science bros, you know? He knows all about genetic mutation."

"Alright, Peter. I'm going to get the bullet out now. You doing okay?" The doctor asked softly, a gentle hand on his good shoulder. Peter nodded.

"Yeah. Fine." Doctor Banner grunted a little, not sounding like he believed it, but then it felt like he was digging into his shoulder and he let out a startled scream, gasping and clenching the hand holding his on instinct. The hand didn't give, though. Instead, it gripped his firmly, another hand on his good shoulder holding him still, and he heard Mr. Stark move closer.

"It's okay, buddy. It's almost over. I've got you, kiddo. I'm here." The man murmured, stroking his hair back, and it took every ounce of Peter's willpower not to keep screaming. He couldn't stop the whimpers and strangled cries that escaped, though, even when he saw how much they hurt his guardian. He realized he was crying too...huge tears rolling down his cheeks. "Dammit...I'm sorry, Pete. You're okay. He's almost done." Mr. Stark assured him over and over until the doctor was finally finished, dropping something into a metal pan with a dull clank. Peter let out a strained sigh, opening his eyes and blinking tiredly.
"Alright, it's out." He realized that Doctor Banner was pale and sick looking as he pressed some gauze to Peter's shoulder. "That healing factor should start working really soon, Peter. How are you doing."

"Fine...thanks, Doctor Banner." His voice was barely a rasp, and the doctor grimaced, throwing his guardian a look that Peter couldn't decipher. Instead of trying to, he let his eyes drift shut, feeling Thor squeeze his hand one last time before setting it carefully back onto the bed.

"Tony…"

"Give me a minute, Brucie." Mr. Stark brushed the man off, resting a hand on Peter's forehead and rubbing a thumb over his temple. "How are you doing, kiddo? Really?"

"'S not bad." He muttered, feeling himself start to fall asleep. It was, but if he could just sleep, it would heal. Already the pain was fading just a little.

"Scale of 1 to 10?"

"Six." He lied.

"Alright. Sleep it off, kiddo."

"Is...Loki...he okay?" For some reason, Peter couldn't remember.

"Yeah, Spider-Kid. He's fine. Just go to sleep." So he did.

Chapter End Notes

(Did I use the same trope in both of my stories? Yup)

Thank you so much for reading!
Tony didn't look up from the boy on the bed until he was sure the kid was asleep. Trying his best not to look over at the bloody rags that Bruce was cleaning up, he focused on Peter, holding his hand now that there was no danger of it crushing his own. The kid was breathing fine, and the hole in his shoulder was healing, the skin knitting back together under the gauze. The blood flow had already slowed down, but he knew the area would be tender for at least the rest of the day.

He hadn't exactly studied Peter's ability to heal...there really wasn't a way to study it unless he came to the lab already hurt, which the kid rarely did. There was no way he was willing to hurt the boy for the sake of science, especially since he'd failed to make any kind of pain meds that would work with his metabolism. The kid got banged up all the time doing his superhero thing, but rarely complained. Tony thought of Steve and decided the two of them would probably get along pretty well. Both self-sacrificing and stupidly noble. He knew Peter tried to hide injuries all the time, never wanting to worry him, which was why he'd had FRIDAY scan the kid every time he came over so Tony would know what he was working with.

It had never been bad. Usually bruises. The kid might hold himself too stiff or limp a little, and once, Tony had patted him on the back only for the boy to flinch, gasping, and Tony had pulled his hand back so quickly he might as well have been burned. He hadn't thought it likely that he'd hit him too hard...his kid was stronger than almost anyone he knew. Still, he'd put his hand carefully back onto the kid's shoulder. "Are you alright?" Peter had tried to brush him off but had apparently seen in his mentor's expression that the man wasn't about to let it go.

"I just got cut up a little...it's taking longer than usual to heal." Tony had ordered him to take off the t-shirt that had probably said something about math or science and had flinched at the ragged cut going from shoulder to shoulder. "A couple of guys had this girl surrounded...one of 'em got me…” He had hesitated. "I was going to try and sew the suit but…"

"Holy shit, kid. Do not ever try to sew the multi-million dollar suit. Ever. Just bring it here if it needs repairing." He'd urged, running a hand down his face at this kid...this kid who would play off any injury and pretend for as long as possible that he was fine. It was why Tony had to watch him like a hawk sometimes, always on the lookout for some potential problem the kid would refuse to share.

He hadn't even seen the gun. Neither had the Shield agents, which Tony found hard to believe. Then again, they'd been more worried about Loki. They didn't trust him, which Tony could understand, but apparently, his kid cared enough about the guy to save his life. Then again, Peter had saved the life of that Vulture idiot too, so the kid had low standards. Still, he had a feeling that Thor and Loki would be even more inclined to protect his kid now, which was never a bad thing. The gods of thunder and mischief were good friends to have on your side.

"Tony?" The man sighed at Bruce's voice, squeezing Peter's hand before dropping it back onto the bed, then tucked a sheet from the foot of the bed around him.

"He'll probably only sleep for about an hour," Tony told them, even though they hadn't asked. "FRIDAY, where are we on that shooter situation?"

"The man is currently in police custody. No one else was injured. Agent Hill is downstairs waiting to speak with you." He swore under his breath, rolling his eyes. He didn't have time for Shield. He just wanted to get Peter back to the compound where he would feel a lot safer. He would need to up
security at the Tower...get rid of the protestors outside and make sure Peter would be safe coming and going.

"Tell her to call me later."

"She's insisting, sir."

He'd been giving a stupid speech...he gave them every day. He hadn't been paying any attention to Peter who'd been all but hiding behind him and Pepper, his back to the wall, probably wishing he could bolt at any second. Hands had shot up when he'd announced his guardianship over the boy, but Pepper had stepped in.

"We will not be answering any questions about the boy under his legal guardianship, nor will Mr. Stark be revealing any information about the boy. We ask that you all respect this decision and the privacy of all parties involved." Her words had been reasonable, but her tone had been made of steel. Every hand in the room had gone back down, and then Tony had gone on to explain the presence of Thor and Loki. He'd been explaining the part about King T'Challa, and briefing the press on the king's arrival, when Peter had yelled behind him.

He'd turned in horror to watch Peter spring across the strange, arms going around the god of mischief and knocking him across the stage...and then he'd heard the gunshot, screams of terror echoing around him. Torn between Peter and Pepper, he'd stood frozen for a horrible second before Thor had stepped in, moving himself between Peter and the crowd, expression fierce as he'd blocked his kid from view, and so Tony had turned and grabbed Pepper's hand, keeping himself between her and the crowd as he'd led her to where Happy waited to get them both to safety.

But of course, he hadn't gone to safety. He'd hurried back across the stage, watching as Rhodey had started to move forward and help but had waved his friend off. "Help Happy get Pepper to safety. Make sure no one else is hurt." He'd ordered, and his friend had nodded, hurrying off the stage. Then he'd found himself kneeling next to Bruce who had been on the ground beside his kid, hand on the boy's shoulder which had been soaked with blood, his breath coming in frightened gasps.

It had been Loki's face that had surprised him the most. Thor had looked concerned and sad, Bruce worried...but Loki had been furious as the idiot in the crowd had screamed at them, calling the Asgardian a murderer. Loki's gaze had gone from the man being dragged away to the too-pale boy on the ground, and something in his expression had hardened. His hand had come up, a slight green glow starting to illuminate his fingers, and Thor had given a sharp shake of his head. "Loki! Not now." He'd hissed.

The hand had dropped, and the Asgardian had opened his mouth, maybe to argue, but Tony hadn't been able to focus on their family squabble. Instead, he'd gotten Thor to pick the boy up and they had all rushed to the medbay. This self-sacrificing, noble, too-selfless child would be the death of him one day, but he was going to enjoy every moment of it, he was sure.

"Tony?" Bruce asked again, the quiet voice jerking him back to the present moment. Sighing and running a tired hand through his hair, he turned to Bruce.

"Yeah?"

"Peter is...he's a mutant?" Tony waved a hand.

"Enhanced individual." He parroted the kid. "You heard him. He's like Steve...got bitten by a radioactive spider and it messed with his DNA."
"Are there any other side effects?" Bruce wondered, that curiosity getting the best of him for a minute, and Tony shrugged, not wanting to get into that. Not without Peter's permission. Sure, the boy had told him about the enhanced metabolism, but not the spider powers, so maybe he still wasn't ready for anyone to know about his web-slinging alter ego.

"I haven't run any experiments on him yet." Bruce managed a weak smile at that, glancing at the boy.

"How long has he been…"

"Little over a year...maybe more. I didn't know at first either. But he doesn't want anyone to know. You've seen how they talk about mutants in the news. He was worried about what would happen if anyone found out."

"We will not tell anyone. You have our word." Thor spoke up, voice soft and serious. "Will he be alright?"

"Yeah...yeah, he's...he heals pretty fast. He'll be sore for a while but…” Tony broke off, remembering walking into a hospital room to find the boy unconscious, an oxygen mask on his face, tubes and wires running from his arms to machines at his sides. Remembered waiting for days for his kid to wake up. 'He'll be fine. We'll go back to the compound as soon as he wakes up. We can go out the back way...keep him away from any reporters. I was going to try and get him back into school by Monday. We're going to be moving here…I wanted to take a look around upstairs, see what needed to be done before we moved back." There was so much to do...so many things he needed to take care of. Thankfully, he knew Pepper was more than willing to help.

Bruce finished disposing of the bloody rags and cleaning up and took a step forward. "You can go ahead. Look around, talk to Agent Hill...I'll stay with Peter." Tony wasn't so sure...didn't want Peter to wake up without him around. But who safer to leave him with than Bruce Banner, Thor, and Loki?

"We will not allow anything to happen to your son," Thor assured him, and Tony managed to roll his eyes.

"He's not my son." He told him on instinct, barely processing the words he'd spoken before Thor shrugged.

"Close enough." Blinking for a moment, Tony finally cracked a smile.

"Yeah. I guess he is." He reached out, patting Thor on the shoulder. "FRIDAY, tell me when he wakes up. Inform Agent Hill that I'm on my way downstairs. I'll meet her in the conference room. Ask Pepper to start ordering things for upstairs...I want the living area ready in two days. Furniture, Peter's stuff...the labs too. Get Happy to help."

"Yes, sir," FRIDAY responded, her voice on a low setting, probably so she wouldn't wake Peter. He touched the boy's hair one last time, long past worrying about how he looked to the others. Thor had already said it out loud...Peter was practically his son. And none of them seemed inclined to tease him about it, so he ran a hand through his kid's curls.

Nodding to Bruce who had taken a seat by Peter's side, and to Thor and Loki who stood at attention by the door, he headed to the elevator which he took back down to the conference room. Walking away from the boy's room felt wrong, especially when he was unconscious...when he'd just been shot. But he had to deal with this...get it over with so that he could spend more time looking after Peter. He knew that Pete would heal pretty quick...he just felt like it was one thing after another...
hurting his kid. Tony's phone buzzed as he reached the first floor, pulling him out of his thoughts, and he pulled it out, answering immediately when he saw Pepper's name.

"Is he okay?" She asked before he could even say hello, her voice wavering.

"He's going to be fine," Tony assured her, leaning against a wall. "The bullet went into his shoulder, but Bruce was able to get it out." He was glad she hadn't been there for that part...hadn't had to watch the fifteen-year-old have a bullet dug out of his shoulder without anesthetic. Hadn't had to listen to him scream.

"Okay." He heard her take a long, deep breath and knew she was still worried. Then again, so was he.

"He's asleep. His healing tires him out. Bruce and company are staying with him."

"Good. That's...good." She took a deep breath once more, obviously trying to focus. "I'm going to make some calls and take a look around upstairs. Go ahead and talk to Agent Hill." He wished she was there with him so he could hold her for a moment...take her hand and actually comfort her. Instead, he just listened to her breathe for a second. "He's really okay?" She confirmed softly.

"Yeah. He's really okay." It was a fact he was deliriously grateful for. It would have been so easy for the boy not to be okay...if the shooter had aimed a little higher or lower...Peter could have been dead. That wasn't something he wanted to think about, though, so he pushed that thought away and told Pepper he would see her later.

It wasn't just Agent Hill waiting for him downstairs. Natasha Romanoff leaned against the wall of the meeting space, eyes on the street outside, shoulders tense, and Tony wondered why he was surprised. Agent Hill was sitting in one of the chairs around the small table, her hands folded on the tabletop, a stack of folders beside her. "Agent Hill." He greeted, nodding, and she gave him a weak smile.

"Is the boy alright?"

"He will be," Tony told her, glancing over at Natasha who turned just a little to face him. "Agent Romanoff."

"Hello, Stark." She greeted, still tense, and he wondered if she thought he was going to attack or something.

"Who else is around?" He wondered. He hadn't seen her in the crowd but he had been more focused on getting it over so he could get Peter home and away from the crowd of reporters.

"Just me. Steve said he called you?"

"Yeah." Tony took a seat across from Agent Hill and gestured for Natasha to join them, and she did after a moment, sitting at the head of the table.

Agent Hill wanted to know about Loki, but there wasn't much to tell. "He sits in my living room and reads novels when he isn't hanging out with his brother. That's about it." He told her with a shrug, wanting to get back to his kid, but knowing that it would be a while before he could. "Who was that asshole?"

"He was a reporter...he lost his family in the attack on New York." She explained. "Obviously he is in police custody." Tony nodded. "We're going to have Shield watching the Tower for a few days...make sure no one gets too close. Agent Fury wants to have a meeting with you."
"I'm in the process of moving my family back to the Tower this week. And my kid just got shot."
Tony told her simply. "So send my regrets but I don't think I'll be able to have any Shield meetings
for a while. Agent Hill sighed.

"I'll have him call you." She told him simply, and he let it go. He could talk to Nick on the phone if
he had to, but he wasn't making time for any more meetings, not for a while. "No one else was
injured, but we're speaking to all of the reporters. Is Loki going to stay with you?"

"At the moment, the plan is for Loki, Thor, and Bruce to stick around for a while. Not sure how
long...that's up to them, but they're welcome to stay here for as long as they need."

"And if we asked you if we could speak to Loki?"

"That's not up to me. I'll let him know as soon as my kid isn't bleeding from a bullet wound." He
snapped a little, hands clenched into tight fists in his lap.

"I'm sorry." She murmured then, leaning in across the table and meeting his eyes. "We were keeping
an eye on Loki...we weren't as focused on the reporters as we should have been."

"Thor says he trusts Loki, and I trust Thor," Tony told her simply. "Until he becomes a problem, he's
a guest of mine, so if you want to talk to him, you're welcome to come to the compound for a visit.
We'll all be relocating to the Tower by the end of the week though, as soon as the Asgardians are on
their way to Wakanda. We've been working with the Swedish and Norwegian governments to find
them homes in those countries, but in the meantime, they'll be staying with King T'Challa."

"Understood. Thank you, Mr. Stark." He nodded, remembering that Mariah Hill had been a friend of
his. Of course, after Ultron, Shield, in general, had been a little less friendly, but maybe they could all
finally move on from that.

"And you're always welcome to stop by. I'm sure Pepper would be glad to see you. Nick too, if he
wants to stop being a spy for a couple of hours." Mariah smiled at that, finally seeming to lose some
of that tension.

"I don't think he ever stops being a spy, but I'll let him know. Thank you, Tony. Really."

"Of course. I can get you in contact with Happy Hogan...he's still my head of security. I'll have my
guys here, making sure the Tower is secure for us, but it never hurts to have Shield watching our
backs." She nodded, pushing over a folder that, he realized after a quick peek, held the information
of the reporter that had shot Peter, more information on the protests along with a couple of notable
protesters, and information on members of the UN that were against allowing Loki to remain free.

"There is one more thing before I go...Agent Fury said that you brought a new vigilante to German
during the...argument with Captain America." Tony felt his blood run cold but didn't let it show on
his face. At least, he hoped it didn't show, but in a room with two of the best spies in the world, he
wondered if he was really fooling anyone. "Spiderman, right? The one from the internet?"

"Yes."

"Have you been in contact with him since?"

"Not really." He lied, waving a hand and shrugging. "The kid wanted to stick low to the
ground...keeping on helping the little guy or something. I figured I ought to leave him alone, but he
has my number in case of emergencies. Why?" He wondered, hoping he'd mixed just enough of the
truth in with the lies that they would swallow it.
"Agent Fury would like to speak with him as well."

"Spiderman isn't a superhero." He lied through his teeth, silently apologizing to the boy as he spoke. "He's barely a vigilante. He rescues kittens from trees and gives old ladies directions. Tell Nick to leave the guy alone." She stared at him for a minute, eyes darting over to meet Romanoff’s, then nodded.

"I'll pass along your message. Tell Pepper I said hello." He waved as she saw herself out, then turned in his chair to face Natasha who had been strangely silent for the last few minutes. Leaning back in his chair, he crossed his arms.

"Well...to what do I owe this surprise?" He wondered.

"I did some digging." She told him simply. He lifted an eyebrow, prompting her to continue. "Peter Benjamin Parker, son of Mary and Dr. Richard Parker. Both deceased. Taken in by his aunt and uncle, both recently deceased." He felt his hands clench back into fists, knowing he shouldn't take it personally but still feeling a wave of protectiveness for Peter. Natasha did background checks on everyone...but she couldn't find out Peter's secret. He'd promised the boy.

"That is my kid, Romanoff." He warned her softly, leaning in and hoping he looked at least somewhat intimidating.

"Biologically?" He brought a hand down on the table, smacking it just hard enough to make a sound.

"That doesn't matter, nor is it any of your business. Now, I already told Cap that we can all meet up, talk about how things went down, try to get the band back together, whatever. But Peter is my kid and he has nothing to do with any of this. That means you don't go digging into his past or trying to find out whatever it is you like to dig up on people. Am I making myself clear, Agent Romanoff?" If he didn't know better, he might have said that there was hurt in her eyes. It was gone after a second, and she leaned back, obviously relaxing her body to put him at ease.

"I was only trying to understand." She told him, dropping her voice. "You never said anything about a son, so...I was curious. I didn't mean to overstep. Of course, I won't share any information about him that isn't already public with the team." He didn't know what to make of that statement, but she went on before he could ask for some clarification. "He was your intern?"

"Yes. And his aunt was a family friend." She nodded, apparently accepting that.

"And...he isn't yours?"

"He's mine in every way that matters." He told her, his own voice going soft. There was a smile turning the corners of her mouth and immediately he tensed. "What?"

"Nothing." She chuckled. "It's a good look on you." Snorting and rolling his eyes, he leaned back in his chair again, trying to relax. "Why are you moving back to the Tower?"

"It's closer to his school." He decided to throw some honesty in there, and she accepted it with a sharp nod.

"Midtown School of Science and Technology. Good school. And he was your intern...so he's smart. Genius level smart."

"Yeah." Tony chuckled. "He is." She hesitated for a second, then softened, leaning forward over the table.
"Is he really okay?" She asked, real concern leaking into her voice.

"Bruce took care of him. He's going to be okay." He noticed her flinch a little at Bruce's name but she didn't say anything about him, and he decided to ignore that.

"Good. Maybe we'll get to meet him." Tony nodded. He wasn't sure he trusted these people with his kid just yet, but he knew that Peter would be excited to meet the rest of the Avengers, even if he didn't quite trust them. They'd take things slow.

"Yeah. I think he'd like that." He was about to answer when his phone chimed in his pocket. Glancing at the message, he frowned, heart clenching. It was from Bruce.

"He's waking up, but he has a fever. You need to come back."

"Is everything okay?" Natasha asked, genuine concern on her face.

"Peter's waking up...we need to move him back to the compound..." He trailed off, shaking his head and struggling to focus as he stood. "Come back to the Tower next week. Bring Cap and everyone...we'll work this out. For now, I need to..."

"Go." She urged, standing when he did. "I'll tell Steve...we'll call before we come over. I hope everything is okay with Peter." He muttered a thanks, hurrying out of the room and to the elevator, heart pounding as he tried to make it back to Peter's room before he was fully awake.
Recovery

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much to everyone who has read and reviewed. I appreciate it so much. I hope you like the new chapter :)

Recovery

Peter was hot. Groaning, he tossed his head, trying to push the blanket off of him. "Peter?" Someone asked, but he was so tired...too tired to open his eyes or even bother trying to figure out who was talking to him. "Peter? Can you hear me?" Yes. He could hear them. But he didn't want to talk...didn't want to put effort into answering. He didn't think he could make his mouth move even if he wanted to.

"What's the matter with him?" Someone else asked, and a huge warm hand touched his forehead. Ugh. He didn't want warm hands on him, but it was too much effort to pull away, so he just wrinkled his nose and hoped they got it.

"He has a fever...not too bad but it's rising. I texted Tony...he should be on his way soon." Someone muttered, and he tried to pull away again. "I'm going to try…" The man's voice faded out, or maybe he just couldn't process the words. "It might not work...his metabolism...waking up."

Peter wanted to argue. He wasn't waking up. He was already awake...and hot. Someone took his hand and he squeezed without thinking, not even thinking about the fact that the hand didn't give, nor did the other person try to pull away. They just held his hand steady in theirs, letting him squeeze and toss his head and cry out when something poked him in his other arm. "Peter?"

"Hm?" He asked, still not opening his eyes. This didn't make sense. Where was he? His arm hurt...had someone hurt him? He could barely think.

"Dang it..." The other person muttered. He knew these people...he just couldn't figure out their names. He knew he was safe though. Mr. Stark wouldn't have left him with people he wasn't safe with. "It's rising…"

"Why does he have a fever?" Someone else asked...a voice he kind of recognized. He recognized all of them...his brain just didn't want to put the pieces together. That last person didn't sound worried though, so he took a breath, trying to calm his own heartbeat that was thumping in his ears.

"It could be an infection from the bullet...I was as careful as I could be but..." The person trailed off, and Peter tried to get used to the heat and the discomfort, flinching away from the warm hand that found his forehead once more. "This is why I wanted to treat him at a hospital." He grumbled.

The next thing Peter knew, an ice cold hand was on his forehead and he breathed a sigh of relief, surprised at how nice that felt. Around him was silence, and he turned his head and leaned it into the hand, smiling a little at the cold. It felt so nice...so comforting. He relaxed into the bed, letting himself slip back into sleep.

Peter was only vaguely aware of the voices. One was the most familiar, a voice he knew like the
back of his own hand...a voice he always tuned in to. "What's going on? What's wrong?"

"His fever was rising...faster than it should have been. He started to wake up and was showing signs of discomfort but he seems okay now."

"And what are you doing?" The familiar voice asked, and one closer to Peter answered, their tone bored. The cold hand was still on his forehead and he wondered whose it was...why was someone so cold? Whatever the reason, it felt awesome, so he hoped they stuck around.

"Your child was hot. I am cold. Thus..." He must have made a gesture or something, and Peter felt the hand holding his run a thumb over his knuckles, the comforting, soothing gesture lulling Peter even further into his dreams where he dreamed about a hand running through his hair and a soft voice at his side, telling him that everything was okay. He believed that voice. That voice never lied to him.

When Peter woke again, Mr. Stark was slouched in a folding chair at his side, flipping through something on his phone. They were still in the Medbay at the tower, and he felt a lot better...like he could actually focus. He blinked at the man who sat beside him...but on the wrong side to be holding his hand. Furrowing his brow, he turned his head to the other side, ignoring how that pulled at his shoulder and looking over at the person on his left...Thor. Thor was holding his hand. Thor, god of thunder. Feeling his cheeks heat up, he started to pull his hand away, getting the Asgardian's attention. "Peter? Are you alright?" The man asked, letting him take his hand back.

"Hm...yeah." Peter murmured, turning back to Mr. Stark who had put the phone down, running a hand through his hair. The boy wondered who had had their hand on his head...Thor's hand was too warm to have been keeping him so cool.

"Hey, kiddo. How's are you feeling?" Mr. Stark asked, voice gentle and quiet.

"I'm fine." He muttered. "What's going on?"

"What do you remember?" Mr. Stark asked, leaning forward and keeping a hand on his head. It felt nice, his fingers running through his curls, so Peter kept still, letting the man continue.

"Uh..." He tried to think back. "Some guy was trying to shoot Mr. Loki, right? I...I pushed him out of the way."

"Yep." Mr. Stark sighed, moving his hand away, and Peter shifted a little on the bed, flinching when his shoulder gave a dull throb.

"And I got shot."

"Yeah, let's not forget that." The man shook his head. "You've got to stop doing stuff like this...you're going to make me go gray Pete."

"You're already going gray, Mr. Stark." The man snorted, shaking his head and looking relieved as he ruffled Peter's hair.

"How's the shoulder?" His guardian wanted to know.

"Uh...not too bad." Peter was only lying a little. It wasn't awful, but it still throbbed. Mostly he was just tired. Still, Mr. Stark looked relieved.

"Good. You have a fever, but it's not too bad. Bruce was able to get it down with some help from Thor's crazy brother." Peter frowned, glancing back over at Thor who was giving Mr. Stark a half
smile. Loki...that would explain it. He was an Ice Giant, right? It would make sense that he was cold.

"Mr. Loki? Where did he go?" He wondered.

"Loki went back to the compound," Thor told him. "He feared his presence would draw more attention." That made sense. Those protestors really hated Loki. He wondered if someone else would try to hurt him, but decided that he'd have to worry about that later. At the moment, his brain was too tired to figure out any more problems.

"Bruce is looking over some test results." Mr. Stark put in. "We're going to take you back to the compound as soon as he's finished. Think you're up for it?"

"Uh, sure." He started to shrug but quickly thought better of it. He was still tired, even if he was feeling better than before, and his arm ached. Mr. Stark put a hand on his head, looking grim. "I'm sorry, Mr. Stark." He hadn't meant to worry him. "I didn't mean to ruin your press conference."

"Rule number 1, Petey." Peter gave a brief smile at the ridiculous nickname. "None of this was your fault. We got that asshole in custody...Shield is going to take care of him. You didn't ruin anything. He did." 

"You saved my brother's life, Peter," Thor informed him solemnly. "I will forever be in your debt."

"It's nothing, Mr. Thor." He waved him off, not wanting anyone to be in his debt. The Asgardian smiled then, eyes softening.

"It most certainly was not 'nothing' Peter." The Asgardian assured him but didn't push it any further, and Peter appreciated it. If they got into the whole 'great power, great responsibility' talk, he was going to have to figure out a way to explain why he felt the need to save people, and that might lead to talking about his spider-themed alter ego, which he really didn't want to do.

"Do you want to try and eat something?" Mr. Stark asked, capturing his attention once more. He didn't really, but Mr. Stark looked worried, so he nodded, and Mr. Stark started to stand, but Thor was getting up before he could.

"I can get the food, Tony."

Peter half expected Mr. Stark to argue, but his guardian nodded. "Thanks, Point Break. The kitchen around the corner is stocked." Thor shut the door to Peter's room behind him, and Mr. Stark put a hand back on Peter's forehead.

"Are you okay, Mr. Stark?" Peter asked. The man sighed, giving him a weak smile and moving the hand away, dropping it back in his lap.

"You scared me to death, Spiderkid," He murmured, and Peter realized that Mr. Stark's eyes were red-rimmed and that the man looked exhausted. "But you did good. No one else even saw the gun." Mr. Stark shook his head, and Peter felt a rush of warmth that had nothing to do with the fever. "The room was full of Shield agents and all of them were too worried about Loki to pay any attention to the reporter with a gun."

"Are the protesters still here?" Peter wondered, remembering the people outside the tower, all yelling and holding up signs that called for Loki's death. He knew the man had done some bad stuff but...well, he couldn't really remember too much about the attack on New York. He knew he'd been scared...remembered him and Uncle Ben and Aunt May all huddled together in the bathroom like it had been a tornado or something. Uncle Ben had kept Peter's head pressed against him, a hand rubbing his back and promising that everything would be okay. Peter had believed him.
"No. My security and Shield chased them off the property. As soon as Bruce gets back, we'll get you home, okay?" Home. It was kind of surprising that when Mr. Stark said the word 'home' his brain went to the compound rather than his old apartment in Queens. He wondered what had happened to that apartment...had Mr. Stark paid the rent? Was someone else living there now? He tried not to focus on that, nodding instead to Mr. Stark and trying to focus on the conversation at hand

"Sounds good." He murmured around a yawn that he couldn't quite hold back.

"You tired, bud?" Mr. Stark asked him as Thor walked in with a tray, and Peter just nodded again as the man sat it down in front of him. On the tray was a plate that held a sandwich, a bowl of fruit, and a bottle of water. He was glad it wasn't much since he wasn't all that hungry, so he grabbed the bowl of fruit once Mr. Stark adjusted the bed to help him sit up, and began picking at the fruit. He really didn't want to worry Mr. Stark even more, so he ate as much as he could, managing most of the fruit and a few bites of the sandwich that Thor, god of thunder, had made for him.

Bruce returned as he was putting the sandwich back on the plate, and Mr. Stark leaned in, pressing a hand against his forehead as he slumped against the pillows. "What have you got for us, Bruce?" Mr. Stark asked, removing his hand to run it through Peter's hair. He didn't understand much of what was going on. He was tired and hot and his whole body seemed to ache, but he drank the water someone held to his mouth, swallowing as much as he could before turning his head away, his body trying to get more sleep. He was inclined to give in, but he wanted to know what Mr. Stark and Doctor Banner were talking about.

"The fever is holding steady. As far as I can tell, his healing factor is working overtime to fight an infection introduced into his system when the bullet was lodged in his arm. I did my best to clean it but this room isn't as sterile as a hospital, especially since it's not completely set up yet. There could have been dirt or dust in the air...and he was on the floor. His body is fighting the infection, thus the fever. At this rate, he should be back to a normal temperature by tomorrow, but he's going to need a lot of rest and to drink plenty of fluids."

"Is it safe to move him back to the compound?"

"Yeah. I think he'd rest better in his own room. I'm going to give him some more antibiotics. Those seemed to work pretty well. Do you have any fever reducers that might work on him?"

"I have one we can try. I was closer with that than I ever got trying to find something to help with pain." Then Mr. Stark must have been talking to him again. The man's hand landed on his knee over the blanket, squeezing gently. "Hey, Pete?"

"Hm?"

"We're going to get you back home, okay?"

"Gotta get up?" He wondered.

"No. I'll carry him, Tony." That was Thor, and then huge hands were lifting him once more, and he rested his head against the Asgardian's shoulder, eyes still shut. There was a lot of moving and jostling, and then he was being eased into a car, Mr. Stark climbing into the car beside him and helping him lean onto his shoulder, an arm draping around him.

"You feeling okay, Pete?"

"Tired." He murmured into the man's shoulder.

"We'll get you in bed as soon as we get you home, okay?" He hummed in agreement, and he felt Mr.
Stark press his lips against his hair. Safe and comfortable under his guardian's arm, he relaxed, smiling a little and curling up on the seat.

"Mk."

It sounded like Doctor Banner and Mr. Thor were talking...he figured Happy was driving the car, but he wasn't sure where the other two were sitting. He couldn't make himself listen, though. Whatever they were saying, he figured he could ask Mr. Stark about it later. Someone touched his forehead, and Mr. Stark shifted beside him. "Still warm." He felt more than heard his mentor say.

"It should start to go down soon." Doctor Banner told his guardian. That was the last thing he heard before someone else was picking him up and carrying him into what he assumed was the compound, then into a bed he knew was his. Immediately, he curled up and someone pulled a blanket over him, tucking him in, and then Peter was asleep again.

He felt like he slept forever, his dreams hazy and hard to hold on to. He remembered someone touching his forehead and fingers on his wrist. He also remembered quiet voices, a cold hand brushing his hair out of his face, and someone sitting beside him, holding a straw to his mouth.

"Come on, kiddo. Drink up," someone urged. No...no just someone. Mr. Stark. He did as the man asked, drinking every time the man held something to his mouth. It happened lots of times and was always accompanied by a hand running through his hair.

The next time he opened his eyes, Peter was alone in his room. His body felt like it was weighed down with lead, and his mouth was dry, but otherwise, he felt alright, if still pretty tired. Rubbing his eyes, he started to sit up and groaned when that was too hard. Giving up, he stared up at the ceiling.

"Hey, FRIDAY?" He muttered.

"Yes, Peter?"

"What time is it?"

"Nearly 4 am. I will alert Mr. Stark that you are awake." Peter's eyes widened. Mr. Stark was probably asleep! And Pepper too!

"No! Don't do that, FRIDAY." He hadn't had a nightmare! He just wanted to drink something and then go back to sleep.

"I'm afraid you do not have the option to override this protocol." He groaned again, closing his eyes and trying to get back to sleep. It didn't work, and before long, he heard his guardian's footsteps approaching.

"Peter?" The man asked, tapping on his bedroom door.

"Hey, Mr. Stark." He murmured, wincing at his raspy voice. Mr. Stark came into the room, taking a seat on the side of his bed and putting a hand on his forehead.

"How are you feeling?" Without prompting, Mr. Stark poured him a glass of water from a pitcher on his nightstand just like before, holding it so he could take a drink. Sighing in relief at the still-cold liquid, he rubbed his eyes, taking in Mr. Stark's sweatpants and tank-top.

"I asked FRIDAY not to wake you."

"And I told FRIDAY to get me when you woke up."

"You didn't have to do that."
Mr. Stark sighed, running a hand through Peter's hair. He had to admit, it felt wonderful, and he let his eyes slide shut. "Your healing factor is pretty impressive, kiddo, you know that? Your shoulder should be as good as new in a day or two. Until then, you need to be careful. Try to keep your arm still. Okay?" He nodded. "You're on bedrest for the rest of today. Doctor's orders." That sounded fine to Peter who could already feel himself falling asleep again.

"I'm tired." He murmured, wishing he could manage to hold a conversation. He blinked, trying to stay awake, but Mr. Stark shook his head.

"That's because your healing is working overtime. You got an infection and then you had a fever." A hand was pressed to his forehead. "You still have a fever. Bruce said it should break sometime tomorrow. Go ahead and get some more sleep, Spiderling."

"I'm sorry." He'd made FRIDAY wake the man and now he was falling asleep on him.

"Don't be sorry, bud. Just get some sleep." He opened his mouth to respond, but the next thing he knew, he was opening his eyes again and found himself alone in his bedroom once more. Blinking in surprise, he wiped his eyes and tried to sit up. It sort of worked...he managed to scoot up in the bed a little, and rested his head against the headboard.

"FRIDAY?" He called, grateful for the AI.

"Good morning, Peter. It is currently 8:21 am. Mr. Stark has been alerted that you are awake." He sighed but didn't bother asking FRIDAY to stop calling for Mr. Stark every time he woke up. He obviously couldn't make her do anything. She never listened to him anyway. Maybe at some point, he could figure out how to make her stop bothering the man...figure out how to override her protocols. He wondered if he could do that without Mr. Stark finding out.

Mr. Stark arrived after only a minute or two, this time dressed in jeans and a Metallica t-shirt. "Hey, Pete. You awake this time?" He asked, smiling a little and moving over to his bed.

"Yeah, I think so." Peter stretched a little, trying again to sit up some more, and this time, Mr. Stark put a hand behind his back to help him. The man supported him as he sat up, moving one of the pillows so that he could lean against the headboard.

"Pepper's making breakfast." Mr. Stark sat down on the edge of Peter's bed once more. "Pancakes sound okay?"

"Oh...she doesn't have to…"

"She's already making it, kid. Besides, you need to eat. Your metabolism is faster than a normal person's when your body isn't fighting off an infection." Peter nodded, not up to having an argument about eating at the moment. He was hungry, and if Miss Potts...Pepper, was already making breakfast, he figured he might as well have some.

"Thank you, Mr. Stark."

"Don't worry about it, Pete." Mr. Stark handed him a glass of water once more from his nightstand and Peter took a drink from what he realized was a purple curly straw, wondering how the water stayed so cold. He smiled a little at the colorful, childish straw, and Mr. Stark chuckled. "How are you feeling? Really?" He asked as soon as Peter was done.

"I'm okay." He shrugged with his good shoulder. "My shoulder doesn't hurt much. I'm just kind of tired."
"Bruce said you'd probably be tired until your shoulder is fully healed. Some food will probably help. The fever broke a few hours ago...are you hungry?" Peter nodded. "Okay. I'm going to go see if Pepper's done with those pancakes." He patted Peter's leg, then left him alone to get him some breakfast.

Peter was well aware that Mr. Stark probably wanted him to stay in bed. However, his bladder had other ideas. Pushing the blankets off and finding that he was dressed in a pair of Iron Man pajamas, he rolled his eyes, then carefully put his weight on his feet.

He was wobbly at first, but after a minute, he was able to stand, and he carefully picked his way over to the bathroom, leaning on the wall or his furniture the whole time. Thankfully, though, he made it to the bathroom, then, once he was finished, managed to wash his hands and splash some water on his face.

"Peter?" Mr. Stark's voice sounded on the verge of panic, and Peter frowned at his reflection in the mirror over the sink. Why would Mr. Stark be that worried about him after just a few minutes? How far could he have possibly gotten?

"Just a sec...". He called, opening the door, then cursed under his breath when he took a step and his knee gave out and he found himself pitching forward.

Immediately, Mr. Stark was there, catching him easily under his arms and holding him up. "Pete? Are you okay?" The man demanded, and Peter managed an embarrassed nod.

"Yeah. Sorry...just tripped." He muttered, trying to get his feet back under him.

"What are you doing out of bed?" His guardian asked, shifting Peter so that he could get an arm around his waist and help him walk back to bed. Peter lifted an eyebrow, wondering if the man was going to make him say it. Mr. Stark exhaled, the corner of his lip quirking upward. "If you need to get up, I can help."

"I don't need help going to the bathroom," Peter muttered, cheeks going red, and Mr. Stark gave him a pointed look as he lowered the boy onto the bed. He was kind enough not to point out how wrong Peter obviously was, instead, helping Peter lean back against the headboard. He was happy to realize that his shoulder barely hurt anymore, but he didn't really want to test it by moving around too much.

"Bruce is going to come by in about an hour and have a look at you...see how you're doing." Mr. Stark hesitated for a second. "I don't have any meetings today, so I thought maybe we could watch movies or something...keep it low key."

Peter wasn't sure which surprised him more, that Mr. Stark was offering to watch movies with him all day, or that the man seemed worried that he wouldn't want to.

"Yeah! That sounds great, Mr. Stark. I mean...if you're not too busy. I understand if you have stuff to do or something...like working with Doctor Banner or meetings or something." Mr. Stark's face went kind of soft then, his hand squeezing Peter's knee.

"Nope. I cleared my schedule, kid. Pepper is getting the tower ready, but she should be free tonight too. Maybe we can get dinner or something." Peter nodded, and then Mr. Stark gestured for him to start eating. The man sat down in the chair by the bed. "FRI, turn on the TV, would you?" Suddenly the TV was on and Mr. Stark propped his feet up on Peter's bed, and Peter moved his feet to give him more room. He flipped through the channels until finding a movie neither of them had seen and Peter split his attention between the TV and his food until he was finished eating.
It wasn't long after he'd finished his food that Doctor Banner knocked on the door, peeking his head in. "Hey, Peter. How are you feeling?" He asked as Mr. Stark paused the movie.

"Um...I'm okay." He shrugged his good shoulder, trying not to move the other one too much. He didn't want to go back to sleep but he could already feel his eyes getting heavier. He didn't want to sleep! He wanted to hang out with Mr. Stark and watch movies and maybe work in the lab with Doctor Banner. Instead, he sat back while Doctor Banner checked his temperature and took a look at his shoulder. Mostly, he felt a lot better, and Doctor Banner agreed, obviously impressed when he pulled the bandage away from his skin to take a look at how his arm was healing.

"That's...incredible." Doctor Banner told them quietly, eyes huge as he stared at the newly healed skin. "He heals even faster than Steve!" Mr. Stark chuckled, putting an arm on Peter's shoulder and grinning almost proudly. It made Peter's heart warm to see it...his chest tightened and he found himself smiling down at his lap.

"Pretty impressive, right?" Mr. Stark asked, smiling down at Peter. "When you're feeling better, we'll all take a look at that healing factor of yours...run some tests. You can help us find some drugs that will work on you."

"Sounds good." He grinned and squeezed Peter to his side and turning the movie back on as Doctor Banner headed out.

Mr. Stark sat on the bed beside him while he watched movies and Peter rested his head on the man's shoulder after a while, unable to keep his eyes open. The man didn't complain, just ran his fingers through his curls and keeping him close. He managed to stay awake for part of one movie, then fell asleep for the rest, but the man never moved, just held him. By the time he woke the third or fourth time, Mr. Stark was flipping through his phone while a Star Wars movie played in the background. "Hey, buddy. You with me again?" He hummed in agreement, wiping his eyes and sitting up a little. "Bruce checked up on you again about an hour ago. Your fever is almost gone, and your shoulder has mostly healed. How are you feeling?"

"Better." He wiped his eyes, stretching a little, and was glad to realize his shoulder barely hurt. "Thirsty." Mr. Stark reached over and handed him a glass of water that was somehow cold...did he have someone refresh the water every hour and he just kept missing it? Either way, he took a long drink and then let Mr. Stark help him up so he could go to the bathroom again. Then he disappeared for a minute and then returned with two plates of sandwiches.

When they were done eating, Mr. Stark offered to watch another movie now that Peter was more awake, but Peter felt bad for taking up all of his time and figured that he'd want to spend more time with Pepper or Bruce or someone, so he told him he needed to do homework. His guardian didn't look convinced, but the man put his homework on the nightstand and told Peter not to work too hard...then told him that he'd be back to get Peter for dinner in an hour or two.

It turned out he couldn't really focus on his homework, but he tried. Ned had emailed him everything, apparently before everything that had happened because it made no mention of the attack on Loki at the Tower. His texts, however, definitely did, and Peter split his attention between his reading for English and trying to assure his friend that he was okay. He was also trying to figure out much other people were talking about him. Everyone knew that he was Mr. Stark's...kid now. That Mr. Stark was his guardian and he lived with him and Pepper. He just wanted to know what their reactions were going to be. So far, it sounded like people weren't too likely to tease him. Well...no more than usual. Flash would probably make a couple of comments, but he could deal with that.

He had been working on homework and texting Ned and MJ for about an hour in when his senses tingled just a little. It wasn't like he was in danger or anything...just that someone was nearby. And it
wasn't Mr. Stark. He knew what Mr. Stark's breathing sounded like...what his footsteps sounded like. What it felt like when Mr. Stark was watching him. He jerked his head up in surprise to find Loki standing in his doorway, his shoulder against the door jamb. "Oh…" He put the book down, then the phone in his other hand. The Asgardian looked upset...almost angry, and Peter wasn't sure why. "Um…hi, Mr. Loki. I, uh…I didn't...sorry, I didn't see you at first. Did you, um...need...something?" He trailed off as the man just stared at him.

"The honorific you are placing in front of my name is completely unnecessary." He finally said, arms crossed. It took Peter's still kind of fevered mind a few seconds to untangle that sentence...usually he was faster than this, but after an hour of staying up, trying to focus on homework, and worrying about school, his body was ready for another nap. He'd been hurt as Spiderman plenty of times, but he'd never been shot before...much less shot, then cut open, then sewn back together, and his body was still trying to recover.

"Oh. Um...right. Sorry. Loki." He felt like all of the adults in his life were making him call them by his first name. First, Rhodey, then Pepper, and now Loki. Loki looked uncomfortable, and Peter felt his fingers start tapping on his legs, the nervous energy making it hard to stay still. "Did you, um...did you need anything?" He repeated, not wanting to offended him, but not sure why the man was standing in his bedroom.

"You knew that man was going to attempt to shoot me. How?"

"I looked over and saw the red dot." He shrugged, trying to push down the panic. Peter really didn't want to get into his other powers. They didn't know he was Spiderman, and it wasn't something he really wanted more people knowing even if he did sort of trust them. Loki didn't look convinced, though, so he kept talking. "Um...like, from the gun. On your shirt...it's like a laser attached to a gun and..."

"I know what a 'red dot' is." Loki seemed almost angry, but not quite. Upset. Worried? It was hard to tell.

"Oh. Right." He muttered, fidgeting with the blanket covering his legs and wishing he didn't feel so awkward around the Asgardian..

"That was a very brave thing to do." Somehow, that didn't sound like a compliment. Still, he made himself smile a little.

"Um...thanks, Mr...um...Loki. Sir."

"That title is also unnecessary." Peter flinched.

"Right. Sorry."

"Why?"

"Why...". He trailed off, not sure what the man wanted to know. He wondered if he was just tired or if Loki was always this confusing.

"Why did you risk your life to save mine?"

That...wasn't an easy question to answer. He couldn't just say that he was a hero...that he saved people all the time. That he had power and thus responsibility. He trusted Loki and Thor, but not enough to go around talking about his secret identity. So he decided to go with a partial truth. "Um...because I didn't want them to kill you." Peter told him simply.
The Asgardians stared at him for a minute, apparently unsure of what to make of that. "Why?" He asked again. Peter shrugged his good shoulder.

"I don't want you to die. I like you." Loki frowned, still looking confused and almost irritated. Finally, though, the man blew out a breath, shaking his head.

"Right." He muttered, seeming even more frustrated than before. But he didn't say anything else, just stood there for a moment while Peter fought back a yawn. It had to have been the super healing...that always made him tired. Plus the fever. "You're still ill." It was a statement but Peter felt the urge to fill the silence.

"Um, kind of. I still have a fever. It's mostly better though."

"Should you not be resting?"

Peter gestured to the bed, fighting another yawn. His book for English had been pretty boring, and even Ned's texts couldn't keep him awake. He wanted to stay awake until Mr. Stark came and got him for lunch, but he wasn't sure it was going to happen. "I am."

The man humphed, rolling his eyes and moving over to the chair Mr. Stark had left by his bed. Peter leaned back against the pillows and watched in confusion as Loki rested an ice cold hand against his forehead. Letting out a breath he hadn't known he was holding, he found his eyes closing again. Suddenly the exhaustion was settling on him, heavy like a blanket, and he felt his whole body relax into the pillows. He was so tired...so comfortable and warm except for his forehead which was cool and comfortable. His senses tingled a little...not like he was in danger but like something was happening. Something weird. He opened his eyes and saw a slight green haze.

"Are you using magic?" He asked, finding that it was harder than before to make words. Still, his lips pulled back in an impressed smile.

"Yes," Loki replied, his voice just over a murmur.

"That's so cool." Peter slurred just before he dropped back into sleep, this time dreaming about green waves on the beach and an ice cold hand on his forehead.
Tony checked the time, then put his phone in his pocket, wiping a hand down his face and glancing over at Bruce who was working on the other side of the lab. It had been twenty minutes since he'd left Peter to work on his homework, which he didn't think was a good idea, but he didn't want to seem like an overprotective parent. Parent. He was a child's parent. Sometimes that thought hit him and he would feel his heart start to race and his hands shake. He was responsible for Peter. That was his kid now, and his kid had jumped in front of a bullet to save Loki. Loki! And Tony had knelt next to the bleeding boy on the floor, then sat by his bed while he'd tossed and turned in his sleep, fever rising. His kid was sick now. Fevered and miserable and exhausted. And sure, he was feeling a little better now, but it was still terrifying to see Peter so sick after getting shot.

He wanted to check on him again, but he'd told Peter he'd give him at least an hour to work on his homework, and he didn't want to keep stopping in and distracting him. He needed to do his homework...the social worker was keeping an eye on them and requesting updates on Peter's condition after the kid was shot on live TV, which wasn't exactly ideal.

What he wanted to do was get Peter out of the city for a couple of days to let all of this die down, then maybe kill the man who'd shot his kid, but he knew that the Asgardian situation still had to be dealt with, and Peter needed to go back to school if he wanted things to stay as normal as possible for him. If Peter wanted to go on a nice beach vacation and start homeschooling, that was fine with him, but he knew Peter wanted to be with his friends again, and as far as he could tell, the little nerd actually liked school most of the time, so he'd stick to the original plan.

Bruce was looking at a sample of Peter's blood on the other side of the lab, getting a jump start on some pain medicine that would work on him. His body was reacting really well to the antibiotics, which gave Bruce some cues on how to move forward. Still, Tony was worried. He was looking at everything he had on Peter's DNA while also trying to nail down some exact times for T'Challa to come and pick up the Asgardians that were going to Wakanda. And Pepper wanted him to do another press conference...just update everyone that Peter was okay and that they stood by Thor and Loki and all that crap when all he really wanted to do was stay at Peter's side and keep the public the hell away from his kid. He'd asked Pepper to talk to the press and release a statement that Peter was going to be fine and asking for privacy and all that other crap.

"FRIDAY, how's Peter doing?" He asked, giving in. He couldn't stop checking on Peter...couldn't stop remembering how it had looked to watch Bruce cut into Peter while the boy was awake and crying...couldn't stop seeing his hand gripping Thor's, and the way he'd tried so hard not to scream. Bruce didn't even glance up at the question, just kept working, and Tony was grateful.

"Peter is currently working on homework and texting. Would you like me to pull up his phone records?"

"No." He shook his head at Bruce's lifted eyebrow. He'd never do that...well unless it was an emergency. "No, just...let me know if anything happens." Anything. Anything at all. He had to fight the urge to clarify. If the boy got out of bed. If he fell asleep. If his fever spiked again. If he wasn't feeling well. If he just wanted Tony back by his side. Anything.

"He's really doing a lot better." Bruce offered, glancing over at Tony who nodded. The scientist closed whatever it was he'd been doing, walking over to where Tony was standing, glancing through the screens surrounding them. "The fever is almost gone, he's been getting plenty of rest and fluids.
He's coherent, the infection is nearly out of his system...he's able to work on homework." Bruce was quiet for a moment, and Tony could feel the man's eyes on him. "You're a great father, Tony."

Tony blinked, startled from his work, and turned in surprise to Bruce. "What?"

"I mean, I knew you were a good guy from the time I met you. No one else on that airship would get anywhere near me, you know? Tiptoed around like I was going to go off at any minute. And, I mean, I got it. That's...understandable. I mean...I understood. But you..." Bruce chuckled and pointed a pencil at Tony. "You came right up to me, talked about my work...poked me with something sharp." He had to smile a little. "But with Peter...that kid loves you. And he's going to be fine. He's getting better. And he's got you. No one blames you for being worried. That's your kid. You don't have to pretend with me...check on him as much as you want. Hell, I'll run tests and check his blood and make sure he's healing and everything else. He's obviously a really special kid, and I'm pretty sure you're not telling me everything, which is fine." He held up a hand when Tony started to protest. "It's fine. Really. Peter doesn't know me and I understand if he doesn't trust me just yet. But maybe he will someday." He shrugged. "Either way, you're a good father, and Peter is lucky to have you."

Tony wanted to say something snarky...something that would cut the tension and the sentiment...something that would help him deal with the kind words Bruce had just said and the pit in his stomach that had opened when Bruce had started talking. He wasn't good at praise...well, not this kind. Praise over his inventions and his suits and the stuff he did while inside them, he was great at accepting. But this...this was personal. Sweet and genuine. And Tony didn't know how to act when someone gave him genuine, personal praise.

"Yeah, well..." Tony trailed off, going back to his work and staring at one of the screens. Bruce laughed, patting Tony on the shoulder, then heading back over to his own workstation.

Tony's phone rang after about thirty minutes of working, and he pulled it out, frowning in confusion when the display was black. Then he remembered his other phone, grabbing the old flip phone from his back pocket and staring at the name for a minute before answering. "You know you can just call me on my regular phone now that you're not a fugitive anymore. There's no reason to use this obsolete piece of garbage." He answered, wiping a hand over his eyes and carrying the phone into the hallway outside of the lab, not wanting to bother Bruce while he was trying to work.

"We all saw the news...is he okay?" Steve asked, sounding truly worried, and Tony swallowed back some kind of emotion that he didn't want to name. Things were better with Steve and the others, but he wasn't sure about this...sharing his personal life with him. Let him know how important Peter really was to him. Because if he let them in again and they betrayed him...again...he wasn't sure what he would do.

"Hello to you too, Spangles."

"Why didn't you ever tell us you had a son, Tony?" That took him by surprise and he stared at the blank wall in front of his face for a minute before answering.

"What?"

"Nat said she talked to you...you said he was your kid." That...was true, Tony guessed. And honestly, Peter was his kid. In every way that mattered. He was planning on adopting him as soon as Peter was ready to talk about it. Stepping into the elevator, Tony decided that Steve didn't need to know all that.

"It's complicated." He told Steve, dropping the snark for a moment.
"Is he okay?"

"Bruce is keeping an eye on him...the bullet didn't hit anything vital. He's resting now."

"He took a bullet for Loki." It wasn't really a question, but Tony felt like he should defend the kid as he stepped into the living room, looking around to make sure it was empty before dropping onto the sofa.

"Yeah. Apparently, the two of them are friendly now." He sighed, not even sure how to explain that. "Loki hasn't caused any problems yet." Tony had to admit, it was a surprise to him too, but Loki was being incredibly well behaved. No scheming, no manipulating...no murder.

"You son is...friends with Loki." Tony shrugged even though Steve couldn't see him.

"Go figure."

"I don't understand how he even saw the man with the gun...he wasn't looking at Loki." Steve sounded almost suspicious, and Tony felt himself getting defensive. Forcing his voice to remain even, he took a deep breath.

"I don't know. I just...I guess he saw the red dot. I didn't get the chance to ask him. After the doctors got the bullet out, he had a fever...he's been resting ever since."

Steve hesitated. "So now...he's really okay?" Steve asked, voice soft and serious.

"He's going to be." Steve sighed on the other line. "So...how old is he?"

"Fifteen." There was a long pause, and Tony ran a hand over his face. "We've got the best doctors here...Bruce is taking care of him. He's going to be okay." He wasn't sure who he was trying to convince, himself or Steve.

"How long have you...I mean...how long has he been..."

"We met about a year ago." Tony cut him off, assuming that that was where cap had been going with that bumbling question. "Maybe just over..."

"You mean...you knew him before...well..."

"I met him right before the team broke up." Tony threw him a line, too exhausted to feel the betrayal at the moment. Sure, the team had broken up because Captain America and his crazy murder friend had left him for dead in Siberia, but his kid had just been shot so he didn't really have a lot of leftover emotion just then.

"So...are we going to get to meet him?"

"If he wants to, sure." Tony figured they would all meet at some point, and eventually, they would all meet Spider-Man officially too...he wasn't sure how the kid felt about that. He was pretty serious about the whole secret identity thing. Tony didn't blame him.

"How would you feel about us coming to the Compound next week? Or, the Tower. Wherever you're staying."

Tony hesitated for a moment. He wasn't sure...how would Peter feel about that? He'd need to talk to him first. "Think we can table this discussion until next week, Steve?" He asked. "I've got a home
full of Asgardians, a hurt kid, and Loki to deal with at the moment.

"Of course. I just...I wanted to call. We all saw the news and we were all worried. Is Pepper okay? Colonel Rhodes?"

"Yeah, everyone else was fine. The shooter only got Peter."

"I'm sorry, Tony. I'll call back next week and we can talk about a meeting?"

"It's a date, Cap." And with that, he shoved the phone back into his pocket, glancing up when Bruce stepped out of the elevator. His friend joined him on the sofa, arms crossed as he leaned against the arm of the couch. "They saw on the news...Steve said they were worried about Peter." That made sense, he guessed. They didn't know Peter, but the kid had a way of wrapping everyone around his finger. He was a good kid...the best kid. Everyone loved him, and he was sure the team would adore him. But there was that part in the back of his mind that still worried...could he trust them? What if something happened? What if they found out Peter's secret identity, and what if they betrayed him? He thought of Peter in his place...thought about Siberia and his kid laying on the ground while Steve brought a shield down on his chest and felt his heart clench. How was he supposed to trust these people with his kid? Knowing Peter, though, he wasn't sure he'd get the choice.

Heading back down to the lab, he pocketed the flip phone, hoping he could throw it away soon lest someone catch him using the obsolete piece of crap. Bruce was scribbling some notes in an old notebook sitting on the desk in front of him. On the screen in front of him was a long stream of letters and numbers that Tony couldn't make out from across the room. Going back to his own workstation, he stared at the screens in front of him for a moment, scrolling aimlessly through them until Bruce spoke up.

"Do you want to check on him?" The man asked. "Order dinner and watch a movie? He can rest on the couch for a while." Tony agreed instantly, not worried about what Bruce would think of him for it. He trusted Bruce...with himself and with Peter.

"FRIDAY, order some Chinese. Get Peter's favorite, my usual, and, well...get enough for everyone and have some sent to the hotels too." That done, he turned to Bruce who was gathering up his notebook and some supplies.

"I'll check him over...make sure the healing is still working."

"Thank you, Bruce." Tony murmured before they entered the elevator, and together, they headed upstairs. They found Rhody in the kitchen, apparently back from talking to someone or some meeting or something. Tony hadn't been paying a whole lot of attention to anything other than Peter and Pepper. "Hey, Honeybear." Rhody rolled his eyes. "I just ordered Chinese. We're going to get Pete and watch a movie in the living room."

"Perfect. It's my turn to pick the movie, and I'm thinking something classic." He grinned.

"Great. That should put Peter right back to sleep."

Rhodey chuckled but turned serious after just a few seconds. "How is he? Really?"

"He's been sleeping a lot...apparently that's normal. Super-healing and all that." Rhody nodded. "Steve called...apparently they all saw my kid get shot on live TV."

"Are we meeting with them anytime soon?"

"I told him to call back next week."
"Sounds good. Go get your kid." Rhodey patted him on the shoulder, stepping into the living room and sitting carefully on the sofa. "FRIDAY, bring up my classic movies playlist." Rolling his eyes and snorting, Tony led Bruce toward Peter's room. They were nearly there when Thor called for them, and they turned to find him hurrying down the hall toward them.

"What's going on, Point Break?" Tony asked, not liking the concerned look on the Asgardian's face.

"I'm looking for my brother. Have you seen him?"

"Not recently…” Bruce glanced over at Tony.

"He was quite angry with the man who shot Peter...I worry that he will...find that person."

As much as Tony would love to let Loki murder the man who had shot his kid, he knew that he couldn't. He was responsible for Loki, which meant keeping him from killing anyone. "FRIDAY, where is the Wonderful Wizard hiding out?"

"Loki is currently in Peter's room," FRIDAY informed him, and Tony felt his breath catch, heart skipping as he turned and met Bruce's worried gaze.

Tony power-walked (but didn't run) down the hall, brushing past Bruce and Thor and grabbing Peter's doorknob, jerking the door open and then freezing as Bruce and Thor came up behind him. Loki was sitting at Peter's side, his hand on the boy's forehead, barely glancing up them. For once, he wasn't reading a novel. Instead, he sat in a chair beside Peter, fingers resting on Peter's hair, seeming almost relaxed. Calm. Like he hadn't murdered dozens of people.

"Loki?" Thor asked, voice hesitant. It didn't seem like Loki was hurting his kid, and Peter had saved his life, making Tony less inclined to believe that Loki would want to harm him. Still, it was disconcerting to see the green glow around his hand and Peter's face. The kid didn't stir when Thor spoke, making Tony's heart twinge in worry. Peter was a light sleeper...usually Thor's booming voice, even when the Asgardian was making an attempt to speak softly, would have the kid jerking upright. Still, Tony just stood there, desperately fighting to give Loki the benefit of the doubt. Peter cared enough about him to save his life. "What are you doing?"

"The child is ill and should have been sleeping. I was helping him sleep." Loki told them, and Thor took a step into the room, followed by Bruce who took Peter's wrist in his hand, checking his pulse, then rested a hand on his forehead, nodding to Loki who moved out of his way.

"He seems a lot cooler. He's breathing fine...just seems to be asleep." Tony entered the room fully and just looked at the boy for a second. This was his son. His son who had taken a bullet for Loki and who was currently sound asleep with the green magic surrounding them both. He loved this kid so much, and he even though he was almost sure he was safe here with Loki, especially considering they were all in the room with him, he couldn't help the twinge of worry. The first time Loki had put Peter to sleep, he'd been terrified. Now he was just a little worried.

"Can you wake him? He needs to eat." He asked Loki, fighting to keep his voice calm. Peter had taken a bullet for him...Peter liked him. Which meant, Tony guessed, that he should at least give the guy a chance. Loki removed the hand and Tony sat beside Peter on the bed, watching the green mist fade. "Hey, Petey. Wake up." He murmured, taking his hand. The others kept quiet, stepping away from Peter's bed and giving them some room. "Peter?" The boy muttered something unintelligible, sighing softly as he turned his head. The hand Tony held squeezed a little, then released. "Pete?"

"Dad?" Everyone in the room seemed to freeze but Tony barely noticed. Peter had a slight green tint to his eyes, but they were mostly brown as he blinked up at him. Of course, all Tony could hear was
the boy calling him 'dad.' His heart swelled, warmth filling his whole body. Peter had called him 'dad.' Sure, he was exhausted and barely aware of what he was saying...the kid still called him 'Mr. Stark' for crying out loud, even as the list of adults he called by their first name seemed to be growing. But in some way, in some part of his brain, Peter thought of him as his parent, even if the kid wouldn't admit it out loud while coherent. He caught Bruce smiling a little down at his feet, but Tony ignored everyone else, just squeezing Peter's hand.

"Hey, bud. You feeling okay?" He asked, almost surprised at how soft his own voice was.

"Magic." He murmured, eyes closing once more. "It's so cool."

"He should wake up on his own in a few minutes," Loki told him simply, standing from the boy's bedside. He hesitated for a moment, then turned to Tony. "He saved my life, Stark. I would not harm him." The crazy thing was, Tony believed him. "Brother. Banner." He nodded to the other two men, strolling out of the door and out of sight.

The other two followed suit, leaving Tony alone with his kid, and for a few minutes, he waited as the boy woke, twitching and mumbling until, finally, his eyes opened once more, meeting Tony's eyes with light brown eyes. "Mr. Stark?" He asked, rubbing a fist over his eyes which made him look like a toddler and made Tony's lips twitch into a smile.

"Hey, kiddo." He let the boy's hand go, ruffling his hair and pushing some of it out of his eyes. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm okay…" He blinked a few times, then looked around, seeming to remember where he was. "Where's Loki?"

Loki? Tony wondered what had happened to the 'Mr.' before moving on, then wondered when he'd have the courage to just tell the kid to call him Tony. "He just left." He told Peter.

"He put me to sleep with magic again, Mr. Stark!" The boy sat up, pushing himself up so that he was leaning against the headboard. He still looked tired, but he was sitting up and talking and Tony couldn't deny the relief. "He put his hand on my head and then everything was green and then I was so tired and it was all because he was using magic! Isn't that cool!"

"Yeah, kiddo. That's pretty cool." Tony chuckled.

"You think he could teach me magic?" Could Loki teach Peter how to use magic? Maybe. Would Tony ever allow this already self-sacrificing, danger-prone child to learn magic in addition to the powers he already had? No. Never. At least, not until he was eighteen. Or twenty. Maybe thirty.

"I don't know, Pete. You've already got spider powers. You really need more?" Peter hesitated, obviously about to say yes, of course he did, but seemed to think better of it. Tony moved on, hoping Peter would forget about the whole magic thing "Did you get any homework done?"

"Yeah, a lot of it." He glanced over at his phone which lay on the nightstand. "I was texting Ned too." He admitted.

"Good. How is the guy in the chair?" Tony asked, just glad Peter was keeping in contact with his friend.

"He's okay...he was pretty worried. I guess he saw everything on TV." Tony thought back to the other Avengers and wondered if he should tell Peter that they'd been pretty worried about him too.

"I'll bet." He told him, deciding to hold off on discussing the Avengers. Peter looked pretty tired
despite his magic-induced nap. He doubted the kid was up for a discussion about the other half of the Avengers, his secret identity, and his status as Tony's son. "How about some food? I ordered Chinese. You want to come into the living room and have some? It's Rhodey's turn to pick the movie...I think we're watching some ridiculous old black and white movie, but at least you'll get out of this room." Peter grinned, nodding.

"Yeah, sounds good." Tony held out a hand, helping Peter to his feet, and together they headed to the living room where Tony eased the kid down onto the sofa beside Rhodey, then sat on his other side, draping an arm over the back of the sofa. It only took a moment for Peter to lean into his side, head resting on his shoulder. Tony squeezed him to his side, rubbing his arm as they waited for the Chinese food and Rhodey continued to scroll through his playlist of black and white movies.

Just as Tony had predicted, Peter fell asleep halfway through the movie, snoring softly into his shoulder, and Tony kept a hand on his back, rubbing circles over his shirt and trying not to move. The kid had finished all of his sweet and sour chicken and a container of rice, plus a Gatorade in some strange not-flavor, so Tony wasn't too worried. Neither was Bruce, who took his pulse and temperature again, assuring Tony that the kid was healing nicely and that Tony didn't need to worry. He slept through the rest of the movie, and Tony ignored Rhodey's soft smile. When the movie was over, Thor, who had decided to join them, stood, resting a gentle hand on Peter's hair before leaving for his own room. Bruce left as well, assuring Tony that FRIDAY would let him know if anything changed with Peter.

"Kid's lucky he's got super-healing."

"Yeah." Tony moved his hand from his back to the boy's hair, running his fingers through the curls as the kid sighed, curling up closer to him, all but nuzzling his face into Tony's arm.

"Speaking of super-things..." Rhodey trailed off, using the remote to turn off the TV. "Have you guys talked about that thing he does where he wears a onesie and helps old ladies cross the street?" Tony chuckled, pulling the boy a little closer.

"Not yet. There hasn't really been a chance. He hasn't brought it up."

"Are you going to let him?" Tony had thought about that...he'd thought about it a lot. Even when he'd first met the kid and taken him to Germany, he'd felt a little guilty about enabling a fourteen-year-old superhero. Still, the kid was good at what he did, and Tony knew that he loved it. So he wasn't going to stop him...but he'd certainly have to have some ground rules. Curfews. Tracking devices. Boundaries.

"Yeah. I made him the suit...can't exactly tell him to stop now, can I?"

"He's a great kid. And he's going to be a great superhero when he grows up." Tony had to agree, even though the kid already was a great superhero. "You gonna carry him to bed or you want some help?"

"What, are you going to carry him?" Tony asked with a chuckle.

"Nah. I was going to call Thor back in here." Tony shook his head, grinning.

"I've got him. But thanks." Rhodey headed off to his room, and Tony carefully disengaged himself from the little spider. "Alright, buddy. Time to get you back in bed." Peter muttered something, nuzzling closer to Tony, and he ran his fingers through the boy's curls, carefully working out the snag that caught his hand. "Pete? Come on, you're pretty heavy. You really going to make an old man carry you?"
"You're...not old," Peter mumbled, gripping Tony's shirt, and Tony laughed, slipping an arm under Peter's legs and struggling to stand with the boy's added weight.

"And you're heavier than you look, you know that?"

"Mhm. What time?" The boy asked, not quite awake, curling himself around Tony like a baby koala.

"It's about ten, which means bedtime for little spiders."

"M'not tired."

"Yeah." Tony chuckled. "I can tell." Stooping down, he lay Peter down on his bed, then sighed when the kid didn't let him go. "Pete? You wanna let go?"

"No." He sighed, sitting down on the bed and trying to pry Peter's fingers off of him, but the boy's super-strength put a halt to that.

"You know, I'd like to go to bed too." Peter hummed, pulling him closer, and Tony shook his head, grabbing the blanket from the foot of the bed, and lay his head down on the pillow. "Alright. You win, Spider-Kid." The boy didn't respond, just curled up against his side, head on Tony's chest, and Tony found that it wasn't hard at all to fall asleep with his kid curled up beside him.
Tony

Peter was laying on someone...the person was warm and comfortable, and a hand ran through his hair almost lazily, the fingers gentle against his scalp. He couldn't remember how he'd gotten there...why was he sleeping on someone? How had he gotten in bed? The last thing he remembered was sitting with Mr. Stark and Rhodey, maybe Thor...they had been eating Chinese food. Watching a movie. And then...Peter had gone to bed? His brain felt like mush, and he brought a tired fist up to rub his eyes.

"Pete?" He yawned, surprised to realize that he felt more awake than he had in a while. He'd been shot...he remembered that much. Then he'd been sick. He moved his arm a little, realizing that it didn't hurt much anymore. "You with me, kiddo?"

"Mhm."

"You sure?" It was Mr. Stark...of course, it was Mr. Stark. Peter knew he wouldn't have fallen asleep on anyone else. The man sounded like he was smiling, and Peter realized that with his other hand he was clutching the man's shirt, holding him in place. Had he forced Mr. Stark to spend the night in his room because he wouldn't let go? Letting go immediately, he stared wide-eyed at the man.

"Mr. Stark?"

"Hey, kiddo."

"I...I'm sorry...I didn't mean to…" He started to push himself up but the man just rolled his eyes and ruffled Peter's hair.

"Don't worry about it, kiddo. How are you feeling?"

Peter hesitated, staring at Mr. Stark for a moment to see if he was serious, then shrugged. "Um...I'm okay. My arm feels better. Doesn't really hurt anymore."

"Good." Mr. Stark scooted himself up and Peter stood up, yawning again and stretching, freezing when Mr. Stark pressed the back of his hand against his forehead. "You don't feel hot...Bruce will take a look at you after breakfast."

"Did...did I got to bed?" He asked, rubbing his eyes. "I thought we were watching a movie."

"We were...you made it through about half of the movie and then we lost you."

"Wait...so...you carried me to bed?"

"Yep." Mr. Stark popped the 'p' and grinned as Peter felt his face heat up. "You wouldn't let me go so I had to sleep in here," He chuckled when Peter put a hand over his face. "You're pretty strong, you know? Almost ripped my shirt…"

"I'm so sorry…" Mr. Stark laughed, squeezing Peter's knee.

"Don't worry about it, kid. Why don't you take a shower, get dressed, and we'll have breakfast. Then Bruce is going to take a look at you. Tomorrow is the day, so the Asgardians are getting ready to leave, and King T'Challa should be here early…I've got a video call with him sometime today, but
otherwise my schedule is wide open today." He hesitated. "We might take a trip to the Tower...start picking out some stuff for your room there. Pepper and I need to give some final approval to some of the furniture and paint colors. You can bring some homework to work on if you want. Then I thought we'd go down to the lab...take a look at your suit." Peter frowned at that, kind of surprised. Mr. Stark hadn't really said anything about his suit in a while...or about Spiderman.

Sure, he'd thought about it. Somewhat...before getting shot, anyway. For the last couple of days, his brain hadn't really been working. If they were going to live in the tower, he'd be close enough to Queens to do his patrols. It wasn't like he was afraid...he'd be glad to get back to patrolling. But...some part of him felt strange at the thought. He'd be going back to normal. Moving on. The last time he'd gone on patrols in his suit had been the day...that day. The last one he'd had with May. But he didn't want to think about that, he blinked the thought away, focusing instead on following his guardian's instructions.

After a shower, he met Mr. Stark, Pepper, and Doctor Banner in the kitchen where they were setting the table and putting plates of food at every spot. Pepper sat at the head of the table with Mr. Stark on her right, Rhodey on the left, and then Peter and Doctor Banner, then Loki and Thor joined them as soon as they'd sat down. They all ate together, everyone stealing worried glances at Peter who tried to focus on his food, not on the stares he was getting. Pepper asked if he was okay, and after he'd assured her that he was, she turned to Tony and the two began discussing the meeting with the Wakandan later.

Loki, in particular, was staring at him from across the table, narrow, analyzing eyes on him and never really letting up. When he finally glanced up at the Asgardian, a slight questioning smile on his lips, the man sighed, going back to his breakfast in silence. Thor, too, was watching him kind of closely, but he didn't know what they wanted...what he was supposed to say. He'd saved Loki's life, sure, but he would have saved anyone. And yeah, he did like Loki, but he didn't want the two to think they owed him anything. He had had the power to save Loki, and so he'd had the responsibility to do it.

When they all finished eating, Mr. Stark and Doctor Banner went with him down to the Medbay where Doctor Banner had him sit on a table and take off his shirt so that he could take a look at his arm and make sure everything was healing okay. The hole in his shoulder was pretty much healed, just leaving a small scar that looked like it would probably fade, and after checking his temperature to make sure the fever was gone and having him move his arm around, the man gave him the all clear.

"That healing factor is pretty impressive, Peter." The doctor told him with a smile. "I'm going to be looking into painkillers that will work on your metabolism. There are some sedatives that have worked on you in the past, and the antibiotics worked pretty well. I'd like to take a sample of your blood if that's okay."

"Oh, sure thing, Doctor Banner." Peter held out his arm eagerly, making him chuckle.

"You can just call me Bruce, Peter."

Peter bit back a sigh. It was kind of weird to have so many adults tell him to just call them by their first name...especially the Avengers! But he didn't want them to be upset with them, and he figured it was more polite to call them whatever they preferred. "Oh...um...okay Doctor Bruce." Mr. Stark snorted a little.

"Just Bruce, Peter."

"Right. Sorry." He smiled weakly at the man who tossed him his shirt, letting Doctor Banner...Bruce, take his arm and stick a needle carefully in the crook of his elbow. He flinched a little then...
looked away, not wanting to watch his blood go up a tube and into a little vial.

"So…a healing factor and super strength…that's pretty cool, Peter." Bruce made conversation as he sat on a stool in front of him, Mr. Stark standing beside the table. "Does anyone else know?"

"Just Rhodey and Pepper. And Mr. Stark." He nodded thoughtfully, pressing a cotton ball to the tiny hole in Peter's arm and pressing an Iron Man Band-Aid over it, making Mr. Stark chuckle and Peter's face heat up.

"Well, you're all set. Let someone know if you start to feel sick, okay? I'm going to start working on some pain killers for you." He patted Peter on the arm, and Pete pulled his shirt over his head, hopping off the table and letting Mr. Stark drape an arm over his shoulders.

"Alright, Pete. You ready to head to the tower?" He nodded. "Good. We'd better get going. I'll take that call with T'Challa on our way, then we can work on getting the tower ready for us to move in next week."

On the way over, in the car with Mr. Stark and Pepper, T'Challa called and he and Mr. Stark had a video call, discussing the logistics of transporting the Asguardians to Wakanda. Peter hadn't thought that the Wakandan king would remember him, but as soon as Mr. Stark answered the call, the king asked about him. "Tony, it is good to hear from you. I saw that your son was injured in the shooting. Is he alright?" The king asked, sounding genuinely worried, and Tony scooted closer to Peter, throwing an arm around his shoulder and pulling him into the frame.

"He's doing a lot better. Wanna say hi, Pete?" He asked, and Peter gave a panicked smile.

"Um…hi….your majesty, um…King T'Challa sir…" The man laughed a little.

"You can call me T'Challa, Peter." The Black Panther told him with a smile. "Are you alright?"

"Yeah, I'm, uh…I'm fine, sir." He stammered.

"That was very brave of you, Peter. Was anyone else harmed?" He asked Mr. Stark.

"No…just Pete." Mr. Stark got a strange look on his face…sad and frustrated, and there was a moment of silence in the car. "He's okay, though. I'm just going to have to keep a closer eye on him." And then they moved on to talking about the Asguardians, and Peter pulled out his phone and started texting Ned, assuring him for what must have been the thirtieth time that he was okay, that he wasn't in danger, and that his shoulder didn't hurt…and that he had just spoken to King T'Challa of Wakanda!

The rest of the day was spent at the tower, Mr. Stark and Pepper approving furniture, talking with movers, and trying to get Peter to choose everything from flooring type to paint colors, and then furniture despite Peter telling them over and over that they didn't have to buy him all of this stuff. They ignored him completely, Pepper holding a tablet where she scrolled through different types of bunk beds. "Do you prefer bunk beds, Peter, or would you rather have a regular bed?"

"Oh…um…whatever's cheaper, Miss… I mean, Pepper." He told her, ignoring the look she shot him. Mr. Stark had been in the other room taking a phone call from someone he suspected was Steve Rogers. "It really doesn't matter."

Pepper had stared at him for a minute, then placed the StarkPad on the kitchen counter and had gestured for Peter to take a seat on one of the new barstools, joining him and resting an elbow on the island countertop. "Peter, you do understand that Tony is your guardian, right?"
"Yeah, I mean…" He'd shrugged. "I know."

"And you know that Tony is rich, right?" He'd stared down at his hands.

"Yeah."

"Peter, Tony loves you. You are important to him, and he wants to make sure you have everything you need to be comfortable in your new home. The tower is going to be our home…we're all going to live here as a family." He sat silent, staring down at the countertop. "Can you tell me why this upsets you so much?"

He wouldn't say that it upset him…at least, he didn't want them to know that it upset him. He didn't want them to worry about him. But she was staring at him, eyes gentle and worried, and he realized that they were already worried about him. Every time he told them that it didn't matter, that he didn't have a preference, Mr. Stark and Pepper would exchange looks, and he hated it. Hated that they were worried and hated that it was his fault and how uncomfortable he was having Mr. Stark spend money on him.

"It's just…May didn't have a lot of money." He told her with a shrug, voice soft. "She couldn't buy me a lot of stuff…even before Ben died, we didn't have much extra money and then after the spider bite I had to eat more and I kept losing my backpacks and she had to work so much…" He bit down on his lip. "I'm just…not used to all of this yet." He told her with a shrug.

Pepper reached out, a hand resting on his shoulder, the one where he hadn't been shot. "It was weird for me too, you know? Do you know what my first big Christmas present from Tony after we started dating was?"

"What?" She smiled.

"Take a guess." She leaned in, smiling and glancing over at the door to make sure Mr. Stark hadn't returned.

"Um…a necklace?" He thought, thinking back to what Ben would get May. "A dress? Shoes?"

"All excellent ideas. No. He got me this." She pulled her phone from her purse, scrolling through her pictures and finally holding one up.

His jaw dropped as he stared at a picture of a stuffed rabbit that must have stood at least three stories tall sat in a very nice foyer. "Is that…"

"A giant stuffed rabbit? Yes. Yes, it is." He bit back a laugh and didn't quite succeed.

"Wow."

"Yeah."

"It's kind of cool…" She pushed his shoulder, laughing as she replaced her phone.

"It was destroyed along with the rest of that house." She informed him. "At first, I wasn't comfortable at all with the gifts and the multiple houses and the cars…but it's how he shows people how much he loves them. He grew up with money, and it's never been an object to him. So let him do this…you need furniture for your room anyway…you might as well pick out stuff you like."

"If I do, do you think he'd get me a three-story stuffed rabbit?"
"Hey! That was a great gift!" They both jumped as Mr. Stark stepped into the room, arms crossed. "You loved that rabbit, did you Pep?" She shot Peter a look.

"I loved it, honey." She told him, standing and kissing him on the cheek. "Now, I'm going to go make a call. I need you, boys, to finish ordering everything for Peter's room and the living room and place all of the orders. Also, we're going to need groceries." She pointed a finger at them, lips turning up just a little in a smile. "Got it? When you're done, we'll pick out a sofa and Tony, you can order stuff for the lower floor."

As soon as she was gone, Peter turned to Mr. Stark. "Lower floor?" Mr. Stark hopped up onto a stool and grabbed the StarkPad she had left behind. The man hesitated.

"How much do you know about the tower, Pete?"

"Uh…the Avengers used to live here, and before that, it was where you ran your company?"

"That pretty much sums it up. The bottom floors are for my company, which will still be true…we're working on hiring more workers for the expansion and anyone that wants to transfer back here from our new office in Jersey. Then there are a few floors of labs, Research and Development, then the gym and training room, the pool, then…well, after that was the floor where the Avengers lived, then a common floor with a living room, movie theater, etc…and then, this floor which is mine. And yours. Upstairs is my private lab and a few more labs…Bruce used to work up there too. You have your own space up there too."

"Wow…so…are the Avengers going to move back here?"

"I don't know." Mr. Stark admitted. "Things are still up for discussion. I've been talking to Steve…he said he hopes you're feeling better, by the way." Peter blinked.

"Captain America knows about me?"

"Kid, you stole his shield." Mr. Stark reminded him.

"No, I mean…me! Like, Peter Parker!"

"Well, you got shot on live TV after I announced that I was your guardian. I'd say everyone knows about you." He reached out when Peter blanched. "Hey, don't worry about that. I'm not going to let anything happen to you, Pete."

"I know that…I just…that kind of sucks."

"Yeah…it does." Mr. Stark patted his shoulder. "Alright. You heard Pepper. We need to pick out some furniture. So, I'm assuming you want a bunk bed, right?" Peter stared down at the StarkPad where Mr. Stark had pulled up a few pictures of beds. "So Ned has a place to sleep when he comes over? Or we can just get him a separate bed?"

"No, uh…I like bunk beds." He admitted, reminding himself of what Pepper had said. It wasn't easy, but Mr. Stark wanted him to choose. "I like to sleep up high."

Mr. Stark nodded, seeming to make a mental note, and opened up a page with a dresser, a bunk bed, a nightstand, and a desk. He flipped to another page with the same furniture in a dark wood, then one in black, and then one in white. "Pick a color, any color." Once Peter had picked the dark wood, he closed the cover on the StarkPad. "There, that wasn't so hard, was it?"

Peter grinned. "No, not too bad."
"Good. Okay, I'm going to finish up here. You, finish your homework, and when you're done, we'll head down to the lab."

Once Peter was done with his homework, he looked around the empty kitchen, wondering how he was supposed to find Mr. Stark. "Um…hey, FRIDAY?" He asked, glancing up at the ceiling.

"Hello, Peter." She greeted, voice coming from the ceiling speakers.

"Where's Mr. Stark?"

"Boss is in the lab. Would you like me to get him for you?"

"Uh…no. Can you just lead me to him?"

"Sure thing, Peter."

He found Mr. Stark where FRIDAY had promised, and he knocked on the lab door, making Mr. Stark turn from where he was staring at a holographic screen. "Hey, Pete. All finished with your homework?"

"Yeah. I'm all caught up." Mr. Stark reached out, clapping Peter on the shoulder and pulling him closer. It reminded him of Ben…he wasn't sure why. Mr. Stark had squeezed his shoulder or slung an arm around him so many times now, but it was also something Ben had done a lot of, especially when he'd gotten older and had said he was too old for hugs. What he wouldn't give to have a hug from his uncle now.

His expression must have changed because Mr. Stark pulled him a little closer, squeezing him into an almost hug. "Pete? You alright? Having any trouble with your homework?"

"Oh, uh…no." He shook his head. "It's not hard."

"Are you sure you don't want to skip high school and just go to college?" He asked with a smile, and Peter shook his head.

"Nah. I wouldn't want to leave Ned and MJ." He joined his guardian at the work table, glancing around at the screens.

"Yeah…MJ." Peter paused at Mr. Stark's tone. "I did get to meet her for the first time. Back at the hospital."

"Right…Ned said she yelled at you. Sorry, Mr. Stark." Mr. Stark started to wave him off, then a smile grew on his face.

"Yeah…being yelled at by a teenage girl in a hospital wasn't really something I enjoyed." Peter knew he was getting at something…almost like he was setting some kind of trap, but he didn't know how to avoid it.

"I'm…I'm really sorry. I can talk to her…I'm sure she didn't mean it. She was just upset."

"Yeah…there were witnesses…I wouldn't be surprised if there wasn't a video on Youtube…'local teenager screams at Tony Stark in a hospital waiting room.'" Mr. Stark didn't look angry, but Peter's stomach was still in knots. I'm really sorry, Mr. Stark. I…I can talk to her. She'll probably apologize…and I don't have to bring her over or anything…"

His guardian smiled, crossing his arms and leaning against the worktable. "Well, I guess there is one
way you could make it up to me."

"Oh…um…okay. What can I do?"

"You can call me by my name." Peter blinked, stomach dropping. This was different than all the others. He knew Mr. Stark better than he knew any of the others…had been calling him 'Mr. Stark' since he'd met him. And now the man was his guardian. It wasn't like the man was asking him to call him something like…like 'dad.' And he didn't even want to think about that…didn't want to admit it, but there had been one or two times that he'd started to think of him that way…that he sort of saw Mr. Stark as a father figure. But he'd never called Uncle Ben 'dad.' What did it mean that he'd thought of Mr. Stark that way?

"What?" He asked, not wanting to admit that he knew exactly what he was saying. Mr. Stark paused, the smile dropping for just a second, then he softened.

"My name, Pete."

"Mr. Stark is your name." Peter tried not to show that he was nervous…tried to pretend it didn't mean anything. His guardian watched him for a minute,

"Yeah. It is." Mr. Stark smiled, tapping his hand on the worktable. "Alright, kiddo. Never mind. Let's get the suit out. FRIDAY." Heart sinking, Peter followed him. He'd disappointed him. Mr. Stark had barely asked anything of him…all he'd asked was for him to not apologize for everything, and for him to call him 'Tony,' something everyone else already did. He already called pretty much every other adult by their first name. Why should he let his own hang-ups stop him from doing practically the only thing Mr. Stark…Tony had ever asked of him?

He knew that Mr. Stark had been trying really hard to make sure he was comfortable. He'd been great when Peter had been practically non-functioning after his aunt. He'd sat with Peter almost every night after he'd had nightmares. He'd understood that Peter was uncomfortable picking out furniture and had made it as easy as possible. All he wanted was for Peter to call him by his first name.

"Alright, so I've been looking at improvements to your old suit. I think we could increase the capacity for web-fluid so you don't have to change canisters so often. Also, I want to look at you in action in the suit…see if we can improve how well you're able to stick to walls when it's raining." He gestured for one of the screens to come closer, typing up something and then a schematic of his suit appeared. "What do you think?" He asked, touching something, and enlarged webshooters appeared on the design.

"I think it looks great…Tony." The man beside him stiffened a little and Peter almost lost his nerve, refusing to meet his guardian's eyes. But after a minute, the man moved on, apparently glad to let the moment pass without acknowledging it.

"Alright. Let's get to work."
The King and the Princess

Peter stood beside Mr. Stark...no...Tony. The man had asked him to call him Tony. Surely he could do that much. He stood beside and slightly behind Tony and Pepper, all three of them in nice outfits...not suits but nice. Business casual. The kind of clothes Peter would wear when he went to church with Ned and his aunt and uncle. Slacks and a dress shirt that probably cost more than anything he'd ever owned before. Mr. Stark had insisted on buying him so many new clothes. So many. So he wore them and picked out rich-people furniture. And he tried not to feel weird about it. It was how Mr. Stark...Tony took care of him. It was how he showed affection. So Peter tried to be okay with it. He tried not to think about May and he tried to be okay with this.

In the background were Thor and Loki, along with Doctor Banner, Rhodey, and Vision. The compound was full. Asgardians waited to meet the people that would take them to Wakanda and Thor waited to speak to T'Challa. Two kings...Peter was going to watch the king of Asgard and the King of Wakanda speak to one another. From very close. And he's spoken to each of them. It seemed insane.

The ship landed, floating gently down to earth, and in the distance more approached. Huge ships that, he assumed, could carry all of these people. There were so many. He hasn't quite realized just how many. They sat at tables and on benches, reading or using tablets or drawing or playing games...Tony had provided plenty of entertainment for them. And food. Food he was apparently also welcome to. Mr. Stark had offered him plates of food at least six times in the last hour, and every time he'd assured him that he wasn't hungry. He was too nervous.

He'd gone swimming that morning. When he'd woken at 4 am, not really from a nightmare but not able to get back to sleep, he'd grabbed swim trunks and a towel and headed down to the pool on the lower level and throwing himself into the chilly water. FRIDAY asked if he wanted to adjust the temperature but he'd waved her off. He'd wanted to be cold. Cold would keep him awake. So he swam, back and forth until he lost himself in it. Until all he could feel were his arms pulling himself forward and feet kicking through the water.

It hadn't been a nightmare, but it had been about May. May touching the top of his head, smiling down at him...teaching him to tie a tie. May. May who had loved him. Who hadn't even been related to him. And once more he found himself with people that chose to keep him despite not being related to him. But no matter how much he appreciated Mr. Stark, he missed May. He missed her in his chest and in his soul and in every part of him. He missed waking up in his apartment, something he hadn't known to appreciate at the time. Missed her awful cooking and going out to dinner with her when her cooking inevitably failed and missed the way he would sigh, exasperated, but always loving. He missed how much she loved him. Surely she still loved him. Death couldn't touch love.

He'd thought about going back into that room to go through May's stuff but had quickly vetoed that in favor of swimming. He didn't want to face it. Not yet. He wanted to forget. No...not forgot. He didn't want to forget May, ever, but if he didn't think about her, it didn't hurt as much. So he had pushed himself, swimming until 6:30 when he figured Tony would be waking up soon. Then he had pulled himself out of the pool, staggering a little to the locker rooms and taking a hot shower. His muscles had been tired, which wasn't always easy to achieve, and his stomach had been growling. Even before the spider bite, swimming had made him hungry. Still, he had stood under the hot water for a while, letting it warm him back up.
When he'd been dry and had changed back into pajamas, he'd headed upstairs, surprised at how comfortable he'd come to feel in the compound. He had just strolled into the kitchen of the Avengers Compound in his pajamas, hair still kind of wet, and hadn't even hesitated. In some ways, it was comforting. This was kind of his home now. His home was with Mr. Stark. Tony. But in other ways, it made him sad. Not sad like he was going to cry again. Sad, like in his soul where he missed May and Ben.

No one else had been up, so he'd grabbed a bottle of water, then headed, stomach growling, to the freezer, deciding that waffles would do. He had been finishing up when Mr. Stark had emerged from his room, seeming unsurprised to find Peter awake and making breakfast. "Waffles?" He'd offered, pushing over a plate, and then he'd made two more for Pepper. Tony had ruffled his hair, thanking him and taking a seat at the counter, watching him sort of cook. Together, they'd just been. In silence. Mr. Stark hadn't asked about nightmares and Peter hadn't volunteered anything. But after making his own waffles, Peter had sat down. "They're coming today?" He'd confirmed.

"Yep. They should be here before lunch." Peter had stared down at his food for a moment.

"You sure you don't want me to go to Ned's?" He hadn't wanted to be in the way. But Tony had shaken his head, expression turning a little softer. Sadder.

"No, Pete. I don't want you to go anywhere. You aren't in the way." He must have been able to sense Peter's mood, so he hadn't said anything else, and Peter had done the dishes in silence, Mr. Stark drying and wiping down the counters. Like a regular person. Like someone used to cleaning up after himself. That was still kind of strange to Peter. Iron Man used paper towels to clean up syrup sometimes.

After they'd cleaned up the kitchen, Mr. Stark had sent Peter to change, and then they had waited. And waited. They'd watched TV and Mr. Stark had chatted with Thor and Rhodey and then Doctor Banner had come to the living room followed by Pepper who'd slept in...and then the ship had arrived.

It was probably a jet or something, but it looked like a spaceship. Like something out of Star Trek. And the man that emerged was tall, dressed all in black with short-cropped hair. At his side and following were several women with shaved heads and long red robes, spears in hand. Peter fought the urge to take a step back as they approached.

Thor stepped forward, joining Tony, while Loki stepped up beside Peter, and together they all watched. King T'Challa nodded to Tony, reaching out a hand that his guardian shook. "Hello, Tony." He greeted, then turned to Pepper, taking her hand as well.

"Welcome, King T'Challa." She shook his hand. "Thank you for coming."

"Of course. And Thor." The Asgardian smiled, the two of them shaking hands.

"I cannot thank you enough on behalf of my people."

"Thanks are unnecessary. We are happy to help." Mr. Stark stepped slightly out of the way to reveal Peter then, and the Black Panther turned to face Peter with a friendly smile. "Ah. And you must be Stark's son. Hello, Peter."

Peter shook the hand held up to him. "Um...yeah. It's nice to meet you, sir." He remembered that the king hadn't wanted him to call him 'your majesty' so hopefully 'sir' was acceptable. He never knew what to call anyone anymore. His aunt and uncle had taught him to use the titles...Mr. and Mrs....sir and ma'am. Now all of the adults in his life dismissed this idea.
"I saw that you were injured...are you feeling alright?" The man asked, staring at him critically.

"Oh...yeah, I'm okay." The king looked skeptical but nodded.

"That is good to hear." The king turned to everyone then. "There is someone else that I would like you to meet." He seemed a bit exasperated as he gestured back to the ship, and a girl that looked about Peter's age, maybe a little older, emerged. She was tall and slim with long braids that she had half pulled back in a tie, and she was grinning, practically skipping up to his surprised guardian. "This is my sister, Shuri, princess of Wakanda. Shuri, this…"

"Yes yes, I know." She reached out, grasping Mr. Stark's hand from his side, obviously surprising him. "Tony Stark. I have been dying to show you my tech."

"Oh...of course." He shook her hand, glancing over at the king of Wakanda who seemed more amused and exasperated by the moment.

"Shuri is in charge of all technological development in Wakanda." T'Challa smiled a little.

"Your Iron Man suit is excellent, of course, considering what you've had to work with, but I think we can make it even better. Have you ever thought about utilizing nanotechnology?" Mr. Stark just blinked for a moment.

"Nanotechnology?" He repeated as if he wasn't quite sure what she meant.

"Of course! Also, you must introduce me to the Spiderman! I've watched all his videos on YouTube, and the suit you made him is great, but I think if we work together we can make it even better. I have a prototype and…"

"Alright, Shuri. I apologize...she gets carried away sometimes." The king stepped forward.

"No...not at all." If anything, Tony looked happy to have someone else to talk science with. Peter crushed that tiny part of him that wanted to be jealous. Mr. Stark was his guardian. They were both superheroes. He didn't have to worry about that. "I'll have to show you my lab, Princess. And you can show me what you have on nanotechnology. Pete can help too...he helps me work on the suits all the time."

The girl grinned, then moved back to let her brother speak once more. "We have twelve ships ready to carry some of the Asgardians to Wakanda. The journey takes several hours, so it may take all day to transport everyone...we should get started.

"Alright. Pete, why don't you go ahead and take Shuri inside and give her a tour? I'll be down in a while...we'll need to do some coordinating first."

"Oh...sure." Peter nodded, gesturing for Shuri to follow, and he led her away from the group and back toward the compound. Behind them, the adults all formed a tight huddle, obviously working out the logistics of moving so many people. Peter was kind of glad he didn't have to worry about it, though he would have been happy to help, had Mr. Stark asked. "I'm Peter." He introduced himself, shaking her hand as they walked. She grinned.

"You are Tony Stark's son?"

"Uh...kind of." She frowned, cocking her head. "He's my guardian."

"Ah. How long have you lived with him?"
Peter shrugged. "Not too long." He muttered.

"How old are you?" She wondered.

"Fifteen." He hesitated. "You?"

"Seventeen." She informed him with a smile. "Have you met Spider-Man?"

"I, uh...not...not really." He stared down at the floor, feeling her skeptical eyes on him as they entered the lobby of the compound. "So, uh...this is the lobby. And down on this level are mostly conference rooms and stuff." She nodded, waiting patiently. Then he took her into the elevator where FRIDAY greeted them.

"Hello, Peter."

"Hey, FRIDAY. Shuri, this is FRIDAY. She's Mr. Stark...uh...Tony's AI. FRI, this is Shuri." The elevator doors opened to the main living area and Shuri grinned up at the ceiling.

"An AI? Is it integrated into the whole building?"

"Yeah, here and the Tower. And Tony's armor."

"It is nice to meet you Shuri." The AI greeted.

"You too." Shuri smiled around at the room, just taking it in. Peter guessed it was nice. At least, he'd always thought so. Floor to ceiling windows, a state of the art kitchen, a huge TV...it was all light and open and fancy.

"So, this is the living room and the kitchen. Do you want something to drink?"

She shrugged. "Sure." He opened the refrigerator and she picked out a Gatorade. "Thank you." Taking a drink, she continued to stare. "So." She capped her drink. "You were shot a few days ago."

Surprised that she was bringing it up, he took a second to answer, not sure what he should say. "Yeah." He finally told her. He couldn't exactly lie about it...it had happened on live TV.

"To save Loki's life." She continued, and he nodded. "Do you know him well?" Peter shrugged.

"Kind of. We've talked a few times."

"Doesn't it hurt?"

"Kind of. Not much anymore." She hummed like she was solving a puzzle, but didn't deign to share what kind. "Anyway, our rooms are down there." He pointed down the hall. "The labs are downstairs and the training rooms are all together on another floor."

She seemed to be waiting for him to keep the tour going so he did, leading her to the pool, then the training rooms where she walked around for a moment, then to the labs. "We shouldn't touch anything until Mr. Stark comes back." He warned as she walked around, seeming to take note of everything.

"This is more advanced than I thought it would be. Is this the best lab in your country, do you think?"

"Uh...yeah. I think Tony's lab is probably the best there is."
"You switch back and forth a lot. Which should I call him?" She wondered.

"Huh?"

"Which does he prefer? Mr. Stark or Tony?"

"Oh...uh...Tony, I think." She nodded but didn't say anything else about it. Didn't question why he sometimes forgot to call his guardian by his first name. "So. You're a princess?" She smiled, meeting his eyes and crossing her arms.

"Yes, but don't worry colonizer. There's no need to bow." He gave a surprised laugh. "We don't really do that." She spun in place, taking the room in.

"Do you have your own lab?" Peter wondered. He'd heard of the famous Wakanda tech, of course. Ever since they'd come forward...showed the world what they truly were, he'd been fascinated. And here she was, a girl about his own age, who knew all about it.

"Oh yes." She grinned mix. "I make vibranium weapons and clothing...everything in Wakanda contains it."

"So your lab is better?" She shrugged.

"I have better materials to work with. If Tony Stark can build all of this with inferior tech, then I can't wait to see what he can do with nanotechnology...and maybe vibranium. I think my brother might be convinced to share." He hesitated but finally asked.

"Can you show me? The nanotech?" She grinned.

"Oh, colonizer...I thought you'd never ask." And then she was grabbing one of his notebooks that he'd left out, him handing her a pencil, and that was how the two of them spent the next two hours. It was incredible...she was incredible. Smart and nice and...smart. Really smart. Maybe even smarter than Mr. Stark, although he'd never tell him that. And for those hours, he barely thought of his aunt. Barely remembered her giving him his first chemistry set and barely remembered her helping him with his first science fair project. She'd never understood but she'd always encouraged him. Told him how smart he was. She would have been so impressed with Shuri.

As they worked, Shuri kept the conversation going, drawing plans and explaining as she went. At one point, though, she glanced over at him and put the pencil down. "What is he like? As a guardian?" She wondered. He swallowed, shrugging and feeling like he was back in front of the social working.

"He's fine. Nice. I mean...he's great."

"He seems like a good man." She agreed. "Smart. Good at what he does. That doesn't always make a man a good father, though." Uncomfortable with that line of questioning, he'd asked another question about the nanotech and she'd dropped easily back into that conversation. Soon, she had him relaxing again, back in his familiar, safe place of science. Mr. Stark was a good father. Tony was a good father. But he was afraid to think that...to admit it. It felt like a betrayal in so many ways. It was something he was more comfortable pushing down, just like his thoughts of May.

Mr. Stark found them in the lab later, both of them laughing, each with a pencil in hand as they worked. "Wait...the whole thing comes out of the necklace! So he can wear it anywhere?" Peter asked, incredulous as he looked over the design.

"Exactly! For the Iron Man armor, it could be a necklace or a housing unit where his arc reactor was..."
It wouldn't need to be permanently attached. See?" She pointed to another drawing. "And for Spider-Man, since he keeps his identity a secret..." She turned the page, sketching out two thin bracelets. "It could be bracelets or a necklace...anything, really, as long as it can be worn."

"Wow...I leave you kids alone for two hours." Tony chuckled, and Peter turned to grin at him, ignoring that twinge in his heart...he'd missed him. Started to feel like seeking him out...like he needed him. It was scary. He pushed that thought down.

"This is so cool, Mr. Stark! Look!" He cried, not noticing his verbal slip up. Tony didn't correct him, just moved over to take a look at their work. On the page was a design for a Spider-Man suit...using nanotechnology.

"Of course, you would be in charge of all the actual design aspects," Shuri told him. "You actually know him, after all." She trailed off and Tony chuckled, most of his brain obviously devoted to the new technology.

"I'll ask if he wants to meet you." He promised, eyes glued to the paper. "He takes the whole 'secret' part of his secret identity pretty seriously." Peter dropped his eyes to the floor.

"And if I swear never to tell anyone, not even my brother?" Tony glanced up at her. "I want to see how he does it...actually sticks to walls. And I want the formula for his webs."

"Why?" Peter wondered. She turned to him. "Why do you want his web formula?"

"I think they could have some applications in the medical field, especially during battle. Spiderwebs have been used to close wounds for centuries. If we could find a way to make synthetic webs to close wounds in an emergency, I think they could save a lot of people. We have people out in the field around the world...working in third world countries and trying to save lives. I think his spiderwebs could help."

"I'll talk to him," Tony promised, lowering the paper. "Spider-Man is one of the best superheroes I know. If anyone would want to help save lives, he would." She nodded, and Peter stared at his feet once more, cheeks hot. Shuri noticed, eyes raking over him as if, once more, she was solving a puzzle. She was so smart...and he realized he wasn't doing such a good job of acting innocent. She was going to figure it out.

They worked in the labs for another couple of hours, talking over designs and different uses for this new technology until Pepper called them up to eat, and outside the remaining Asgardians waited for their ride to their new home, eating the food Pepper had ordered them. It was a late lunch of Chinese food, and Peter was famished. He managed to eat three full containers of orange chicken, plus some of those eggrolls that Tony knew he loved, but no one commented. Instead, both Shuri and Mr. Stark seemed eager to get back down to the lab. It felt normal. Like May wasn't dead. Like he didn't have a hole in his chest that he just kept ignoring.

Shuri and King T'Challa stayed all day, Peter and Tony working in the lab with Shuri until the king practically had to drag her away. Throughout it all, Peter was deep in thought, trying to figure her out as she explained the finer points of nanotechnology to her guardian. Finally, though, it was time for them to go...something about a promise to take her to Disney, but as Mr. Stark and T'Challa were saying their goodbyes, Peter reached out, handing her a piece of paper. It wasn't a decision he'd thought much about. More of an impulse. She was smart...it wasn't like this was a hard secret for her to figure out considering how smart she was. She stared down at the paper for a moment, then met his eyes.

"So I was right?" She asked with a little smile. He sighed, lowering his voice and glancing at the
adults on the other side of the room.

"How did you know?"

"Enhanced healing. An instinct to step in front of a bullet to save others. You looked worried when I brought it up, and you were embarrassed when Tony praised him..." She trailed off. "And of course, you just confirmed it." She held up the paper. "Who came up with this"

"I did."

"That's impressive. You'll have to come to Wakanda sometime." She glanced over at her brother. "How do you stick to walls?" The girl asked in a rush as if she needed to know right that second. He smiled. It was almost a relief, explaining this to another person.

"I was bitten by a radioactive spider that changed my DNA so my hands are sticky, even through the gloves of the suit. Plus I have super strength." She nodded, obviously filing all of this away even as some part of him wondered why he was telling her all this. But for some reason, he thought he could trust her. No...he knew he could trust her. She was smart and she was good, and he trusted her.

"It was good to meet you, Peter. You really do need to come to Wakanda. Soon. We can work together...you can show me what you can do and I'll show you what I can do."

"Sounds good." He smiled, and she reached out, squeezing his hand.

"Your secret is safe with me Peter. I promise." And even though he'd just met her that day, he believed her.

Mr. Stark approached him when they were gone, dropping onto a stool beside him. "So...that princess is something else, huh?" Peter gave a half laugh.

"Yeah." The man stared down at the table for a moment, then turned to Peter.

"What did you give her? On the paper?"

"The formula for my web fluid," Peter answered, figuring there was no reason to keep that a secret. His guardian furrowed his eyebrows.

"Yeah? How does she think you know about it?"

"She'd already guessed." He admitted. Tony's eyes widened. "She won't tell."

Tony draped an arm around Peter's shoulders, squeezing him to his side. "I agree...I don't think she would tell anyone. But you didn't have to tell her, you know that right? If you want to keep Spider-Man a secret, I'll make sure you can. Okay?" Peter yawned, tired from getting up at 4 in the morning and then spending most of the day playing host and working in the lab. Gently, Tony pulled him to lean his head on the man's shoulder. "Okay?" He asked again. Peter nodded.

"Okay."

"Alright, Spider-kid. The Asgardians are all in Wakanda, minus Thor and Loki...they're going to stick around for a while. You want to go out and get some dinner? Pepper had to go back to the Tower for a meeting."

"Sure." Tony stood, reaching out a hand and pulling Peter to his feet, and Peter yawned, rubbing his eyes. "Shuri asked if I could come to Wakanda sometime." He informed his guardian hesitantly. "I
mean...if it was okay...she said she wanted to see what I can do, and she might be able to help make pain medicine that works in me, so…"

"Sounds like a good idea. With her and Bruce working together, I bet they come up with a solution in no time." Arm still around Peter's shoulders, he led the boy out to the garage where he kept his cars. Picking one at random, he unlocked the door and the two climbed in.

"I don't doubt that. I think she's the smartest person I've ever met." It took Peter a moment to realize what he'd just said, but when he did, he reddened, looking over at Tony in a panic. "I mean…" Tony waved a hand, chuckling and reversing out of the parking spot.

"Nope, I think you've got it right, kid. She's the smartest person I've ever met too."
May was sitting with him. No. He was sitting with her. The two of them were in their living room in the apartment, his head resting against the back of the sofa, the old TV on. They were watching HGTV, him with unfinished homework on his lap. He needed to do his homework. It was due soon. But May had an arm around him, fingers trailing up and down his arm. "How was school, baby?" She asked, not looking up from the TV.

"It was fine." If he thought about it, he couldn't remember his day at school. Had he even been to school in a while? He couldn't remember. Ned...something about Ned. Maybe Ned hadn't been in school. Either way, he was sure school had been fine, so that's what he told her. No need to make her worry.

"How's the internship?" He frowned at that. Didn't May know that he was Spiderman? Well...he did have an internship. Sort of. He went to Mr. Stark's place and worked with him in the lab sometimes. Every other week or...something. Right? Every week? But it felt like he'd been there more. Hadn't he just seen Mr. Stark? They'd gone out to dinner, right? And...Shur! He'd met the princess of Wakanda! And she'd been so cool! "I met a princess." He told May, smiling up at her, and she gave him a sad smile, finally turning away from the TV.

"That's nice, baby." His smile fell. He had thought she would be more excited. She was always excited for him. He tried again.

"She's so cool! I think she might even be smarter than Mr. Stark. And he agreed!" She just nodded. "May? What's wrong?" He asked, shifting on the sofa to face her.

"I just don't understand." She told him quietly, withdrawing the arm around him.

"What?" He looked around the living room...had they turned the TV off.

"I don't understand how you could forget me so fast, baby." His jaw dropped, heart stuttering. "I just...you weren't even related to me by blood. And I took you in. Then you killed Ben…" He couldn't breathe. No way she would be saying this to him. Never. She would never say that. "And...I still kept you."

"May…” He choked out.

"But I'm gone for, what, Peter? A month? And you're already forgetting me."

"No! I'm not forgetting you!" He wasn't!

"You don't even want to think about me."

"May, I...I'm so sorry. I'm...I'm sorry. I'm just...I miss you! I miss you so much and…" He was gasping for air, tears cold on his cheeks.

"Do you? If you missed me, you wouldn't be forgetting me."
"I'm...I'm not…" He shook his head. "I'm not forgetting you!"

"After all I've done for you..." She stood up and he tried to reach out for her, but his arms wouldn't move. Mouth open, he wheezed, sobbing and he felt like his body was weighed down by laad. She was leaving, heading for the door, car keys in hand, and he knew that if she got into her car to drive away, something bad would happen. Something terrible.

"Please...please..."

"Peter?" He didn't know who was talking to him but May was walking out the door and he couldn't breathe and he needed her to come back. "Buddy?" A hand pressed against his chest, gentle pressure pushing him into the sofa. Was he laying down on the sofa? Why? "Easy, kiddo. Come on." He looked down at the hand...he was alone. Right? May had left him. But he followed the hand to an arm and suddenly he wasn't alone on the sofa. Mr. Stark was beside him, one hand on his chest, the other brushing his hair back and wiping a thumb under his eye. "Wake up." The man urged. His mentor...no...his guardian. Mr. Stark was his guardian. But May...May was gone! "Come on, Pete. Wake up." The man urged.

"I...I didn't." He gasped, desperate to make him understand. "I'm not..."

"Not what, kiddo?"

"May?" He begged.

"Wake up, Peter." Tony urged, shaking him a little. "Come on. Wake up."

May was in her car. She was going to leave but...she was already gone.

He gasped as he woke, body jerking as he fought for breath, and the hand on his chest rubbed gently. "Peter? Take a breath." He was wheezing, and Mr. Stark got an arm around him, easing him upright and scooting closer to him on the bed. He couldn't take a breath, and his head dropped to Mr. Stark's shoulder. Tony. He wanted Peter to call him Tony. "It's a panic attack, bud. It's okay. You're going to be okay."

"Tony, I can't..." He begged, eyes shut tight, and Tony rubbed his back.

"Easy." He took one of Peter's hand, pressing it to his own chest and taking a deep breath. "Feel me breathe, bud." He took a deep breath, and Peter did his best. "Come on. Deep breath in and hold it." He tried, managing it after a few seconds. His heart raced, blood roaring in his ears. "There you go." A hand stroked his hair, working out tangles from his curls. "Now breathe out. Good." His head was resting on Tony's shoulder and the man was rubbing his back and slowly, so so slowly, he could breathe again. Sort of. "There you go. Keep breathing."

A nightmare. It had been a nightmare. Of course it had. Because May was gone. He choked on a sob, bringing a hand up to his face, and Tony pulled him closer, resting his chin on Peter's head. Surely she didn't think he'd forgotten her. Right? He bit down hard on his lip, letting Mr. Stark hold him close, rubbing his back. "It's okay." The man assured him, and Peter tried to nod. "I've got you."

Peter wrapped his arms around the man, clutching the back of his shirt in his hands. "I want May." He sobbed, and Tony held him, shielding him. Iron Man would keep him safe. Right?

"I know, buddy. I'm so sorry. But I'm here, okay? I promise. I'm right here." He started to apologize but remembered rule number 1. He'd already woken the man up several times, and it was the middle of the night and he knew Mr. Stark had to be tired. He was tired too. The man shifted, holding Peter to his side. "I'm here."
Peter didn't want to say the words, but he knew he shouldn't keep the man awake all night because he had nightmares. "You don't have to stay. I'm…"

"Nope. No apologies. Scoot over a little." He murmured, and Peter did, giving the man room to stretch out, still holding him. "I'm here. Just breathe, buddy. Do you want to talk about it?" Peter shook his head. He had no idea how to put that dream into words. He missed her so much...but even thinking about her brought it all back, like poking at a wound that would start bleeding at the slightest provocation. "Okay. Try to go back to sleep."

"What time is it?" He wondered, sniffing and wiping his eyes roughly.

"Almost two." He murmured, running a hand through his hair. Slowly, he let himself relax, too tired to fight it. He just wanted to sleep. Just wanted to sleep without dreaming of his aunt, as terrible as that made him feel. And it didn't take long for his eyes to drift shut, head resting on Mr. Stark's shoulder.

"Tony?" The deep voice eased him out of sleep...time had passed. It was bright outside, light coming through the open curtains. Still, he didn't open his eyes, too comfortable from where he was snuggled up to his guardian. "Is he alright?"

"He's fine, Point Break." He felt his guardian's voice against his ear pressed to the man's chest. "Just a rough night." Point Break. Thor. What was Thor doing in his bedroom?

"He has nightmares often," Thor spoke a little more softly, and Peter wondered if he was really awake.

"Yeah." His guardian told him simply, a hand rubbing up and down his back. That lulled him back to sleep, and the next time he woke, Mr. Stark was gone. Yawning, he stretched out, grabbing his phone and taking a look at the time. 10:40. He hadn't slept that late in a while, but he was still kind of tired. Yawning, he stretched again, then climbed out of bed. Looking around the room, he reached his arms to the sky, toes curling into the thick carpet. He couldn't hear much...Pepper was gone. Back to the city to have a meeting. Weren't they moving back to the tower? He assumed that's what they were going to do that day. So, shooting Ned a quick text, he made his way to the kitchen.

Mr. Stark was making pancakes, scraping irritably at some batter in a pan, jaw tight, eyes narrowed in concentration. Smiling a little to see the man who could create the Iron Man armor frustrated by pancakes, Peter stepped fully into the room. Mr. Stark finally looked up, smiling a little. "Hey, Peter." He pointed to a stool at the counter, and Peter climbed onto the seat, leaning forward and watching him cook. "You hungry?" He nodded. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm okay." He shrugged, not wanting to think about the nightmare. Or May. Or any of it.

"Are we moving to the tower today?" He wondered, hoping Mr. Stark let him change the subject.

"Yep." Tony popped the 'p' with a brief smile, flipping the pancake and swearing under his breath when the pancake broke apart. Peter chuckled softly and Mr. Stark gave him a mock-annoyed look, but he could tell that the man wasn't really upset. "The movers should already have the furniture set up and ready for us, so we'll just be taking the necessary stuff over and getting settled in." He put the three parts of the pancake on a plate, pouring more batter and trying again. Peter grabbed the plate, smothering the slightly black pancake in syrup, and started to dig in.

Thor and Loki joined them for breakfast, and Tony informed Peter that Rhodey and Bruce were already at the Tower settling in. Bruce had wanted to get his lab set up, and Rhodey had a meeting in the area...some military stuff that went over Peter's head. Peter washed the dishes despite Tony
assuring him that he didn't have to, but after a minute of futile arguing, Tony headed to his own room to get dressed, leaving Peter alone in the kitchen until Thor joined him, grabbing a towel and drying the plates. For a moment, Peter was struck dumb. He'd never thought that he'd see Thor, Asgardian god of Thunder, drying dishes...but here he was.

"You...you don't have to do that, Mr. Thor."

"My brother somehow convinced you to drop the honorific from his name. You are welcome to do the same with me." Thor told him with a brief smile, placing a dry plate in one of the cabinets.

"Oh..right. Sorry."

"There is no need to apologize. Formality is an acceptable show of respect, but it is not necessary between friends." Peter froze, staring up at the man in surprise. Friends? Thor thought they were friends? "When I woke this morning, I was passing your room and found that Tony was sitting with you. Are you alright?" The topic change made his head spin but he forced himself to nod.

"Oh...um...yeah. Yeah, I'm...I'm fine."

"Tony mentioned that you often had nightmares." He stared down into the dishwater, pulling out the next plate and scrubbing it clean. "If you ever wish to talk about them, I wanted to let you know that you are welcome to do so." Peter nodded, swallowing hard, and a large hand rested on his shoulder for a moment before Thor went back to drying the plates. "You have a machine to wash the dishes for you. Why do you want to do it by hand?"

Peter shrugged, about to brush him off, but he remembered his nightmare...the accusation that had been thrown at him from May. He knew it wasn't real. May would never say those things to him. But...but he couldn't help it. Couldn't help thinking about it. "My aunt always made me do the dishes after dinner. Or she would if I cooked. That was the deal. One of us cooked, the other did the dishes. She couldn't stand it when there were dirty dishes in the sink all night...she hated waking up to them." Thor didn't say anything, just nodded, but Peter was surprised to find he felt lighter. So he spoke again. "I miss her. All the time."

Thor carefully took the wet plate from his hand, drying it and placing it in the cabinet. "I miss my father." The Asgardian told him. "My mother as well. There were not perfect, but I still feel their loss nearly every day." Peter stared up at him. "It helps to remember them...to talk about them. I have many good memories with them, and I am sure that you have many good memories of your aunt." With that, the dishes were done, and Thor placed the last dry plate in the cabinet. "I should get ready to leave."

"How long are you and Loki going to stay at the tower with us?" He wondered.

"A few weeks. I will need to check on my people, but as long as Loki needs a place to stay, he will probably live in the tower."

"He's welcome to stay, as long as he doesn't murder anyone." They both glanced up when Tony joined them. "You gonna get dressed, kid?" He asked with a smirk.

"Yeah...sorry." Peter hurried past him, heading to his room and turning the corner just in time to hear Thor chuckle a little.

"My brother has sworn to behave."

"Yeah, he'd better." Mr. Stark murmured, and then Peter was in his room, grabbing all of his stuff that would come with him to the tower. All of his clothes were already packed, so he threw his suit,
laptop, phone, phone charger, and his books into his backpack, hurrying to get dressed in jeans and a t-shirt that had Iron Man on it, giving up on trying to avoid the many, many Iron Man t-shirts that Tony had placed in his closet. When he reached the living room, he tried to ignore his guardian's grin, rolling his eyes.

"I'm out of other shirts."

"I knew you'd run out eventually. I should get you some Thor shirts." He ruffled Peter's hair, making him give a reluctant laugh, jerking away, and then the two of them were heading down to the garage, Tony climbing in the driver's seat of a fancy car and Peter in the passenger's seat. He told Peter that Thor and Loki were riding with Happy, and Peter wondered why. He didn't have to wonder long, though. "So...you want to talk about it, kiddo?"

"Not really." Peter murmured, all too aware of what Tony was talking about.

"Come on, Pete. They're happening nearly every night."

"I know. I'm sorry." He whispered.

"Don't be sorry, Pete." The man reached out, squeezing his knee and smiling just a little when Peter jerked, the man's hand touching a ticklish spot on his leg. "You don't have to be sorry. I don't care to sit up with you...I don't want you to worry about that. But I'm worried about you, kiddo. You aren't getting enough sleep. You're stressed out and tired and I know you miss your aunt. I know this is hard on you, and I know it won't be okay for a while. You can talk to me, though, Pete. It might help." Peter stared down at his legs, part of him wishing he could jump out of the car. But another part of him remembered how nice it had been to talk to Thor about her. Mr. Stark had known her. Maybe...just maybe...it would make that awful nightmare hurt less.

"I dreamed that she was angry with me." He told him, staring out the window at the passing traffic. It was kind of a long drive to the tower...he knew they'd be trapped in that car together for a while.

"Why?" Tony asked softly. Peter didn't look over.

"She said I was forgetting her." The hand on his knee remained, not squeezing but just resting there. Comforting him. Grounding him. "I'm not...I'm not forgetting her. I couldn't."

"I know, Pete."

"I still miss her."

"I know you do. That probably won't go away for a long time." Mr. Stark told him gently.

"I know."

"I'm here if you need to talk, bud. You know that, right?" Peter nodded. "Good. Okay." The man clapped his hands. "You'll be heading back to school tomorrow. Happy can drive you. Do you have all your homework done?" He nodded again, relieved at the change in topic.

"Yeah. I'll just have to take my midterms."

"Are you ready for them?"

"Yeah."

"Good." Tony pulled to a stop at a red light. "The official story is that you were just grazed by the
bullet during the shooting. You can wear a bandage on your arm under your sleeve if anyone happens to look. You have been excused from PE until your doctor says otherwise."

"Who's my doctor?" Peter asked with a small smile.

"That would be Doctor Banner."

"Think Doctor Banner can get me out of PE forever?" Mr. Stark shrugged.

"It's possible. You can ask him. It's not like you need it." He pulled off of the expressway, entering the heavier traffic of the city. "No one knows exactly what happened, and we didn't take you to a hospital, so no one can say anything about our story. If you need to come home, just text me and I'll have Happy pick you up."

"Thanks, Mr. Stark."

"Sure thing, Pete."

"Sorry, Tony." Peter corrected himself, face hot. Mr. Stark...Tony smiled a little, checking over his shoulder before changing lanes.

"The Avengers are going to come by sometime this week," Tony told him after a minute, glancing over at Peter as they came to a rather abrupt stop. Gridlock. Peter certainly hadn't missed the traffic. From the look on Tony's face, he got the idea that he hadn't either.

"Oh...really?"

"Yeah. They wanted to talk. With the Accords abolished…" Tony trailed off, waving a hand.

"Oh." Tony lifted an eyebrow.

"Oh? Don't you have several Captain America t-shirts?" Peter rolled his eyes, and Tony chuckled. "What's up, kid? Not excited to meet the team?"

"I already met them. Sort of." Mr. Stark was silent and Peter sighed. "I just...do you trust them? Really?" Tony sighed.

"I don't know, Pete. I guess we'll have to find out."

"And...and we can just tell them that I'm your kid?" Mr. Stark smiled, reaching out and taking his shoulder as traffic inched forward.

"Sure we can, Pete."

"Because I am?" Peter asked in an almost whisper, and Tony turned with a soft smile, wrapping his arm around his shoulders, pulling him close.

"Yeah, buddy. Because you are."

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so I know this one was fillery. I hope you still liked it. I'm trying to transition to more things happening and I promise you, there will be more Avengers in the next
chapter, as well as Tony's POV of King T'Challa and such. :)
Tony followed Peter into the Penthouse living room, smiling when his kid stared at their living space in wonder, eyes huge as he took it all in. It was live-in ready, with new sofas and a giant new TV on one wall, while the adjacent wall was all windows overlooking the city. Natural light flooded the living room, all done in cream and black with splashes of dark blue, the bookshelves on the far wall covered in science texts and novels. Tony approached the boy, resting a hand on his shoulder. "This is our living space. There's another common room downstairs for anyone else who will live here, like Rhodey, Thor, his crazy brother, etc. Bruce, too. They all have access to this floor most of the time, though. They have a kitchen, bedrooms, all that." Tony waved a hand, almost amused at the rapt attention the boy was paying him. It seemed to be a good day, despite the nightmare the night before.

"The kitchen is through here, all redone and stocked. If you want anything we don't already have, ask FRIDAY to put it on the list." He led Peter through the room to the hallway, moving away from the elevator. "Here is my room." He pushed the bedroom door open, revealing his own custom-made giant bed on a pedestal, sitting area by the windows, huge TV, dresser, and desk with a custom computer. "You and Pepper are the only ones that have access." He smiled at the boy's wide-eyed gaze, squeezing his shoulder and then leading him forward. "Your room is right across the hall. There are only two bedrooms up here...yours and mine. The rest of the team are on the lower levels."

Tony pushed Peter's bedroom door open, gesturing for the kid to go on in. "Keep in mind, if there's anything you don't like, we can change it." Peter placed his backpack on the floor beside the door, stepping hesitantly in the room and looking around, still silent. The bunk bed was over against the wall like Tony knew Peter preferred, and the balcony door and windows were covered by dark blue curtains. A desk on one wall had a charger for Peter's laptop and cellphone, and an empty bookshelf was by the door. A partially ajar door led to a bathroom where a new toothbrush, toothpaste, towels, and everything else Peter needed filled the medicine cabinet. "Well, don't keep me in suspense, Spiderling." Tony urged, surprised to find that he was nervous.

"I...it's bigger than my room at the Compound." He murmured, seeming at a loss for any other words. Tony smiled.

"Yeah, well, we've got more room to work with. There's more..." He hesitated. Peter had had some pretty bad nightmares the night before. The kid looked pretty tired. It wouldn't hurt for the kid to take a nap. "Unless you want to lay down first, or..." He suggested, not really surprised when Peter immediately shook his head.

"No...no, let's go." Tony chuckled when Peter practically bounced in place and turned to lead the boy back into the hallway and through the living room, pointing out another bathroom, an office that Tony assured him he was welcome in as well, a library that had the kid pretty excited, then the two of them stepped into the elevator, going down a floor where the common area for the rest of the team was. "There are bedrooms down both of those hallways." He told Peter as they walked, him pointing out each Avenger's room. It was a similar layout as their floor, except with more bedrooms. Then they went down another floor, moving downward from the penthouse.

"This is the training floor. We have two gyms." He gestured to two glass doors, letting Peter pick the one he wanted to see first. This one was full of machines and mats that could be used for sparring. Free weights sat along one wall on racks, neatly arranged by size. "This is the one we'll use to practice sparring, running, weight-lifting..." He trailed off, smiling as Peter wandered over to the
weights. "Think you can lift it?" He asked, smirking a little as he gestured toward a huge set of 350 lb weights that sat against one wall...the ones that Steve had used most often. 800 pounds was pretty much his max.

Peter smiled a little, bending down and grabbing the weight with one hand, fingers barely able to curl all the way around the bar. Tony shook his head, chuckling when the boy lifted it with no problem, tossing it up and down like Tony would a ball of paper. "I wonder what the max you can lift is..."

Peter shrugged. "I don't know...cars are no problem but I couldn't pull the ferry back together." The boy's eyes went kind of dim at that memory, jaw tightening, and Tony moved over to his side, hand on his upper back. The boy placed the weight carefully back on the floor, lips tight, then he gave a fake looking smile. "So, what's in the other gym?" Tony decided to go with it, wondering if they needed to have a talk about that. Peter had been careless...but Tony hadn't exactly communicated with him...hadn't told the kid that he had called the FBI and that they were going to handle it.

Tony shook that thought off. Maybe later. "Take a look." He invited, and Peter hurried through the other door just as Tony's phone vibrated in his pocket. Pulling it out, he hesitated before following Peter. "King T'Challa." He greeted, holding up a finger to Peter who had turned to ask him something. The kid nodded, walking over to one of the boxing rings, moving past several hanging sandbag bags, giving one a tentative nudge. It swung easily, and Tony wondered absently if the kid could get even stronger than he already was by working out or if it would just get rid of some of his energy.

"Hello, Tony. I was calling to let you know that the Asgardians are settling in well here. We have managed to find homes for most, while a few are staying in hotels. I had a few questions for Thor, but he does not seem to have a phone." Tony snorted.

"Yeah...I'll get him one today." He promised. Peter examined a rack of boxing gloves, then picked up a roll of tape as Tony watched him from the other side of the room. "We're at the Tower, so I can ask him to give you a call as soon as he pops up. He's around here somewhere." When they'd arrived, Tony had taken Peter up to the penthouse immediately, wanting to give him a tour. He'd figured that they could all meet up for lunch later.

"My sister was quite impressed by your son." Tony chuckled, nodding even if T'Challa couldn't see him.

"Yeah? Peter thinks she's the smartest person on the planet. That nanotechnology...that's something else." Peter hadn't been doing too well that day...he'd seemed to be in one of those sad, lonely moods that he couldn't seem to shake, no matter how he'd tried to act normal. But then he'd met Shuri who had effectively managed to distract him as though she'd been able to tell. Of course, they only knew the bare minimum about Peter...that Peter was his kid, which was true enough, and that he'd lost someone recently. That was all they needed to know.

And Shuri had figured out that he was Spiderman? Well, she'd suspected, and Peter had confirmed it. Tony was sure that they could trust her...still, it was kind of strange to him that the boy had just gone ahead and handed over his web formula. Then again, Peter would do just about anything to help people. He wondered why Shuri had suspected Peter...sure she was smart, but still...he supposed she had her own resources, but it kind of worried him. If she had found it out, could other people? He would need to go on Youtube and take a closer look at some of those videos...make sure no one else could link them to Peter.

T'Challa laughed softly on the other end. "She's been working nonstop in her lab for the last few hours...I practically had to force her to go to bed. She's found a new formula to play with..."
"She's resourceful, I'll give her that."

"You will have to bring your son to Wakanda...come for a visit. I'm sure Shuri would be more than willing to share her lab."

"I think Peter would love that." He glanced up to see if Peter was paying attention, and like a puppy, the kid had his head cocked to the side. Tony smirked a little, jerking his head for Peter to join him again, and the boy ambled over obediently. Reaching out an arm, Tony put a hand on his shoulder, squeezing a little. "Think we could trust those two in a lab alone?" T'Challa laughed again.

"I am not sure. We might need to supervise them." Peter gave an incredulous, offended scoff, and Tony squeezed his shoulder before letting go and patting him on the back. T'Challa turned the conversation back to the Asgardians and how well they were settling in, questions he would have for Thor, and they had a brief chat about Loki, who, so far, had behaved incredibly well. He passed that information along, all while Peter explored the gym and then, eventually, pulled out his own cell from his pocket and started scrolling or texting or something. Tony figured he was talking to his 'man in the chair.' He would have to remind Peter that Ned was welcome to come over sometime. MJ too. He wanted the boy to feel at home here, even though he knew it was going to take time.

It had been interesting, speaking with T'Challa and his people. They were all friendly, all willing to help. The female warriors had all been very kind to the children, while T'Challa and Tony had sat down in a conference room with Thor and Loki, and they'd talked about their plans for the Asgardians, who would live temporarily, or permanently in Wakanda, depending on how things went. It had been agreed that Loki would remain in New York with his brother until protests died down. The governments hadn't made any comments about Loki just yet, and since Peter had been hurt defending Loki, there seemed to be a general consensus that they weren't going to say anything until Loki made himself a problem. Tony didn't think he would...he seemed to be committed to this whole 'no killing people or destroying stuff' lifestyle of his.

After talking with T'Challa and the others, and leaving Thor and T'Challa to do king stuff, Tony had found Shuri and Peter working together in the lab, which had been fun to watch for a moment. It had been good to see Peter actually enjoying himself. He'd been blown away by the change in Peter...and Shuri had been impressive. Not to mention the fact that he'd been playing around with the idea of nanotechnology but hadn't yet been able to crack it...and it turned out that she had been more than willing to help.

When he finally hung up the phone, he led Peter to the elevator, the two of them heading down another floor where Tony's private lab was, alone with Bruce's lab. "You and Pepper are the only ones with access to this lab but don't ever do anything you're not sure about without me. You can ask FRIDAY for help if you need it." Peter nodded seriously, and Tony was sure he could trust the kid. Peter had created his own web formula while in a high school chemistry classroom, so he wasn't worried.

"Alright, so that's pretty much everything...except the roof." He smiled a bit as he spoke, noticing that Peter immediately perked up at that.

"The roof?"

"Yep. Come on." He led Pete into the elevator, him pressing the button for the roof, which took them up to a small shed-like structure that housed the elevator. They stepped out onto the roof and Peter gasped softly beside him. A wooden deck gave way to an infinity pool that went all the way to the edge of the roof, a clear glass wall the only thing separating the pool from the nothingness below. On the deck were lounge chairs and umbrellas, a grill on one corner with a low table surrounded by pillows, basically creating a fully functional kitchen. By the pool where three buildings they could
use for changing rooms, and another that was full of towels and sunscreen, surrounded by a short wall that would help shield them from the high winds that might come with a storm.

"Wow…” Peter whispered, moving closer to the pool.

"Yeah." Tony nodded, following along. "What do you think?"

"It's...it's incredible. I've never seen a pool like that before."

"You're welcome to swim whenever you want. It's heated, and the temperature control is over here," he pointed at a control panel over beside the pool. "And...that's about it." Peter snorted.

"Oh, is that all?" He asked, sarcasm heavy in his voice, and Tony chuckled, suggesting they go find the others.

Pepper joined them that evening in time for dinner, all of them gathered around the table eating the dinner that Tony and Peter had both cooked. It was all very...domestic. Nice. Tony had to admit, he was really enjoying domestic. After dinner, Peter artfully excused himself and disappeared into his room, obviously trying to give him some time alone with Pepper. He wanted to tell Peter that he didn't have to do that...that he was welcome to hang around, but he had missed his fiancee. So they took advantage of the time they were given together, and FRIDAY informed him at eleven pm that Peter was already asleep, so he decided to leave him to it.

Tony wasn't sure what had woken him...he'd instructed FRIDAY to wake him if Peter had any nightmares in the Tower as well as in the Compound, so it hadn't been that...he hadn't heard an alarm...had he? He'd dreamed about an alarm. But he was so, so tired. He'd been waking up with Peter so often and working late to get the Asgardians settled and deal with the Accords and he was so tired. So he closed his eyes, rolling over and throwing his arm around...no one.

His eyes popped open, and he searched for her. "FRIDAY, where's Pepper?" He asked, trying not to panic. It would be dumb to panic...she was fine. They were in the Tower and everyone was fine.

"Pepper is in Peter's bedroom. I attempted to wake you when he had a nightmare, and she woke and went to him."

"Damn it." He muttered. Why hadn't he woken up? "Is he okay?"

"He seems to be falling asleep once more. She was able to calm him." He nodded, telling himself to get up...to sit up and go to Peter and make sure. Of course, Pepper could handle it. She loved Peter. She would be a great mother-figure to him. But Tony had promised to be there for him!

The next thing Tony knew, Pepper was climbing back into bed, and he scooted closer to her, an arm going around her. "Are you awake?" She asked, sounding bemused.

"Mhm. Is he okay?"

"He's fine. Just had a nightmare?"

"Did he want to talk about it?"

"No."

"Does he need me?" He heard the smile in her voice when she answered.

"Always. But he's asleep for now." Tony meant to ask something else but didn't wake again until
5:45 when the alarm went off. Groaning, he was surprised to find Pepper already up, dressed in a skirt and blouse, brushing her hair into a ponytail."

"Is this when you get up every morning?" He moaned, covering his eyes when FRIDAY opened the curtains. There was barely any light outside, and he could only see Pepper because of the faint light from the bathroom.

"Some of us have meetings to go to since you handed over the company." She told him, glancing over with a smile he only saw in profile. He smiled, yawning and stretching as she climbed out of bed, joining her over by the mirror and placing his arms around her. She put the brush down, leaning against him and placing her hands over his. "I am the CEO."

"You're a better CEO than I ever was." He told her softly,

"What time does Peter have to leave for school?"

"Happy's driving him. School starts at 7:15 for some ungodly reason, so I'd say...6:30?"

"Alright. You should probably wake him up." She turned, giving him a quick kiss, then went back into the bathroom.

Yawning and pulling on a sweatshirt, he left the bedroom and walked across the hall, tapping on Peter's bedroom door. There was no answer, so he pushed it open, heart stopping when he realized the bed was empty...made perfectly and empty. His eyes went from the bed to the balcony door, which was closed, but he still moved over to it, heart in his throat, and released a breath when he realized it was empty. "FRIDAY, where's Pete?"

"Peter is currently in the kitchen." He sighed, placing a hand on the balcony wall and wondered why his mind had gone right to 'jumped off the balcony of the penthouse.' Why? Peter seemed okay. He seemed to have been doing better, especially yesterday, even though he was still having nightmares nearly every night. Rubbing a hand down his face, he took a deep breath, then left the balcony, shutting the door behind him, and glancing down at the perfectly made bed in the perfectly spotless room...it was the same as his room in the Compound, not that Peter had had much time to mess this one up. Still...he seemed like he was afraid to make a mess. Afraid to make this his home. And Tony wasn't sure how to fix that. Time, he guessed. Wasn't time always the answer to stuff like this?

He found Peter in the kitchen, dressed in jeans and a black t-shirt and picking at a bowl of cereal. He was hunched over the counter, head in his hand, stirring the cereal and moving it around more than actually eating it. "Morning, kid." He greeted, not surprised when Peter didn't even jump. The kid had crazy-enhanced hearing.

"Hey, Mr. Stark." He muttered. There didn't seem to be a pattern to when Peter called him Tony and when he called him 'Mr. Stark.' At the moment, he seemed pretty tired, so that might be it. Sometimes he corrected himself, and sometimes he didn't. This time, it seemed like he was too tired to correct himself, and Tony didn't feel like it was a big enough deal to correct him. Instead, Tony poured his own cereal and sat beside him at the counter.

"You feeling okay?" Peter nodded, his lips in a tight line.

"Yeah." He didn't believe the kid, but wasn't sure how to press it.

"You ready to go back today?" He asked instead. Under the short sleeve of Peter's shirt, a bandage poked out, white fabric wrapped around his upper arm. "Because if you need some more time, you can have it, kid. I won't mind. I promise. You can stay home and work from here if you want. No
"No...I...I mean, thank you, Mr...Tony, but I...I want to go back."

"Okay." Tony nodded, glad they were back to his first name. "I already had a note delivered to your school. They'll accept all of your homework and you can make up any of your midterms. They have my number if they need to reach me. So do you. If you need anything, call. I can pick you up if you need me to. Happy will be there to pick you up as soon as school's over."

"Can I take the subway home?" Tony frowned a little at that. "I just...I mean...Happy doesn't have to pick me up. I've always taken the subway home. I don't mind. And Happy's probably busy."

Tony was quiet for a moment. Peter hadn't asked him for much...hell, the kid hadn't really asked him for anything. Just permission to see his friend once or twice. And for Tony to shut off the alarm that woke him when Peter was having nightmares. He wasn't ever going to shut off that alarm, but he could give the kid this.

"Sure. That's fine. You have money?"

"Um...I have a card. You can reload it online and..." Peter trailed off as if realizing for the first time that asking to take the subway would mean asking for money. Tony waved a hand, trying to dispel his fears.

"Sure. I'll make sure it stays loaded. Take the subway to your heart's content, kiddo. Just let me know if you're going somewhere after school. And tell Happy if you change your mind and want a ride. Or me. Either of us can pick you up. Hap will be ready to take you to school in about 20 minutes...your lunch account is loaded with money, so eat whatever you want. There's plenty of food in here, so grab whatever you want to take with you." He hesitated. Should he bring up Spiderman? The kid hadn't said a word about it...hadn't even mentioned it. Was that because he thought Tony wouldn't let him? Or did he not want to be Spiderman anymore? Of course, Tony didn't care if Peter didn't want to do it anymore. Hell, it would be great for his peace of mind. But he knew it was important to Peter. So...Tony was going to be stressed either way.

He decided to wait, letting Peter finish his breakfast, grabbing an apple and some granola bars that he stuffed into his backpack, and then wrapped an arm around his shoulders, squeezing him in a half hug before he headed downstairs to meet Happy. "Remember, call me if you need anything. Or Happy. If you need to come home, do it. Okay?" Peter nodded. "Alright. Have a good day, Pete." And with that, the boy had been gone.

It was almost strange, having the place mostly to himself. He didn't stay long in the penthouse, heading downstairs where he found Thor and Loki at the table with Bruce and Rhodey. "Where is Peter?" Thor wondered in between bites of waffles. Thor always was a good cook, somehow.

"Went back to school today. He just left."

"He okay?" Rhodey asked, giving Tony a strange look...could he tell that Tony was anxious? That Tony worried about what the other kids would say and worried that, despite tons of prep on Pepper's part to keep them away, the journalists and paparazzi would harass him. He knew that the last thing Peter wanted was more attention. Still, he shrugged and gave a smirk, trying not to let on how nervous he was.

"Sure. I told him he could stay home for another week but the kid's weird. Actually wanted to go to school." He shrugged, knowing that Rhodey wasn't buying it but not able to put any more effort into
the facade. Instead, he dropped into a chair beside Bruce. "Were you able to talk to T'Challa?" He asked Thor?

"Yes. It seems my people are transitioning well...we truly appreciate what you've done for us, Tony."

Tony waved him off. "Don't worry about it, Point Break. Are you two going to stick around?"

"Yes, I believe so. You have been speaking to Steve, have you not?"

"Yeah. He wants to come by the Tower to talk." They were all quiet for a moment.

"I would like to hear from him what happened. Find out why the Avengers broke up."

"Well, I'm sure he'd be glad to tell you." Tony was only a little embarrassed at the bitterness in his voice. He had to fight the urge to leave the table...to just go back to his penthouse and...and what? Work in his lab? Tell FRIDAY not to let anyone bother him? What if Peter needed him? And even if he did make an exception for Peter, he didn't know if he could concentrate at the moment. He was worried about his kid. Worried that Peter would never really feel at home here and worried that the nightmares would never end and worried...worried.

He tapped his fingers on the counter, feeling tired and worried and done. Done with arguments with Steve and justifying himself...of course, no one here was asking him to. He was just sick of doing it. "So I was taking a look at that nanotechnology...the plans you were working on for your suit." Bruce broke in quietly. He nodded, snapped out of his thoughts as he looked up from his fingers on the counter. "I was wondering if we could take a look at it."

He felt himself relax a little. "Sure." He couldn't turn Bruce down. So, for several hours, he and Bruce worked downstairs in their lab, Tony trying to lose himself in his work and trying not to worry so much about Peter. He texted the kid a couple of times, and every time Peter assured him that he was fine and Ned was fine and school was fine. Tony didn't like it...the kid had seemed okay that morning, if kind of tired, but he wasn't getting much from his texts and he didn't want to call him. He would wait until he got home.

Tony's phone rang a little after lunch, which Bruce had had to remind him to eat. With all of these people around, he was eating more regularly than ever. But he had to make sure Peter ate regularly! So, he guessed that meant he would finally be making Pepper happy. He and Bruce had been working since seven in the morning, not because Tony didn't have other things to do...he had so much to do. Phone calls to make and paperwork to do and plans to look over, not to mention trying to get the Avengers together for an actual talk. If that would even work. But at the moment, he couldn't bear to think about any of that. He couldn't think about his company or the Avengers when he had a sad, scared kid that he was thinking about adopting going back to school after being shot. And being taken in by him.

He had found himself checking the news almost compulsively, looking at his phone to make sure that journalists weren't surrounding and infiltrating Peter's school. Making sure that no one had cornered his kid...thrust a microphone in his pale, terrified face and demanded to know how he'd met the great Tony Stark. So when his phone rang in his pocket as he scrolled through his tablet, trying to focus on some paperwork, he jumped. Grabbing the thing just in case it was Peter, he frowned when he realized it wasn't his phone...but it was. It was his other phone. The old flip phone piece of garbage. He stared at Steve's name for a moment, then answered it, sitting alone in his office.

"Cap?"
"Hey, Tony." He should have known that Captain America wouldn't give him more than a day to settle in.

No, that wasn't fair. Steve knew almost nothing about this. Still...Tony felt the familiar irritation bubbling up, doing his best to squash it. "What can I do for you?" Fund the Avengers, give you all a place to live, design your suits and tech, be your punching bag, let you leave me for dead again?

No. That wasn't fair. They were starting over. For Peter. Peter needed him and Peter needed the Avengers. He could do anything for Peter. "I wanted to check on you guys...we saw on the news that the Asgardians were able to relocate to Wakanda. Did you guys have any trouble?" He wasn't sure why Steve was wanting to make what seemed like small talk, but it beat fighting.

"Uh...no. Not really. Most of them have found new homes there, and they have some in hotels. Thor and Loki are the only ones still here. We're all in the Tower now, so we've been getting settled."

"Is everything going okay with Loki?"

"Yeah. He's behaving so far."

"Think he'll want to join the Avengers?" Tony snorted.

"Yeah, I wouldn't hold my breath on that one." Steve laughed a little, and then there was a brief silence.

"So...how's Peter?"

"He's fine. He went back to school today."

"Yeah?" He asked, sounding surprised, but Tony didn't feel like trying to explain their cover story...so he just let Steve think what he wanted.

"Yeah. So I'm guessing you want to come to the Tower at some point to talk all this out."

"Um...yeah, actually." Steve agreed. "I wasn't sure when you were available..."

"What about Wednesday?" Tony asked, more than ready to get this over with. Not that he didn't want to meet up with the team and get them back together...but more than that, he wanted to take Peter and Pepper on a long vacation to the beach.

"Oh...um...that works. Yes." Steve agreed immediately. "Are you okay, Tony?"

"I'm just peachy, Cap." Tony sighed. "I just..." He hesitated, frowning when his other phone vibrated in his pocket. Pulling it out, he felt his heart stutter. The number was from Peter's school. "Shit."

"Tony? What's wrong?" Cap asked, sounding ready to jump into action.

"Peter's school is calling. I've got to go." He all but barked. "I'll call you back." Shutting the phone with a satisfying flip, he touched the answer button on his real phone. "Hello?"

"Hello, is this...are you Peter Parker's guardian?" The woman asked, sounding hesitant.

"Yes." He tried not to snap. "Is he okay?"

"Um...we need you to pick him up."
"Why? Is he hurt?"

"He and another student got into an altercation." She told him, still not sounding sure that she was talking to the right person. He took a deep breath, running a hand over his face, heart back to racing.

"Alright. I'm on my way."
Bullies

Bullies

Peter sat in the office, leg bouncing as he glanced over at Ned, his friend sporting a bloody nose and refusing to meet his eyes. "Are you okay?" He murmured, glancing over to find the secretary not looking at them. His own nose was throbbing, and the tissue he was holding to it was just barely managing to stop the bleeding.

"Fine," Ned told him with a shrug, and Peter felt his chest squeeze uncomfortably.

"I couldn't risk…"

"He's been tormenting you all day. He threw you into a locker earlier! And then, when he throws you on the ground and starts hitting you in the face, you wait for a teacher to pull him off?" He cried. Peter sighed, dropping his head into his hands.

He couldn't believe this...couldn't believe that Flash was already causing him trouble...after only one day. Mr. Stark was going to be so mad.

The day had been going fine! Sure it was weird to be back and his teachers had given him worried, hesitant looks all day. He hadn't been called on to answer a question once. Ned and MJ had stuck close to his side, MJ finding excuses to sit beside him, her shoulder touching his, distraction him from the looks and whispers by filling him in on homework and gossip and the books she'd been reading. Ned, too, chattered about the video game he'd been playing and was talking about how cool a Spiderman themed video game would be. "You could swing around the city and stop crime…". He had been saying when Flash had approached their lunch table.

Flash's father showed up, dressed in a suit and looking royally pissed. "You're the kid that hit my son?" He demanded, towering over Peter. The secretary looked up from where she'd been typing on the computer and stood, hesitantly putting out a hand.

"Sir?"

"You think you can come into this school and lay a hand on my son, Parker?" His finger was inches from Peter's face and he felt the righteous anger in his chest.

"Hey! He hit my friend first!" Peter snapped, never mind he hadn't actually hit Flash, just shoved him, and the man suddenly looked seconds away from hitting him.

"You don't speak to me in that tone, Parker." He warned softly, and Peter understood Flash a little better all of a sudden. "You ever touch my son again and I'll…"

"One more word and I'll have the police haul your ass in for threatening a minor." Peter felt the blood drain from his face. Mr. Stark was mad. Like...madder than he'd ever seen him. The four people in the room all turned to look at the billionaire who stood in the doorway, dressed in a T-shirt and jeans and still, somehow, he was the best dressed in the room.

"Mr. Stark…". Flash's father started.

"And step the hell away from my kid." He entered the room, moving fast, and placed himself firmly between Peter and Mr. Thompson. "Why don't you go talk to her and I'll talk to my kid. You got that?"
"He hit…"

"Yeah. Your son. I heard you. Personally, I think your kid is an asshole and probably deserved it, but I'll see what Peter says, and what the principal says. For now, I need to talk to Peter." The secretary nodded, and Mr. Stark turned to Ned, apparently done with Mr. Thompson. "You okay, Ned?" Peter's friend nodded, eyes huge, apparently still surprised at the sight of Tony Stark. "Good. They call your parents?"

"Yeah...uh...my mom's on her way."

"Alright." He turned to the secretary. "You got a room where I can talk to my kid?"

"Oh...um...yes. Yes...you can use that office. Jo's on lunch so…” She pointed to the empty room across from where Peter was sitting and Mr. Stark nodded. "Alright, Pete. Come on. Let's go talk in here." Peter looked over at the secretary.

"You can go ahead, Mr. Parker. The principal is speaking with Mr. Thompson at the moment. I'll let him know that you are talking with your...guardian." Sighing, Peter pulled himself to his feet, wincing at his head gave a throb of pain, and Mr. Stark placed a steadying hand on his back, eyes narrow in concern. He followed him into the room, sitting in one of the chairs and staring at the floor as his guardian shut the door behind them.

He waited, tense as he waited for Mr. Stark to start yelling. He didn't think he could take it...his hands were clenched tightly in his lap, eyes hot, head pounding. But Mr. Stark didn't yell. Instead, he crouched in front of Peter, reaching up carefully and pressing his hand against Peter's cheek, turning us face to her a better look. "Damn, kiddo. You look like you got hit by a truck." He murmured, and Peter wondered if it really was that bad. He knew that Flash had hit him a bunch of times, but he hadn't exactly had time to look at himself in the mirror.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Stark." He whispered, voice hoarse.

"I'm not mad, bud. Well...not at you. Are you okay?" Peter nodded, and Mr. Stark gave him a look. "Are you sure?"

"Yeah. I'm fine." He promised. It was mostly true.

"Just tell me what happened, okay?" The man urged, dropping the hand from Peter's face and placing it on his knee. Peter swallowed hard, ashamed to say...ashamed to admit that he'd gotten into a fight on his first day of school and made Mr. Stark drop everything to come to his school and get him.

"I...Ned and I were at lunch. I mean...Flash...he was being...he was…” He chanced a looked at Mr. Stark who didn't seem even remotely upset with him. Instead, the man waited, leaning in and watching Peter closely. "Flash was being a jerk all day, but I was ignoring him. I didn't want to get in trouble on my first day back. He was saying…” Peter trailed off, not sure he wanted to say it out loud. "He just said stuff about me staying with you and Aunt...and about my aunt. And I was...I ignored him. Or, I tried to. Then at lunch, he came up to our table...he was...he said something about my aunt and Ned...Ned got up and told him to stop and he called him a dick and said something about his dad and then...Flash punched him." He muttered, staring down at his hands. Mr. Stark nodded, showing he was keeping up.

"Okay. What happened then?"

"He punched Ned and then I got up and pushed him off...I didn't hit him! I didn't...I just pushed him
away, and then he hit me and…” Peter shrugged. He didn't want to admit that he'd let Flash hit him again and again...that his head was pounding from where it had hit the floor before a teacher had finally noticed. "Then a teacher pulled him off."

"How many times did he hit you?” Mr. Stark asked, putting a hand on the back of Peter's head, obviously noticing when Peter flinched.

"I don't know...like...five...six times." He muttered with a shrug.

"And you didn't hit him back?"

"No, I swear, Mr. Stark, I didn't hit him!” Mr. Stark closed his eyes, taking a deep breath.

"Pete…” He opened them again, standing and putting a hand on the top of Peter's head.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to get in trouble on my first day back. I'm sorry."

"You don't have to be sorry, Pete. It wasn't your fault."

"He hit Ned."

"I know. And I'm glad you stood up for your friend. But, Pete...you can defend yourself. Hell, I want you to defend yourself. Rule number...what are we up to? 3? Rule number 3. If someone is hurting you, you defend yourself, okay?” Peter nodded. "Alright. Come on." He murmured, holding a hand out, pulling Peter to his feet.

"I'm sorry they called you…”

"I'm not. I'm your guardian, kiddo. If you're in some kind of trouble, I want to know. It's what I signed up for." He ruffled Peter's hair, grinning when Peter ducked away, then brought a hand up to his head. "Let's get you home, kiddo. I want Bruce to take a look at you." He led Peter back into the office where Flash's father sat with Flash, and Ned stood off to the side with his mother. The Principal was standing in the doorway, nodding to Peter and Mr. Stark.

"Principal Morita." The man introduced himself, holding a hand out to Peter's guardian that the man took, nodding.

"Tony Stark."

"It's nice to officially meet you, Mr. Stark. If everyone could follow me, we can talk in my office." Mr. Stark nodded, placing a hand on Peter's back and leading him forward, angling them so that Peter wasn't close to Flash or his dad. When they reached the room, he led Peter over to a chair on the other side of the room, sitting beside him, followed by Ned and his mom, and Flash and his father. Principal Morita sat across from them at his desk, pulling out a piece of paper.

"I spoke to the teachers that witnessed the fight...everyone I spoke to said that Flash hit Ned first and that Peter tried to break up the fight. Then Flash hit Peter who did not fight back. So neither Ned nor Peter are in any trouble.” Mr. Stark nodded, glancing over at Peter who stared at his hands in his lap. "Flash is facing a three-day suspension for fighting."

"Parker hit him back! He was just as involved…”

"Peter pushed Flash away from Ned. He was protecting his friend from your son." Principal Mortia's voice went hard. "Flash, when you return to school, I want you to stay away from Mr. Parker and Mr. Leeds, or you will be taken off of the Academic Decathlon team.” He warned. Flash's father
threw Peter a furious look and he found himself shrinking a little in his seat, dropping his eyes, and Mr. Stark shifted, hiding Peter from view and glaring right back at Mr. Thompson.

"Is that all, Principal Morita?"

"Yes, Mr. Stark." The principal stood, holding out a hand.

"I'm going to take Pete home for the rest of the day...get him looked at. He hit his head pretty hard." Principal Morita looked a little more closely at Peter, nodding.

"Of course..."

"Alright. C'mon, Pete." Mr. Stark motioned for Peter to stand, and he wrapped an arm around him. As they were leaving, he turned to Flash. "And you...the next time you lay a hand on my kid, we're going to have a problem. You understand me?"

"Don't you threaten my son, Stark." Mr. Thompson stood, and Tony pushed Peter back a step, turning to face the man.

"Then tell your son to stay away from mine." He snapped. Peter felt something twist inside. Tony had just called him his son...he had just told the whole room that Peter was his son. His heart was warm all of a sudden. Flash shrank back in his seat, and Mr. Thompson scoffed.

"He's not your son, Stark. Unless you've got a secret love child that the press hasn't gotten wind of yet." Peter went still, watching Mr. Stark's back stiffen, his head tilt back, and he could just imagine the look on his guardian's face. Flash was pale, eyes wide as she slouched in his seat, and Ned's jaw was tight, eyes darting between Mr. Stark and Flash's father. Peter was afraid...afraid his guardian would start yelling or worse, punch Mr. Thompson in the face. Instead, he scoffed, turning and putting an arm around Peter.

"Come on, bud." He murmured, hand firm on Peter's shoulders. Peter nodded, not daring to speak, and followed Mr. Stark out of the building, across the parking lot, and into the passenger's side of the car.

They were quiet for a while, Peter resting his head on the window. "You okay?" He asked, and Peter nodded.

"I'm fine, Mr. Stark."

"Tony." He corrected, voice gentle, and Peter released a breath, realizing that the man really wasn't angry. Surely he wouldn't be telling Peter to call him 'Tony' if he was angry.

"Tony. Sorry."

"What's rule number 1, Pete." He asked, almost exasperated, but smiling a little.

"Tony..."

"Rule number 1. Recite it for me."

Peter sighed, feeling his lips turn up into a weak smile. "Don't apologize or something."

"Exactly! I knew you were a genius." Peter smiled for real when Tony laughed, then the man was serious again. "You don't have to apologize to me for things that aren't your fault. I'm not upset with you, kid. Hell, if I'm ever upset with you, I'll tell you, okay? Promise. But you defending yourself
and your friend...that's exactly what I want you to do. And if it happens again, actually defend
yourself. If I'm upset about anything, it's that you didn't fight back." Peter stared down at the
backpack between his feet on the floor of Tony's car. "I want you to fight back, Pete." He urged.
"Do you understand?" Peter nodded. "That Flash kid, he gets it honest," Tony grumbled then.
"Assholes, the both of them. Want me to have him expelled?" Peter chuckled.

"No...wait, could you do that?" Tony gave him a look. "Right. Of course, you could. No, don't."

"Alright. But if he bugs you again, I want you to tell me." Peter shrugged. "Hey, I mean it. Tell me
these things, okay? I want to know. And if he ever lays a hand on you again, you have my
permission to lay him out. And try to get Ned to capture it on film because I want to watch." He
smiled over at Peter who struggled to return it. "Pete?"

"I just...I could hurt him, Tony."

"Yeah, that's the idea, kid. He hurt you, remember? Or did he actually give you a concussion?" He
could tell that Tony was only half joking.

"No...I mean, I don't think so. But...I could really hurt him. Like...if I hit him too hard, I could kill
him." Tony was quiet beside him as they drove, stealing glances as they sped toward the tower. "I'm
really strong. And usually, I can control it...I mean, I don't break stuff anymore. Usually. But I've
ripped your shirts before and sometimes I squeeze pencils too tight and...I broke some of Ma...". He
took a deep breath. He could say her name. "...some of May's glasses when I squeezed too hard.
I...try really hard not to break stuff..."

"But you can't always control it?" Tony finished, his voice gentle. Peter nodded, cheeks hot.

"Yeah."

To his surprise, Tony just nodded. "Alright. We'll work on that."

"Wait, what?" Tony smiled a little.

"I said, we'll work on that. I thought you had enhanced hearing, Petey."

"I do...but...how are we going to work on that?"

"I don't know...practice? We'll figure something out. I'll bet Bruce can help." Tony squeezed his
shoulder for a second, smiling. "Don't worry, Pete. I get it. It's going to be fine." The strange thing
was, Peter had no trouble believing that.

Tony and Peter stepped into the tower through the private entrance, Peter following Tony into the
elevator and out through the living room. Peter kept his head down, hands in his pockets as they
passed the kitchen. "Hey, Bruce. Think you could do me a favor?" Peter glanced up and found Thor,
Loki, and Bruce all sitting at the kitchen table, and all three looked up, took one look at his face, and
their faces moved from curious to worried in seconds, all at the same time. It would have been funny
had his head not been pounding.

"Peter?" Bruce asked, pushing himself to his feet. "Tony, what happened to him?" He demanded.

"Got into a scuffle at school. You ought to see the other guy." Peter almost laughed. Flash didn't
have a scratch on him. "Mind taking a look? Pete hit his head pretty hard."

"Yeah...of course..." He scrambling for a moment as if looking for his bag, and Tony pointed at the
living room. Peter obeyed without a word, dropping onto the sofa and closing his eyes. Tony came
to stand behind him, and Peter could practically feel his nervous energy. Embarrassed, Peter kept his eyes shut until he heard footsteps approaching and cracked an eye to find both Thor and Loki in the living room, both staring at him. He blinked, glancing over at Tony who had pulled out his phone, grimacing.

"Dang it." He muttered. "Alright, Petey, I've got to call Pepper back. I'll just be a second." Peter nodded, face flushing. He didn't need Tony to stand watch over him. He was fine. He'd hit his head but he was okay. He was Spiderman, after all. He was stronger than Flash...a lot stronger. He'd just let the other boy keep hitting him because he didn't want to hurt him by hitting back. Besides, it kept him away from Ned.

"A scuffle?" Thor asked once Tony had stepped into the other room. Peter nodded, not wanting to admit to the Avenger that he'd been beaten up by another student. How much did Thor know about him? He'd told them that he had an enhanced metabolism and super-healing...and that he was strong. That was all. "What sort of scuffle?" The Asgardian wondered.

"Um...just...got into a fight." He told him with a shrug. Loki lifted an eyebrow.

"You? Got into a fight...with another student at your school?" He asked, disbelief dripping from every word.

"Yeah."

"Why?" Loki wanted to know, and Bruce chose that moment to appear, bag in hand as he hurried into the living room.

"What?" He asked as Bruce sat his bag on the coffee table.

"Why did you get into a fight with another student?" Thor clarified, and Peter wondered how his life had come to this. Thor and Loki were standing over him, asking why he'd gotten into a fight, and Doctor Bruce Banner was checking him for a concussion.

"He hit my friend," Peter told him simply, wincing when Doctor Banner shined a light in his eyes. "Ouch."

"Pupils somewhat dilated, but you don't seem to have any trouble speaking or walking...any dizziness? Nausea?"

"No. Just hurts."

"Well, the concussion is mild and seems to already be healing on its own. Take it easy for the rest of the day and get some rest." Peter nodded, closing his eyes again. "We're still working on painkillers for you, but we're getting closer."

"Thanks, Doctor Banner." The man sighed, smiling as he put his light back in his bag.

"Just call me Bruce, Peter. Everyone else does." He reached out, touching Peter's nose carefully, apologizing when Peter flinched. "And you're welcome. It looks like your nose was broken, but it's healing too...we don't need to reset it. How's the head?"

"Not bad."

"Alright. You're going to have some bruises for..." He chuckled, incredulous. "About twenty more minutes, apparently." Peter smiled. "Rest. Drink plenty of water." He ordered, walking into the kitchen and returning with an ice pack that Peter placed over his throbbing forehead. "Let me know
if the pain gets worse." Peter agreed and the man went to put his stuff away or update Tony... Peter wasn't sure. He just wanted to sleep for a few minutes...let his healing take care of all this. But... Thor and Loki were still in the room. He opened his eyes, finding that they were still watching him.

"What happened to the other student?" Loki wanted to know, taking a seat in the chair across from him while Thor remained standing, arms crossed.

"Uh...he got suspended. He has to stay home from school for three days."

"And then?" Peter shrugged.

"He comes back to school..." He wasn't sure what Loki was getting at...or why the Asgardian cared. But he looked unhappy, and Peter wanted to sleep, so he dropped his head against the sofa cushion, tucking his legs up beside him and letting his eyes drift shut. Healing always made him sleepy, especially when he hit his head. He could hear them though, even when he dozed, and he heard his guardian return.

"He okay?"

"Yeah. He just needs rest. He's healing incredibly quickly." Peter heard Bruce tell Tony. "He has a mild concussion but it should be fine by the time he wakes." They were all talking so softly, had Peter not had enhanced hearing, he might not have been able to hear them. He felt a hand on his head and knew it was Tony.

"Why did the other student attack his friend?" Loki pressed.

"The kid's a real asshole. He's always after Peter...I think he said some stuff about the kid's aunt. Pete didn't really tell me. Got the feeling he didn't want to talk about it." Loki hummed, then Thor broke in.

"And this student...what was his name?" Tony chuckled, and Peter wondered why Thor would care.

"Don't worry about it, Point Break." Someone, Tony, he assumed, draped a blanket over him, and he sighed as he shifted against the sofa cushions, getting comfortable. "I've got this handled."

"Peter said the boy would return to school." Thor pointed out.

"Yeah, but Pete promised to tell me if the little asshole bothers him again. Besides, Peter can hold his own."

"Can he?" Loki asked, voice dry. "I couldn't tell by the broken nose."

"He wasn't fighting back."

"What? Why?" Bruce wanted to know.

"He doesn't want to hurt anyone," Tony told them with a sigh. Then Peter was really asleep, not waking until Tony woke him for dinner. By the time he looked at himself in the mirror, the bruises were mostly healed, and his nose didn't hurt so much anymore. His head was better too. Thor and Loki kept a closer eye on him than usual, and when Pepper returned, she placed a hand on his shoulder, seeming concerned until he assured her that he was fine.

School the next day was fine, and the day after. He rode the subway home each day, and each day he dreaded Flash's return. He knew that Tony wanted him to fight back...to defend himself. But the thought of actually hitting Flash...he couldn't imagine doing it. Beside...
gotten physical before, so he doubted it would happen again.

Then, on Wednesday as he was riding the subway home, thinking about bringing up Spiderman with Tony, he got a text from the man. "I met with Steve today, and he's still here. We're in the living room."

Steve. Steve Rogers. The man that had hurt his...his guardian. His mentor. His...well, Tony. And apparently it was important to Tony that the team get back together, and sure, Peter has been a big fan. But now? He wasn't so sure.

He didn't answer the text, just continued to listen to his music and worked on his homework until he got to his stop. He'd taken two of his midterms that day and only had three more to go, and he was pretty much caught up on his work.

Hood up, earbuds in, heart pounding, he walked into the tower, using the private entrance and taking the elevator up to Tony's floor where the others usually joined them for lunch. He paused his music, pulling the earbuds out and letting them dangle over his hoodie, then pulled his hood off, not wanting to be rude but also...not sure if he wanted to talk to Steve Rogers. But he'd do it. For Tony.

The elevator dinged and he stepped into Tony's floor...and his, he guessed. He lived there too. The living room seemed full, with Tony sitting on one sofa with Rhodey and Thor, Loki in one of the chairs that he usually sat in, and Captain Steve Rogers on another sofa, looking kind of alone on the other side of the room. They all turned when he approached, Steve standing immediately, and then Tony who moved over to his side, giving him a reassuring smile as he wrapped an arm around his side, the familiar weight of his hand on Peter's back calming him a little.

"Steve, this is Peter. Pete, Steve Rogers."

"Hello, Peter. It's nice to finally meet you." Steve moved over to where he stood, holding out a hand that Peter took, careful not to squeeze just in case Captain America figured out that he was stronger than a normal teenager. He'd stolen the man's shield and fought against him in Germany...there might be some bad feelings there.

"It's nice to meet you, Mr. Rogers...um...Captain Rogers...sir." The man's lips turned up and he all but felt Tony smirking beside him as his cheeks heated up. Rhodey had told him that he could probably just call the man Steve but he didn't want to presume.

"Steve is fine, Peter." The man assured him. "I've heard quite a bit about you...I had no idea that Tony had a son." Peter glanced over at Tony who made no move to correct him. "And I saw what you did...how you protected Loki...that was incredibly brave."

"Oh, um...it wasn't anything, really..."

"I disagree. Peter is incredibly brave, and I am in his debt." Thor spoke up, and Peter's face flushed again.

"Alright, you're going to give the kid a big head." Tony interrupted, and Peter threw him a grateful look. "Peter, you finish your homework on the subway?"

"Almost."

"Alright. We're ordering dinner and it should be here in about twenty minutes. Want to stick around and wait with us?"

"Sure." He couldn't explain the urge to stay close to Tony when Steve Rogers was in the room. He
remembered the black eye Tony had had when he'd taken him home...how the man had been stiff and how his arm had been hurt. Steve has done that. To his own teammate.

Peter followed him to the sofa and sat between him and Rhodey who turned to him, patting him on the back.

"Hey, Peter. How was school?"

"Good. I finished two of my midterms."

"And when is that boy coming back to your school?" Thor wanted to know. Peter blinked in surprise.

"Um...on Friday."

Captain America watched the exchange with some confusion, and despite not being sure if they could trust him, he felt kind of rude. "Um...how are you, Mr...um...Steve? Sir?"

Steve chuckled a little, face going soft. He didn't look like a man that would turn on a teammate. He looked...nice. "I'm doing well, Peter. Thank you." He turned back to Tony. "So...this weekend?"

"How many want to come?" Tony asked, crossing his arms, and Peter sat back to listen.

"Nat for sure. Probably Sam too." Tony nodded.

"That's fine. All of your rooms are set up if anyone wants to move back in."

"I'm not sure...". Tony waved a hand, lips pursed.

"Just letting you know, Cap." There was some kind of tension there...Peter could feel it. So, he opened his mouth like he usually did when he was feeling tense.

"Are you all moving here?" He wondered, trying not to shrink back when all eyes turned to him.

"We...we haven't exactly discussed that," Steve told him carefully, glancing at Tony. "There is still...trust to be built back up." Peter felt his stomach turn.

"You don't trust him?" He asked, voice flat, and Steve's eyes widened, glancing between Peter and Tony.

"I...it's not that I don't trust Tony, Peter. A lot of things happened, before...and...some members of the team are...hesitant to move back here."

Peter bit his tongue, fighting back the desire to speak up again...to ask what right they had not to trust his...to trust Tony.

"So just you, Sam, and Nat then?" His guardian asked, voice careful. Neutral.

"Yeah. I think so...I'll let you know if anyone else decides to come." Tony nodded, and Peter felt irritation flare up. This was Tony's house! Tony paid for everything! And they were acting like he was the one who had to earn their trust back.

"Can I go?" Peter asked suddenly, keeping his voice down as he turned to Tony. The man gave him a strange look as if he didn't understand the question.

"Of course you can, Pete." And, knowing he was being rude, he left without a word, going straight
to his bedroom and shutting the door.

He didn't understand why he was so angry...Tony could certainly take care of himself! And the Avengers were all adults. It wasn't exactly his place to get in the middle of it. But...he was mad. He was mad and sad and disappointed and...and the knock on the door took him by surprise.

"Come in." He called, the invitation sounding more like a question.

He hadn't been expecting Steve Rogers to be the one to enter his room...couldn't imagine that Tony would have sent him. But there he was. "Can I...". Steve asked, gesturing to the room, and Peter sat down on the bottom bunk of his bed, nodding to the desk chair. The man folded himself down into Peter's chair, and Peter felt his lips twitch. He looked ridiculously huge in that little chair. "Your dad didn't send me...he thinks I went to the bathroom...I figure I have about five minutes before he gets suspicious."

His dad. Steve thought Tony was his dad. Tony had called Peter his son. Aunt May was dead. All of these things swirled around his mind, making him wonder...making his heart pound and head whirl. It was a lot. It had been a while since he'd come to live with Tony but sometimes it still hit him. He dropped his eyes, jaw tight. "He's...I'm sorry...do you want me to go?" Peter figured the pain must have shown on his face, so he tried to hide it.

"No...sorry...it's just...uh...still new." Steve nodded slowly.

"Right. Of course. I'm very sorry about your aunt. Tony mentioned...I'm sorry."

"Thanks." He muttered, never knowing what to say in response to that.

"I just wanted to tell you...you don't have to worry about him. About Tony."

"Don't I?" He asked, mustering his courage to look up at Steve, meeting the bigger man's eyes. They'd fought before. He'd taken the man's shield, and then Steve had hit him in the face with it. Given him a black eye. "You turned on him. All of you. You hurt him." He didn't know if he should be saying this...if Tony would want him to say this. But his mouth went ahead anyway. "You abandoned him and...and all because you couldn't just sit down and talk about things. You picked the Winter Soldier over your team! You were supposed to be his friends!" Steve let him talk, nodding slowly, and Peter waited for the man to try and defend himself. Finally, he spoke.

"I'm not saying you're wrong. I'm not. It...it happened so fast. They were showing us the Accords and threatening us and I reacted and Tony reacted and...we wanted the same thing. We wanted to protect people and we wanted to stay together. But...then Bucky...he was my friend and I wanted to help him. He didn't plant that bomb. He didn't kill anyone. I...it happened so fast." He repeated. "It seemed like there wasn't any time. And then we were at an airport fighting each other and I...I...I kept something from Tony about Bucky and Tony found out and then...then we were fighting. Again." He took a deep breath. "The others blamed Tony for what happened. For the Raft and Ross. I don't. I know he...I know this wasn't on him. It was on me. And they followed me and...they're starting to get it too, I think."

"They shouldn't blame him," Peter muttered.

"No. They shouldn't. And we've been talking and...things are going to be okay. They want to talk to him and work this out. And, I'll admit, they're pretty curious about you."

"Me?"

"Yeah." Steve nodded. "No one ever thought of Tony as a father. Then we find out that he not only
has a son, but that kid also jumped in front of a bullet for Loki?" Peter frowned at the way Steve said Loki's name. Incredulous. Like he didn't deserve to be saved.

"Loki's always been nice to me. I didn't want them to kill him. Besides, Thor says he's changed and he hasn't done anything wrong." Steve's face softened again, blue eyes gentle.

"I believe you. It was brave, what you did. You're a good kid, Peter. That's why they want to meet you." He glanced over at the alarm clock on Peter's nightstand. "Alright. I'd better go before Tony comes looking for me." Peter nodded, watching him go, then dropped down onto the pillow on his bottom bunk, staring up at the top bunk until FRIDAY informed him that it was time to eat.

Tony kept a close eye on him all through dinner, and Peter was sure that Steve noticed. Still, there was nothing Peter could do until the others came and proved whether or not they could be trusted. He was quiet while he ate the Thai food that Tony had ordered, then volunteered to do the dishes just to have something to do. Rhodey joined him, the two of them working side by side as Peter washed and Rhodey dried. The cool thing about ordering out, though, was that there were barely any dishes to do, so after not too long, he was left at the sink, hands resting on the edge of the counter, Rhodey's hand on his back.

"You alright, Pete?" He asked quietly. Steve was about to leave, and Peter wasn't too sad about it...but in other ways, he was. He was sad that Steve Rogers had betrayed Tony and he was sad that the man had sought him out and that he seemed nice and that Peter wasn't sure if he could trust him. Instead of trying to explain all of that, he just nodded.

"Yeah. I'm fine."

"You sure?" Peter nodded. "You know we aren't going to let them hurt Tony. Right?" Peter nodded again, looking up for the first time and smiling a little. "It's not going to be like before, Pete. He's got you now. You and Pepper and me...Bruce and Thor and even Loki." He patted Peter's back. "If it comes down to it, you can put on the suit and we'll fight them together." Peter laughed at that.

"Yeah. Sounds good."

Despite the reassurance, and despite everyone getting together to watch a movie and Tony sticking to his side and asking him about school and distracting him all evening, he still had nightmares that night, and it was only 3 am when he woke up screaming.
There was a warehouse. Or...a building. Maybe an airport. It kept changing, the way locations in dreams so often did. The bottom line...it was a place and it was cold and Peter couldn't move. He looked around, dread settling in his stomach. He wasn't afraid yet, but he didn't know what was happening. He wanted to go home. Wanted to be with Tony. Where was he? His feet were rooted, and he opened his mouth to yell or scream or call for help, but he couldn't make words come out.

Suddenly there was movement. Iron Man took a step backward, hands up as he attempted to block a shield that came crashing down onto his face. His heart stuttered as his father...no...guardian. Tony. As Tony fell backward, attempting to get his hands underneath him...tried to get up. But Captain America brought the shield up again, kneeling over Tony and bringing it down again, slamming it into Tony's chest. And then, only when Captain America walked away and disappeared, could Peter move again.

He raced into the open area and dropped to his knees beside Tony, hands pulling uselessly at the metal. "No...no." He sobbed. "Tony? Please...please, Tony. Please! Dad...please!" His voice got louder and louder as she shook the man in the suit, finally managing to rip the mask away, exposing a pale, bloodless face with eyes that didn't meet his...that stared lifelessly at the ceiling. "No!" His throat hurt with the force of the scream, and he pulled harder on the man's shoulder, gasping as he was suddenly falling...and then he was on the ground, gasping at the force of his landing, a grunt forced from his lips as he hit something.

"Peter!" He opened his eyes, barely noticing the tears as he lay stunned on his bedroom floor, gasping for air. "Shit! Peter?" Someone knelt beside him, a hand on his arm. "Peter, talk to me, buddy." They urged. He wheezed as someone slipped a hand behind his shoulder, rolling him over a little and patting him on the back.

Tony. It was Tony. Peter moved so quickly that Tony flinched, wondering if he was actually awake or if he was still in that awful dream. Every time he closed his eyes, he saw the lifeless eyes of his guardian staring up at the ceiling...dead. He'd had been dead. And Captain America had killed him. He wrapped his arms around Tony's torso, holding him for dear life. He was alive. He was alive.

"Not you too...please...Dad please!" He sobbed, head hidden against the man's chest, and Tony returned the hug, tentatively rubbing his hand over his back.

"Okay...okay, Pete. It's okay. I'm right here. It's okay." He whispered.

"You were dead...he killed you." Peter sobbed, unable to stop.

"I'm not dead, buddy. I'm right here. No one killed me. I'm here." He shuddered, and Tony rubbed circles on his back. "Are you hurt?" Peter shook his head. "Okay. Come here...let's get you off the floor." He stood, pulling a still shaking Peter up with him, and he followed Tony to the living room, clutching at him like a lifeline until they were seated in front of the tv on the sofa, Peter clutching his shirt. "It's okay. I'm here, Pete."

"Not you too. I can't..." It felt like his chest had a weight on it, heart heavy and painful. He couldn't lose Tony. Not on top of everything else. He wouldn't be able to survive that.

"I'm not going anywhere, buddy." For a long time, Tony just held him, rubbing his back and
promising over and over that he wasn't going to leave. That Peter was safe. That everything would be okay. But then, Tony sighed, words cutting off. Peter stiffened, afraid that he was irritating the man, but that was before Tony spoke. "This isn't a good time." He told someone tiredly.

"Is the boy alright?" Peter heard Loki ask, voice soft and...concerned? Could Loki be concerned about him? He felt his cheeks heat up and he hid his face. It was bad enough he couldn't stop crying in front of Tony...now Loki was there too! Tony rubbed his back once more, pulling him close and letting him hide.

"He'll be fine."

"What happened?" The man almost sounded angry, and he felt Tony release a deep breath, Peter's head moving with the man's chest.

"He's just not feeling too good right now. He's fine." Tony's voice was firm. Final. And Peter felt a wave of gratitude. He knew that Peter was embarrassed, and he was trying to help. "Loki, back off." He snapped, and Peter glanced up from where his face was hidden against Tony's chest.

"I am not going to hurt the child," Loki told him, his own voice nearly offended as he came closer. Tony was silent and Peter closed his eyes again, still shaking. "Why are you upset?" He wondered, and Tony stiffened as he felt the man sit beside them, the sofa dipping next to Peter.

"Loki..."

"I had a nightmare," Peter whispered shamefully, refusing to meet his eyes as he turned in his direction. He didn't want Tony to fight with him...didn't want anyone to argue over him. There was already so much tension...he couldn't stand the thought of being the cause of more. So he confessed.

Loki didn't look like he found this surprising or particularly interesting, for that matter, but Peter was starting to realize that it might be a mask...that Loki might feel more than he let on.

"What did you dream about?" He asked.

Peter hesitated, then turned to face the man, cheeks hot. He knew Tony was probably tired and he had woken him up and he was keeping him up...and now Loki was asking him to admit, in front of Tony, what his nightmare had been about. He wanted him to say, in front of Tony, that he was afraid that Tony was going to die. He didn't even want to say it. "Pete, you don't have to talk about it." Tony told him quietly, squeezing him a little. "It's none of his business." Loki continued to look at him, and Peter realized he wanted to say it...wanted to let it out. It was heavy in his chest, and he gripped Tony's shirt even tighter as if that would keep him safe.

"Captain America." He murmured, glancing back at Tony but not meeting his eyes. "He...he killed my..." His dad. No. Guardian. Tony. "Tony. He killed Tony."

Tony stiffened once more, but Loki barely reacted, just nodded. "Yes. I understand how that could be upsetting." He told Peter, eyes thoughtful. "However, you must realize that would be impossible." Peter frowned.

"What?"

"Well, considering there are several of us here who would not allow Steve Rogers to harm your father, there is no reason for you to fear it coming to pass." He explained, but not condescending. Just...simply. As though it were the most obvious fact. "I know it was a frightening dream, but it would never happen. None of us, not Colonel Rhodes, or Banner, not my brother or myself would allow Captain Rogers to kill your father."
Neither would Peter. He was Spiderman...and he hadn't been able to save his parents or his uncle...he hadn't been able to save his aunt. But he would save Tony. So he nodded, sniffing and rubbing a hand over his eyes. "Now that we have that issue settled, I am going to return to bed, and I would suggest you do the same." And then the man was leaving, and Peter stayed where he was, leaning against Tony. He closed his eyes, resting against Tony's arm, and the man lifted his arm, wrapping it around him and holding him close.

"How are you feeling, Pete?" Tony asked softly, leaning down so that his chin was on Peter's head. "I'm sorry I keep waking you up." Tony shook his head. "Don't worry about that, Pete." He assured him. His hand rubbed up and down Peter's back, making soothing circles. "Why don't you lay down?" He asked. Blinking tiredly, Peter let Tony scoot over a little, his head eased down into the man's lap. "FRIDAY, turn the TV on low." He heard Tony say as the man slipped his fingers into Peter's hair, his hand running through his curls. Peter's eyes drifted shut, unable to focus for long on the TV.

"You've gotta sleep too." He murmured, but Tony's hand didn't pause, his other hand tugging on the blanket hanging over the back of the sofa and draping it over Peter's torso. "I will, buddy. Just rest."

"Mkay." He muttered, relaxing and letting him sleep, this time without any nightmares.

When he woke hours later, Tony had his head thrown back against the sofa, mouth open as he snored softly. Peter stared up at him for a second, trying to remember how he'd gotten to the couch, then turned his head and found Thor holding a mug of coffee and watching Peter closely. Peter wanted to sit up, but Tony's hand was on his arm and he didn't want to wake him. "Are you alright, Peter?" He asked, voice soft.

"Yeah." He rubbed his eyes, trying not to move too much. He'd already told Loki about his nightmares...he really didn't want to rehash it with Thor. "What time is it?"

"It's nearly six." Peter sighed, closing his eyes again. He was so tired. His whole body felt heavy, but he needed to go to school. And he needed to leave at 6:30. "Are you supposed to be leaving for school soon?"

"Yes." Peter groaned, not moving from where he rested on Tony's lap. Thor didn't say anything else, and the next thing Peter knew, a hand was running through his hair, another rubbing up and down his arm. "Huh?" He asked. Was it Tony? Or Thor? It didn't make sense that it would be Thor. Thor wouldn't be running his hands through Peter's hair like that.

"Hey, Petey. You awake?"

"Uh huh...gotta go. School." He yawned, curling his feet up so they were under the blanket covering him, and Tony shifted the blanket, helping him out. "Am I late?"

"Don't worry about that right now. Just rest."

"School? Isn't it time?"

"Just rest, kid. You had a rough night." Peter hummed in agreement. Rough night. He'd had a rough night...nightmares and then falling out of bed...his back was sore, and so was the shoulder he'd handed on. He moved his shoulder a little, wincing. "Peter?"
"Hm?"

"What's wrong?"

"Sore." He mumbled. "I fell? Off the bed."

"Yeah. I thought your weird spider DNA wouldn't let you fall off anything." He heard the smile in Tony's voice as the man rubbed his arm.

"Guess not." Tony chuckled.

"Am I going to have to put safety rails up?" He asked. He'd fallen out of bed. Then...Loki. Loki had asked him about his dream...and then...Thor? Asking him if he needed to get up for school.

A surge of adrenaline shot through his body and he sat up so fast that Tony jumped, hands in the air to get them out of his way. "Woah! Peter?"

"What time is it?" He asked, heart racing. He was late. He was going to miss another day of school!

"9:30."

"I'm late! Tony, I can't miss more school!" He cried, starting to jump to his feet, but Peter reached out, catching his arm.

"Woah, there kiddo. Take it easy."

"I'm late!"

"Peter!" He stopped, freezing in place on the sofa when Tony raised his voice, but the man didn't look upset with him. More...worried. "Stop for a second. It's fine. I called your principal...told him you were sick. Ned's getting your work. I texted him...kid about had a heart attack he was so excited. He's coming over after school to bring your work." Mr. Stark spoke softly, soothing, like he was worried that Peter was going to break apart, and for some reason, Peter felt like he might. It was school...he'd missed school before. It never upset him this much.

"I'm...I should go...I need to go..." He started to get up again, but Tony didn't let go. He could have pulled away, but he didn't. Instead, he stayed on the sofa, letting Tony put a hand on his shoulder.

"It's okay. You're okay, kid."

"I already missed so much and...and I left early on Monday and...and I still...I have homework and..."

"You'll make it up. You have plenty of time. You're okay." He knew that. Peter knew that he was okay...that he didn't have anything to worry about. It was just school. He could miss another day and do his homework and Tony was taking care of it and it was fine. "Take a breath, Pete." Tony urged, moving forward and squeezing his shoulder.

"I'm sorry. I don't know why..."

"It's okay. You're going to be okay. You don't have to be sorry." Peter put a hand to his chest.

"I just..." He closed his eyes, dropping his head forward onto Tony's shoulder and the man wrapped an arm around him.

"You're stressed, buddy," Tony informed him carefully. "It's a lot...I know. All of this...look, I'm
going to call Steve, okay? Tell him not to bring the rest of the team. Or...I'll go to them. Or something. Just...it's too much right now. That's okay."

"No! Don't go..." Peter flinched at the way the words came out. Young and so afraid. "Please."

"I won't be in danger," Tony reassured him.

"You can't know that." There was a long silence.

"It was just a nightmare, bud. That's all." There was another pause, and Tony sighed. "What do you want to do? It's up to you."

"I want to be Spiderman," Peter whispered, surprised at the words even as they came out of his mouth, and then realizing how true it was. He wanted normal back. He wanted to feel like he was in control of something again...like he could somehow fight back against all this. Like he could defend Tony if it came down to it. And yeah, he was still strong and still had his powers, but as Spiderman, he helped people. He was a superhero.

"Okay." Tony nodded. "No problem, kid. I'll put some updates in your suit and you can go back to swinging around the city and giving me anxiety." Peter managed a smile, head resting on Tony's shoulder. "When the others come, you can be with me if it makes you feel better. Thor and Loki will be there too. Rhody. Bruce. Hell, kid, you think Steve is any match for the Hulk? He's barely a match for you." Peter laughed then, knowing that Tony was lying but still appreciating it.

"If Cap had wanted to lay me out, he would have." Peter reminded him, and Tony chuckled.

"Yeah." He ran a hand through Peter's curls, his smile fond. "Go get dressed while I make breakfast. Okay?"

"Where are the others?"

"Rhody has a meeting, Pepper had to fly to DC, and who knows where the aliens are." He shrugged as Peter stood, following suit. "After breakfast, we'll take a look at your suit, okay?"

"Thanks, Tony."

Ned arrived a little after 3, eyes huge as he stared at the lobby where Peter was waiting for him. Tony had told him to go ahead and spend the evening with his friend while Tony made some phone calls, and had disappeared into his office. "Hey." He greeted his friend, surprisingly relieved to see him. He didn't know why he'd been so freaked out about missing school...why the littlest thing seemed to undo him. But he was glad to see Ned and found himself throwing his arms around his friend, grateful when his friend just squeezed him back.

"You okay?" Ned asked, resting a hand on his friend's shoulder. Peter nodded.

"Yeah...yeah, I just...it's good to see you. You want to come up?" Ned nodded, leaning in.

"Is Captain America here?" Peter snorted something in his chest releasing as he laughed.

"No. He was here yesterday, though."

"What's he like?" Ned asked as Peter led him toward the elevator.

"He's...um...he's fine." He shrugged, not sure what he could say about Captain America...Steve. But this was Ned...he could tell Ned anything...just as soon as they weren't in an elevator heading up to
his floor at the tower. Tony's floor. Not his. Tony's.

When they reached the top floor of the building, Peter led Ned over to his bedroom, shutting the door behind him. Peter sitting on his bed and Ned standing in the middle of his room. "Wow...wow." Ned whispered, looking around. "Is Iron Man here?"

"He's in his lab." Peter told him with a smile. "And his name is Tony."

"Oh my god dude you call Iron Man by his first name now!"

"Well...he asked me to and…" He shrugged, self-conscious, and Ned sat beside him, their shoulders touching.

"I got your homework." He opened his backpack, pulling out a folder that he dropped onto the bed. "It's not a lot..." Peter nodded. "Come on, man. What's up?"

"I don't know…" Peter whispered, staring down at his hands clasped in his lap.

"Dude, I'm your guy in the chair! You can tell me anything." Ned told him, shifting so that he was facing Peter. "Whatever it is, you can tell me. Is...are things bad with Mr. Stark?"

"No! No, it's not that...he's been really great. Like...he's...he's great. And so are Rhodey and Pepper...and Thor and Loki..."

"OhgodThorandLoki…" Ned gasped out, as if he'd forgotten somehow, and Peter laughed, wiping at his misty eyes.

"Yeah. They're nice. They'll probably be around for dinner if you want to stay."

"Are you serious?" Peter nodded and Ned put a hand to his chest.

"Okay...okay, I get to meet Thor…" He whispered to himself. "But...that's not what we're talking about right now. I can freak out about that later. Right now, we're talking about you." Peter grinned at the effort it took for his friend to say that, then Ned was serious again. "So, if it's not them then…"

"I just...ever since May…" It took a lot of effort to say her name, but he managed. "I've been having nightmares and...they're pretty bad. Like...I keep waking up screaming and waking up Tony...and he keeps telling me that it's fine and he doesn't mind but yesterday Steve came over and he...well, I don't really trust him because of what he did to Tony and I just...he was nice. And he said that they were going to work things out but..." He shrugged. "Last night, I had a nightmare that Steve...that he killed my...killed Tony and it was really bad and then...then Tony let me sleep in and told me I didn't have to go to school and I was so freaked out." Ned furrowed his eyebrow, hands clasped. "I couldn't stop freaking out for a minute and it was like...like, I just had to go to school and if I missed everything was going to fall apart and it was so dumb and I know it was dumb and Tony was worried."

"Dude…" Ned murmured, reaching out and slinging a shoulder around him. Peter felt his cheeks heat up as his friend hugged him. "I'm sorry." He whispered. He was crying. In front of Ned...over nothing. "I'm sorry...it's so stupid…"

"It's not stupid, Pete. It's okay not to be over May."

"I'm afraid I'm going to lose Tony too." Peter didn't mean to sob the words, but his head rested on Ned's shoulder and his friend rubbed his back. "And Loki told me that they wouldn't let anything happen to him and I trust him and I know that he can take care of himself and...I know it's stupid…"
"It's not stupid." Ned insisted again.

"He's Iron Man! He can take care of himself...but I still can't stop worrying and the team is all coming here and…"

Ned didn't say anything else...he just wrapped an arm around Peter and held him for a long time. "I'm sorry. This isn't why you came over. I can show you around or…"

"Peter." Ned's voice was soft and reprimanding. "I'm your friend." Ned didn't have to say anything else...Peter understood. So he nodded, resting his head on his friend's shoulder until Ned began to talk to him about school and how Flash had been on the lookout to make sure he stayed away from both Ned and Peter. Peter asked about MJ and Decathlon which he was still a part of despite his absence and Ned reminded him of the competition coming up in a month that Peter had completely forgotten about.

"Do we have permission slips yet?"

"Not until next week. Practice is on Mondays and Wednesdays and staring next month it's going to go thirty minutes longer. Is Mr. Happy going to pick you up?"

"No. Tony said I could take the subway."

"Want to get started on the homework?" Peter nodded, and the two sprawled out in his room, Peter at his desk and Ned on the bottom bunk. They made quick work of math, asking each other questions and comparing answers, and Peter showed Ned how to ask for scientific formulas when they moved into Chemistry and Physics.

All in all, it took about two hours, and at 5:30, they finally packed their stuff away and Peter pulled out a new Lego set, since the Millenium Falcon was still at Ned's place. They worked for a while before there was a knock on the door, and they both looked up when Tony pulled the door open. "Hey, Ned. We're about to have dinner. You want to stay?"

"Stay...eat...with Thor and Loki?" Ned repeated in a whisper, turning from Tony to Peter.

"Yeah, He's staying," Peter told Tony with a barely restrained smile. Tony seemed to be fighting a laugh as Peter's friend tried not to freak out.

"Alright. Go ahead and wash up." He seemed to stare at Peter for an extra second, like he was looking for something. He must have found it, because he smiled and then left.

"Peter....Peter...I'm going to have dinner with Iron Man, Peter."

"And Thor and Loki. Oh, and probably Bruce Banner. And don't forget War Machine." Peter reminded him with a wicked smile, climbing to his feet and holding out a hand that he used to pull his friend up easily. Ned paled.

"Bruce Banner...how did I forget about Bruce Banner?"

Peter laughed as the two of them went into his bathroom to wash their hands. "I'm just kidding. They're all really nice. Don't freak out."

"But..."

"Don't freak out." He repeated. "And don't mention Spiderman...they don't know."
"Really?" Ned asked, incredulously

"I mean...they know about the fast healing and stuff like that but not the swinging around the city stopping crime thing."

"Oh...why not?"

"I just...didn't want to tell them. Not yet."

"Okay." Ned shrugged, and the two headed out of Peter's bedroom and into the dining room where they found everyone already waiting, the two spots beside Tony left empty. Ned would be sitting next to Bruce, something Peter suspected Tony had planned.

Peter dropped into the chair beside Tony and his guardian turned to the others. "Everyone, this is Pete's friend, Ned. Ned, this is Rhodey, Loki, Thor, and Bruce."

Ned hadn't looked away from Bruce and Peter stared down at his plate with a smile. "You're Doctor Bruce Banner."

"There are two of them." Peter snorted at Loki's incredulous whisper, but Ned didn't seem to notice.

"Doctor Banner, I've read all of your books..."

"What is it with you kids and reading boring science books?" Rhodey asked, and Ned gave the man a look so incredulous that Tony chuckled.

"They weren't boring! Peter and I did a whole science fair project and three reports on your rooms until our teacher told us we had to choose someone else."

"Wait a minute." Tony cut in. "How many did you do about me?"

"Six." Peter told him with a shrug. "You have more papers published." Tony sat back with a self satisfied smirk and Bruce laughed.

"I'd be happy to go over any of it with you, Ned." Peter grinned back at Ned and passed the bowl of spaghetti that Thor had made, him and His friend quiet while Thor spoke about how well his people were settling in Wakanda and Rhodley talked about his meeting with Tony. Ned followed everything with wide eyes but seemed too star-struck to ask any more questions until dinner was over, and then Peter and Ned headed back to Peter's room to watch a movie until it was time for Ned to go home. Tony had asked if he wanted to stay the night, but unfortunately Ned had some kind of family event going on the next day, so Happy drove him home, and Peter found himself down in the lab with Tony, the two of them working on his suit, the lab locked down so that no one could accidentally stumble upon them.

"So...I talked to Cap on the phone." Tony started as Peter stared at the lines of code. Since he'd gotten Ned to unlock the suit's full capabilities, Tony hadn't reinstalled the training wheels protocol, although he had given Peter a stern talking to about messing with the suit. And he'd reinstalled the tracker. Peter glanced up from the code that dealt with his webshooter combinations. He usually just used the default, but he was looking at the others now, wondering if he could come up with more. "He's coming over tomorrow...he's bringing Sam and Natasha."

Sam...Sam was Falcon. And he'd met the Black Widow briefly before, although they hadn't spoken. Peter nodded, looking back over at the screen. "Unless you need me to cancel." Peter looked up at him again, this time in surprise as Tony pushed the screen away, coming to sit beside Peter at his workstation.
"What?"

"Look, the Avengers, we're going to try and work things out. And I want that to happen. We all do. I want you to have a team, Pete. Being a superhero, it's hard and it's scary sometimes, and having a team makes it so much better. But if you're not ready to have them here, I'll postpone. This is your home, Peter. I need to make sure you feel safe here. That's my number one priority now. Okay?"

Peter nodded, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath. Reaching out, Tony put a hand on the back of his head, pulling him close to rest on his shoulder.

Peter had a team. He had Tony. He had Thor and Bruce and even Loki...Rhodey and Pepper. Happy, too. He had Ned and MJ. They were his team. But Tony wanted the Avengers to get back together. So he would do whatever he could to help.

"Can I stay, when they come here?"

"Of course. They want to meet you anyway."

"Will Thor and Loki be here?"

"Yep. Thor, Loki, Rhodey, Bruce...they'll all be here. You don't have to worry, Pete. I'm going to be fine." Peter nodded, and Tony ran a hand over his back. "Alright, kiddo. How about you try on that suit and see if it's ready." Peter nodded.

"Sounds good."
Thank you so much to everyone who has read and reviewed! I appreciate it so much! To the person who asked if I can write some Peter and Rhodey interaction: Yes! Yes I can! There will be more interaction all around (the rogues and Rhodey and Peter etc) in the next chapter, but here is some :)
anything other than school work, his web formula, or being Spiderman again, which he planned on doing that evening after the Avengers left. He could swing back to Queens pretty quickly with no trouble...patrol for a few hours, then come back.

The hour passed too quickly and the treadmill shut off without him doing anything, coming to a careful stop so that he wouldn't fall. He tugged out his earbuds in confusion, only to hear FRIDAY's voice. "Boss asked me to ensure that you are not on a treadmill for more than an hour at a time." She informed him, and he nodded. Right. Rule number 2. So, jumping in the shower at a little after 4 am, he cleaned up then he went back to his room, not meeting anyone on the way. In his room, he opened Netflix and found a TV show to watch, more awake after the exercise but not wanting to go up to the roof and risk losing track of time while swimming. He didn't want Tony to know that he'd stayed up all night...didn't want him to worry anymore. So he watched TV for a while, then, at 6:30, lay down for a quick nap, setting his phone alarm for 7:00.

He felt worse when he woke up, groaning as he shut off his phone alarm and checked social media in bed, hoping the lights from phone screen would wake him up. Nothing new was happening, so he sat up, then immediately fell back down, room spinning around him. "Dang it." He muttered. He hadn't eaten anything after exercising. This had been a problem ever since he'd gotten his powers...he was constantly having to eat, but recently he hadn't been feeling much like eating...he figured it was probably the stress. Either way, he pulled himself out of bed, rubbing a hand over his eyes and stumbling into the kitchen where he found Rhodey sitting at the counter, eating a bowl of cereal.

"Good morning." He greeted, and Peter smiled a little, gripping the counter as he reached down and pulled out a box of cereal, head spinning.

"Morning." Milk was next, and then he was practically inhaling the cereal.

"You wanna sit down, kid?" Rhodey asked, chuckling, Peter barely heard him, scarfing down the food until the bowl was empty. "Peter?"

"Yeah." He mumbled, climbing onto the barstool next to Rhodey at the table, then poured another bowl of cheerios.

"You okay?"

"Mhm. Hungry."

"Yeah, I can tell." He knew that Rhodey was trying to get a better look at his face, so he hid it in his bowl, focusing on the food and not looking up until Bruce entered the room.

"I thought teenagers slept in on Saturdays." The scientist murmured. Peter finished his second bowl of cereal, pushing the box over to Bruce who thanked him, pouring himself a bowl. Peter was thinking about going for a third bowl when Pepper joined them, placing a hand on Peter's head as she walked by, grabbing a granola bar out of the cabinet.

It was so domestic...just like when he and May would spend the morning together on a Saturday, the news on in the background before she would switch it to a nature documentary about eagles or meerkats or something, and Peter would watch from the couch while she sat in her chair, the two of them eating cereal or eggs with sausage, both feeling lazy and comfortable. Surprisingly, that thought didn't hurt. It didn't hurt to think of May curled up in the living room eating breakfast. This was...different. But it was still comfortable. Warm.

Pepper put a granola bar in front of him before she sat down at the kitchen table. He grinned at her, swallowing it in a couple of bites and finally feeling full. She had her tablet out, typing away, only
looking up when Tony entered the room, reaching down and pressing a kiss to her cheek, murmuring something Peter didn't try to hear. The man turned to the others, lifting an eyebrow and grinning. "Well. Isn't this just domestic?" He asked with a chuckle, moving over to Peter and patting him on the back. "Morning, kiddo."

"Hey."

"You sleep okay?" The way he asked made Peter suspicious, but he nodded his head anyway.

"Uh...yeah. Fine." He lied. Well...he had. After he'd stayed up most of the night. But Tony didn't need to know that. It was a lazy Saturday morning, with Peter moving over to the sofa and scrolling through social media, Tony next to him alternating between watching the news and glancing down at his phone. The others gathered around the kitchen table for breakfast then went their separate ways, but Peter knew that they'd come back soon...they would all be around when the rogue Avengers came. Peter too.

He left to get dressed after a little while, changing from pajamas into jeans and a t-shirt, then, after brushing his hair and teeth and fighting the urge to climb back into bed, he headed back to the now-empty living room. This was Tony's private floor. Well, his and Pepper's and Peter's, but the others seemed to enjoy spending time there, and Tony didn't seem to mind. Peter didn't mind either, and he was kind of surprised to find it empty. Still, he dropped onto the sofa, waiting for Tony to reappear.

He was getting more comfortable at the Tower, but he'd admit, he was less comfortable during the day when he ran the risk of running into someone. Laying his head back on the sofa, he started to pull his phone out of his pocket but his eyes were too heavy, limbs tired and seemingly stuck at his sides, and he let his eyes close, shoulders slumping.

"Peter?" A soft voice asked, a hand pressing to his forehead. "Honey, are you okay?" He hummed in agreement to whatever the woman was saying. May? No. His heart stuttered a little at the thought. Not May. He knew better. He was just tired. Forcing his eyes open, he smothered a yawn and gave Pepper the best smile he could manage.

"Hey. I'm fine." He assured her. She narrowed her eyes, removing the hand from his forehead.

"Are you sure? You look exhausted." He nodded.

"Yeah. Just kind of tired."

"You didn't have nightmares last night, did you?" He shook his head and decided to lie again.

"Just...had trouble falling asleep." He shrugged. "Might take a nap later."

"Okay." She didn't seem convinced but didn't push it.

"What time are they coming?" He didn't have to clarify who...she knew.

"Sometime around lunch." She told him, sitting beside him on the sofa. "You have time to lay down if you want. I'll tell Tony you wanted to take a nap..."

"No...I'm fine. Maybe later." She seemed hesitant, but once more didn't force the issue. "Steve Rogers, Sam Wilson, and Natasha Romanoff are all coming to speak with Tony, Rhodey, Bruce, and Thor. Loki was...not invited." She gave a weak smile and he nodded, glad she was changing the subject.
The others arrived a little after 1. Peter had followed Tony into the conference room that didn't really look like a conference room. There was a table and chairs over in one corner by the window, but Tony waited on a sofa with Peter on one side (he'd tugged him away from the chair he'd been about to sit in in the corner) and Pepper on the other, her hand clasping his. Peter wondered if he was nervous. Peter was. But no one else gave any sign of it. Thor and Bruce were sitting together on another sofa with Rhodey, all of them at attention. Not anxious...but ready. Peter glanced over at Thor who gave him a reassuring smile, and Peter had to admit, it was hard to feel too anxious when Thor was smiling at him like that.

Tony leaned over a little, his shoulder touching Peter's. "How about Chinese for dinner after you go to Ned's tonight?" He asked, voice purposefully louder so that everyone in the room could hear. That was the alibi...that he was going to Ned's. Only Pepper and Rhodey knew about Spiderman, and they wanted to keep it that way.

"Sure." He nodded.

"What do you think, Pep? You free tonight?" She laughed a little, squeezing his hand.

"I think I can make time."

And then the rogue Avengers were there. Not that they were the 'rogue' Avengers anymore...now that the Accords were gone, they weren't in trouble or anything. But Peter wasn't sure if they were Avengers either. Were the Avengers even still a thing? He wanted to ask, but it was too late. Suddenly, Steve Rogers, Sam Wilson, and Natasha Romanoff were walking into the room, single file, like a line in elementary school, and they all paused in the doorway when everyone but Peter stood, him moving a second after the others.

The whole room seemed to hold its breath. Then Tony stepped forward, holding out a hand. "Steve."

"Hey, Tony." The two shook hands, then Steve did the same with Thor and Bruce while Sam and Natasha said their hellos. And then Steve moved past Tony and Pepper to where Peter stood in the back of everyone, holding out a hand and grinning. "Hi, Peter. Good to see you again." Peter took his hand, careful to only squeeze a little.

"Hi, Captain Rogers...sir."

"It's Steve, Peter." The man reminded him with a smile, then moved aside so that Tony move back to his side. "How are you doing?"

"I'm okay. Um...how are you?" Steve smiled.

"I'm doing just fine, son."

"Sam, Natasha, this is Peter." Tony introduced. "Pete, Birdman and Spider Spy." The two gave him friendly smiles, both reaching out to shake his hand, and he was as careful as he could be not to squeeze too hard or even think about Spiderman while shaking their hands.

"Hi. Nice to meet you." He mumbled, glancing over at Tony who had his hands in his pockets, watching everything carefully.

"You too, kid." Sam greeted, also glancing at Tony. "So...you're Tony's kid?" He asked, eyebrow lifted. Peter didn't like his tone. Didn't like the suggestion that Tony would make a bad father.

"Yeah. I am." He told the man, voice firm. Serious.
"It's nice to meet you, Peter. The last time I was here, you had just been shot. I'm glad you're okay."
Natasha stepped forward, reaching out and shaking his hand.

"Nice to meet you too, Miss Romanoff."

"Natasha." She insisted. Out of the two of them, he definitely trusted her more. Plus, she seemed to accept the fact that he was Tony's kid...that Tony cared about him. He could tell by her manner...the calm way she stood close to Tony, giving the man a smile, as opposed to Sam who stuck pretty close to Steve. "It's good to see you again, Tony."

"You too, Nat."

Everyone sat down after a moment, Tony and Peter taking their same spots by Pepper and their three guests. He had to force his leg not to bounce, fingers twisting in his lap as he hoped they didn't notice. But the three Avengers kept throwing glances at him. He forced his face into a neutral expression, trying to look like he wasn't terrified that they were either going to attack or figure out who he really was. He'd stolen Captain America's shield and webbed Falcon to the floor. Sure, he and the Black Widow had been on the same side, but she probably wouldn't be too happy to find out how young he was.

"So...what can I do for you?" Tony asked, voice kind of dry. What could Tony do for them? Peter felt himself bristle. They ought to be asking what they could do for him...how they could make up for what they'd done! They'd abandoned him! Turned on him! And now...now they were coming into his house and he was asking what he could do for them! He glanced over at Pepper whose lips were in a thin line, tablet in her hands, apparently ready to take notes or something.

"We want to put the team back together." Steve started, leaning forward, hands clasped. Natasha stared at her feet, but Sam was watching Peter...Peter met his eyes for a minute, wondering if the man could tell that he didn't trust him...that he didn't know if he could ever trust the people who'd hurt his...Tony. "The Avengers were formed to protect the Earth. They need us." Tony nodded as if that wasn't what he'd been trying to do the whole time. Peter bit down on his lip and stared at his hands. "We...we should have tried harder to talk this through. Should have tried to sit down and..." He sighed, gesturing with his hands. "We should have tried harder. And I'm sorry. For everything." He met Peter's eyes for a moment and Peter dropped his head once more, focusing on his fingers twisting in his lap.

How could he trust them?

"Water under the bridge, Spangles," Tony told him, his own voice soft. But it wasn't. Peter couldn't believe that. Couldn't imagine trusting these people. He trusted Tony, though...that would have to be enough. "So how are we going to do this?"

"I was thinking we start slow...start training together. Maybe try going on some missions. Shield is barely operating at the moment...the entire structure of their organization is being redone, so there isn't anyone working on taking down HYDRA at the moment. We could start there."

"Alright. Is the team planning on moving back here?" Pepper asked, hands folded in her lap.

"The plan is to stay where we are for the moment. I have a place, Clint is with his family, and Sam has an apartment." Tony nodded, and Peter couldn't help being grateful. He didn't want them moving into the Tower full time...didn't want them around all the time. Didn't want to have to worry about Tony all the time. He didn't know if he could take it.

"So the Accords...they're really gone? For good? I can...I can go back to my parents' place and not
worry that the cops are going to show up?"

Tony smirked a little. "Depends on what you're going to be doing at your parent's place."

"Damn it, Tony!" Peter flinched, and he felt rather than saw Thor and Rhodey stiffen. "It's not a damn joke! Do you have any idea…" He trailed off, shaking his head.

"If I remember correctly, you made that choice." Tony's voice was hard, and Peter was glad. Glad that he wasn't going to let Sam talk to him like that. He sat stiffly beside Tony until the man put a hand on his shoulder, and Peter couldn't help but notice the three visitors' eyes following Tony's hand. His guardian took a deep breath, squeezing his shoulder a little.

"All of that is in the past," Steve spoke forcefully, shooting Sam a look.

"Tony's right. We chose our sides...chose to fight. If we're going to be a team again, this has to stop." Natasha told Sam, her voice serious. She was kind of scary...but then she turned back to Tony and her face softened. "Tony, I was thinking about moving back in. What do you think?"

"Sure, Nat." He told her, his hand remaining on Peter's shoulder. Like Peter was grounding him. That was fine with Peter. He wanted to ground him. Wanted to be useful to the man. Comforting, like Tony always was with him. So he leaned toward the man, wishing he could do more. "Your room is the way you left it."

"Thanks." She glanced at Peter, eyes running over him like he was a puzzle she was trying to solve. He hoped she never solved it.

Her words seemed to have calmed things down a little. "You can all go back to your families. All charges removed from your records. House arrest canceled and all that. Ross is out of power. If we reform, we will have to answer to the UN to a certain extent, but we don't have to sign anything just yet. We just need to stick to this country for a while until things get completely straightened out. I have a copy of the paperwork if you want to look over it." Tony offered, and Pepper held out a tablet to Steve who took it, holding it so that both Natasha and Sam could look. "Go ahead and take that. You can all read it. Send copies to Clint and the other bug one if you want."

"Antman." Steve clarified absently.

"Right." Tony snorted.

"Yeah, now we've got a Black Widow, and Antman, and a Spiderman." Sam laughed a little ruefully. "The Avengers are turning into a team of bugs."

"Spiderman?" Thor asked, and Tony squeezed Peter's shoulder a little more firmly. Thankfully, no one seemed to be looking at him.

"Some freak Stark recruited," Sam muttered, not looking up from where he was skimming the documents on the tablet Steve was holding. Peter flinched at the word. "Has some kind of webs…"

"Spiderman isn't a freak," Tony told them, voice hard once more, eyes narrowing. They all glanced up at his tone, and his face seemed to be set in stone. "He's sticking close to the ground. Don't worry about him."

There was a brief silence, then Steve nodded. "Okay. Kid's not an Avenger. He's fighting crime in… Queens, right?" Tony nodded. "He's fighting crime in Queens. Maybe he can join us someday. The kid has heart." Peter's guardian chuckled.
"Yeah, he does." Peter fought to keep his face neutral, and Tony dropped his hand, patting him on the back. "Pete, we're going look over these papers for a while. You wanna stick around or you wanna take a break?"

Peter looked over at Bruce and Thor who had both, up until that point, been pretty quiet. They were leaning forward, though, watching the others, and Thor glanced over at him, giving him a reassuring nod. Tony would be safe...the others were outnumbered. And Peter was on edge...and so tired. Every time he blinked, he worried that his eyes would stay closed for good. "Yeah...okay."

"Alright. Go ahead and eat if you want. We'll get Chinese before you go to Ned's if this doesn't go on too long." He nodded, standing with his heart in his throat. He didn't want to leave Tony alone with them. But he had to trust him. Plus Thor and Bruce...and Rhodey, who was starting to pull himself to his feet. Peter moved over to his side, holding out a hand and pulling him up.

"Thanks, Pete. I've got to make a call to DC, Tony. I'll be right back." Tony nodded, and Peter and Rhodey left the room together, closing the door firmly behind them. Instead of moving away from the door, Rhodey put a hand on the back of Peter's neck. "He'll be fine, Peter," Rhodey assured him, keeping his voice low.

"But what if…"

"Pete." Rhodey was smiling at him, eyes fond, and he pulled him into a half hug. Peter melted against him, head resting on the man's shoulder, and Rhodey wrapped his arms around him fully. "You don't have to worry about him. He's fine. This is his building, the Iron Legion is here, Thor and Bruce are in the room with him. Not to mention Pepper!" Peter gave a weak chuckle.

"I know this is stupid," Peter whispered. "I know…"

"It's not stupid to be worried about your dad, kid."

"He's all I got left." He murmured, staring over at the door. "If they…"

"They won't. And he's not all you've got left, Peter. You've got all of us now. Hell, kid, I think even Loki would take you in...not sure he'd be the best guardian, though." He laughed, trying to imagine. Loki would probably just sit in a chair reading novels and making smart remarks until he turned eighteen. He liked Loki, though. Still...he didn't want any of the rest of them. He wanted Tony.

He leaned against Rhodey for what felt like a long time, head resting on the man's chest, until he finally pulled away, eyes downcast. "I'm sorry. I know this is dumb. I shouldn't…"

"Don't be sorry, Peter." Rhodey murmured, patting his back before pulling back and looking into his eyes. "You feeling okay? You look tired."

"Yeah, I'm...I'm fine."

"Alright. If you need to talk, you know where to find me. Or...well, just as Friday." He grinned. "Why don't you rest for a while? You're going to Ned's tonight, right?" Peter nodded. Of course, Rhodey knew what he was actually doing, but they'd all decided to keep speaking in code just in case anyone could overhear. It was quiet in the conference room...Peter could hear all of them breathing and occasionally Steve would ask a question. Steady heartbeats. Shifting on sofas...Tony was safe. "Rest for a bit, Pete. I'll see you for lunch."

"Thanks, Rhodey." The man grinned at him before pulling out his cell phone, walking kind of stiffly down the hall. His braces were getting better and better, but they still hissed and whined as he walked. Once more, Peter wondered if he would be allowed to help with them. He'd have to ask
Peter ran into Loki on his way to his bedroom, pausing when he found the man in his usual armchair, flipping through a book. Not wanting to be in that room with the rogue Avengers anymore, but also not wanting to be alone in his own room where he'd probably fall right to sleep and have nightmares, this time with more of the Avengers around, he dropped onto the sofa, sitting cross-legged and staring at the man who lifted an eyebrow, placing his novel on his lap.

"Can I help you?" He asked, and Peter smiled a little. The man was actually kind of funny if you got past the dry exterior.

"How come you weren't in the meeting too?"

"They do not trust me." Loki didn't sound upset by that.

"I don't trust them," Peter admitted, arms crossing as he leaned back against the sofa. "Steve and Sam...they hurt Tony. Betrayed him."

"I have betrayed my brother fairly often." Loki pointed out, and Peter laughed sadly.

"This was different. They left him for dead...turned on him, after everything he did for them." Loki just sat silently, watching him. "I know...I know that you guys won't let them hurt him...but...he said he forgave them."

"Yes, well, there is no understanding you humans and your willingness to forgive one another just about anything," Loki told him, picking up his book again. Peter closed his eyes, leaning his head back against the sofa. "My brother has the same problem. No matter how often I betrayed him, he forgave me." There was a brief silence. Then Peter felt his mouth moving without thinking too much about the consequences.

"Loki?" Peter asked, opening his eyes, and the Asgardian looked up.

"Yes?"

"Why...why did you do it?" He almost whispered the question, wishing he hadn't asked as soon as the words were out of his mouth. But he had, and so he had to continue. "New York...I mean...I was little when it happened...only eight or nine but…" He shrugged.

"You are still little," Loki told him, smirking a little, and Peter grinned. Then the Asgardian sighed. "What do you remember?"

"We lived in an apartment in Queens...it's kind of far from here, where most of the aliens were. My aunt and uncle and I all hid in the bathtub. My aunt was crying…" He dropped his eyes. "My uncle, he was holding me and promising that it would be okay but my aunt was crying so I was scared." Loki sighed, placing the novel on the table beside him.

"The attack on New York is not something that I orchestrated of my own free will." He told Peter slowly.

"Wait...someone made you do it? Who?"

"A very powerful being that wished to gain access to an infinity stone...there are several of these stones in the universe. All dangerous. All better left alone. I wished to harness the power of one and found myself at the mercy of this being...and so I did as he wished. I attacked the earth to gain back the stone, all while under its power."
"So...you were brainwashed?"

"In a sense, yes." Peter couldn't help the small, relieved smile. So Loki hadn't wanted to kill all of them. That was pretty comforting. "That is not to say that my brother and I have not fought, nor that I have not, on occasion...attempted to kill him..." Peter's eyes went wide and Loki went on, almost as though he wished to reassure him. "However, my brother and I have come to an understanding for the moment. He will always be the god of thunder, and I will always be..."

"A trickster?" Peter supplied, and Loki smirked.

"Yes, I suppose. Still, we are, for the moment, on the same side."

"And...what happens if you stop being on the same side?"

"Then I give you my word that neither you nor your father will come to any harm at my hand. You will be left out of whatever disagreements we have. I swear it." Peter felt himself smiling, head dropping back against the sofa once more.

"Thanks, Loki." He hesitated. "And...the really powerful space guy?" Loki sighed, staring down at his lap for a moment and seeming deep in thought.

"He...he will not be a problem. Don't worry about him." Peter swallowed, not sure if the Asgardian was telling him the truth. Then again, Loki hadn't lied to him yet. So he nodded.

"Okay." He whispered.

"Are you still unable to sleep without nightmares?" Loki asked, leaning forward.

"Don't tell my dad." The title slipped out, and for a minute, Peter was so stunned that he'd allowed himself to say that his whole body stiffened. He glanced around as if he'd done something wrong and was in danger of being caught, but Loki didn't seem to notice.

"I will not tell him." Loki stood then, moving over to his side. "Would you like to sleep?"

"Can you do it for, like, an hour or something? So Tony doesn't freak out? They should be in that meeting for a while, right?"

"I will wake you before your father comes out of his meeting," Loki promised, then two fingers pressed against his head and he was dreaming of a beach on a green ocean once more.
"Peter?" Green waves on a green beach...he was so comfortable. So peaceful. "Peter?" He looked around with a frown. No one was on the beach with him...right? He didn't see anyone. So...who was calling his name? Pete?" Suddenly it all vanished and he was awake and staring up at Rhodey who was crouched beside him. He jerked in surprise, shrinking back against the pillow, heart racing then calming down when he remembered where he was. "You okay?" The man asked, hand on his arm, eyes worried.

"Huh? Yeah...yeah, I'm fine." He mumbled, looking around and realizing that Loki hadn't moved from his chair, nor had he looked up from his book. He guessed Loki had said he would wake Peter before Tony came into the room...he hadn't said anything about Rhodey. "How long have I been out here?" Peter wondered, pushing himself up and sitting against the back of the sofa. The man still crouched in front of him.

"A little over an hour. Tony's ordering Chinese food for everyone since they're still going over those papers."

"What is there to go over?"

"A lot of legal mumbo-jumbo. Basically just some parameters for future Avengers activity. Since Shield is still trying to figure out what they are, the Avengers will have to be pretty careful. It's not the same as before...they don't answer solely to the EU, but they have been asked to stick to America for now when it comes to going on missions and fighting Hydra."

Peter nodded. That made sense, he guessed. "They'll be lawyers and negotiation and all that. You don't have to worry about any of that, though." Rhodey paused, getting a closer look at him. "Are you sure you're feeling up to this tonight? I'm sure your friend will understand if you aren't feeling up to coming over. You look kind of pale."

Peter pushed down the growing panic. The nap had helped, and he had a feeling that Loki had done something to make this particular nap more restful, but he still felt like he could sleep for days...everything was just a little hazy at the edges. But he was fine. Everything was fine. "Nah, I'm okay. Still waking up." He rubbed his eyes but Rhodey didn't seem convinced.

"If you're not feeling good, then Tony needs to know." Peter waved him off, doing his best to keep his face neutral.

"I'm fine. Actually, I'm getting hungry...how long until the food comes?" Honestly, the thought of eating wasn't too appealing, but it distracted Rhodey and that was all he'd needed.

"He just ordered the food, so it shouldn't be too long. Why don't you grab a protein bar or something?" He suggested, shooing Peter into the kitchen where, instead of a protein bar, he grabbed a Mountain Dew, draining the soda in a few gulps, then burying it in the trash. His stomach churned for a second and he leaned against the sofa, blinking heavily and waiting for the caffeine to kick in. He had to stay awake, just until he was done being Spiderman that night. Then, when he got home, he could sleep in. Or drink more caffeine. He hadn't decided yet. He remembered the nightmares, then...May screaming and Tony dying and decided that caffeine would probably be better. His DNA was mutated, right? That probably meant he could get by on less sleep than other people. A quick nap ought to do it.
Heading back into the living room after a detour to his bedroom, Peter sat down on the sofa once more, a novel he was supposed to be reading for English in one hand, his phone in the other which had a text from Ned on it.

"Are you going out as you-know-who to do you-know-what tonight?" Peter chuckled a little at the text, replying with a simple 'yes' before opening the book. It wasn't a particularly interesting book...sadly they rarely picked books Peter would usually read for English class, but he figured he could probably finish it in no time.

Footsteps came not too long after he'd sat down, and he glanced up to find Steve Rogers and Sam Wilson standing at the entrance to the living room, their eyes going between him and Loki almost hesitantly. He put his book down, glancing over at Loki who hadn't even looked up. "Loki." Steve spoke hesitantly, and the Asgardian lifted an eyebrow, barely looking up from his book. Peter had to fight a laugh at his tone at his expression, and Loki shot him an almost amused smirk.

"Captain America. Friend of Captain America." Steve's eyes went from Loki to Peter, and he softened a little.

"What are you reading?" He wondered, coming into the room and leaning against the wall close to Peter.

"Um...it's for school." He held up the book and Steve nodded.

"He goes to Midtown," Steve told Sam who had joined him in the living room, both apparently ignoring Loki, but Peter couldn't help but notice the trickster's eyes following them while he pretended to read.

"Damn. The genius school?" Sam asked, and Peter had to fight not to blush, a battle he lost. "Guess you really are Stark's kid." Peter blinked in surprise, but didn't deny it, no matter how strange that felt to hear him say.

"Um...yeah, I guess. I mean...it's a good school." Peter told them, spider senses quiet. He didn't have to worry about them. He could take them if he had to. And Loki was right there. Loki wouldn't let them do anything.

Suddenly it was as if his thoughts paused and then went backward in slow motion. His spider senses were quiet.

Surely, if he were in danger or if Tony were in danger...his spider senses would go off. Right? He could always trust his senses to warn him about any danger.

"What grade are you in again?" Sam wondered, dropping onto the sofa across from Peter's against the far wall, leaning back comfortably as if he'd been here before. But he had, Peter realized. They'd all lived here. Or...stayed here. He didn't know if they'd lived here full-time.

"I'm a sophomore." Sam nodded.

"And you're fifteen?" Steve asked.

"Yeah...sixteen in about a month." Both were quiet for a moment, maybe taking it in or maybe running out of things to say, and Peter found himself filling the silence, his least favorite nervous tick.

"So, um...did you finish looking over the Accords?"

"We're getting there," Steve told him, not sounding worried. "It's a lot of legal speech to sort through."
But it shouldn't take too much longer." Rubbing his eyes, Peter glanced down at his phone that vibrated in his hand.

"Want to stop by my place?" Ned had asked. He typed out a quick 'sure' before rubbing his eyes again. They were heavy...gritty. He would need to wash his face with some cold water and maybe drink some more caffeine if he was going to stay awake. His body burned through it so fast!

"Peter?" Steve's tone surprised him, and he stared up at the man. "Are you feeling okay, son?"

"What? Um...yeah...yeah, I'm fine." He felt his heart sink. First Rhodey, now Steve. Apparently, he wasn't doing a great job at hiding his exhaustion.

The man narrowed his eyes, obviously not believing him. "Are you sure? You look kind of pale."

"I'm fine." He said again, hoping he sounded convincing. Honestly, he just felt tired. On edge. Jittery. It might have been the caffeine...and maybe food would help. They would eat, and then he could be Spiderman again and then...then he could take a nap. Tony would never figure out how exhausted he was and the Avengers would drop it.

Tony joined them, then, Natasha and Thor trailing behind. "Bruce and Rhodey will be back to eat. They're down in one of the labs." Peter figured that meant they were looking at Rhodey's leg braces. The man didn't like anyone but maybe Tony around when he did physical therapy, but he thought maybe Bruce could help improve the braces. Tony had been kind of busy lately, and Peter hoped he hadn't prevented him from helping his friend. His guardian took a seat beside him, arm thrown over the back of the sofa, almost around his shoulders, while Natasha curled up in a chair, and Thor took a seat on Peter's other side. The group was spread out around the living room, covering every sofa and chair in the room, and Peter wondered if this was what it had been like before...back when they had been the Avengers.

He'd seen the Avengers on TV a thousand times. And yes, when he'd started swinging around the city as Spiderman after getting his powers, he'd thought about running into one of them in Queens...fantasized about one of them talking about how talented he was or how brave he was, and bringing him back to this tower. Then he'd get to meet all of them and they'd exclaim over how cool he was considering how young he was, and they'd invite him on missions sometimes...it was kind of embarrassing to think of now. But also...he was sitting in the living room of Stark tower with Mr. Stark...who was now Tony who was now his sort-of dad but mostly guardian, Loki, who was turning into an almost-family type person, and...well, several Avengers. Avengers who wanted to make small talk with him.

Peter felt himself zoning out for a lot of their meal, but he could feel Tony's eyes on him. The man was worried. Peter ate his sweet and sour chicken and rice, the food doing a pretty good job of helping him focus a little better. His brain stopped feeling so...spacy. Still, he was tired. There was nothing he could do about it though. He wanted to be Spiderman again. More than anything. Wanted to feel strong again. Useful. Like a superhero. He wanted to be a superhero again.

It was nearly three o'clock when Peter went to his room to get his stuff. The three guests were all back in the conference room once more, and Tony had made a show of telling him to get ready to go to Ned's. "Happy will give you a ride, just meet him in the garage." His guardian had told him in front of all the others after they'd finished eating. "Call me if you need anything." Peter had practically tripped over his own feet in his haste to get to his room where he'd pulled on his suit, greeted Karen excitedly, and then climbed out onto his balcony.

Tony had reiterated that Peter should call if he needed help, and had told him to keep his phone on. That was it. "Be careful, kiddo. Don't stay out too late." Tony had murmured, the two of them in the
kitchen as Peter had done the dishes.

"I won't." Peter had promised, and Tony had patted him on the back with a smile.

"Go on, Pete. Remember to call if you need anything."

Peter stood on the balcony railing in his suit, crouched, feeling strong. Sure. This was high, but he wasn't afraid. He was excited. Heart-pounding, hands shaking excited. Gripping the railing, he crouched, then sprang himself off the side of the building, free-falling for several stories before shooting a web at the closest building, swinging around the tower and then making his way to Queens. "You seem to be in a good mood, Peter." Karen told him with what sounded like a smile.

"It's good to hear from you again. I've missed you."

"I have missed you as well, Peter."

"Can you scan the area for me?" He asked as he reached Queens, flipping high in the air and landing on a rooftop. It was just like when he'd go out on patrol after school...just like when May was alive.

That thought hurt, but not as much as it would have a few weeks ago. He missed her. Missed her like he couldn't remember missing anyone else, except for Ben. Of course, he'd probably missed his parents this much. But he didn't remember. He just remembered them not being there. Remembered May and Ben being there for him. And now...now Tony was there for him.

His senses hadn't gone off when he'd been in a room with Steve and Sam. They hadn't gone off when Tony had been in the room too.

His senses would have gone off if there had been any danger.

Tony was safe. Peter was Spiderman.

Maybe...maybe everything would be alright. Tony would be safe. The Avengers would get back together. He could be Spiderman again. He would eventually get some sleep...preferably without nightmares. For a moment, he rested on the rooftop, staring at the buildings of Queens beneath him. And waited.

"It seems as though there is an armed robbery occurring a few blocks from here," Karen told him after a minute. Peter grinned, springing off the building and shooting a web, swinging along the route that Karen had mapped out for him. Leaping down onto the ground right behind the group of three armed men soundlessly, he webbed the first before they could even turn around, dodging bullets and fists with equal grace, flipping out of the way of one gun and ducking under a fist, and in the end, all three men were webbed to the wall, awaiting the police.

Next was a drug deal he stumbled upon happening in a back alley a few miles away. Equally easy. Then a mugger trying to take an old lady's purse. He chased the guy for three blocks but couldn't find the old lady, so he just webbed the purse to the closest police station and went back to crouching on rooftops, waiting for Karen to give him something else to do. He strung a web between two buildings and practiced his tightroping, then rode the train for a while. He practiced his flips and freefalling and swung around the city and caught two guys trying to break into a decently nice car, webbing them both to the ground beside it, then helped a girl who was locked out of her building.

He couldn't pick the lock, but he did take her up to her window and let her in.

Then there was a guy trying to steal a bike. He webbed the guy to the closest building, but had no success finding the bicycle's owner, so he propped it against the wall, leaving a note warning people not to try and steal it. Then, since he'd killed about three hours without even noticing, he texted Ned
from a nearby rooftop. "Are your parents home?" Placing his phone on his stomach, he stretched out
on the rooftop, hands propped under his head, legs stretched out. He was tired, eyes heavy, mouth
stretching in a yawn as he waited for a response.

His phone buzzed after a few minutes. "No. Just left to go to a movie. Come over!" Grinning, he
jumped up, frowning at the wave of dizziness but figured he just hadn't eaten enough during his
patrols. Usually he stopped for a sandwich at Delmar's, but he hadn't wanted to stop and besides, he
hadn't been hungry. Deciding he'd get something at his friend's place, he swung across the city and,
making sure no one was watching, he climbed into his friend's window before pulling off his mask.

"Dude...this is so cool," Ned whispered, and Peter laughed, dropping onto his bed. "How are patrols
going? How are the Avengers? What's it like with them there? Are you feeling okay? You look kind
of sick..." Peter sighed, grinning and waiting for him to stop, but feeling absolutely wiped out now
that he was sitting on a real bed. But he'd only been going for three hours!

"Uh...patrols are good. The Avengers are fine. It's...weird. And I'm fine. Just hungry. Mind if I get a
sandwich or something?"

"Sure! Do you want to go to Delmar's or..."

"I don't really have a change of clothes." He told his friend apologetically, so the two went into
the kitchen, Ned making sure to close the curtains before Peter entered the room in his suit, and, at the
kitchen table eating ham sandwiches, Peter told Ned everything. He told him about the muggers and
the Accords and the robberies and accidently calling Tony 'dad' and everything else. Ned listened
spell-bound, mouth dropping at the end.

"You...you called Tony Stark 'dad.'" He whispered.

"Well...not to his face. To Loki."

"You called Tony Stark 'dad' while you were talking to Loki." Peter laughed at his tone.

"Yeah...but I didn't mean to!"

"No...man, that's great! I mean....he kind of is your dad. Right? He takes care of you and you live
with him and he's your guardian...that's what dads do." Peter shrugged. "Peter...that's what dads do."

"I just...everything is...crazy." He whispered, feeling better after scarfing down his sandwich, then
starting in on the chips. "With Loki and Thor and Bruce...now the other Avengers...and the Black
Widow is going to stay at the tower..."

"Do you think I can meet her?" Peter lifted his eyebrows and Ned hurriedly backtracked. "I
mean...like...if I could come over sometime and she just happened to be there...that would be cool."

"Sure." Peter grinned, already imagining that meeting. "She seems really nice...not that I've talked to
her much." Ned was quiet for a minute, then he took his plate to the sink, Peter following.

"Hey, you want to work on the Millenium Falcon?"

They worked for almost an hour, and by the time they were done, it was getting dark out. "I'd better
head home." Peter told him, then donned his mask, climbing out the window and checking his
phone. A text from Tony.

"How's patrol?"
"Good." He texted back. "I'm on my way..." He hesitated, then finished the sentence. "...home." Then he hit send.

He was swinging back toward the tower, swinging from building to building as he flew through the air, heart pumping, mind racing. Home. He was going home. Stark tower was his home. Tony was his home. He was Spiderman again. He had a sort-of family. No...not a sort-of family. A family. Tony was his family. Rhodey. Pepper. Maybe even Bruce and Thor and Loki. And one day...the rest of the Avengers? No...he'd think about that later. For now, he could go home, finish his reading for English, then maybe try to keep himself awake until it was late enough to take a quick nap. His willpower to stay awake was kind of weak, though. He might just go to bed...screw worrying about the nightmares.

His phone vibrated when he was in the air, and he pulled it out mid-swing, glancing around to make sure he didn't run himself into anything. "Be careful, Pete. See you soon. Your window's open."

He was quite a way from the tower...at least half an hour, but he enjoyed the swinging...enjoyed the sound of the wind and the feel of his muscles straining as he swung, shooting webs at the last second, flipping when he got to the highest point of his swing, then repeating the whole process and feeling his heart race with the excitement of it. Web-swinging never got old. Never got any less fun. He loved it. He wondered if this was what Tony felt like when he flew in his suit. Then he wondered if Tony would ever let him use the armor.

The crash jerked him out of his thoughts and he almost lost his grip on the web. Looking down, he almost fell when he saw the cars below...one had a crushed front end and was off to the side of the road, a man in his thirties stumbling out...and the other...the entire driver's side was caved in. And someone was screaming. Traffic had come to a dead stop and people were standing around...but no one approached the cars.

He didn't think before he dropped to the ground, racing to the car and peering inside. Was barely aware of his own actions. He didn't think when he saw the woman in the front seat, her face a bloody mess...no pulse. He could hear that much. She was dead, eyes open and staring straight ahead at nothing. But in the back seat...there was a car seat. "No...I didn't...I didn't mean to..."

The man was sobbing, dropping onto his knees in the middle of the road. "I never meant...I just closed my eyes for a second I didn't..."

Peter couldn't hear him...not really. His screaming and sobbing didn't register. All he could see was the baby. A little boy, maybe two years old. He was screaming and fighting and thrashing and he was alone. Alive. Everything was a vacuum...a quiet but loud buzzing in Peter's ears. The boy had survived and the woman had died and Peter thought he might throw up. But the little boy screamed and reached out his arms, squirming in the car seat, surrounded by broken glass and metal. Grabbing the side of the car, Peter pulled with all his might, peeling away the side of the car with almost no effort. The boy kept screaming, and, as if from far away, Peter heard himself speaking. "Hey...hey...it's okay." He assured the child, reaching out and carefully unclipping the restraints on the car seat. Carefully, Peter picked him up, stepping away from the car and pressing his hand to the back of the child's head, trying to keep him from looking at the woman in the front...his mom. His dead mom. Or maybe not his mom...maybe his aunt.

He couldn't breathe...but he had to. Pacing back and forth, holding a hand to the back of the boy's head to keep him from looking at the dead woman, he didn't stop moving, ignoring all the people gathered around watching. All silent. Maybe recording. He didn't care. Couldn't care. He was vaguely aware of a tear dripping down his cheek. "I'm here...it's okay." He whispered the lie. It wasn't okay. It may never be okay. She was dead...but all he could focus on was breathing. He had
to keep breathing. For the baby. The baby needed him and the man moaned and sobbed several feet away and the woman was dead and Peter breathed.

No. Peter couldn't think about that. Not now. Not with a screaming child in his arm. "It's okay. I'm here. I'm Spiderman...I'll keep you safe. I've got you." He murmured, rocking the screaming boy, hands shaking as he rubbed the boy's back. He was so small...so tiny and delicate in Peter's hands. He'd never really held a kid before...not like this. Rocking him and pacing in front of the car until a police car broke through the crowd, an officer jumping out of the car. "He was in the back." Peter choked out, handing the boy over.

The man asked him something. He must have. But Peter couldn't hear him...couldn't make his brain take in the words. Instead, he jumped, shooting a web at the closest building and swinging. Swinging as fast as he could, hurrying toward the tower. He felt numb. Numb and cold. He climbed up to his bedroom and slipped through the window...and found Tony sitting on his bed. Was he late, he wondered as he pulled off his mask and let it drop to the ground. He'd texted that he was coming home...but he'd taken longer than he should have. Was Tony mad? He didn't know if he could take Tony being angry with him right now.

The man stood up and stared at him, eyes narrowing as he approached, reaching a hand out and touching Peter's cheek. "Karen showed me everything." The man explained, and Peter stared at him, lips trembling.

"I'm cold."

"Come here, buddy." Tony invited softly, opening his arms, and Peter felt something inside him break...like a dam crumbling. His legs buckled, and Tony took his weight, arms tight, leading him over to the bed where they both sat down on the bottom bunk. Peter wasn't even aware of the noises he was making....whimpering and sobbing. It felt like he was so far away...but at the same time, he was painfully present. "Shit, kiddo. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

"She was dead...he...he was alone...in the back seat and..."

"I know. Karen told me. I saw...I know. I know, Peter." Tony whispered.

"She was dead...but...I should have got her out too...I was too late..." He sobbed into Tony's shoulder, and the man rubbed his back, just like Peter had the baby.

"You got the baby out, Peter. You did everything exactly right," Peter shook his head, the vision of the dead woman and the vision of his aunt mixing...his nightmares and reality...

"I left her alone, Tony...I just left her in there and she was alone..." Tony shook his head.

"No. You got the baby out. You had to get the baby out. You did great, Peter."

"He was crying and he wouldn't stop...he was scared. I couldn't...I couldn't do anything. And the guy...he could have been hurt but I couldn't...Tony...Tony, I couldn't help him I couldn't save...I couldn't save them...any of them...I didn't...Dad, I couldn't..."

"I'm sorry, Peter," Tony whispered, leaning back against the headboard and pulling Peter against his chest. "I'm so sorry, honey." Closing his eyes, Peter rested his head against Tony's neck, listening to his heartbeat and wondering why he couldn't have saved her. His exhausted mind ran itself in circles for what felt like hours before he let Tony's gentle hand on his back put him to sleep.
The first time Tony had seen Peter Parker had been on a computer screen. It was his habit to have FRIDAY keep tabs on local news and possible recruits, both for his team and for his company. This generation of kids was smart...smart and resourceful and he was always on the lookout for new blood. He had her keep him updated on high schoolers who excelled in coding and college students, especially those on scholarships and working in fast food, who would make good a good fit at Stark Industries. Then, every month, he passed this information along to Pepper who hired the best. Not all of the work was interesting, but he paid all of his employees really well so there were very few complaints.

He kept close tabs on new vigilantes too, all through FRIDAY. When the Devil of Hell's kitchen started fighting crime and bleeding all over the place, he'd had FRIDAY work on figuring out his identity for months. No to out him...he'd never give out someone else's information, and all of that research was kept on a separate server that had more protection than DC and Shield combined. He also knew about Miss Jones, and their ragtag group of small-time vigilantes. He never contacted them or anything...never even spoke to them. But he kept up with what they were getting themselves into so he could be ready to help if necessary. And so that he could call on them for backup if it ever came to it.

He also knew about Dr. Charles Xavier and his special school. Thought it was great. Hell, he'd given talks there. Made sure they had access to good technology. A lot of those kids were already hated by society, but he'd be damned if they didn't get a good education. Jobs at his company too, if they wanted them and were qualified. So he went public about supporting mutants, not that anyone knew that the school was a safe haven for mutants, but still...he gave talks with Dr. Jean Grey who was both brilliant and a little scary and appeared in public at a lecture with Dr. Xavier. Tony Stark was all for local vigilantes. How couldn't he be? He was one! Just...on a larger scale. But everyone had to start somewhere.

So when FRIDAY had informed him of a brand new vigilante running around, a guy in a red hoodie that people on Youtube were calling 'Spiderman' he was intrigued. "Mutant...has to be." He'd murmured, watching the boy climb a wall. "Unless it's the gloves..." Then the guy had shot a web...an actual web, and had swung down to the middle of the street, landing right in front of a van. His heart had stuttered a little...and then the guy had put up his hands, stopping the car and barely even getting pushed back by the force. "Holy shit." He'd whispered, leaning forward and stroking his goatee. "Is he stronger than Cap?"

"It would seem so." His AI told him, showing him another image of the guy stopping a semi truck that was rolling down the highway.

"FRIDAY?"

"Yes, boss?"

"Any idea who he is?"

"I am analyzing all possible data now."

That had taken a week. A week of watching the guy through traffic cams and cell phone footage...a week of trying to figure out when he patrolled (mostly between 4 and 10pm) and where he lived...
(Queens, most likely) and the first piece of information FRIDAY came back to him with had made him pause, sitting down heavily in his chair. "Spiderman is most likely a high school student."

"Run it again." He had ordered, putting his hand over his mouth and sighing. He'd known when he'd chosen to reveal his identity that there would be copycats. That kid would look up to him and want to be superheroes when they grew up. But...this guy...this kid...was actually trying it. And if he got himself hurt...Tony felt like that was at least partially on him.

He was most likely a high school student.

Next had come the process of elimination. The guy was white. Slim. On the sort side for a high schooler. Tony had been willing to go ahead and assume that he'd created the webshooters that he wore on his wrists. They were effective. Nothing fancy, but they worked well. So he had FRIDAY look at local schools for gifted kids. Midtown School of Science and Technology. That fit. Then...then FRIDAY had come up with a name.

Peter Parker.

"Tell me about him." Tony had said, spinning in his chair and gesturing toward the screen in his lab. A picture had appeared. A boy...a teenager. Short brown hair, big, dorky smile in a school yearbook photo.

"Peter Benjamin Parker is fourteen years old. He is a sophomore at Midtown School of Science and Technology. He has an unweighted 4.0 GPA and up until a month ago, he was a member of the robotics club, chess club, debate team, academic decathlon, and played snare drum in marching band. He has dropped every extracurricular activity other than academic decathlon. His parents, Doctors Richard and Mary Parker are deceased, and he was placed under the guardianship of Ben and May Parker, his father's brother and sister-in-law. Benjamin Parker was murdered three weeks ago, leaving him in the sole custody of his aunt, May Parker."

"Shit, kid." Tony had murmured, shaking his head. The boy had already lost three guardians. Deciding that there was no need to get involved in the life of a grieving fourteen-year-old boy, he'd closed out all the information, hiding it away for later. But he hadn't been able to put the thought away...the kid could use a suit. A real one. So he'd gotten to work. It had to be flexible. The kid could move, flipping and jumping from building to building. And the gloves had to be thin enough that he could stick to things through the material. So he'd worked. And worked. Spending hours in his lab to make sure this suit would work.

Then he'd kept going. Programs that the kid could work through to help him improve. Web combinations. A monitor so Tony could keep track of him. If the kid was anything like Tony had been...which he wasn't, based on what Tony had seen so far...still, he was a teenager. Teenagers needed supervision. Not that he planned on recruiting the boy for a while. Still...the monitor might come in handy. He added a heater in case Peter was ever trapped somewhere cold. He remembered walking through the snow, dragging the Iron Man armor...the kid wouldn't have to worry about that. The suit would have to be easy to take off and put on in case he had to change in a hurry. A parachute in case he fell. Tony had imagined Pepper falling, fingers just out of reach, and had shuddered. The boy wouldn't have to worry about that either. He'd had a good laugh while programming 'enhanced interrogation mode' and 'enhanced combat mode,' then locked them away behind a training wheels protocol. The kid would get just the basics first. The extra stuff he could give him later. Once they had worked together...then again, he had no real plans to meet the boy.

Then, a few days after finishing the suit, the last piece of the puzzle had come to him. An AI. The boy had lost his mom and dad, then his uncle. He'd maybe want someone to talk to. So he'd made the AI female. Nurturing. Kind. Supportive. Smart and maybe just a little sarcastic, but ultimately
genuine. Someone to guide him when he felt alone. But he hadn't named her. He'd let the kid do that when he was able. So he'd kept track of Peter and Spiderman until that day that he'd needed him. As he worked, he thought of Jarvis...he wanted this kid to have someone like that.

Of course, he'd known that the kid would see some tough things. All superheroes did. You couldn't save everyone. But if you'd told Tony at the beginning when he'd first seen Peter's dorky yearbook photo that one day he'd been the boy's guardian...that one day soon, the boy would cry himself to sleep on Tony's shoulder after calling him 'Dad' Tony would have laughed you out of his building. Well...no, he'd wonder how the hell you know about Peter and demand your silence with a few not so thinly veiled threats. Either way...

"FRIDAY?" Tony murmured, not stopping the careful circles he was rubbing on Peter's back. He wanted to get him changed out of his suit and into pajamas but doubted he could without waking him, and if the dark circles under the boy's eyes were any indication, Peter needed to sleep.

"Yes, boss?" His AI asked, marching his volume.

"Lock his door and the elevator to this floor for everyone but me, Pepper, and Rhodes."

"Yes, sir." He heard Peter's door click and pulled the blanket up around them, not willing to risk moving just yet...and honestly, not really wanting to. The boy clutched Tony's shirt in one slack fist and his red-rimmed eyes were shut but relaxed. He was exhausted. Tony wanted to know how he'd been sleeping but decided to ask later...after the kid was fully asleep and wouldn't wake if he moved.

Tony rested his head on the pillows and tucked the blanket more firmly around Peter's shoulders, trying not to think of the boy stumbling in through the window, ripping off his mask...his huge, dilated pupils, eyes red from crying. His trembling lips, or how his whole body had shaken. He was still shaking. The boy had been cold.

"FRIDAY, tell Karen to turn on his heater." He whispered. "Lowest setting for ten minutes. Warm him up a bit."

There was no outward sign of the heater turning on, but the boy sighed softly, hiding his face in Tony's chest, and he moved his hand from Peter's back to his hair, playing with his messy curls. The kid usually used gel or something to make them lay flat, but Tony had to admit, only to himself and never out loud, that the curls made him look younger. Cuter. The man had never felt this way before. Sure, he loved Pepper. He was going to marry her and he loved her more than he'd ever loved anyone else. But this kid...this boy laying on his chest...he needed him. Peter needed him and looked up to him. Peter thought Tony could do anything, and when that kid looked at him, Tony thought he could too. He loved Peter. Loved him in a way he hadn't ever loved anyone.

Tony waited for about thirty more minutes, eyes closed, relaxing with his son before he started the process of extracting himself from the boy's arms. First, he loosened the kid's hold on him, then carefully slid his head to the pillow Tony had been laying on. Careful not to bump his head on the top bunk, he stood, tucking the blanket around him then...pausing. Looking around. Quickly, and almost too lightly for it to count, he kissed the top of Peter's head. "Night, Pete." He murmured, running his fingers through the boy's hair before leaving him to sleep.

Shutting the door behind him, Tony spoke to FRIDAY once more. "Soundproof his room 50%...keep it dark in there if he sleeps in tomorrow." He ordered, heading to his bedroom which, since it was only about 8, was empty. Pepper was...somewhere. He'd forgotten to ask much about her plans for the day after everything. He needed to get her a spa trip or something. Soon. "Soundproof this room. 100%. Only let Pepper in." Dropping into his desk chair, he stared at the laptop for a moment before speaking once more. "FRI, how did Peter sleep last night?" He
"He slept for a little over 1 hour."

"Wait, what?" Tony demanded. Sure, he'd been distracted, but to not notice this? "What did he do all night?"

"Peter exercised for quite a while, drank soda in order to stay awake, and watched a movie."

Tony swore under his breath, all too aware of what Peter was trying to do. Hell, he'd tried it himself plenty of times. But the kid had to sleep! He didn't want Peter picking up his stupid habits and coping mechanisms. "Loki helped him sleep earlier today," FRIDAY told him unprompted. He was able to sleep without nightmares for an hour."

"Alright. Thanks, FRI." Tony sighed, leaning back in his chair and staring at the ceiling. Peter wasn't sleeping...hadn't really had a good night's sleep in weeks. And he was exhausted...the boy was making himself sick. But what could Tony do about it? He couldn't force Peter to sleep. Loki could apparently help but he didn't exactly want to rely on Loki for this. Or anything. Ever. Sure, the guy was friends with his kid, but that didn't mean Tony trusted him. Not fully.

Tony had thought that Peter was a bit strange earlier. Pale and kind of withdrawn. Then, when he'd left, after Sam and Steve had started looking through the Accords, Natasha reading through them as well, Steve had suddenly looked up at the door, eyes wide and...surprised? Hurt? Worried? It had been a quick glance at the door, and then the man had gone back to reading, a tight, serious look on his face, throwing occasional glances at Tony that the man didn't really understand.

The soft tapping on his door pulled him from his thoughts, and Tony smiled up at Pepper. "You don't have to knock, you know? You live here too." Dressed in jeans and a t-shirt, feet covered in soft, fuzzy socks, his fiancée smiled.

"You looked like you were working on something." Tony shook his head, opening his arms and gesturing for her to come over. She did, resting her hands on his shoulders instead, squeezing and making him sigh in relief as she massaged his back and arms. "Is Peter okay?"

"There was a car wreck...a woman and a baby. The woman was dead when Peter reached them."

"His aunt or the woman?" He snorted without any humor.

"I don't think even he knew." He dropped his head back against her.

"He has you." Pepper reminded him. "He sees you as his father now...he's going to be okay. We'll get him through this." She promised, dropping a kiss on his head. He nodded, reaching back and taking her hand. They would get him through this. They had to.

That evening as they lay in bed, Pepper sound asleep, Tony sat up against the pillows, tablet in hand. The tablet was turned down low, and he adjusted the reading glasses on his nose. It was probably bad for his eyes to be reading in the dark like this...he didn't care. He was halfway through 'Helping your teenager deal with grief' and was flipping back and forth between that and an article on helping teenagers sleep.
Help them relax. Make sure the room was dark. Keep the temperature cool but not too cold. He
could do all those things. But he knew that Peter was having a lot of trouble with the nightmares.
Even though Tony wanted to be there for him and was happy to spend the whole night with the kid
if it helped him get some sleep. But Peter thought he was inconveniencing Tony or being a burden or
something...they hadn't talked about it much. That would have to change.

He would need to sit down with the boy. Try to get him to talk more. Try to help him relax. After he
was out of school for the semester in about two months, Tony was going to take him and Pepper to
the beach house he was in the middle of purchasing in southern California. Get the two of them to
relax. Send Pepper to the best spa he could find and take Peter out on a boat. Teach him to sail and
fish and let him swim in the ocean and...and it was going to be great. But Peter needed help in the
meantime. Maybe they could do something the next weekend...get out of town. Go...camping or
something. Did kids like camping? How did one 'camp'? Tony would have to figure it out.

Before then, though, Peter would need sleep. Regular sleep...like, the normal amount for a teenager.
Maybe more. And he had roughly one day to figure out how to get him to do that. "Tony?" He
jumped a little, turning the screen of his tablet so it didn't shine in Pepper's eyes.

"Yeah?"

"It's almost three in the morning." Surprised, he stared down at his tablet and realized she was right.
"You need to sleep too." She reminded him, and he put the tablet down, scooting down in the bed to
let her wrap him in his arms. He didn't want to sleep...didn't want to rest until his kid was okay. But
if he was exhausted, how was he going to help Peter? So he closed his eyes, breathing in Pepper's
hair and trying to relax...trying to sleep. He finally succeeded.

The alarm went off at nine and Tony rolled over to throw an arm around Pepper only to find that the
bed was empty. Sighing and wondering if he'd ever wake up before her, he climbed out of bed,
running a hand through his hair. "FRIDAY, how's Peter?"

"Peter is still asleep. He woke briefly at four am, got a drink from the kitchen, then went back to
sleep." Tony nodded. Good. The kid needed it. But he'd need to eat too, so Tony headed to the
kitchen, still in a tank top and sweatpants, and threw some bacon in a skillet. Pepper joined him after
a minute, looping her arms around his neck and kissing the back of his head.

"Need any help?" She wondered.

"You can make the eggs?" He suggested, wondering how his life had gotten so domestic and
enjoying every second of it.

The elevator dinged when the bacon was nearly done and Tony was surprised to find Natasha
stepping into his kitchen. She leaned against the counter, hesitant, and he pointed to the blender
where he'd laid out fruit and a bag of frozen spinach. "Want to make the smoothies?"

"Sure."

The three worked together in amicable silence, the tension broken, as if nothing had happened. As if
it were any day at the tower. "Where is Peter?" Natasha wondered once she had made smoothies to
fill the four cups Tony had laid out.

"Still in bed. He got back from his friend's place late last night?" She nodded and if she saw through
his lie, she didn't say anything about it. Instead, she poured the smoothies into cups and set them on
the table as Pepper began scooping eggs onto plate and Tony dropped some bread into the toaster.
"Were Loki and Thor awake?" He asked, figuring that Bruce would sleep in.
"I haven't seen them." She told him, setting the table. It wasn't unusual for the team to gather for breakfast on a Sunday morning, so it wasn't strange for Natasha to join them. "Steve and Sam headed back pretty late last night, but they mentioned coming by next week sometime...and bringing Wanda." Tony just nodded. Wanda coming meant Vision would come back, so that would be nice. His mind wandered briefly to Bucky, but he shook that off. He knew that Bucky was in Wakanda having that HYDRA programming removed from his brain. He just didn't know if he was ready to have him in his home. Around Peter and Pepper. Not yet.

"I'm going to go wake Peter up," Tony told them as Pepper began filling the table with food. Natasha gave her a hand, filling a pitcher with water to place on the table, and Tony hesitated outside Peter's door. "He still asleep?" Tony checked.

"Yes, sir," FRIDAY told him.

Opening the door as quietly as he could, Tony stepped into the room, shutting the door behind him and moving over to Peter's bed. The boy was wrapped up in his blankets like a caterpillar in a cocoon, only his head and messy hair sticking out. Tony sat beside him, placing a hand on the boy's head and running it through his hair. "Pete?" He asked, keeping his voice soft. The kid was a light sleeper, and as soon as Tony spoke, his eyes opened.

"Huh?"

"Ready to get up?" The boy groaned, scooting down and hiding in his blankets.

"No." Tony chuckled.

"Pepper and I made breakfast. And we have a guest." The boy peeked up at him.

"Who?" He asked suspiciously.

"Another spider."

"The Black Widow" Tony nodded with a chuckle.

"That's the one. But you can just call her Natasha." He teased, coaxing a smile out of the boy. "She's pretty curious about you. They all are. Heck, I think they're more interested in talking to you than talking to me." He grinned to make sure the boy didn't misread him. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine." Peter sat up a little, and Tony lifted an eyebrow.

"Fine like you were yesterday?" Peter frowned, looking down at the blankets pooled in his lap. "FRIDAY said you weren't sleeping." The kid didn't answer, and Tony tried to remember everything he could from the parenting book he'd been reading at night. Be there. Listen. Try to get them to talk but don't force it. Show them you loved them...everything Howard had never done.

"You...you want to talk about it?" Peter shook his head. Right. Of course not. Because when were things ever that easy? "Come on, kiddo." Tony scooted over on the bed, wrapping an arm around Peter's shoulders and sitting against the headboard beside him. The kid leaned against him without seeming to think about it, his head resting on Tony's shoulder, and the man felt something in his chest melt. He loved this kid. So much. "Talk to me, Pete." He urged.

"I just don't want to have nightmares." Tony nodded.

"I know. And I get that, kid. Really, I do. Hell, I've stayed up more nights than I can count trying to avoid nightmares. But Pete...you have to sleep. I know the nightmares suck. Really, I do. We're going to figure something out, okay? Just...promise me you'll try?" Peter glanced up at him, eyes sad
and worried. "You'll make yourself sick if you don't sleep, buddy." Tony squeezed him to his side, resting the side of his head on the top of Peter's.

"I don't want to keep bothering you," Peter whispered. Tony didn't look down at him, knowing it would make it easier for Peter to tell him if he just let him talk. "Ever since...since you took me in I've been trouble for you and I hate it...I don't want you to have to worry about me all the time, Tony."

"You're my kid, Pete. It's my job to worry about you. It was your aunt's job and your uncle's job and your parents' jobs...they all worried about you because they all loved you. And that's why I worry about you." Tony murmured, getting dangerously close to emotions he didn't know how to express. He wasn't good at this. Howard had never been good at this. Sure, he'd told the kid he loved him after the boy's aunt had died but this was different. This wasn't heat of the moment emotion. This wasn't him trying to get through to a grieving boy as quickly as possible. This was...slower. More serious and more genuine and...more. Emotions his father had never shown him. But he had to be better than Howard. He had to. Because Peter needed him. He had to be strong for Peter. So he looked right at Peter and prayed that the boy understood. "I love you, kid. I want to help you get better. And I know you're trying. I know...I can see it. And you're doing good. Better than I did. But...you have to sleep and you have to eat. You have to. Please." Peter nodded, still not meeting his eyes, and Tony pressed his lips to the top of the kid's head.

"I love you too," Peter whispered, voice barely audible.

"You ready for breakfast? It's never a good idea to keep the Black Widow waiting." Wide-eyed, Peter followed as Tony climbed out of the bottom bunk of the bed, nearly hitting his head on the top bunk. "Go ahead and get ready. I'll see you in a few minutes." And with that, Tony headed back to the kitchen to get the kid a plate. He wasn't sure if the talk had helped, but he'd keep talking until his kid was okay. He'd do what his dad had never done for him...he'd be there.
The Black Widow was watching him. Seated next to Tony and across from the super-spy, eating breakfast and trying not to worry Tony even more than he already had, he could feel it, even though he hadn't caught her actually looking at him yet. He didn't look up at her. Didn't look up from his plate. He had no idea what to make of the woman...had barely spoken to her. She seemed nice enough...and she probably wasn't going to, well...attack or anything. She had smiled at him when she'd sat down. Honestly, he wasn't 100% sure of her role in the whole Accords airport fight thing. She had been on their side at first...and then she'd been gone?

To be perfectly honest, he didn't understand most of what had happened. He knew that Tony had asked for his help and he knew that he'd been on Tony's side along with Vision, Natasha, Rhodey, and King T'Challa. The Accords hadn't been perfect, according to both Mr. Stark and Steve, but...they just hadn't sat down and talked? Hadn't tried to negotiate or make them better? Why? Steve had mentioned that it had all happened so fast. So...Ross. Peter knew that Ross was the bad guy in all this. That didn't mean that he didn't worry about the other Avengers. They hadn't trusted Tony after everything. They'd turned on their teammate. And something had happened between Tony and Steve...Steve had left him for dead. How was he supposed to reconcile that to the guy who had smiled at him and who called him 'son' and had tried to make small talk with him?

Peter felt better...a lot better. Still kind of tired, but the blurriness at the edge of his vision had mostly gone away, and he didn't feel dizzy anymore. Or like one more small thing was going to break him. Because that's how he'd felt before...like one more setback...one more problem, and his whole being would shatter. Like when he hadn't woken up in time for school. But now it was like he could think. His spider senses weren't going off. They weren't in danger. They weren't in danger from Natasha and they weren't in danger from Steve or Sam. Maybe he didn't completely trust them yet, but his senses had never steered him wrong.

"Kid, you gonna drink that or stare at it?" Tony asked, jolting him out of his thoughts.

"What?" He glanced between Tony and Pepper, then down at his smoothie. "Oh...yeah. Drink it." He told him, grabbing the cup and taking a drink.

"Are you okay?" Pepper asked, her voice soft, and Peter nodded.

"Yeah. I'm fine." He assured her, not making eye-contact with Natasha. It was strange, having her there. Not bad, not really. Just...odd. She had only been nice to him, but she was a spy. An Avenger. And...and Tony trusted her, Peter told himself. His senses hadn't gone off around her and he felt safe around her so he wasn't going to worry about it. He didn't want to keep worrying Tony...

Tony had told him that he loved him.

The man had said that before. He'd told Peter that he loved him right after he'd become Peter's guardian...right after Peter had woken up. And Tony showed him that he loved him all the time...they worked together in the lab and Tony would put his arm around Peter's shoulders...Tony woke him up from his nightmares and sat with him. He watched TV and movies with him. So Peter already knew that Tony loved him. But to hear him say it...it had felt different this time. More. More serious and more meaningful, like Tony was struggling but needed him to know.

And Peter had told him that he'd loved him too. He'd...called him dad. Right? Peter couldn't
remember everything he'd said, but he vaguely remembered that. And he'd called him 'dad' to Loki too. So...he would have to be careful. Tony was his guardian. His mentor. Maybe even a friend. But he wasn't his dad and probably wouldn't be comfortable with Peter calling him that.

When breakfast was over, Peter immediately stood to clean up, and no one reprimanded him...he figured that Tony had given up. But, to his surprise, Natasha stood up as well, helping him carry the plates into the kitchen. He listened for Tony and heard him and Pepper go into the living room and figured he'd leave them alone for the rest of the day. Tony deserves to spend some time with his fiancée instead of worrying about Peter all the time. No one was in danger. His senses had proven that. So he began to do the dishes, freezing when Natasha stood beside him and held out a hand. "You wash, I'll dry." She offered, a slight smirk turning the corners of her mouth.

"Oh...um...you don't have to, Ms. Natasha."

"It's just Natasha. Or Nat. And I don't mind." She plucked the dripping plate out of his hand and began drying with a clean towel.

He had to force himself to start moving again, blinking himself back to the present and grabbing the next plate out of the sink. "So, are you looking forward to going back to school tomorrow?" She wondered.

"Um...yeah, I uh...yeah. I guess." He shrugged, and she kept her eyes on him, pleasantly curious. "I mean, uh...I'll get to see my friend and...and we have academic decathlon practice after school...oh, I forgot to tell Tony about that! Uh...yeah." He trailed off, cheeks flushing, but she didn't seem like she was going to tease him or anything. Instead, she seemed intrigued.

"Academic decathlon?" She asked.

"Yeah." He handed her the last of the forks and felt around the dishwater, searching for more dishes before pulling the plug. He really would need to tell Tony about that. Plus he always patrolled after school, and his school was closer to Queens than the tower, so it would make sense to just come back later.

But he'd need to ask permission.

He hadn't exactly asked May's permission to be Spiderman. It was something he'd started on his own one day after he'd gotten his powers. He'd been walking home from school, head pounding from the sensory input from the subway...it had been right after he'd recovered from the 'flu' and everything had still been so loud!

It had been getting dark when he'd crossed the street then, glancing down into an alley, he'd seen the man shove the older lady against the wall, hand darting towards her purse.

He'd acted without thinking.

Taking off toward them, hood up, backpack thrown against a wall, he'd grabbed the man by his shoulder, using his new strength to shove him across the alley and the man had slumped against the wall, cradling his head where he'd hit it.

The woman had thanked him profusely, but he'd been distracted. Shocked. He'd just saved someone. Him. Peter Parker, the nerdy, quiet nobody kid from Queens that loved Star Wars and science and Iron Man. He'd saved that woman...he had powers. He hadn't quite explored all of them yet at the time. He'd been too focused on catching up with school and hiding things from May and Ben. But at that moment he'd realized that, like Tony Stark, he could be a superhero.
Ben had died a week and a half later.

"Peter?" He jumped, looking over at Natasha in confusion.

"Huh?"

"What's academic decathlon?"

"Oh! I'm sorry." He wiped his hands on the towel she tossed him, then folded it up and hung it by the sink to dry. "We just...uh...answer questions and stuff. Like...math and science. We study and practice every week. Starting this week it'll be on Mondays and Wednesdays so...I'll be late. I just have to tell Tony." She nodded and he felt bad, talking only about himself, but he wasn't sure what topics were safe to talk about.

He couldn't exactly ask about her childhood. Spies always had dark backstories...he'd read books! And she was more mysterious than most. The weather was the most boring topic ever, and the Avengers might be kind of a sensitive topic still. "So what's your favorite movie?" He found himself blurting out.

Natasha lifted her eyebrows, amused, then pondered the question for a moment. "13 going on 30." He just blinked at her. "What? It's sweet. I also liked the last Star Wars movie."

"Oh. No...I just...my aunt loved that movie too." He shrugged, eyes drifting down to the sink for a moment. "The...the first one. We watched it sometimes." There was a pause, and he forced a smile back onto his face, determined not to ruin the light Sunday mood. "So, um...what are you doing today?"

"I'm not sure. I still have some things to move from my old place."

"Oh. Do you want some help?" He asked before realizing that that might not be the best idea. But he'd already said it. "I mean...I don't really have any plans or anything so I could help if it's carrying boxes or..." She looked him over, then smiled.

"That would be great, actually."

Tony seemed surprised, to say the least when Peter asked if it was okay. It was kind of strange to ask him but...he was Peter's guardian. Tony looked up from his conversation with Pepper, the two of them close on the couch, and gave an inviting smile, seeming more relaxed than he had in ages.

Peter hated the thought that he'd been stressing Tony out.

Before Peter could get a word out, Natasha spoke up. "Think I can borrow your kid for a few hours?" Tony's eyebrows lifted, eyes darting over to Peter who tried to assure the man through a shrug and a smile that he'd volunteered for this.

"What for?" He asked, eyes sliding back over to Natasha.

"Secret mission. It'll be a quick trip to Russia and back, don't worry." She told Tony with a grin, wrapping an arm around Peter's shoulders and steering him toward the door.

"Romanoff!" Peter heard Tony call, and Peter stifled a laugh when she pulled him into the hallway toward the elevator.

"We'll be back by midnight don't worry Tony! You taught him to shoot a gun right?" She called as the elevator doors shut and they began to descend, Peter finally giving in and laughing out loud.
The elevator slowed then, and FRIDAY spoke softly. "Natasha, boss has asked me to remind you that if you were to place Peter in danger, he would take drastic measures."

"Is that really what he said, Fri?" Natasha asked with a grin for the ceiling.

The AI seemed to sigh. "The direct quote was, "FRI, tell that Russian spider that if she lets anything happen to my kid, I'm gonna lose my shit.""

Peter chuckled again and Natasha grinned at him. "Noted." She told the AI, and then they stepped out into the parking garage where Natasha led him to...a pickup truck.

A nice pickup truck…but still…it wasn't what he'd been imagining. "So, uh...do you have a lot of stuff to move?" He asked after climbing in, the radio turned down to a low, pleasant hum in the background.

"A few boxes. Not too much. It should only take one trip.

Then they were left in a comfortable silence as she drove, taking them slowly out of Manhattan and towards Brooklyn. The traffic wasn't too bad, but there were a few wrecks that slowed things down. Peter didn't look at the cars.

His phone buzzed in his pocket when they had been gone for about twenty minutes and he pulled it out to find a text from Tony. "Everything okay?" He grinned.

"Yeah! I've never been to Russia before! And Natasha promised that the way we're going, I don't even need a passport!" Then he threw in a couple of excited smiley face emojis.

His phone rang a few seconds later. He answered with a laugh. "Hey, Tony!"

"Alright, kid. I'm ninety percent sure you're messing with me but I need to hear the words from your mouth." He laughed, able to hear Pepper doing the same in the background.

"We're not going to Russia today, Tony," Peter assures him, and he could almost hear his guardian relax.

"What are you two up to?"

"I offered to help her move her stuff."

"Alright. Let me talk to her, would you?"

Peter hesitated, glancing up at the cars surrounding them. "Um...she's driving...". Natasha held a hand out, and after another hesitation, he handed the cell phone over.

"Yes, Tony?" She asked lightly.

"That's my kid, Romanoff." He heard Tony's voice, soft and tinny, but perfectly clear with his enhanced hearing.

"I know. I was just messing with you. We're going to my apartment to box up some of my stuff and bring it back to the tower. I'll feed him and bring him back in one piece. I promise." She told him, voice softening.

"Is the team there?"

"I didn't ask." She told him. "Look, if he wants to leave, I'll bring him home."
When Peter took his phone back, Tony was a lot quieter...calmer. "Alright, kid. Call me if you need anything."

And that was that.

It was nice, Peter realized all of a sudden. Normal. Well...not quite. He was going to help the Black Widow move her stuff from her secret apartment to the Avengers tower. But if he didn't think about who she was, it was almost normal. Really close to normal. And normal was good. After everything, normal was exactly what he wanted.

The apartment was in Brooklyn. Not the best part of Brooklyn, but still. It was pretty nice. "When we were in hiding we had a couple of safe houses. This apartment belonged to a friend of mine, and he let us stay here."

"All of you?" Peter wondered, hopping out of the truck.

"Not all at once. We rotated...took turns. Then when the Accords were dissolved for the most part and we were pardoned, we bought another apartment in the building. That's where Steve lives." She told him, leading him up the sidewalk and swiping a keycard to get into the building.

"What about the others?"

"Clint and Antman stayed with their families. Sam stayed with us but now he's back home...he lived in DC but he moved out here...he's a therapist who works mainly with veterans. Wanda has a place somewhere with Vision. And I live here." She stopped in front of one of the doors, unlocking it and ushering him in.

The apartment was mostly empty. Just a sofa and a coffee table in the living room, a couple of boxes stacked along one wall. To the side was a kitchen where there was a single box on an otherwise bare table. Then, straight ahead, a hallway. "I still need to pack the clothes in my bedroom. Would you mind packing up the books in here?" She asked, leading him to an office filled with bookshelves.

Natasha played music on a small radio that she left in the hallway and together the two worked, Peter carefully placing the books in the boxes and taping them up, labeling all of them 'books' and stacking the boxes by the door, making sure not to make them so heavy that he couldn't plausibly lift them. In her bedroom, Natasha folded clothes and fit them into boxes, then eventually joined Peter and helped him finish up the office. Every once in a while, he'd pause to look at the books, many of which were in Russian.

There was a knock on the door before they were done, and Peter felt his stomach flip, eyes darting over to the spy kneeling beside him. She stood fluidly, throwing him a reassuring smile before leaving the room to answer it, turning the music down on her way. "Were we too loud?" She asked after he heard her open the door.

"We?" The familiar voice asked, and Peter went back to boxing up books, surprised to find that he was relieved. It was just Steve.

When his phone vibrated in his pocket, he wondered when he'd started thinking of Captain America as 'just Steve.'

The text was from MJ, reminding him about the decathlon practice the next day, and he shot a quick text to Tony making sure that was okay. He got a quick 'sure kid' back and smiled down at the next book he packed. Normal. Tony wasn't worried. Everything was okay.

"Hey, Peter." He glanced up, surprised that he'd been so lost in his thoughts that he hadn't heard
"Hi." The man had a way of putting him at ease...making him feel like everything was okay. Peter decided to trust it. "You guys been working hard?" He shrugged.

"Yeah, but we're almost done."

Natasha joined them in the office, slipping past Steve and kicking the tape over to Peter so he could seal the last box. "How about some lunch?" She asked. It was nearly one...Peter hadn't realized that they'd been working for that long, but his stomach was growling, so he nodded.

"Why don't you come over to my place and I'll order a pizza." Steve offered, and Natasha accepted for the both of them, giving Peter a hand and leading him into the apartment across the hall.

Captain America's apartment was...normal. There were a sofa and a tv and...an Wii? Peter stared down at the video game system for a moment, then over at Natasha who grinned, folding her legs under herself as she perched on the sofa. "Sam got it for him. For an old man, he's pretty good at Mario Kart." The woman told him as Steve held a flip phone up to his ear and asked the person on the phone for five pizzas.

That was good...Peter could probably eat a full one on his own...except he couldn't. They didn't know who he was. He bit back a groan and dropped onto the sofa away from Natasha, pulling out his phone as she turned the TV on and flipped it to the news.

Ned had texted him a few minutes ago and he grinned as he texted back. "Hey! About to eat pizza with the Black Widow and Captain America." Then a few smiley face emojis.

"Dude what is your life!?!" Was the almost immediate reply, and he smothered a laugh, scooting over a little when Steve joined them.

"I got pepperoni, cheese, and three everything pizzas. That okay?" He asked Peter who nodded, kind of surprised to be asked.

"Oh...yeah, sure. I'm not really picky." He told him, putting his phone on the arm of the sofa.

To his relief, Natasha asked Steve something about Sam and then they were in their own conversation for long enough for Peter to keep texting Ned. "This is crazy! I've been helping Natasha pack up her stuff since she's moving to the tower but Steve lives next door!"

"That is so cool! What is Captain America's apartment like?" Ned wondered.

"Like a regular apartment. He has an Wii."

"Oh man...can you imagine playing Mario Kart on Captain America's Wii!?" Peter swallowed a laugh and glanced back up at the news. They were talking about the UN and the accords. Peter wasn't great at politics and stuff...it wasn't that he didn't understand. He would just rather stick to science. Still, this stuff was kind of relevant.

They switched to local news then, and Peter was surprised to see a picture of himself...well...Spiderman. "Last night, Spiderman was filmed on the scene of a wreck that ended in one casualty. This footage shows him holding a 2-year-old boy after pulling him from the wreckage." The boy screamed and Peter felt his heart clench, jaw going tight as he dropped his eyes, feeling suddenly sick. On screen, he could vaguely hear himself murmuring to the child, holding him tight as the man on the sidewalk moaned and cried.
"How old do you think he is, Nat? You're the only one who really spent any time with him." Peter was beyond grateful that neither adult was looking at him. He wanted out of the room...wanted to get away from the footage of himself holding the little boy, then handing him off to an EMT or a police officer...he couldn't remember.

"I barely spoke to him," Natasha told Steve.

"He told me he was from Queens." Steve murmured, and just then, the doorbell rang. The captain jumped up.

"Um, can I use your bathroom?" Peter asked as the footage ended.

"Of course. Down the hall on the left." Steve pointed and Peter tried not to run out of the room, closing the bathroom door behind him and leaning on it, then taking a few deep breaths.

He was okay. He was safe. Tony was safe...right? He pulled out his phone, opening the last message to Tony, then shoved his phone back in his pocket. He didn't need to do that. Tony was fine. He was with Pepper and Peter wasn't going to bug him every time he...every time he got scared.

Washing his hands and shoving the painful thoughts away, he rejoined the others in the kitchen, taking a plate and two slices of pizza and, between the three of them, they finished four of the five pizzas. Thankfully, no one said anything about how much he ate other than Steve chuckling that Natasha had worked him too hard.

Steve asked him questions while they ate, more making polite conversation than anything. How was school? Favorite subjects. Friends. College? All the normal questions that adults usually asked him. Only this was Captain America asking! Still, Peter answered his questions, surprised at how easy it was to make conversation with the guy.

When they had finished eating and had all thrown their paper plates away, they headed back over to Natasha's apartment and began carrying boxes, Steve making sure to grab most of the boxes of books, all three of them loading the books into the back of the pickup truck.

Peter didn't think about the little boy or the car or the smell of metal and oil or his aunt.

And after a few minutes of carrying boxes down to the truck with Captain America, he didn't have to try so hard. Didn't have to push the thoughts away. He just worked alongside two of his heroes in contended silence. That is, until another pickup truck pulled into the lot and a man Peter recognized immediately jumped out, followed by a woman that took him a moment to recognize. Red hair...Wanda. Maximoff. She was wearing a ballcap as if trying to hide her identity, and she looked upset...and then she paused, allowing Clint Barton to catch up with her. The woman's eyes were on him, confused.

"Clint. Wanda. I didn't know you were stopping by." Peter placed his box in the back of the pickup truck, breaking eye contact from the woman. Her powers were scary. He didn't know much about them, but he knew that much. He wanted nothing to do with her and her red magic...but she was still staring at him. Too intently. He glanced around the empty parking lot, spider senses not going off but...tingling. Just a little. Recognizing her power, probably. Reacting to it.

He couldn't let them know who he was. He wasn't ready for that yet.

"We heard you were moving back to the tower," Clint told her hesitantly, his eyes straying over to Peter. "Hey. You have a...nephew I don't know about? Cousin? Friendly neighbor?" He asked with
a half smile. Natasha glanced over at Steve, both of them moving slightly in front of him, and Peter was almost touched. They were...protecting him?

"This is Peter. He's helping me move my stuff to the tower." Natasha told them, waving an arm at Peter. "Peter, this is Clint and Wanda."

"Nice to meet you kid." Clint held out a hand that Peter grasped, careful not to squeeze too tightly as always.

Wanda was next, holding out a hand that Peter shook, her eyes narrow...suspicious. But she didn't use any of her magic, not that he could tell. Instead, she just shook his hand.

"Well...you two had better get back to the tower before your dad worries," Steve told them, patting Peter on the shoulder. "Clint, Wanda. Why don't you guys come on up?" He invited, and Peter followed Natasha's leave, nodding to the two and climbing back into the truck, feeling distinctly as if Natasha and Steve were trying to keep him away from them...like they were protecting him from something. But didn't all the Avengers already know about him? He'd been on the news, right?

"Who's his father?" He heard Wanda ask as they Natasha started the truck, and she pulled out of the parking lot before he could hear Steve explain.
Natasha pulled into the parking garage about an hour later, turning the radio down as she chose a spot close to the elevator. Through the support beams and up a level, she could see Tony's collection of fancy sports cars. She wondered which one he would gift to the teenager beside her...or maybe they'd pick one out together. Only about a month away from sixteen, she was sure a very nice car was in his future, although she'd put money on the kid having no idea. Of course, the kid probably didn't know that, to Tony, an expensive car as a gift was kind of par for the course.

The boy beside her had been quiet for most of the ride, and she hadn't pushed him to talk. He seemed like a fairly quiet kid, but that could be for any number of reasons, she was sure. She was still a stranger to the kid, and also an Avenger, and also he wasn't sure he could trust her. That was apparent from the start, even without Steve pulling her aside after they'd met with Tony to discuss the new Accords a few days before.

"He's afraid we're going to fight again...that I'm going to hurt Tony." The man had told her, the two of them in her nearly bare kitchen, eyes struggling to meet hers. She knew it was hard on Captain America to know that a kid, barely sixteen, was afraid that he was going to kill his dad, even if the two men had fought.

It made sense, she supposed. The kid had lost every family member he'd ever had. He'd lost everything like someone had been picking them off one at a time. His parents. His uncle. His aunt. And now he had Tony Stark, a man with a colorful past and a high-risk side-job. It was no wonder the boy worried. Of course, Steve wasn't going to attack Tony out of the blue or anything. Natasha was well aware that that particular fight had been started by Tony, who of course had been distraught over his parents.

And Bucky.

Tony had felt betrayed, and Nat didn't really blame him. Still, Tony could hold his own. He was Iron Man, after all. Genius billionaire philanthropist superhero. But she could put herself into the shoes of a kid who'd lost everything. She could imagine seeing a trusted mentor return from a trip with another superhero covered in bruises and scrapes and unwilling to talk about any of it. She was almost certain the kid didn't know the whole story.

It didn't matter. The boy loved Tony. Needed him. And Tony was doing great. Being needed was doing wonders for him. Having a fiancée that loved him and a kid that needed him and practically worshiped him...she didn't think Tony had ever thought he'd get any of this, and she could tell he wasn't taking any of it for granted. Of course, Tony had never been cruel or anything...he'd certainly had some bad ideas, but he wasn't malicious. Still, she was impressed.

Natasha knee that fatherhood changed a man, that is, if the man was a decent person. She'd seen that firsthand with Clint. And she'd always known that Tony was a decent person. A good person. She'd never thought of him as a father, but he was a good one. The exact father that Peter needed. And she was happy for them.

Peter started to hop out of the truck when she put it in park, but paused when she didn't move, hand on the door, body half turned away.

They had all been watching the press conference when Peter had been shot. They hadn't gotten a
good look at the boy, though. He'd been in the back, practically hiding behind Tony and Pepper, and then, after he'd saved Loki, first Thor and then Tony had blocked him from the cameras.

Tony had said that it was just a graze. And the kid seemed fine now. Had it been a real hit, the kid wouldn't have been able to carry those boxes today.

Unless...

Her brain was trying to put the pieces together of a puzzle whose final shape she didn't even know. Whose final shape she had no business trying to figure out.

"Natasha?" She had to put the puzzle away. Peter was Tony's kid. A good kid. A nice kid who had volunteered to help her move and whose help she'd accepted on a whim, hoping it would do him good.

It had.

Tony wanted her to leave this alone. She needed to leave this alone.

"Right. Ready to carry all of this upstairs?" The kid nodded, opening his door and hopping out with a grace one didn't usually associate with fifteen-year-old boy's. Peter wasn't very tall, but he was long-limbed and stretched thin like most teenage boys she saw, body growing and his mind catching up. But he never moved awkwardly. Never seemed to have trouble getting his limbs to do what he wanted them to. He was deliberate. For the most part.

Put the puzzle away, she warned herself. Let it go. Tony was trusting her and she wanted to be worthy of that. If this was ever going to be a team again, then they were going to have to trust one another. Tony was trusting her with his child. She was going to be worth of that. So she followed Peter to the back of the truck, grabbing a box of books and grunting under the weight. Carrying his own box, Peter turned to her with something like concern. "You got it?" He asked as if he were going to take over if she needed help.

Definitely Tony's kid. Not biologically, even though the others thought he was. But still. Beneath the armor, Tony was always ready to help. Always ready to be of assistance. If she chose to analyze, she could probably find a reason. The impulse to earn love. The need to feel needed. Worrying, but endearing.

"I've got it." She assured him, hoisting it up a little more and carrying the box to the elevator, Peter following behind. FRIDAY took them right up to the floor where Natasha's room was, and they ran into Thor in the kitchen, a large glass in his hand full of what looked like beer. "A little early, don't you think?" She asked with a grin, not stopping as she passed, and he followed behind, setting the glass on the counter.

"Never too early." He told them, leaning in the doorway as Nat pointed to the corner.

"You can put the books over there." She told Peter. "When I get a bookcase I'll put them away." When she got a bookcase...what she should have said was 'when Tony buys me a bookcase.'

She had tried to never abuse the man's generosity. He seemed to throw money around as though he had a tree in the back that grew it...or, rather, a whole orchard. Her first shopping experience with him when she'd moved into the tower years ago had been strange. He'd been tapping at his phone, barely paying attention as she'd stared at the furniture, some of which would be hers, at the upscale furniture store.

"Get whatever you want." He'd told her, careless, and for a long time, she'd just stared at her options,
trying not to look so out of her depth. Then he'd looked up and smiled. Not his celebrity smile or the press conference smile. A real one. "Don't tell me that the Black Widow, feared super spy, is afraid of furniture shopping."

It was something she admired about Tony. He could tease without being cruel. Tell jokes that didn't hurt. It was a skill that not all that many men in his position had. "You've discovered my secret." She'd told him dryly. "Now I'm going to have to kill you." He'd snorted...and then he'd helped her pick out furniture.

Peter helped her carry all of her boxes in, Thor pitching in as well, until everything was in and they were in her room, Natasha unpacking a box of clothes while Peter stacked the boxes of books out of the way by her closet. "Hey, Natasha?" He asked after a moment.

He'd been working up to asking her something for a while, but she'd decided to let him get there without any prompting. It seemed like he was finally ready. "Yes?"

"Why did we leave your apartment when the others showed up?" Before she could answer, he kept going. He tended to ramble when he was nervous. "Not that I care...I mean...it was your apartment and truck and everything and I don't mind. I was just wondering. If it's none of my business that's fine too. I was just...curious." He finally trailed off, sheepish face turned toward the ground. "Sorry."

"You don't have to be sorry." She told him, not pausing as she pulled a pair of jeans from the box. These were old clothes. "I wanted to get you back here before your dad worried. He's been texting me...making sure everything was okay."

"Do they know about me?" He asked, voice small.

She glanced up, then grabbed a hanger from the closet. He'd seen right through that, apparently. He was smart.

She told her brain to put down the puzzle.

"We all know that Tony has a son, but they hadn't seen you before. I think Steve probably told them who you were."

"Were you worried that they'd...". He trailed off, and she knew that he probably didn't even know what he wanted to ask.

"Out of everyone, Wanda is probably going to be the last to forgive Tony." She saw the boy bristle and smiled. "It was a hard situation, Peter. And you should know that there are many sides to every story. I'm not saying that Tony was wrong. I...I think both sides needed to try harder to sit down and talk. Especially Steve." For a moment, the boy looked like he was going to argue, but to her surprise, he nodded, sighing softly.

"I never asked what happened," Peter admitted. "I just knew that they fought and then he came back and he had all those bruises...". Natasha moved to kneel beside Peter after a pause, a soft smile on her face.

"That's behind us now. We're going to be a team again...it just might take some of them a little longer to move on. And I think Wanda might be one of those people." He nodded, seeming to understand.

He was smart.
He was Tony's son but not biologically.

He looked enough like Tony for it to be plausible...but according to his birth records his parents were Richard and Mary Parker. Doctors.

He'd been Tony's intern but Stark Industries had very little information on their internship program available to the public...or even Natasha.

She patted Peter on the shoulder and stood. "Alright. Thank you for your help today. I think I have it from here."

"Oh...of course. Yeah. Um...tell Steve thanks for me...for lunch."

"I will." She felt herself soften. She liked kids. Loved Clint's children and, apparently, she was starting to love Tony's.

The boy stood, waving as he left, hands shoved in his pockets as he headed back toward the elevator.

Smart.

Not Tony's son...but, in every way that mattered, Tony's son.

An intern for a company that had no other high school interns.

The way Tony has slammed his hand down on the table, eyes furious, shoulders tense. "That's my son." She'd never seen him like that before. About anything. Tony loved that boy. Loved him in a different way than he'd ever loved anyone else.

She shook her head, grabbing her tablet and opening the IKEA website to browse the bookcases. "Leave it alone, Natasha."
Thank you so much to everyone who has been reading and reviewing! I appreciate it so much!

So I'm doing my best with the timeline. I can't find Peter's birthday online anywhere, so we're pretending it is in April. That makes zero sense considering he was fourteen in Civil War but...well, sometimes I write things without double-checking all the facts and since the MCU timeline is a little hard to keep track of, I'm just going to have to hope everyone can suspend their disbelief :)

Peter stifled a yawn, blinking tiredly at his history teacher who was talking about...something. Probably something important. He really needed to pay attention...midterms were over, so now everything was all about finals. Then summer vacation...but first, he had to survive finals, which he always hated. He wasn't a terrible test taker, but there was always so much pressure at the end of the year and after everything...he just felt like so much had changed. He was living with Tony and the Avengers were coming together...sort of...and Thor and Loki and Bruce were all back. It was a lot. And now he had to try and focus on his finals. And Academic Decathlon. He needed to make sure he got Tony to sign the permission slip for his first meet!

He'd sat next to Ned in homeroom that morning, as usual, and had given him the rundown on his weekend. Ned had asked about a million questions about Natasha and Steve and THE Captain America's apartment and what it had been like spending the day with them. Honestly, Peter hadn't had a whole lot to say. It had been fine. Natasha had been nice and Steve had been nice...his spider senses had never gone off so they were safe and Tony was safe, so he didn't need to worry so much about that. Well...he'd do his best not to worry, anyway. He was also glad that Tony had finally gotten to spend some time with Pepper since it felt like the man had rarely seen his fiancee lately. All in all, it had all felt...normal. Well, his new version of normal. So Peter had no complaints.

At lunch, Ned started up with his questions again, and he and Peter kept their heads close as they theorized about whether or not the rogue Avengers would return. Ned also wondered if they'd ever get to play Mario Kart with Captain America which was an idea that Peter didn't hate...as long as everything went well between Steve and Tony, that idea didn't seem so crazy. Steve had been nothing but nice to him, and Tony seemed to have forgiven him. Peter wasn't so sure about the others, but he hadn't really talked to them yet. Either way, he trusted Tony. So he was trying.

Neither of them brought up the news or Spiderman saving a baby from a car.

MJ pretended not to listen as she sat across from them, nose in a novel, but after they'd been talking for a while, Peter jumped when she kicked him, lifting an eyebrow. "Hey, losers. There's only five more minutes left until lunch is over." She reminded him, smirking when they both rushed to finish their food. "You're going to be at practice today, right?" She asked, finally putting her book down.

"Yeah," Peter told her around a mouthful of cafeteria pizza.
Michelle hesitated, drumming her fingers on her book, then leaned in. "The principal called me into his office on Friday...he told me that Flash was still on the team but if he caused any more trouble, he'd be off." Peter nodded, swallowing the rest of his pizza. He didn't really care if Flash was still on the team, as long as the guy left him alone.

Flash had been a bully since they'd been in middle school, but it had gotten worse that year, probably, Peter figured, because Flash loved the attention that came from pushing Peter around. He hadn't been so bad their freshman year. Still, Flash hadn't actually gotten physical with them before. Usually he was all talk and angry threats...stuff like 'you're dead, Penis' and such. He also liked to spread nasty rumors, knock Peter's stuff out of his hand, and, occasionally, knock him into lockers...well, not that last one anymore, since Peter was a lot stronger and wasn't so easy to knock around. Still, there had been lots of people watching at lunch, and they'd all seen Ned defend Peter to Flash, so it was possible that that was the reason that Flash had escalated things.

School went by pretty quick, and although Peter checked his phone almost constantly, he got no texts from Tony...not that he had expected any. He didn't think that any of the previous 'rogue' Avengers were going to be at the tower...as far as he knew, Tony was just going to...work? Be in the lab? Now that he thought about it, he wasn't 100% sure what it was Tony did all day when he wasn't with Peter. He knew that Pepper was the CEO so she had...meetings? And...did paperwork?

He really needed to figure out what exactly they did. Then again, he didn't think he could just ask to follow them around or anything. He could ask, he supposed. Or google it.

He would google it.

Somehow he managed not to get caught checking his phone all day, turned in all of his homework, and even aced his Spanish quiz. He and Ned got to work together in chemistry, and Flash stayed away from him. It was, all in all, not a bad school day. While waiting in the library for the rest of the team to join them, he, Ned, and MJ sat at their usual table, all of them working on homework. Mr. Harrington joined them after a few minutes, waving MJ over, and she hopped up to join him. Peter did his best to tune them out since they were just talking strategy. It was something they'd all go over together as a team later, and Peter really wanted to focus on finishing his Trigonometry homework.

It was only about a minute later that Flash arrived, throwing his bag on the floor by the table and taking a seat across from Ned. He didn't look up at Peter or Ned, nor did he attempt to speak to them. Instead, he pulled out his own homework, and so Peter went back to his own work until Mr. Harrington rejoined them after a few minutes, waving MJ over, and she hopped up to join him. Peter did his best to tune them out since they were just talking strategy. It was something they'd all go over together as a team later, and Peter really wanted to focus on finishing his Trigonometry homework.

The meet in April took place on the Friday before Peter's sixteenth birthday, and for a moment, his mind wandered to that. His first birthday without May...his first birthday with Tony. He'd be sixteen...his sweet sixteen. Peter tried his best not to think about that...he had almost a month to worry about it. He'd missed the last meet because of the accident with May, so he needed to focus. Study. Do his best at this meet and stay away from Flash and make sure to study for finals too...Peter shook his head a little and stared down at the paper in front of him laying out the schedule for the rest of the year. He needed to focus.

Ned had to nudge him a few times but otherwise, he did fine. He was able to keep his mind on the questions and answered almost all of them correctly. His leg was bouncing the whole time, and he was starving by the time it was over, but all in all, he thought he did fine. Well...almost fine.
Normalish. Things were getting back to normal. Kind of. He just wanted his life to be normal again. Well...normal for him.

But in another way, he didn't. He didn't, because that would mean he was getting over May. Getting past it. Forgetting her. He never wanted to forget her. But he wasn't forgetting her...she'd want him to be happy. Right? Would he ever get past this?

"Hey, Parker?" Peter jumped a little as he threw his stuff into his backpack, looking up in surprise to find Flash standing across from him and Ned, the three of them the only ones left at the table. MJ was talking to Abe and the others had all scattered...and Peter glanced between Ned, who looked about ready to throw himself between Peter and Flash, and the guy who'd punched him in the face several times the week before.

"What?" Peter asked, throwing his backpack over his shoulder.

"Can, uh...can I talk to you for a second?" Ned started to shake his head, but Peter shrugged.

"Um...sure. Ned, I'll see you later."

"Dude!" Ned started, but Peter forced a smile.

"It's fine. I'll text you later?" Ned looked between the two of them again, jaw tight, then nodded.

"Fine. See you tomorrow." Before Ned could change his mind, Peter jerked his head toward the exit, and Flash followed. Peter wasn't worried...he could take Flash. Besides, Tony had told him to fight back if he got in trouble. It was Rule #3. If someone hit him, he was allowed to fight back. And he wasn't worried about being able to fight Flash, even though he didn't want to. Also, he couldn't let Flash discover his secret...but he was fairly confident that he could defend himself without Flash learning that he was Spiderman.

The two walked down the empty hallway side by side in uncomfortable silence for a moment before Flash finally spoke. "Hey...um...Parker?" Peter hesitated, the two of them coming to a stop in the middle of the hallway. "I..." He scratched the back of his neck, then sighed. "Look, what my dad said to, uh...to Mr. Stark about...well...he shouldn't have said that. About you not being...you know." He waved a hand, cheeks faintly red, and Peter felt his eyebrows lift in surprise. Flash glared at the floor for a moment, then Peter decided to let him off the hook.

"Thanks." He told him simply.

"It doesn't mean we're friends or anything, Penis." Flash snapped. "It's just...he shouldn't have...I didn't mean..."

"Hey." Peter interrupted, strangely touched. "It's fine. I get it. Thanks, Flash." The other boy shrugged, and Peter smiled a little. "See you around."

"Whatever, Parker." Peter grinned as he left the school, fighting the urge to duck into an alley and change into his suit. It was nearly four-thirty, and he hadn't asked Mr. Stark if he could patrol after school. It wasn't really something they'd discussed much...Peter kept wanting to bring it up...talk about it more. He knew that Mr. Stark would talk with him and that he'd probably let him patrol after school. But he needed to ask first.

It took a lot less time to reach the tower from school than it had his apartment. Earbuds stuck in his ears, Peter sat in the corner of the subway car doing homework, then, when he reached his stop, he hurried up the stairs, down the street, then through the side door of the tower. FRIDAY opened the elevator doors as soon as he approached, and he wondered why he didn't need a badge or anything.
"Hello, Peter."

"Hey, FRIDAY." He paused his music, leaning against the elevator door as it began its ascent.

"Did you have a good day at school." Peter blinked, looking up in surprise.

"Um...yeah...why?"

"Boss upgraded my programming to make me more personable."

Peter nodded, dropping his eyes. For him? Had Tony changed FRIDAY to make him more comfortable at the tower?

No. He probably just updated FRIDAY sometimes and it was due and he was always working on something even though Peter wasn't sure what...he pushed the thoughts away as he reached Tony's floor. And his floor. Stepping into the living room, he headed straight for his room where he started his homework, earbuds still in his ears as he worked and tried not to think about Flash...or FRIDAY or May or Tony or anything. As long as he didn't think of anything, he'd be fine.

"Great plan, Peter." He mumbled, music still blasting in his ears. He had finished his Trig homework at school, so he'd moved on to Chemistry. "Really great plan."

The hand on his shoulder an hour later nearly had him jumping out of his skin, and he yanked the earbuds out, whirling in his chair and gasping up for air as he looked up at his guardian who stared down at him with something like amusement. "Hey, buddy."

"Hey...Tony...hi. Sorry...I had...um…” He pointed at the earbuds hanging from his hoodie, still blasting music, and Tony lifted an eyebrow as Peter scrambled to turn the music off. "Hey."

"Yeah, hi. Everything okay?"

"Yeah. Yeah, everything's fine...just...homework."

"How's that going?"

"Fine." He shrugged. "Just...uh...chemistry." Tony nodded.

"Need any help?"

"No, I uh...I'm fine. All good."

"You're jumpier than normal, kid. What's going on?" Before Peter could assure him that everything was fine, Tony took a seat on the bottom bunk of his bed, leaning forward, his elbows on his knees. Sighing, Peter threw his pencil down. He didn't actually know what was wrong. Everything was fine. He was fine. "Pete?"

"I don't know," Peter mumbled, crossing his arms. "Everything's fine. School was fine. And we had practice and...everything was fine."

Tony nodded slowly. "Yeah?"

"Yeah. Flash, he uh...he apologized for his dad and it was all normal...and that's what I wanted. I wanted everything to go back to normal." He stared down at his lap, hands clenched, and Tony reached out, a hand on his knee. "But...if everything's normal...it's like...like I'm forgetting May and I know I'm not! I know I'm not forgetting her and I know that...that I'll never forget her but…”
"Hey, Pete." He stopped when Tony pulled him a little closer by his knee, rolling the chair closer to the bed. Peter stopped rambling, looking up at the man. "I get it, kiddo," He told him softly, squeezing his knee.

"It was fine...then..." Peter shrugged and Tony nodded.

"Yeah, that happens sometimes." Tony patted the bed beside him and Peter stood, moving to sit on the bed and leaning his head on Tony's shoulder when the man wrapped an arm around him. "You can talk to me, you know? If you want."

"Thanks." Peter murmured, and Tony patted him on the back.

"And hey, that's pretty cool about Flash. I didn't really take him as the apologizing kind."

Peter shrugged. "He hasn't always been such a dick." Tony chuckled.

"Alright, kiddo. Why don't you take a break and help me order some food? I'm thinking Thai."

After the two looked over a menu that Tony pulled out of one of the drawers in the kitchen, Tony called and ordered enough food to feed everyone. While he was on the phone, Peter grabbed his homework and took it into the living room where he continued to work. It wasn't long before Tony joined him, sitting beside him on the sofa and turning the TV on low. Peter worked for a few minutes, then, mind wandering, he glanced up at the man beside him. "Hey...Tony?"

"Yeah?" Peter hesitated, not sure if what he was about to ask was stupid. It probably was. Then Tony would be offended and..."Pete?" Tony prompted. "What's up, kid?"

"Um...what do you do?" Tony lifted an eyebrow, tilting his head, and immediately Peter hurried to backtrack, cursing himself for not just googling it. "I just meant...I'm sorry, I meant...um...like...your job...not...I know you own the company but Pepper is the CEO and I just didn't know what you did since you aren't the CEO anymore and..."

"Breathe," Tony suggested with a chuckle, holding up a hand, and Peter did.

"Sorry."

"What was rule number 1?" He asked, and Peter rolled his eyes, making Tony chuckle. Hadn't that rule only been for a month? Had it been a month yet? "I do paperwork that Pepper gives me, I meet with representatives from other companies and independent inventors and small business owners who want to work with Stark Industries. I also work in research and development. All designs for Stark Industries products go through me before being released to the public." Tony told him. "I do more, and that's not including what I do for the Avengers, but that's the gist. Maybe when you're off of school, you can watch me work...get a real idea of what I do. You could watch Pepper too. I'll bet I can get you school credit for shadowing the CEO of Stark Industries."

"Really?"

"Sure. I'll have to look into it...FRIDAY, make a note." He ordered.

"Yes, sir."

"Hey, Tony?" He asked, feeling a little braver. "Um...after dinner...is it okay if I go out...as Spiderman. Since, uh...we haven't really...I mean, I haven't really asked about...that."

Tony nodded slowly. "Yeah...I guess we'd better talk about that, huh. How did that work before?"
With May?” His guardian asked, voice soft. He was surprised to realize that hearing her name barely hurt. Peter matched his tone, looking around to make sure no one was around to hear.

"Um...I would go after school. But I had to be home by five so I could do homework and so we could have dinner together if she was home." He hesitated. "Sometimes I'd go out again after dinner...if my homework was done." He admitted. "She didn't know that." Tony nodded, lips tight.

"Alright, kiddo. How about this? We usually have dinner around six, so go ahead and patrol after school, but try to be home by dinner. Then homework. Just...promise me you won't go on patrols without telling me, okay? FRIDAY keeps track of everyone that comes and goes...if you want to patrol again after you finish your homework, just let me know. Sound good?"

Peter could tell that Tony was uncomfortable coming up with rules like that, so he nodded immediately. "Yeah...okay." Tony nodded, patting him on the shoulder and relaxing a little, smiling in relief. "Oh...um...there's a decathlon meet next month. Can you, uh...can you sign the permission slip?"

"Sure thing, kiddo."

They ate dinner with Thor, Loki, Bruce, and Natasha, as apparently, Rhodey had a meeting or something. Maybe someday Peter would work up the courage to ask Tony what Rhodey did all day. It was quiet at the dinner table. Not uncomfortably quiet though...nice quiet. Familiar quiet. Like when he and May had eaten dinner together...family quiet. At least, it was until Natasha seemed to decide to engage Peter in conversation. "So, how was school, Peter?" She asked, glancing up at him from her food.

"Oh...um...it was fine." He smiled. "How was..." He hesitated. "Um...your day?"

"It was fine." She told him, eyes soft. "When do you get out for summer vacation?"

"May 28th." That was one date he had memorized. Tony had mentioned something about a vacation home and California, but he hadn't asked about it...wasn't sure if the man was serious. He knew that Tony had lived in California before, but that house had been blown up or something. Was he really going to buy another house there?

"So finals are coming up?" She asked. Surprised that she knew anything about finals or high schools, he nodded.

"Yeah...uh...that's what we're studying for now."

"What are these finals?" Thor wondered. Loki glanced up from his noodles but seemed more interested on getting them on his fork, which he seemed to be having difficulty with.

"Oh. Um...they're tests we take at the end of the school year. They count for a lot of our grades and if we fail, we fail the whole class." Thor raised his eyebrows, nodding.

"We also had to pass tests as children on Asgard."

"As I remember it, they involved a lot more magic and swordplay," Loki muttered.

"Yes, well…” Thor shrugged as if it didn't make much of a difference.

"Got any plans for the rest of the night?" Bruce asked, and Peter had to fight to keep his face neutral. Yeah, he had plans. To jump off his balcony and swing around the city as a masked vigilante until
Whenever his curfew was.

"Just, uh...homework." He cleared his throat, wishing his voice hadn't chosen that moment to squeak. Natasha was looking at him closely...so was Loki. "I'll probably talk to my friend too...Ned. We have a project coming up so we might...talk about it." His eyes darted over to Tony, and he hoped he wasn't being too obvious in his silent plea for help. The man bailed him out with an ease that Peter envied.

"Bruce, I was wondering if you'd mind taking a look at something in the lab with me after dinner."

"Oh...sure." Peter took a bite of his food, trying not to sigh in relief as Tony and Bruce went on about science for a while, Loki and Thor having their own quiet side conversation with Thor mocking Loki's difficulty with the noodles and Loki pointing his fork threateningly at Thor, and Natasha focusing on her food...or, acting like she was focusing on her food. This was fine, though. His secret was safe.

Natasha volunteered to do the dishes, shooing Peter off to do his homework, and he was jumping off his balcony less than five minutes later with a text from Tony asking him to be home by nine, giving him almost two full hours to patrol.

Swinging through the city, his anxiety seemed to melt away. Fear about forgetting May and fear about never getting over his grief, worry that one of the Avengers would figure out his secret and worry that he was burdening Tony with all of his problems...it all disappeared as he swung from building to building, Karen's greeting in his ear.

"Hey, Karen! What do you have for me?" He asked, making his way toward Queens but happy to stop some crime on his way. As usual, there was plenty to stop. Bicycle theft, drug deals, muggers, robberies...it was a busy two hours, but thankfully he was able to keep track of time, swinging right back to the tower and climbing through his window five minutes early, anxieties forgotten as he climbed onto the top bunk of his bed, hiding his suit in his backpack and pulling out his phone to text Ned.

It was okay. He was Spiderman. Tony was safe. The Avengers were coming back together. Bruce and Thor and Loki were all in the tower and everyone was safe. He loved his aunt but he was also moving on...learning to live with her death just like he'd learned to live with so many others. Maybe he'd even try going through her stuff again. But this time, he'd ask Tony.

Tony knocked on his door right before he was about to climb into bed for the night, permission slip in hand. "Hey, kiddo. Here you go." He put the paper on Peter's desk.

"Thanks, Tony."

"Sure thing." He glanced around the room that Peter was grateful he'd kept pretty clean so far. "Everything alright? Patrols go okay?"

"Yeah. Everything good." Tony nodded, reaching out and gripping Peter's shoulder.

"Alright, Pete. See you in the morning."

"Goodnight, Tony."

The man turned out the light on his way out of the room as Peter crawled onto the top bunk. "Night, Peter."

Everything was fine.
Meet

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much to everyone who has been reading and reviewing! I really appreciate it :) I hope you like the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Meet

"Alright, kid. You remember to pack your toothbrush?"

There was a soft sigh from across the room. "Yes, Tony."

"Enough clothes for the weekend?"

"Yes, Tony."

"Your phone charger?"

"Yes, Tony."

"Granola bars for the ride over."

"Yes, Tony." Tony grinned down at the skillet as he scrambled the eggs for their breakfast, glancing over at Pepper who was frying bacon and fighting a smile at Peter's increasing exasperation.

"Clean underwear?"

"Tony!" Pepper snorted, covering her mouth, and Tony grinned back at Peter's faintly red neck. The boy was making smoothies and chose that moment to turn the blender on. Unfortunately for him, Tony's blender wasn't very loud, so the man was able to keep talking.

"You don't want to be left in another city with no clean underwear, Pete. And you know, I can't just drop everything to bring you clean underwear."

"Tony!" Peter groaned, refusing to turn around. Rhodey arrived as Peter flushed, lifting an eyebrow at Peter's long, drawn out groan.

"Everything okay?" He asked, looking between Tony and Peter, eyebrows raised.

"Oh yeah. I was just reminding Peter of how important it was to always have clean underwear." Peter muttered something under his breath and Tony chuckled, glad that Peter was still at an age where just about anything could embarrass him. Pepper shook her head, elbowing him gently, and Rhodey laughed, moving over to Peter's side and wrapping an arm around his shoulders.

"That is a lesson Tones had to learn the hard way." Tony paused, turning in concern. "Did I ever tell you about the time we were in college, and we decided to go on a road trip during spring break?"

"Rhodey…" Tony warned, but his friend was already leading his kid away from the blender and towards the living room, speaking softly, and it was Tony's turn to groan. Pepper lifted an eyebrow.
"Does this story end with you getting drunk and peeing yourself on a road trip?" She asked, crossing her arms and leaning back against the counter. He pushed some of her hair back, leaning forward for a quick kiss.

"It's...possible."

"It concerns me how many stories about your college days end that way."

He dropped his head on her shoulder. "Tell me about it."

By the time breakfast was on the table, Peter was grinning down at his food, he and Rhodey fighting laughter, and Tony couldn't bring himself to be upset. Not when his kid looked so happy. Pepper rubbed her bare foot against his calf under the table, and even though it was six in the morning, he felt awake and happy...completely happy.

It was Friday, and Peter's Academic Decathlon team was leaving for their meet that morning before first period. They'd be staying overnight, then returning home the following evening. Then it was only a week before his sixteenth birthday, which they hadn't actually discussed. Of course, he knew what he was getting him. Well, he'd already bought a lot of it. A lot of clothes. Various Avengers T-shirts, plus a special Thor and Loki one that glowed in the dark. He was sure Peter would love that. Those he just planned on hanging in Peter's closet for him to find. There were other things...a new watch with a tracker. New shoes (with trackers.) New Bluetooth headphones (he hadn't figure out how to install a tracker in those yet but he was working on it…)

The gift he was most excited and nervous about was the car.

It was a junker, to put it delicately. It didn't run...the entire thing would need to be rebuilt from the ground up...which was what Tony planned on doing with Peter over the summer. It was something he'd learned from Jarvis, and something he wanted to teach Peter. The kid was already great at science, could have a serious career in engineering or research and development...but Tony knew of at least two colleagues in the mechanical and technological engineering field that couldn't even change a tire. That wasn't going to be his kid.

Plus it meant the two of them would get to spend plenty of time together. Bonding. Joking. Laughing. Working. It was what he'd always wanted his father to do with him. He was breaking the cycle. Giving support and love to his son. For a moment, as he stared down at his breakfast, he felt a pang in his chest. He loved Peter...the boy wasn't even his biological son, but he was so proud of him. For the last few weeks, Peter had been improving...almost daily. Sure, he still had rough days. He still had nightmares sometimes, but they happened two or three times a week, not nightly. He was doing great in school, keeping up with Academic Decathlon and acing all of his classes. He'd gone out as Spiderman almost every evening after school, taking the weekends off as per Tony's request, and never missed curfew. And every time Steve and Sam came over to the tower, he was polite, calm...courteous. He made small talk and smiled...he was doing great.

Beyond that, he loved Peter. He loved his kid. Loved spending time with him and talking about his day and working in the lab together. He loved him on his bad days when the boy would drag himself out of bed and sigh his way through his homework. He'd loved him when the boy had screamed himself awake after a nightmare and had sobbed in Tony's arms, clutching at him like a lifeline, and then stayed home from school the next day, practically refusing to leave his room.

So why hadn't Tony's father loved him?

It was a question that hurt...one he tried not to think about. He had his own family now. Pepper, the best woman in the universe, who would be his wife as soon as they nailed down all the details of the
wedding. He had Peter, his son, who went out after school and saved people, and who could nearly keep up with him in the lab. He had Rhodey and Bruce and Thor and even Loki, all good friends. Almost family. Peter loved all of them, and they were all fond of him. Even the rogue Avengers who had met him liked him.

The few times that Clint and Wanda had come to the tower, Peter was at school. Or at Ned's. Tony may have planned it that way. It wasn't that he didn't want them around his kid...Clint had his own kids and Tony didn't think either of them would hurt Peter. It was just...they were still working on forgiving him. Things were still...rocky. And he didn't want Peter in the middle of that. So he had invited them to come during the day each time, making sure it was early enough that Peter wouldn't be home anytime soon.

Once breakfast was over, Petter hurried back to his room, grabbing his backpack and a duffle bag, and then returned to the living room where Tony waited. "Alright, Pete. You ready?" He asked, wrapping an arm around his shoulders. The kid turned his head, coughing quicking into his sleeve, and Tony suppressed a spike of worry. He looked fine though, and it was probably just a cough...the kid was fine. He didn't think Spider-kids could even get sick.

It would be the longest that Peter would be away from Tony since coming to live with him. Nearly two full days. But Tony wasn't worried.

"Yeah." Peter was excited. He was glad...glad his kid had something fun to look forward to.

"You sure you got everything." The boy rolled his eyes and Tony's heart clenched, a smile taking over what felt like his whole face.

"Yes, da...Tony." Peter hurried to cover his near-slip up, and Tony pretended not to notice despite the spike in his heart rate. So far, the boy had only used the title while half-asleep, when waking from a nightmare, or, that one time, after a particularly bad patrol. Never like this out in the open. But that was okay. Peter could call him whatever he wanted. If, one day, Tony got to be 'dad' then, well...he'd think about that when it happened. Peter was his kid, no matter what.

"Good. Come on, kiddo." Leading him downstairs, the two climbed into one of Tony's cars. He was taking Peter to school...because Happy could use a break. The man needed a vacation...well, Tony had suggested he go ahead and take a long weekend. He didn't mind driving Peter. He had plans to meet with Steve and the others, all of them together at the tower, and there they would look over the final version of the new Accords and send them to the UN. Steve had mentioned moving back into the tower once or twice, and although Tony wasn't sure how he felt about that, he was willing to give it a try. If Steve moved back in, Sam probably would too. He knew that Wanda was considering it too since Vision already lived mostly at the tower. He'd already made Vision's room bigger to accommodate Wanda if she wanted to live with him.

"You don't have to drive me...I can take the subway." Peter repeated for what must have been the fourth time in the last two days, and Tony waved him off once more.

"It's no trouble, kid," Tony reassured him as he pulled carefully into traffic. "I need to make a stop on my way back anyway." That was a lie...he was planning on stopping for a coffee though, and he'd probably grab one for Pepper too. "You pack your suit?" Peter nodded. "Good. Emergencies only though, okay? No sneaking out of the hotel in your suit just to patrol."

"I noticed you didn't say no sneaking out of the hotel in normal clothes," Tony smirked.

"Hey, as long as you don't get caught..." He waved a hand and Peter chuckled. "You're a smart kid, Pete. I'm not worried." He glanced over to find Peter smiling down at his hands that were clenched
in his lap. The rest of the drive was spent in comfortable silence, and when Tony parked in the school lot, they both jumped out of the car, Tony ready to walk him over to the bus that sat on the other side of the lot. Ned and MJ, along with a few other kids and their teacher, Mr. Harrington, were already there, all of them gathered in the lot. Another car pulled in and a man Tony immediately recognized as that kid, Flash's father, climbed out, his son just a second behind.

"Alright, Pete. You ready?"

"Yeah." Peter put his backpack on, then slung the duffel bag over his shoulder easily. That super strength really came in handy.

"You have your phone?" Peter pulled it out of his pocket, showing the full battery. "Alright, kiddo. Call me if you need anything, text me when you get there...and whenever else you want..." He wiped some imaginary lint off of Peter's shoulder. "Be careful, kid. Good luck."

Peter only hesitated for a second before lunging forward, apparently not caring that the other kids were watching. Well...if Peter didn't care, then Tony didn't either. He wrapped his arms around his kid, nose against his hair. "Love you." Peter whispered, and Tony squeezed him.

"Love you too, buddy. I'll pick you up tomorrow." Peter squeezed him one more time, and then Tony put his hands on his shoulders, holding him at arm's length. "Call me when you're almost here."

"Okay." The kid smiled, and Tony felt his chest tighten.

Everything was fine.

He let the boy go, waving to Ned who practically jumped up and down, waving back. He snorted. Peter's friend had been to the tower a handful of times in the last month, seeing Tony every time. Was he really still so excited to see him? Chuckling, he climbed back into the car, not moving until the bus pulled out of the parking lot.

Everything was fine. Peter was safe. He was smart...a great kid. A superhero. He didn't have to worry. It was a two-day school trip with the Academic Decathlon team, the nerdiest of all the nerd clubs.

Fighting the urge to text him, Tony drove to the closest coffee place that offered drive-through, ordered two coffees, then hurried back to the tower where he found Pepper already in the conference room. Placing the coffee on the table beside her, he kissed her cheek, then grabbed a folder off the table and tried to focus. It wasn't long before Bruce, Rhodey, and Thor joined him.

"Peter's field trip was today, right?" Bruce asked, yawning and rubbing the sleep out of his eyes as he took a seat beside Tony, Rhodey taking the seat across from him. Beside Bruce was Thor who glanced up from where he was glancing through his papers, one finger adjusting they eyepatch.

Tony and Bruce had been working on a synthetic eye for him and it was almost ready. The biggest issues would come after testing, especially since they hadn't really brought it up with him yet. They had also been working on pain medicine for Peter but that was something they couldn't test very well without hurting him, which neither of them was willing to do...so they would just have to wait. "Yeah." He told Bruce, trying to keep his mind on the present. "He'll be back tomorrow night around seven." He planned on taking the kid and Pepper out to dinner, somewhere nice, as long as the kid was up to it.

"He seems to be doing good." Bruce pointed out, and Tony nodded.
"Yeah. He is." He didn't want to get into specifics...they still didn't know very much about the nightmares. Only himself, Rhodey, and Pepper knew that he was Spiderman. Bruce, Loki, and Thor knew that he was enhanced. Natasha, Steve, Sam, Clint, and Wanda knew nothing. He was going to need to make himself a chart to keep track of it all.

The others trickled into the room, each of them going over to the coffee cart in the corner, mumbling 'good mornings' and taking their seats. Tony was glad to note that most of the awkwardness was gone from the group, even if they weren't completely back to normal. Then again, normal hadn't been so great. He was ready for a new kind of normal. A more comfortable one...one in which the team was what it had always set out to be...a kind of family.

They were in the middle of working when his phone chimed in his pocket and he pulled it out, ignoring the glances from the others and bringing up the text. "We just got to the hotel! Ned and I get to room together, plus they have wifi! The first competition starts in an hour."

"Good luck, kiddo." He typed back, pocketing his phone once more and looking up to find all eyes on him.

"Your son?" Clint asked, his words sounding like a peace offering...like an invitation.

"Yeah. He's on a field trip until tomorrow for one of his nerd clubs." He waved a hand.

"Is he getting sick?" Tony jerked his head around to face Natasha who had an eyebrow lifted.

"What?"

"He's been coughing...". She shrugged. "It's probably allergies or something." Tony swallowed, remembering the kid coughing earlier that morning. Was Peter sick? How had Tony not noticed?

Pulling out his phone as everyone else went back to the tablets, Tony opened a new message. "You feeling okay, Pete?" Placing the phone on the table, he went back to half-heartedly paying attention to his tablet before his phone buzzed.

"Yep." And then a thumbs up emoji. He rolled his eyes, catching the smirk Rhodey sent him.

"Kids and their emojis." He told his friend who chucked.

"Everything okay?" Steve asked. Tony nodded.

"Yeah. You guys about ready to wrap this up?" There were nods all around the table, so Tony turned to Rhodey. "You want to send it all in?"

"Yeah. I'll meet with the new defense secretary and let her know." He hesitated. "She did ask about Spiderman." Tony shook his head.

"Tell her not to worry about Spiderman." He ordered, voice soft and firm. "He's small-time."

"He would need to agree to the Accords," Rhodey told him quietly.

"Why don't we just talk to him?" Steve suggested. "He doesn't have to sign anything. Just...make him aware of it." Tony sighed, rubbing a hand down his face.

"Tell her I'll take care of it." He told them, wanting to get the topic off of Spiderman.

"Who is this man of spiders?" Thor wondered.
"Small time vigilante," Tony told him shortly.

"He's strong." Steve put in. "Maybe stronger than me."

"He's definitely stronger than you," Tony said with a wry smile.

"He was at the airport." Natasha put in. "Young guy. Wears a mask and a suit...no one but Tony knows who he is." Rhodey didn't comment, heading out of the room to make his phone call.

Once this was done, they were in the clear, free to operate as the Avengers once more in the United States and, with some conditions, outside of the states. Anything in foreign countries had to be approved by the UN if it was a major operation, but small missions could be done without any approval. Things like finding Hydra bases and chasing down terrorists.

"He's no one. Just some guy that fights crime in Queens." Tony slapped a palm down on the table, pushing his chair back from the table. "Are we done here?"

"Actually...I had a question." He turned to Wanda, everyone else going quiet. She glanced over at Vision who nodded to her, as if in encouragement. Was she actually worried about asking him something? Then again, they hadn't exactly spoken much since the airport.

"What's up?" He wondered.

"I wanted to ask if our rooms were still available." Her eyes were downcast, jaw tight, and he nodded immediately.

"Of course. Wanda, your room is beside Vision's. Everyone else's room is in the same spot. There were some renovations but otherwise, everything is the same."

There was a moment of silence, then Wanda looked up at him. "Thank you, Tony." He shrugged her off. Getting emotional with his kid was one thing. The rest of the Avengers...well...they weren't there yet.

"Alright. Anyone that wants to stay, your rooms are the same. Kitchen's stocked. FRIDAY has all the movies, etc. I'll be in my lab if anyone needs me." He waved a lazy hand over his shoulder, heading over to the elevator and taking it up to his private lab. Once inside, he pulled out his phone, checking the time, then stuffing it back into his pocket. The kid was probably busy with his meet and hanging out with his friends, so he'd wait to text him.

He would need to talk to Peter about the Accords. He didn't think that Spiderman would ever do anything to break them, or get involved in any international incidents, but still, if he talked to him about it and got Peter to agree, he could pass that on to Rhodey and it would be fine. Then they could move on from the Accords and he could focus on the Avengers and maybe, eventually, introduce Spiderman to them. Plus, now he'd need to actually introduce Peter to Wanda and Clint, even though he'd briefly met them before when he'd helped Natasha move out of her apartment.

The protestors were another issue they'd need to look into. Of course, people were welcome to protest...and sign petitions and write letters. Regardless of what they did, they wanted Loki in prison. On the Raft, most likely. Ever since the shooting at the press conference, Tony had been a lot less likely to actually listen to their complaints. Still, as long as they stayed away from him and his kid, he didn't care. He did wonder what the secretary of defense would say about it though...he'd thought about officially making Loki an Avenger, but hadn't brought it up yet. At this point, everything still felt so fragile. Loki got along fine with the others for the most part, and he usually kept to himself, but Tony wasn't willing to risk the peace.
Tony waited until four to text Peter, asking how the competition had gone. He got another thumbs up emoji and chuckled, going back to his work until his phone rang about an hour later. "Hey, kiddo."

"Hey, Tony." The boy's voice was subdued, and immediately Tony was on edge, putting the screwdriver he'd been holding down onto the table.

"What's up?"

"Nothing, really. We won our competition…"

"That's good," Tony said hesitantly. Peter hadn't sounded too excited.

"Yeah…" Peter muttered, then he heard muffled coughing.

"You sure you're okay, Pete?"

"Yeah. I just...uh...I think I'm getting a cold or something. I just feel...weird."

"Yeah?" Tony asked. "You want to come home?"

"No!" Peter hurried to assure him. "It's only one more day. I got some cold medicine...I'll be fine. We have another competition tomorrow and I can't miss it."

"Okay." He hesitated. "What did you mean, you feel weird?"

"I don't know." Peter sounded frustrated. "Ever since we got here I just...I don't know. I feel like something's going to happen but I don't...I don't know what."

"You want me to come up here?" Tony asked, wondering if a few of the Avengers would be willing to come with him. He was sure they would be...they all liked Peter.

"No. It's probably fine." Peter coughed once more, head turned from the phone so that the sound was muffled. "How is the stuff with the Accords going?"

"It's going well. We finished up a few hours ago. Wanda is moving back into the tower."

"Oh, that's cool. I haven't really gotten to talk to her...she won't use her mind-reading magic on me will she?"

"No." Tony shook his head, even if Peter couldn't see him. Maybe he should have video-called him so he could get a good look at him. The kid had looked fine that morning. He sounded upset, though...worried or on-edge. "She doesn't use her freaky magic for evil, don't worry." He told Peter with a smile, making his tone teasing.

There was a muffled voice in the background and for a moment, Peter held the phone away from his face, calling out something that Tony didn't catch. "I'll let you get back to your friends, Pete. Call if you need anything, alright?"

"Alright. Thanks, Tony." Peter's voice was soft and a little calmer.

"No problem, kid. Be careful if you sneak out. Good luck with your competition."

"Goodnight, Tony."

"Night, kiddo." And, pocketing his phone, Tony tried not to worry. He tried not to worry as he finished up working in the lab and then as he ate dinner with Pepper. She wasn't fooled.
"Tony, what's wrong?" She asked when he missed something she'd said at least twice.

"I think Pete's getting sick."

"He looked fine last night." She frowned in concern. "Is he okay?"

"Yeah...he said it was just a cold."

"I'm sure it is." She soothed, resting a hand on his. And that evening, as they curled up in bed together, he very determinedly didn't think about Peter being sick without him...or about Peter feeling weird. What did that mean anyway? Like something was going to happen...that's what he'd said. But what? He was at a nerd competition! With a bunch of other nerds!

All night he dreamed about Peter...about his kid screaming for him, reaching out for him...and no matter how hard he fought, he couldn't reach him! Like he was moving through jello, he would run and fight, reaching his arms out and never reaching the boy.

He woke up at nine-thirty to pounding on his bedroom door. "What the fuck." He rasped, rubbing a hand over his face. "What!" He snapped, grabbing his phone off the bedside table and feeling his blood turn to ice.

He'd missed three calls from Peter...just five minutes ago.

That didn't necessarily mean anything. Everything was probably fine.

"Tony!" He threw the blankets off, jumping out of bed and yanking the door open, then coming face to face with Rhodey who had a cell phone clutched in his hand. "We need to get to Peter. Now." Tony shook his head. It wasn't possible. Peter was fine. He had to be fine. "Someone tipped off the press. They know his name and they know where he is...he just called me...there's an active shooter at his decathlon competition. The shooter is looking for Peter."

Tony couldn't breathe. He couldn't breathe! A shooter...a shooter who was looking for Peter.

"Tony!" Rhodey cried, grabbing his shoulder, and Tony nodded.

"Give me...just...let me get dressed!" He cried, grabbing his undersuit from his closet and shutting his door for just long enough to throw it on. "FRI, get Bruce up here right now!" He practically screamed. "Did you talk to him?" He asked Rhodey through the door.

"Only for a few seconds. He...the phone cut off. I called him back but he didn't answer." Tony's stomach knotted in terror, but he didn't have time for terror.

Peter had tried to call him.

He'd been asleep.

Undersuit on, he touched a button on his watch, summoning the suit as he followed Rhodey into the living room just as Bruce stepped off the elevator, followed by Steve. "Tony? What's going on?" Bruce asked as the suit covered Tony's body, taking entirely too long. Behind him, Steve watched with wide eyes.

"Peter." Tony choked out, refusing to let his anxiety choke him. "A shooter...they know who he is. They're after Peter."

Immediately, everyone went rigid before exploding into action, and before he knew it, the four of them were on the Quinjet, Tony wondering when he'd invited Captain America to join them.
Sitting in the copilot's seat, he stared down at his phone, heart racing.

Three missed calls.

They knew who Peter was. Someone was trying to hurt his kid.

He didn't know why. He didn't care why.

He was going to kill them.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!!
It shouldn't have surprised Peter that the press had figured out that he was the kid that Tony had taken in. He'd been feeling on edge ever since he'd gotten on the bus at the school, so maybe this was why. Maybe this had been what his senses had been warning him about. It made sense that the press had figured out who he was...they hadn't given his name when Tony had announced that he was taking over the guardianship of a kid. It hadn't been a secret at Midtown that Peter interned with Tony Stark, and although he hadn't spread the news around that Tony was his guardian, it wasn't some huge leap in logic. Tony had come to his school to pick him up after the incident with Flash and then Tony had dropped him off at the bus the day before.

That morning, Peter and Ned woke to camera flashes outside their room that only increased when Peter pulled the blinds aside a little to peek outside. "Dude...look," Ned told him, holding out his phone, and Peter stared at the little screen that showed a news headline.

"Tony Stark takes in orphan, Peter Parker." And then a news story. A news story that started with "Amid controversy surrounding the reunification of the Avengers, the Asgardian refugees, and the protests over the protection of Loki by Tony Stark, anonymous sources have revealed the identity of the teenager under the guardianship of Iron Man as Peter Parker." The article went on to mention his aunt and his school...and his high school yearbook picture that he hated, plus a blurry shot from when Tony had taken him out to dinner. Groaning, he handed the phone back, wiping a hand over his eyes and telling himself not to freak out.

The press had been bound to come after him sooner or later. He hated it...but he didn't think there was anything to be done, especially considering he'd jumped in front of a bullet at a press conference to protect Loki. He considered calling Tony...but it was still pretty early. Only 7:30. Their competition started at 10, and they needed to be there at 9 to get signed in, so they would be leaving at around 8. After the competition was over, they'd have some free time in the city. Maybe then he could call and talk to Tony about all this.

He wondered who that anonymous source was that had talked to the press. He'd have put money on Flash's dad. He was kind of an asshole so it would make sense. The guy didn't like Tony, apparently, and didn't like him much either. The press had to have figured out that he'd be at this hotel somehow, and only the people on the decathlon team and their families would have known. It was possible that Flash had told them, he guessed, but Peter didn't think so. While he hadn't been friendly, exactly, he'd been leaving Peter alone for the most part, knocking off with the rude nicknames although he'd still get pissed when Peter beat him at Decathlon practice or answered questions right in class before him. Still, it had turned into an almost friendly rivalry. It was kind of nice, actually.

He missed Tony, which kind of surprised him. Not that he didn't like Tony...okay, he loved him. He thought of Tony as his dad, which he had nearly called the man the day before, much to his
embarrassment. Thankfully, Tony hadn't seemed to notice his slip. Still...it had only been one day. But he did miss him. Plus he felt like crap. The cough and the headaches had started a few days ago but, not wanting to worry anyone, he'd kept quiet about it. Tony had so much to worry about with the Avengers and the people that hated Loki and the new Accords that they were all trying to agree on. The last thing Peter wanted to do was add even more to his plate. So he'd kept quiet about it, but worried that Natasha might have noticed. He just wanted to go home and go to bed until he felt better and also avoid the people outside his room with the cameras and let Tony deal with all that.

Now that Natasha was living with them full time, he ran into her about once a day, sometimes more. Usually at the gym when he would get on the treadmill, but also just around the tower. Once he'd found her in the living room with Loki, the two of them reading in amicable silence. Another time he'd woken up in the middle of the night and had gone to get a drink and had found her watching TV. She'd invited him to sit, and after a while they'd been joined by Thor and Bruce, both wandering in at different times for a drink or something to eat and just staying. It had been nice.

"Dude...what are we going to do?" Ned asked, the two of them dressed for the day as they stood by the window, peering out of the blinds and trying not to catch the attention of the mob outside.

"I don't know," Peter muttered, closing the blinds and shrugging. "Wait for Mr. Harrington?"

"But...like...should we call Iron Man?" Peter laughed a little at his awed tone.

"And tell him what? That people are taking pictures of me!"

"Yeah! And he can come with his suit and...you know!" Ned held up a hand and made a repulsor noise with his mouth, making Peter laugh out loud. "Come on! That would be so cool!"

"He's busy, Ned. Besides, they just want pictures. We knew they'd figure out who I was eventually. It was never that good of a secret."

"So like...what do we do?"

"Wait for Mr. Harrington and then get on the bus." He wanted to get this competition over so he could go back to bed, honestly. It had started off fun, but he had felt worse than before when he'd woken up and he didn't want to have to deal with the press. How did Tony do this?

When their teacher finally reached their room and opened the door, Peter was surprised to find a handful of police officers with their arms out, forming a line to the bus so that Peter could walk.

"Peter? Are you alright!? His teacher asked, looking concerned, and Peter had to fight the urge to flinch back at all the camera flashes.

He wasn't some baby that needed Iron Man to save him every time something bad happened. He was Spiderman. He could walk to a bus and ignore some reporters. "Yeah. I'm fine." He told him, taking a step forward and following the man to the parking lot where the bus waited.

"They promised to have extra security at the school. They won't let any reporters in." The man assured him as reporters yelled questions, Ned on one side and Mr. Harrington on the other to block him as best they could

"Peter, is it true that you are friends with Loki?"

"Over here, Peter! Can we get a picture?"

"What's it like to live with Tony Stark?"
"Peter, look over here!"

"Why did Tony Stark take you in?"

"How do you feel about your aunt's death?" That last one made him flinch, but he kept his head down, knowing enough not to answer as he hurried up the stairs and into the bus where he sat next to Ned, keeping his back to the window. All around him, his teammates kept quiet, looking almost shell shocked. Had the reporters yelled questions at them too? He hoped not.

"You okay, man?" Ned asked, leaning in.

"Yeah," Peter muttered, pulling out his phone and considering it. Tony would answer. Tony always answered when he called. And he knew that that man would fly out in a heartbeat if Peter asked him to. No questions asked. He'd keep the press from bothering him and watch his competition and put his arms around Peter and ask if he was okay. And Peter could finally admit that he was sick and wanted to lay down and Tony would make that happen.

No. He wasn't going to make a big deal out of this. He was fine, and they were going home that evening anyway. It would be fine. Turning his head, he coughed into his sleeve and wished for the thousandth time that regular medicine worked for him. Maybe he could ask Bruce if he had anything that would help him.

The bus pulled away from the hotel, taking them down the same road toward the high school where their meet was. It wasn't a big competition, so they were just at another high school. It was a pretty big school, but not as nice as Midtown. There hadn't been a ton to do the night before after their completion, so he and Ned had snuck out and gotten junk food and ice cream at a convenience store nearby before watching movies on Peter's laptop thanks to Karen. MJ had joined them, even though they weren't allowed to have girls in their room, and had sat between them, resting her head on Peter's shoulder and curling up on the bed with them.

It had been nice.

Now he and Ned sat close together on the bus, MJ in the seat in front of them, all of them quiet and a little stunned as they drove away from the paparazzi that continued to try and get photos of them. "You okay?" Ned asked him, looking worried, and Peter nodded.

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm fine." He shrugged. "I mean, it sucks but…"

"It'll be better when we get inside the school," MJ told him, turning around in her seat and looking surprisingly sympathetic. "Wonder who went to the press." She glanced over at Flash who was sitting across from them, and the boy scowled.

"It wasn't me!" He snapped. "I have better things to do than talk to reporters about Pen...Peter." Peter had to admit, he was impressed with Flash's restraint. Besides, he believed him. It hadn't been Flash. His dad, maybe, but probably not Flash.

Michelle eyed Flash for a minute, then shrugged. "Whatever. You two ready for the competition?" Both Peter and Ned nodded, so she turned back around in her seat, pulling out her novel and ignoring them once more.

There were reporters at the school too, waiting outside by the sidewalk, cameras ready, and Peter almost expected Flash to say something about it, but he just looked kind of upset. He pulled out his phone and tapped something out, but their teacher was on his feet and hurrying out onto the lawn before Peter could think too hard on that. Mr. Harrington put his arms up, asking the reporters for
quiet, for them to step back, but they didn't listen...he didn't exactly have a commanding voice. "These students are on their way to a competition." He tried.

"Peter? Is Peter Parker on the bus? Is he the captain of the team? How long has he been on the academic decathlon team?" The wall of noise hit Peter even on the bus where he sat beside Ned, trying to keep his hood over his face. He really wished Tony were there. Or Thor. Or Loki. Or any of the Avengers, honestly. He had a feeling that any of them would be able to handle this.

The school only had one security guard, and she was obviously overwhelmed. "Thought they were going to get better security," MJ muttered, rolling her eyes. Ned threw Peter a worried look and he made himself look calm. Maybe there were more guards inside. Or, more likely, the school couldn't afford to get better security, or their best attempt was this one guard and maybe an extra teacher or two inside. If Tony had known, he probably would have sent the entire Iron Legion. The thought made Peter grin.

"It's fine. Let's just go inside." He suggested, standing, and Ned and MJ followed suit, Michelle in front of him and Ned behind him. Flash stood as well, then Abe, then the others, all of them heading toward the front of the bus where their teacher waited. Michelle held a hand out as she descended the stairs and Peter grabbed a hold of it, reaching back to get Ned's hand, and then Flash came down, sticking close behind him, while Mr. Harrington walked in front of him, the security guard holding out her arms and keeping the reporters back.

"Peter, can we get a photo?"

"Peter, do you condone what Loki did?"

"Peter, have you met the Avengers?"

"Peter, do you know anything about Spiderman?"

"Peter, why did Tony Stark adopt you?"

He wanted to answer, though of course, he couldn't. They'd never let him. But that last one...sometimes he wondered the same thing. Not that Tony had adopted him yet...but he had a feeling that he would bring it up sooner rather than later. Or maybe, somehow, Peter would build up the courage to ask Tony about it himself. A part of him worried that letting Tony adopt him would be the last straw...would finally mean that he'd replaced Aunt May. But another part of him, the bigger part that knew better, knew that he could never replace her. Never. Not her or Ben or his mom or dad. He couldn't replace any of them. He'd loved them all so much.

And he loved Tony. Tony was all he had left, really. Tony and now the Avengers, or...well, what part of the Avengers he knew. And Loki. His family was getting stranger by the day. Still, the point was, Tony was already like his dad. Making it legal was the logical next step...the next step that he wanted. He hoped that Tony wouldn't want him to change his name, but that was a part of the discussion that Peter hadn't even gotten to in his mind. Usually, when he played it out in his mind, he walked up to Tony, said the words, 'can I ask you something' and then got too scared to go any further. So he didn't.

He was sure that Tony would say yes but so afraid that he would say no.

They managed to register with no problem, grabbing their nametag badges that said they were allowed to be in the building and headed for the library. It was just them and three other teams, all of them hanging out in the library where they sat around at tables, studying or reading or playing on their phones. At 9:00, Peter pulled out his own phone, surrounded by MJ and Ned, and, strangely,
Flash who sat across from him but ignored all three of them, and called Tony. He was fine...everything was fine, but his spidey sense was shooting sparks up and down his spine and maybe, just maybe, Tony would have some tips for dealing with the reporters.

It went to voicemail.

Sighing and figuring the man was still sleeping, he pocketed his phone. "Voicemail." He told Ned, pulling out a book for English. Ned pulled out his own phone, showing him the latest video by a youtuber they both loved, and all thoughts of school work went out the window. All around the room were whispers about them, but no one approached him. Teachers gathered in groups at the edge of the room, phones out, murmuring about drives back and dinner plans. Their spouses. Children. The school system. Across the library at another table, a girl from another team laughed loudly and showed something on her phone to another guy, while two boys from different teams sat with their heads close together, talking about meeting up later. And still, Peter's senses were going crazy, goosebumps rising on his arms and making him shiver. Something was wrong. But everything was fine.

There were footsteps in the halls and he pulled his phone out again, cutting Ned off mid-sentence. "Something's wrong." He told his friends, dialing Tony.

Voicemail. "Tony? Call me back when you get this, please." He murmured into the phone, not wanting to advertise who he was talking to or who he was just in case there was anyone left in America that didn't know.

Something was wrong.

But everything seemed fine.

His spine was tense, shoulders bunched at his neck, heart speeding up, goosebumps rising on his skin.

Get out.

Get out!

It was 9:21 when the first gunshots went off, and Peter dialed Tony again right before the shots started, grabbing Ned and MJ and yanking them down under the table, the teachers racing to flip the lights off and other students all jumped under tables and behind bookshelves, all sadly prepared for this eventuality thanks to plenty of lock-down drills.

A table over, a girl cried, muffling her sobs into her hands, and MJ was shaking. "Tony. Tony, please pick up. Please. They have guns and they're in the school..." He hung up, hitting the end call button and silencing his phone, then reaching out and grabbing Flash who hadn't moved, yanking him down under the table, and together with Ned, he pulled the chairs closer, trying to create a shield.

One of the teachers was whispering into their own cellphone as another burst of gunfire went off. Loud, staccato booms filled the air as they spoke to the 911 operator. "Silence your phones." He ordered softly, and small screens illuminated terrified faces with varying degrees of brightness as, all around the room, the other students hurried to do as he'd said.

It was 9:24.

The feeling was there, dread and terror and sickness. They were there for him. Of course, he didn't know this, but he felt like he had enough evidence.
It was a Saturday, and they were the only ones in the school, so if they'd wanted to cause as much
destruction as possible, they wouldn't have come on a weekend...they were here for someone on the
Academic Decathlon team.

News about who he was had just broken the night before or early that morning, which meant people
knew that the boy under Tony Stark's guardianship was in this school.

There were at least five people, all with heavy boots and some serious firepower...probably not just
some angry white guy wanting to shoot up a school. No...these guys had a purpose and maybe some
training.

They were here for him. Peter Parker. And maybe it had something to do with Loki and maybe it
had something to do with the Avengers or getting revenge on Tony but he couldn't let anyone get
hurt because of him no matter what. He picked up his phone, let his thumb hovering over Tony's
name, then called Rhodey instead.

It only rang twice before he answered. "Hey, Peter. Everything okay?" The man asked, barely able
to get those words out before Peter was speaking in a rush.

"Rhodey, the press knows that Tony is my guardian and they know who I am." He hissed, fighting
so hard to keep his voice calm. There were two doors to the library but who knew if more armed
people were waiting outside. They couldn't move. They were trapped. His suit was in his bag
already packed on the bus. He knew what he was going to have to do.

"Okay. listen, just stay put…"

The footsteps were so close. They were kicking in doors. Getting closer and closer. People were
staring at him, some in confusion, some hopeful. "There's an active shooter in the school. They're
looking for me. Please...I can't..." He couldn't say what he couldn't do. No in front of everyone.

The door to the library was kicked in and the air was filled with gunfire.

Peter hit the end call button, holding it tight to his chest and closing his eyes, hot tears building up
and spilling down his cheeks as he reached back and took MJ's hand.

It was 9:29.

He knew what he had to do...what was coming next.

The guns were aimed at the ceiling, and as shots filled the air, Peter turned his phone on silent so it
wouldn't vibrate, then shoved it in his pocket, flinching at the sobs and screams in the room. The
lights were thrown on and a girl sobbed uncontrollably, whispering 'please, please God' over and
over. Peter wasn't going to let her die. Not like this.

"Peter Parker!"

"No," Flash whispered, shaking his head, and honestly, Peter was almost touched. He reached back,
grabbing Michelle's hand and squeezing.

"Come with us and no one gets hurt!"

And before anyone could do anything stupid...before a teacher could take another step or someone
decided to be brave, Peter crawled out from under the table, shoving his phone even deeper in his
pocket and pulling his hoodie down, then pulling away from Ned who grasped at him desperately.
"Peter...Peter don't…" His friend begged.
"Tell Tony I'll keep my phone on me as long as I can." He whispered, then stood, hands up as if he was surrendering...which he guessed he was.

The men had huge guns, all pointed at him. There were four of them, and the one in front came closer until he was poking Peter in the chest with his gun. "Hand over your phone." He ordered.

"I gave it to Ned." Peter choked out, jerking his head toward his friend under the table and praying that this worked.

"Give it here." The man ordered his friend, pointing the gun at the table, and Ned all but threw his phone out, only for the man to crush it under his heel, stomping on it two or three times. "Get the kid in the van. Now. No funny business or we start shooting your friends. Got that?"

Peter nodded, not fighting as one of them grabbed his arm, and, refusing to let himself glance backward, he followed the men down the hall, out a side door, and into a van parked in a back alley, the sound of sirens coming to him from a distance.

Tony would come.

Tony would save him.

He would just have to survive until his dad could come get him.

He wasn't going to cry. He wasn't going to cry.

Something heavy whipped him across the back of the head almost as soon as he sat down in the back of the van, a needle stabbing him in the neck right after, and he wasn't sure which had done it, but all he knew then was darkness as his head hit the floor.
“From now on, if Peter tries to call me, wake me up, FRIDAY. I don’t care how. Turn on the damn sprinklers if you have to.” Tony ordered as he sat in the Quinjet, phone clutched in his hand against his ear. They’d been in that jet for about fifteen minutes, Tony sitting by himself despite the worried looks Rhodey and Bruce were throwing him. He didn’t care. He couldn’t afford to be worrying about them at the moment. He needed to fix this. He was a mechanic. He fixed things. Peter was fine. The kid was a superhero. If anything, he was going to think it was ridiculous that Tony had dropped literally everything to get to him, bringing along Captain America, War Machine, and the Hulk.

“Hey, it’s Peter. Leave a message...or, like...just text me.” The kid had been laughing when he’d recorded that voicemail greeting, Tony could hear it in his voice, and he could also hear Ned laughing in the background. It was almost strange to hear the kid laughing like that. Not that Peter wasn’t happy, he didn’t think. He got the feeling that Peter was as happy as he could be living with Tony and a slowly growing group of others. But to hear him laughing and goofing off...it wasn’t a side he’d seen much of over the last month. Then again, the kid had just lost his aunt. Well...not just, but still. He’d lost her and his whole life had been turned upside down. Tony thought he was doing a pretty good job of keeping it together considering. He would happily listen to that voicemail greeting a thousand times...it beat the hell out of listening to the one Peter had left him. The kid had sounded scared. But then he’d called Rhodey. Smart kid. So smart.

Tony had had his phone on silent. Probably, he’d put it on silent before laying down with Pepper and had just fallen asleep. He couldn’t remember and he didn’t want to ask FRIDAY. From then on, he decided, he’d volunteer to chaperone every school trip the kid went on. Every single one. He’d heard that seniors got to go to Europe for their last field trip...he’d fly the kids on his private jet if it meant he got to stay with Peter.

Then again, what if the kid didn’t want him going on all his field trips?

He’d deal with that later.

“Tony, he’s going to be fine,” Rhodey told him softly as Steve piloted the jet. Of course, he would be fine. Peter was Spiderman. The kid was practically a genius, was stronger than just about anyone he knew, and his favorite hobby was swinging around Queens and stopping crime. Everything would be fine. Except for the people who had, for whatever reason, threatened his kid. Those people would not be fine.

He needed to know who those people were and what they wanted. That was the most important thing. Once he knew that, he could take them out. Would he feel bad about using all of his vast resources to exact some revenge? No. Not at all. They’d brought his teenage kid into it. So whatever they wanted, they weren’t getting it. “Tony?” Rhodey broke into his thoughts, apparently wanting his confirmation.
“Of course he’ll be fine.” He snapped a little. “We’re just gonna pick him up and take him home.” He told the others, ignoring the looks they sent him. “I’m thinking we take him to lunch on the way home. Kid loves Thai food so I hope you do too.”

Bruce chuckled a little, obviously making an effort to remain calm. Just then, his phone rang with an incoming call, and he glanced down to find Natasha’s face on his screen. Right. He’d forgotten about her. And there was something about a meeting with Thor that he’d need to reschedule.

“Tony? Where are you?” Natasha asked as soon as he answered the call, holding his phone up so that they could see one another.

“We’re taking the jet to the school where Peter’s competition was.”

Her eyes narrowed as Thor appeared in the background, walking by and pausing. Behind him, Tony could see Loki sitting in his usual spot, making his way through a book without any apparent interest in their conversation. “Tony? Are we not meeting this morning? I wished to discuss…”

Tony cut him off, feeling restless energy crawling under his skin like bugs. “I know...sorry, Point Break. We’re going to have to reschedule.”

“Is everything alright with Peter?” Nat asked, pushing herself back into the conversation.

“Someone leaked his identity to the press...now the whole world knows he’s the kid I took in, and we think someone told the press where he’d be today.” The next part was harder to say, but he had to. Dropping his eyes and tightening his jaw, he tried to speak without emotion. “There was a shooting at the school...he tried calling me right before...he talked to Rhodey but now he’s not picking up his phone.”

That, apparently, was enough to get Loki’s attention, and the Asgardian put his book down and turned toward the phone screen. “Is he…” Thor trailed off, not seeming sure how best to phrase it.

“I don’t know. I don’t...we’re on our way.”

“We’re on our way too,” Natasha told him firmly, shaking her head when he started to argue that it might be overkill. “When you find Peter, you’ll need to stay with him. We can take care of the people that did this.”

He didn’t argue anymore. They could do what they wanted. He was getting Peter back before he figured out his next move anyway.

“Tony.” Rhodey’s voice was soft and urgent to get his attention, and he turned toward his friend who was holding out his own phone, lifting the screen so that both Tony and the Avengers he was on the phone with could see.

It was a reporter, surrounded by people, holding up a mike and speaking solemnly into the camera as she stood in front of a high school. “I’m here at Oakridge High School where Peter Parker, ward of billionaire and superhero Tony Stark, was abducted by a group of armed gunmen less than an hour ago. None of the other students, all here for an Academic Decathlon competition, can be reached for comment. But the police are saying that the kidnappers have been in contact. Tony Stark has not been available for comment, nor has his fiancée, the CEO of his company, Pepper Potts.”

The woman on the screen paused then, eyes narrow, and then went on almost excitedly. “I have just received word that the kidnappers have a message for Tony Stark.” The screen went blue, and white text appeared in quotation marks, an obviously disguised, almost cartoonishly deep voice speaking then.
“Tony Stark. Give us Loki and we’ll return your son.” Then a click as the people who’d taken his kid hung up the phone.

Rhodey closed out of the window as the news went back to the reporter, and Tony felt his blood rushing in his ears. They’d take Peter to get to Loki. For the second time his kid was in danger because of these people...that was two times too many.

“These are the humans you protect?” Loki asked suddenly, speaking obviously to Thor. “The ones who would kidnap a child to get to me?” His voice was full of venom, hands clenched into fists at his sides.

“No,” Thor answered simply. “I will not be protecting these humans.”

“We’re on our way, Tony,” Natasha told him again, moving closer to the phone screen.

“We all are.” Thor put in, face deadly serious. Behind him, Loki stood at the ready. They were going to pair up with Loki. Tony thought back to how the Asgardian had been in New York and almost smiled. They wanted Loki? They’d get Loki.

It was chaos when Tony, Bruce, Steve, and Rhodey approached the school, hurrying from the jet that they’d left in the school parking lot which was so full of reporter’s vans that they almost hadn’t been able to find a spot, garnering plenty of looks but no orders to move. Then again, Tony didn’t think that anyone was brave enough to try and order the Avengers to move their jet. That thought took him aback. He glanced over at Steve, the man’s icy blue eyes darting around, mind already working. They had to talk to the police...see if they had any leads. And Tony wanted to check on Peter’s friends, too. Thor, Natasha, and Loki were all on their way…it would take them forty minutes tops to arrive, so they didn’t have a lot of time.

It had been barely a half hour flight in the jet, but to Tony, that half-hour had seemed to stretch on for days.

Ambulances sat parked on the corner, and police cars were lined up on a side road, a stretcher being wheeled out from a set of double doors that probably let to a cafeteria or gym. Reporters had swarmed the place, which, considering Peter’s voicemail, Tony wasn’t surprised about really. Furious, yes, but not surprised. Pepper was already trying to figure out who they were going to sue. And man, oh man...were they going to sue. Leaking the name and location of a minor to the press may not have been a federal crime, but oh boy was Tony going to retaliate like it had been.

Peter was going to fine. They’d all been held hostage once or twice...hell, Tony’s entire origin story was being held hostage. They wouldn’t hurt Peter because they wanted him for a trade.

They really weren’t going to like that trade.

All heads turned in their direction, jaws dropping, as the four men approached the school. The handful of police officers standing around stopped what they were doing while the reporters began whispering to one another in frantic, hushed tones, grabbing their cameras and pointing them at the group. The officers seemed to take a minute, trading glances before one man finally stepped forward, holding out a hand that Tony took, not wanting to waste time with formalities but also not wanting to alienate the people who were there to help. “Tony Stark.” He introduced himself unnecessarily.

“Of course. Mr. Stark...I’m Detective Brooks.”

Tony nodded. “We need everything you have on these guys.” He told him simply. “Security footage, witness statements...license plate numbers. Everything. Have they called?”
“Come with me. Please.” Brooks urged, eyes darting over to the reporters huddled on the schools front lawn. Hands tight in fists at his sides, Tony did, he and the others following Brooks past the reporters who started calling out questions immediately.

“Tony! Is Peter Parker your son?”

“Why did you take Peter in?”

“Did this have anything to do with Loki?”

“Are you going to adopt Peter?”

“Are you protecting Loki at the expense of your family?”

Tony did stop at that question, ignoring how Steve nearly bumped into him, yanking his sunglasses off his face.

This was supposed to be some nerdy club competition. Peter was supposed to be safe here. Instead, these people had broadcast his location and practically invited those men here. He turned to the reporters, feeling just a hint of satisfaction when everyone stopped. Of course, not all of them had been shouting questions. Several of them had just been standing in the back, wide-eyed and huddled together. He’d grown up with reporters and knew several by name. Lots of them were nice people, and he certainly gave the best interviews to the ones he liked. But he hated reporters like these...the ones that screamed terrible questions to get reactions. What kind of things had they yelled at Peter? It would be best if he never found out.

So he turned to the ones in front, sunglasses in hand, Iron Man gauntlet watch at the ready. “It would be in your best interests to get out of here before I figure out your names.” He told them simply, then followed the officer into the school, relishing the silence.

They’d barely made it inside the school before he heard the crying. Sobbing. Children...just children here for a school competition. Some sat in the hallway with what must have been their parents, some clinging for dear life while others stared straight ahead, tears running down their cheeks. Others huddled in groups, hugging one another. The ones from out of town, he supposed. But he didn’t see any of the Midtown kids. He didn’t know the whole decathlon team, but he knew that they all wore those ugly yellow jackets and those were hard to miss.

Steve shook his head at the scene, wiping a hand over his face and staring down at the floor while Bruce crossed his arms, jaw tight. Rhodey stayed right by Tony’s side, eyes on the officer. The small group made their way through the hall, finally stopping outside of a door marked ‘library, that the detective led them through.

“Mr. Stark.” The detective began, all of them standing beside a bookshelf full of books on science. Somewhere in Tony’s brain, that sparked something. A joke, maybe. Or a pang of irony. Maybe sadness. Focus, he told himself furiously, feeling the seams of his control pulling apart like a suit jacket two sizes too small. The library was almost empty as far as Tony could tell, apart from the tables set up around the room, covered in textbooks, backpacks, and what looked like homework packets. He spotted Peter’s backpack right away and had to fight the urge to grab it. “The gunmen were here for Peter.”

“We already saw the news,” Tony told him, waving a hand. He was more than ready to move forward. To get his kid. On the other side of the library out of the corner of his eye, he finally glimpsed them, his thoughts bouncing around like a green rubber ball he’d had as a kid...the one he’d dropped from the balcony one day to see how high it would bounce. Apparently, when he got
anxious, his mind dealt only in oddly specific similes.

The kids wore those ugly yellow jackets. Mustard yellow. He only caught a glimpse of them, and an idiotic hope shot straight through his heart, one that he immediately crushed. Peter wasn’t here. He already knew that. Those were the other kids on the Decathlon team from Midtown...they were in a room off the side of the library, the door mostly shut. He’d just caught a glimpse. But they were there. In those ugly jackets. Peter’s friends...plus that Flash kid.

“We’re still trying to get witness statements from the kids, but from what we gathered, the men demanded that Peter come with him, and he came forward immediately.”

Of course he had. Because Peter was brave and Peter was a superhero but Peter was also Tony’s kid and a fifteen-year-old child and this wasn’t fair, his mind cried like a petulant toddler. Not fair. Peter was too young and too good and Tony loved him and why did this keep happening?

“Have they been in contact with you?” Steve demanded. “We saw the message on the news but have they given you a location?” Tony’s mind, still whirling from being pulled from the first good sleep he’d gotten in weeks and still sluggish and almost in shock, snapped to attention. Location. Did Peter have his phone? He started to pull his own out as the officer spoke.

“Yes. They’ve been in contact with the police department and have been given my contact information. We’ve assured them that any and all demands will be met as long as the boy remains unharmed.” Well, Tony certainly planned on meeting their demands. He’d gladly let Loki take care of this for him. He supposed that was a benefit to being on the Asgardian’s good side.

“Mr. Stark!” The Avengers and Brooks all turned toward Ned who was hurrying over toward them, eyes red-rimmed and huge. “Mr. Stark!” Behind him, Tony saw a door propped open that led to the small room off the side of the library that may have been an office and a couple of kids in those hideous yellow jackets. Maybe if he donated some money he could get them to pick a better color...focus. Squeezing his hand in a fist, he tried to make it stop shaking. They were going to get Peter back. They had to. He had to keep moving forward. Keep focusing. Take step after step until his kid was safe again.

An officer attempted to stop the boy, reaching out for his arm. “Son, I need…”

“Let him through,” Tony demanded. “Ned? You okay?” He asked, clasping a hand on the boy’s shoulder as soon as he was close enough. The kid nodded. “Alright. Give me just a second.” Then he turned back to the officer, hand still on Ned’s shoulder, holding him tight. This was Peter’s best friend. He would have been right there. For now, though, they needed to know what had happened. Assess the situation, then find his kid. Peter was Spiderman. He’d be okay for a few more minutes. “Give me the rundown, Detective Brooks. What happened?”

“The men entered the building from two side exits at 9:18 am according to the footage. They made their way through the building, shooting two security guards. Because of the media attention, the school contacted their security company and requested an extra security presence, but it was short notice so the extra help didn’t arrive until after all of the children were checked in. There were students from three schools, all of them in the library at the time of the shooting. There were four security guards in total...two are dead, one wounded, and one...well, we just learned that one of them was working with the kidnappers. We’re still attempting to speak to the company they work for. From what we’ve gathered from our witnesses, they reached the library, demanded Peter Parker come with them, and he did so immediately. We interviewed the kids from this school first, and according to them, they demanded Peter’s phone, and then destroyed it.” Tony swore under his breath. Of course, they wouldn’t want him tracking the kid.
They’d taken him almost an hour ago.

“We have police all over the state looking for them but they left in several unmarked vans...we only got one license plate number.”

“You’re telling me that with that many reporters stationed out front, you only have license plate number?” Bruce demanded, stepping forward, looking just a little green.

Brooks shook his head. “The reporters were all by the entrance. Two vans through a back alley, and another through a back parking lot. They were very well prepared which leads me to believe someone leaked his identity and location before today. We haven’t been able to get an accurate count yet, but according to the kids we’ve talked to, there were at least five armed men, probably more outside. They shot one guard in the leg he was told that ‘they would be contacting Iron Man about his son shortly.’”

Apparently, Ned couldn’t wait anymore, the boy practically bouncing on his heels to get Tony’s attention. “Sir? They didn’t destroy his phone!” He blurted, and Tony held up a hand to the officer.

“They didn’t?” He asked. Ned shook his head.

“No! I was just telling the officers in there before I looked up and I saw you walking through the doors and I wanted to come tell you immediately but they said I had to stay! And I was like, that’s Tony Stark and I have to tell him…”

“Ned.” Tony broke in, fighting to make himself calm. It wasn’t working. They’d taken his kid. And yeah, Peter was Spiderman but Peter was also certainly not bulletproof, as they’d all found out for certain not too long ago.

“Right! Sorry.” The kid looked sheepish for a minute before plowing on. “They told Peter to hand over his phone but he said he gave it to me! So...so I gave them my phone and they destroyed that one. He still has his.”

Just then, his phone pinged in his pocket, raid and high-pitched...an emergency alert. He’d programmed Peter’s phone with Karen so that if the kid was in danger, he could have her send Tony Peter’s location. Why the kid hadn’t used that during the shooting, he wasn’t sure. But there would be time to ask about that later. For the moment, he whipped out his phone, staring down at the screen and letting himself smiled just a little.

A set of coordinates appeared under his kid’s name, the bright red message alert on his phone blinking as the device vibrated in his hand. He’d made it impossible to miss. “Atta boy, Pete. Gotcha.”

The detective held up a hand then, and they all paused, “Detective Brooks.” The man answered, touching a button so that the call would be on speaker. Then, the voice of the man that Tony fully planned on killing spoke.

“You the cop looking for Peter Parker?” Rhodey placed a firm hand on Tony’s shoulder, squeezing and throwing him a concerned look. He was shaking. His hands, his arms...his whole body was shaking from the frantic energy. It didn’t matter what the men on the phone said. He had Peter’s location. He was going to wait for the Avengers, and then he was going to get his kid.
Firstly, thank you so much to everyone who has reviewed my story! I appreciate you all so much. I hope you enjoy this chapter!

Those Who Help Themselves

Peter groaned, consciousness coming back in an abrupt, painful way. Memories didn't take long, although they were miserable and painful. Men with guns threatening his friends. The knowledge that he was sick when he hadn't been sick in...well...before he was bitten by that spider, he guessed. The fear that came from having so many guns pointed at him when he didn't have his suit and the memory of a blow to the head and a needle in his neck. They'd drugged him, apparently, but that was already wearing off...it couldn't have been long.

He had to think.

They already knew that he was Tony's kid but they could not know that he was Spiderman. Not under any circumstances. He wasn't ready. Wasn't ready for the world to know, and there's no way a bunch of criminals would keep it a secret, not unless he killed them. And Spiderman didn't kill people. Neither did Peter Parker. So his brain raced through the possibilities.

He could try to sneak away. But if they caught him...if they started shooting...he couldn't think about that. Couldn't let the fear hold him back. He was Spiderman. He could break out of the ropes tied around his wrists without much of a problem, but there were at least five armed men...armed with the kinds of guns that would rip him to pieces. And he'd already been shot once, thank you very much. He wasn't anxious to relive the experience.

But he had his phone and Tony could use it to track him. He could wait...figure out what they wanted and then try to take some of them out before backup arrived.

This was fine. He was fine. He was Spiderman and he would be fine.

He coughed again, wincing at his sore throat and the buildup in his head. He just wanted to lay down. For the hundredth time, he kicked himself for hiding how sick he was feeling from Tony. If he had just stayed home, none of this would have happened. He could have been in bed at home, watching Netflix and drinking orange juice. Instead, he was sitting in a metal folding chair in some giant, empty room, arms tied behind his back. His head hurt, probably from a mix of whatever sickness he'd caught and the blow to the head. That had sucked.

Wriggling a little, he loosened the ropes and got a better look around the room. It was a fairly big room, like...a warehouse, maybe. Boxes and crates were stacked in the corner, and there were dust bunnies in the corners. Sawdust and cobwebs and all the markings of a creepy abandoned warehouse filled the room because of course the criminals never tried to hold their hostages in a nice hotel. With a bed. And room service.

But he'd gotten them to take him. They were far away from his classmates and civilians and now, all he needed to figure out was why exactly they'd taken him. Revenge on Tony? That seemed most
likely. No one knew he was Spiderman, and the drugs they'd given him had only knocked him out for...well, it didn't feel like it had been very long, but he didn't really know. If they had known that he was enhanced, they would have given him more drugs. Or something stronger. Listening for footsteps, he pulled one hand loose, then reached into his pocket. "Karen?" He whispered once he'd seen the screen. 10:27 am.

"Yes, Peter?" She asked, matching his tone.

"Send an emergency alert to FRIDAY with my location. Keep sending it."

"Of course, Peter."

"Thanks." He shoved his phone back in his pocket and put his hand behind his back, slipping it back into the ropes, and resigned himself to wait, figuring he wouldn't have to wait for too long. He couldn't run in blind...he needed to know why they'd taken him and who exactly he was dealing with.

He was right about not having to wait for too long. Three masked men entered the room less than a minute later, throwing the metal door open, the noise making his head ache. Groaning, he dropped his head to his chest, shifting against the uncomfortable metal chair. The men still had their guns slung over their backs, masks in place, and one came behind him, grabbing him by the hair and yanking his head back.

"Call them," The man behind him demanded, and another man, one with a cellphone that he pulled out of his cargo pants, began to dial.

"So...what is it exactly that you guys want?" He wondered, making his tone conversational.

"Money? Weapons? Iron Man's autograph? Because..." He was cut off by the fist hitting his nose and he gasped when blood began to trickle down his face. "Asshole." He grumbled, wondering why he couldn't have been blessed with a better coping mechanism. "You know, he's going to be really mad. Like, it's bad enough you kidnapped me, and now you've broken my nose. He gets kind of touchy when people..." His words were cut off once again, but this time, it was by a punch to the stomach. Not the worst hit...he'd taken worse on patrol, but it still hurt, forcing the air from his lungs. "Shit." He hissed, back slamming into the back of the chair when the man with a hold of his hair yanked him back once more.

He didn't have his suit. They already knew that he was Tony's...ward? Kid? They knew that Tony had taken him in. He couldn't let them find out that he was Spiderman. He wasn't ready! Wasn't ready for the whole world to know. Just the thought made his stomach clench and sweat to run down his forehead...or maybe that was the fever. He was pretty sure he could take these guys...but they had guns and he was sick and he didn't like his odds of getting out of this when all of them were in the room.

The phone rang in the other man's hand. He wished they weren't all wearing those masks...it might be easier to differentiate between them then. The one with the phone put it on speaker just as someone answered.

"Detective Brooks." The person barked.

"You the cop looking for Peter Parker?" There was a brief pause, then the detective spoke again, this time quieter.

"Do you have Peter Parker?" He asked carefully.
"Yeah. We've got the kid right here. Say hello, kid." Before Peter could open his mouth or think of a witty comment, the one who'd hit him twice already punched him again, once more in the stomach, and he let out a cry against his will.

Then the cop was talking again, faster this time. "What are your demands? We're willing to..."

The man cut him off. "I want you to give a message to Iron Man." There was a pause, but the gunman went on. "Tell him he'd better bring us Loki and maybe his son will live to see another day."

Suddenly there was another voice on the phone. "Yeah, well Iron Man has a message for you, asshole." Peter grinned a little down at the floor, relief sweeping over him. Backup was coming. "You picked the wrong kid to mess with. But you know what? I'm going to bring you Loki. I'm going to bring him right to your fucking door. So you'd better get your affairs in order." With that, the call went dead, and Peter shivered as a chill hit, his whole body shaking. Stupid fever.

"So like...what was the plan here? You guys seriously think you can take Loki? Didn't he practically take over New York? The guy's like, a god. Plus, not to be conceited, but I think he likes me, so he probably won't take kindly to you..."

The one holding his hair let go abruptly, taking a step back. "Mason, shut him up, will you?" The back of the chair he was in was given a firm shove that sent him sprawling, hands escaping the bonds before he was conscious of it to catch himself on the floor, narrowly avoiding hitting his face. He kicked, ducking his head when his spider senses sent him a cold warning up and down his spine.

His foot connected with what felt like a knee, and he would have kept going...would have taken these guys down, if a burst of rapid gunfire aimed at the ceiling hadn't had him freezing in place for long enough for a foot to slam into his side, a crunch he heard more than felt letting him know that a rib was broken. The foot pulled back and struck again, and he let out a breathless scream, curling up into a ball and knowing that it was this or the guns.

He wasn't bulletproof. Even if he'd had his suit...he was outgunned...outmanned. Outnumbered. The catchy song started playing on his head and had he been in a less dire situation he might have groaned. It had been awhile since the Hamilton Soundtrack had started playing in his mind on repeat.

'You need all the help you can get I have some friends...Iron Man, War Machine, Loki, Thor'...it didn't quite fit the same, and the melody sort of fell apart at the end, but he still felt his lips twitch into an almost smile, wondering if it was the fever making him delirious or if his sense of humor just sucked. Or maybe this was a coping mechanism. The foot came back, striking him in the arm.

"Got anything else to say, you little shit?" The man asked, and Peter had to literally bite his tongue.

Yes. He had a lot of things to say. But the thing that came to mind as hands grabbed his arms and hauled him back up into the chair, the ropes tied more tightly around his wrists, was 'You guys are so screwed when my dad gets here.'

Peter closed his eyes, jaw tight. Moving slowly, he wiggled his wrists, loosening the ropes without much trouble, and waited. He didn't have to wait for Tony. He knew what they wanted now. But he still had to make sure they didn't figure out who he was. They were bringing Loki here, and he was sure that, between Tony and Loki, these guys would be toast. But he was Spiderman! He could do this. His head throbbed in time with his heartbeat, feeling worse as the seconds passed. He couldn't just sit here. So he worked on getting his arms free without alerting anyone to what he was doing. None of them seemed to be paying much attention to him, but after a few minutes, he let his head hang down to his chest, taking a break.
He remembered feeling like this before when he'd had strep throat and had been waiting in the doctor's office with Ben, feeling so sick and miserable that he'd just leaned against his uncle, dozing and feeling the time move around him like thick soup. That's how he felt now. Time didn't feel real. Was it the fever, he wondered, or the concussion? Either way, Bruce could probably help. But he couldn't let anyone figure out who he was. Spiderman. He was Spiderman and he was sick and every few minutes he'd find himself in the middle of a coughing fit that left his side aching. Broken ribs. Great.

After a while, two of the three masked men in the room with him left, the third one leaning against a wall, messimg around on his phone. His gun was slung across his back and didn't seem too concerned with Peter, so he resumed his efforts, easily slipping his wrists free. Thankfully, he was facing the guy, so the masked man couldn't see his wrists. "So...got any orange juice? Soup?" He called, and the guy looked up at him, attention drawn from the phone. "I think I'm getting sick." He explained. "I mean, I've been sick. For like, a week or two, but I didn't tell Tony. Didn't want to bug him." Peter rambled, cheering inwardly when the guy rolled his eyes behind the ski mask.

"Shut up, kid." He ordered.

"I mean, not that I think it would bug him really...he'd want to know. He's probably going to be pissed that I didn't tell him before...I mean...okay, not pissed, exactly. Just...upset. He worries, you know? And I hate worrying him all the time." The man shoved his phone into his pocket, approaching with a glare. "I said, shut up." His voice was calm, contained. But underneath was anger. Peter knew men like him...had met men like this before. Men who were just waiting for a chance to beat up someone they thought was weaker than them. He shrugged as if he hadn't heart the guy.

"So anyway, I was just wondering if you had any orange juice. My throat's killing me and hey, if you can get me some, I'll put in a good work with Loki. Maybe he won't hurt you too bad." And then, the guy was within reaching distance, a hand outstretched to grab Peter's hair, and he sprung, rope dropping onto the floor as he reached out, grabbing the man's wrist and squeezing as hard as he could, clamping his other hand around the man's mouth and spinning him around, muffling the sound of screaming when the guy's wrist splintered in his grip.

Releasing his wrist, Peter brought back a fist, punching him right in the temple and catching him before he dropped, then grabbed the rope they'd used to tie him up, ripping it in half and using part of it to tie the guy's wrists. Lifting him easily, he carried the guy over to the corner of the room, dumping him behind a stack of boxes. Then, yanking off the guy's mask, he ripped a part of it so that he could wrap it around his mouth, tying it securely behind his head. Pressing his fingers to the guy's neck, he checked his pulse, then went back to the chair, grabbing the rope and tying it loosely around his arms before sitting back down.

His head continued to spin and he closed his eyes, resting his chin on his chest. He'd be really glad when this was all over...he could hear the footsteps of the other men...they were walking around the large door, which seemed to be the only way in and out of the room he was being held in. There were windows further up, but the thought of getting caught climbing a wall scared him too much. He couldn't let them know...couldn't let them find out who he was. Couldn't risk that. So he continued to wait, hoping another one of them came to check on him. He could keep taking them out on at a time...let them underestimate him.

He only had to wait another thirty or so minutes before the door was thrown open, and four gunmen raced into the room, all wearing masks, all carrying their guns as they surrounded him. He almost laughed. Tony was here. They were scared.
Good. They should be scared.

He flinched at the gun pressed against his temple, all of their eyes on the door right before it was blown in. When the dust cleared, Peter almost rolled his eyes despite his relief.

Tony had brought just about everyone. Iron Man stepped into the room first, slowly lowering his repulsor as he took in the sight of Peter surrounded by very large guns, War Machine on his left. On his right was Loki, dressed in a black suit and looking surprisingly invested in the situation. Behind Loki was Thor, then, behind War Machine was Captain America, shield held out in front of him, and then Natasha, gun in hand. Peter wondered if any other Avengers were waiting in the wings but didn't think it wise to ask at the moment.

"You wished to speak to me?" Loki asked, taking another step forward, apparently not bothered by the guns that were suddenly pointed at him, one still pressed into Peter's temple. "Release the child, and I would be more than happy to oblige." He smiled, but it was more chilling than friendly.

"The rest of you, leave Loki here and we'll send the kid out." The man holding the gun to Peter's temple snapped.

"Yeah, I don't think so. Give me my kid and I might not kill anyone." Tony's voice was robotic from the Iron Man mask, but it was still comforting to hear, even though bringing half of the Avengers might have been overkill. The gun pressed further into Peter's head and he flinched, pulling away a little. "Pete? You good?" Iron Man asked, voice deceptively casual. Peter shrugged.

"These guys are assholes, but yeah, otherwise, I'm fine." The Iron Man armor gave him a thumbs up, and he caught Steve grinning a little in the back.

"Release the child. Now." Loki told them, his voice a warning. When no one moved, he took a step forward, hands suddenly holding two long knives that seemed to have come from nowhere, and then there was the rapid sound of gunfire that made Peter flinch, cringing away from the sound that exploded around him, ears ringing for a moment.

Peter felt his jaw drop when Loki held up a hand, the bullets stopping just before reaching him and then clattering harmlessly to the ground. No one moved...no one made a sound.

"Wait...could you have done that at the press conference?" Peter blurted, and the Asgardian shrugged carelessly.

"Had I been paying attention, yes," Loki told him. "However, I was not expecting to be shot at, and regardless, your gesture is still appreciated." The man beside him pressed the gun more firmly into his temple, and Peter couldn't hide the flinch.

"Turn yourself in or I blow the kid's brains out!" The guy barked.

Peter's ribs were killing him and his head was throbbing and he was sick of this shit. The Avengers all stood in the doorway, Loki in the front, eyes going from the gunmen to Peter. "Peter, do you recall asking me what would happen if I made you disappear?" He asked, apparently ignoring the gunmen.

Peter felt his eyes grow wide, excited despite himself. "Yeah!"

Loki smirked, lifting a hand, and suddenly Peter was surrounded by green light right before he found himself in another room, flat on his back, gasping for air. This room was dark, but he was still in the same building...he could still hear the voices of his captors and the Avengers. The new room was smaller, but he couldn't see much in the dim light. "Holy shit!" He hissed, pulling himself up gingerly
and ignoring the pounding in his head and the sheen of sweat on his forehead. "Loki is so cool."

Throwing the ropes onto the ground, he pressed his hand to his side to keep his ribs from shifting. He wasn't sure how many were broken, but he didn't have time to care about that at the moment. They would heal soon enough...but Loki had just teleported him into another room!

The rapid sound of gunfire pulled him out of his musings on how awesome Loki was, and he hurried over to the wall, feeling around for a door. The gunfire stopped almost as soon as it started, which wasn't much of a surprise considering it was a couple of humans up against two gods and four Avengers. Or...five Avengers...Thor was an Avenger, right. He groaned, rubbing a hand over his head and leaning against the wall he'd been feeling around. He wondered how bad that fever was. A few days ago it had been hovering at 99.8, which was annoying but not too high, so he'd still gone to school, slogging his way through homework and putting on a good front. Apparently, it had worked. He thought about pulling out his phone as asking Karen how bad it was at the moment, but that sounded like a lot of effort all of a sudden.

Backup was here. He was fine. Feeling as if the adrenaline was draining out of him, he let himself slide down the wall, chin dropping against his chest. His head spun, and he remembered waiting for the doctor with his uncle, limp against the man's side, too exhausted to even look up. He wanted to go to bed...any bed. Literally, the closest bed would be fine. Tony and the others could take care of this one.

"Son?" His head jerked up when he heard his name and he found Captain America crouching in front of him, a hesitant hand held out toward him. The man's voice bordered on frantic and Peter suddenly remembered wanting to ask if he could play Mario Kart with Ned on his Wii...how excited his friend has been. Focus, he told himself sharply. "Peter? Are you alright?" Steve repeated.

"Oh...hey, Steve." Peter murmured, rubbing a tired hand over his face. "Yeah...yeah, I'm good." He lied just a little. He was. He was fine. Well, he'd be fine.

"Alright. Your dad's on the phone with the police...they're coming to arrest the remaining men. Let's get you up." He held out a hand that Peter took, grateful when the man did most of the lifting, wrapping an arm around Peter and taking most of his weight when Peter pressed a hand to his side. "Peter?"

"Yeah...just, uh...broken ribs, I think." He muttered.

"Alright, son. Let's get you to to the jet. Bruce is there...he can take a look." The man paused. "You feel warm. Do you have a fever?"

"Probably."

"Are you hurt anywhere else?"

"Uh...not sure," Peter admitted. "I think he broke my nose. Can't remember. And, uh...my head hurts." He blinked hard, doing his best to pay attention to the conversation and walk at the same time, leaning heavily on Steve. "I'm fine." He insisted again, and the man nodded.

"Alright. We'll get you checked out just in case."

The finally reached the large room once more where Peter was not too surprised to see two of the gunmen, plus the one he'd tied up, all unmasked and all sitting against a wall, apparently being guarded by Natasha and Rhodey. Tony was on the phone, Loki and Thor close by, but all three froze and stared at him when he entered, arm thrown around Steve's shoulders.
"Pete?" Tony asked, hesitant. Peter gave him a thumbs up.

"I'm fine." He promised, and Tony nodded, jaw tight. He could tell that the man wanted to come to him...to be the one helping him to the jet. But he was holding his cellphone and dealing with the police, and that was important too. They needed to know who these guys were and if there were more of them waiting around to try this again. "Really. I'm fine."

"I'm going to get him to Bruce to make sure," Steve informed him.

"Alright. I'll be right there, kiddo. Just let me finish up here."

Peter very pointedly didn't look at the men on the floor...the ones whose hearts weren't beating anymore. It wasn't like they hadn't deserved it, he guessed. Still...he didn't want to think about it, so he stared straight ahead as Steve helped him out of the warehouse and into the bright sunlight that made him squint, headaches shooting up a notch.

"Peter?" Steve asked when he hesitated, eyes slamming shut.

"Just bright," Peter muttered, stumbling a little, then letting Steve lead him up a ramp and into the blessed relative darkness of the Quinjet.

"Bruce?" Steve called, carefully lowering Peter into a seat. "Give me a hand."

They'd brought Bruce too? Did they think they'd need the hulk for this? Peter dropped his head against the wall, wanting nothing more than to lay down. "He said broken ribs and something about his head."

"Pete? Open your eyes for me." Bruce urged, and Peter did as he'd asked, not able to recall shutting them. "Concussion, but it's mild," Bruce muttered. Then he reached for Peter's side, feeling carefully along his ribs until Peter flinched. "Feels like 2 but I'll need an X-ray to make sure."


"Pete? How do you feel?"

"Sick." He groaned, closing his eyes again, and something pressed against his ear. Thermometer, if he had to guess.

"How long have you been feeling ill?" Bruce wondered.

"About a week...or two. Wasn't this bad before."

"Alright." Bruce's voice turned soft and he gripped Peter by the upper arm, helping him up and over to bench in the corner that curved around a table. "Sit down over here." Peter did, then took the glass of water and the pills Bruce handed him. "Try this."

Peter wanted to ask if the medicine would even work on him, considering his weird spider metabolism, but Steve was hovering nearby, so he just swallowed the pills, the lay down on the bench that looked a lot softer than it actually was. "I'll get an X-ray when we get back to the tower. You can rest for now." Bruce told him, a quick pat on his shoulder accentuating the words before the man wandered to the other side of the Quinjet, leaving Peter with Steve.

Steve only stayed at his side for a second, joining Bruce instead. "How bad?"

"Looks like the flu. His body was doing a pretty good job of fighting it off but I guess it got the best
of him. I'll have to wait for an X-ray to confirm the broken ribs. The concussion is mild, so I'm just going to let him rest until we get back to the tower."

That sounded perfect to Peter who let his eyes drift shut, taking deep breaths as best he could until everything faded into the background and he was able to doze off.
Peter thought he heard voices as he slept. Tony, mostly, the man's soft voice and Bruce's too...Tony was asking him questions. But it was so hard to make out the words, so he just let himself sleep, shifting a little on the hard surface and groaning in pain when that made his side hurt. "Easy, buddy. Stay still." That was Tony's voice, so Peter did, settling in a somewhat comfortable position.

"Will the child be alright?" Loki asked, the Asgardian's voice equally soft.

"He'll be fine," Bruce told him, and Peter slipped back into the darkness around him, taking deep breaths and trying to sleep...he just wanted to sleep. His head hurt and his side hurt and honesty, his whole body hurt. So he slept. Bruce had said that he would be fine. That was good enough for him.

Hands woke him. A hand combing through his hair, a deep voice close by. "Kid? Wake up, Petey." Peter didn't really want to, but he did anyway. The voice had pulled him out of a good nap, and he felt weird. Hazy, like he needed more sleep, but the hand in his hair stilled, the voice coming again.

"Pete?"

"Hm?" He groaned, trying to make his mouth work but really just wanting to sleep some more.

"We're at the tower. Bruce needs to take a look at you, then you can go back to bed."

"Oh...okay." He blinked a few times, realizing that Tony was sitting by his head, one hand on his back and the other on his hair. "Okay." He said again, pushing himself up. Tony was right there, getting an arm around him to help him sit up. His ribs shifted as he moved and he groaned, leaning heavily on Tony to get himself up.

"You okay to walk?"

"Yeah," Peter muttered, not 100% sure what he was agreeing to but agreeing anyway, Tony helping him stand and then leaning heavily on the man. Bruce had hurried on ahead, probably getting the medbay ready, while the others were still in the jet, keeping out of their way as Tony helped him across the space toward the door, their anxious eyes on him. Had Peter been more awake, he would have been self-conscious, relying as he was on Tony. As it was, he just leaned on Tony as he helped him over to the ramp. He'd be okay in a couple of days. He'd be fine.

Loki was standing by the door, watching him closely, and Peter grinned up at him with all the strength he had left. "Hey. You saved me." He muttered.

"Yes, well, I felt partially responsible for your capture." The Asgardian reasoned. Peter glanced up at Tony, his grin turning mischievous as he looked at Loki once more.

"So...does this mean you're an Avenger now?"
Loki rolled his eyes, a hint of a smile on his face as Thor chuckled from his other side. "Bite your tongue, child." Peter laughed a little, moving down the ramp and into the tower at Tony's side. Pepper was waiting as they stepped into the room. They'd landed the jet on the huge landing platform that jutted out from the tower, and the room they stood in was still undergoing renovations, but Pepper had been waiting in a metal folding chair.

"Peter…" She whispered, and he was surprised when she wrapped her arms around him, pulling him close and pressing his head to her shoulder. She didn't smell like May and she didn't feel like May...but that's where his brain went. He closed his eyes tight, putting one arm around her...it was the best he could do considering his broken ribs. Instead, he closed his eyes tight, trying not to cry. He didn't want to cry. He was fine. But it was like May was holding him and he shuddered, sniffing. "Oh, baby. It's okay." She whispered.

"I'm fine." He murmured, lips trembling, eyes heating up. "Really….I'm fine."

"I know." Pepper rubbed her thumb back and forth on the back of his head, fingers buried in his curls. She didn't sound like she really knew it...more like she was placating him. And he wanted to tell her that he was Spiderman and that he was strong and that he was fine...that they hadn't even really hurt him much. But he couldn't get any of it out.

Another hand joined Pepper's, rubbing his back. He didn't want to cry, but it was like being held by May...different but the same, and Tony was there and the man wrapped them both in his arms, their proximity telling Peter that he was safe. "Alright, buddy. Why don't we get you down to the medbay?"

"How bad?" Pepper asked, easing up on her hold of him.

"Just a couple of broken ribs. Concussion. Not to mention the flu." Tony wrapped an arm around him again, and Pepper took a step back.

"We found out who leaked his information, and we're dealing with it. There isn't a lot we can do...it was never the best-kept secret. People at Peter's school knew. But someone went to the media and told them that Peter would be at that Decathlon meeting...told them the hotel they would be staying in."

Tony nodded. "Send me everything?"

"I will." She leaned in, kissing Tony on the cheek, and then squeezing Peter's shoulder. "I'll see you later?" Peter nodded, letting Tony guide him over to the elevator where he leaned against the wall, a hand pressed to his side.

"Bruce and I have been working on some pain medicine that should work for you. We started with the stuff we gave Cap and went from there." Tony told him.

"It's not that bad." Peter tried to wave him off, but Tony shook his head.

"Broken ribs, kid. They hurt. I should know. If I can do something to stop that, I'm going to. Then we're getting you in bed." That sounded fantastic so Peter didn't argue. There was a pause. "Why didn't you tell me you were sick, Pete?" He had really been hoping that Tony wouldn't make him talk about that...that it would be swept under the rug considering he was hurt and everything. But the man was watching him as the elevator lowered more slowly than felt normal. "Kid?" Tony prompted, not sounding like he was ready to accept silence as an answer.

"I didn't...it wasn't bad so…" He shrugged, trailing off. Tony waited. "I just...it wasn't bad."
"You've got the flu," Tony told him, almost lightly.

"I...it wasn't that bad. Just...like, a fever, but not a bad one, and I had a cough. That's all. I was more tired than usual..." Tony was giving him a look so he hurried to continue. "I was fine. I didn't want to bother you with..."

Tony made a noise...like a buzzer, and Peter jumped a little, taken aback. Just then, the elevator doors opened. "You're not a bother. Ever." He told him, voice stern.

"But you're so busy with the..." He made the noise again and Peter glared, the expression dropping when Tony continued.

"Not a bother. Ever. You're my kid and I need to know when you're sick, you understand? I always need to know." Peter dropped his eyes to the ground, letting Tony guide him into the medbay and taking most of his weight, a hand coming up to ruffle his hair. "Look, you're a smart kid, Pete, and I know that you can handle yourself for the most part. But, look, rule number...uh..." He counted on his fingers for a second. "4 I think. Rule number 4. You get a fever, or you start to feel sick, you tell me. Okay? It's not a bother, it's what I want. I want to know when you're sick. Otherwise, I can't do anything about it. Got it?"

Peter nodded, not sure how good he'd be at following that particular rule. Still, Tony didn't ask much of him, so he'd try. "Alright, kiddie. Here..." He helped him up onto an examination table, moving slow and pausing when Peter groaned in pain.

"It's not bad." Peter tried to assure him, sitting up and leaning on one arm. "They'll heal."

"Yeah. Let's get Bruce's opinion first." Just then, Bruce appeared, giving Peter a once over before placing a hand under his chin, shining a penlight in his eyes. Peter flinched but didn't move away, and Bruce nodded.

"Moderate concussion, but there won't be any lasting damage. Lot's of rest, lots of fluids. I want to get an x-ray for the ribs, and I'm going to do a flu test to see if I can identify the strain and get a confirmation. I can get some medicine to ease the symptoms, and I've got some pain medicine to test...I've gotten positive results from the testing." Peter agreed, laying back as they wheeled the bed into another room where he got an x-ray that confirmed three broken ribs, and two bruised ones. Next came a flu test, which involved a cotton swab up his nose which sucked, but he was too exhausted to care. One positive ID of the flu later, he was given strict orders to go to bed and stay there. Peter was then given a couple of pills to swallow and helped up to his room by Tony who eased him down onto his bed.

Peter fell asleep almost as soon as his head hit the pillow, and when he woke, someone had removed his shoes and pulled his blankets up to his chin. Probably Tony. He stared up at the top bunk of his bed...he'd been too exhausted to climb up the ladder to the top bunk. He reached out blindly for his phone and found it on his nightstand, holding it up and blearily looking at the time. 6:32 pm. Feeling strange and still lethargic, he started to sit up but couldn't quite manage. He was so tired, and his ribs hurt and his head pounded...yawning, he tried to roll over but groaned when that hurt too much.

"Peter? I let boss know that you are awake." FRIDAY informed him, her voice strangely gentle. Too miserable and cold and hot to care, he mumbled something and buried his head into the pillow, wishing it wasn't so hot. Why was he so hot? He'd been fine before!

"Hey, buddy." Tony's voice came to him and he realized that he'd fallen asleep again, Tony's words jerking him awake again.
"Tony? M'hot," He muttered, bringing a clumsy hand up to his face. "Why's it so hot?"

"Because you have a fever, bud." Tony put a hand behind his back, helping him sit up, voice patient and soft. "You want to get changed into some pajamas? I've got more medicine for you to take." He felt like he was in the middle of a strange, heavy fog, but he nodded, barely noticing when Tony dressed him in pajamas and sat him in his desk chair. He heard Tony doing something behind him, but he couldn't even keep his head up, resting it on his arms on his desk. There was a pause, and then a hand on his back. "You feel pretty bad, huh kiddo?"

"Mhm," Peter muttered.

"Alright. Let's get you back in bed." And then he was being helped back into his bed where fresh, cool sheets waited. He sank into them with a groan, then took the pills that Tony handed him, draining the glass of cool water.

"How's the pain?" Tony asked him as he pulled the sheet up around his chest and tucked him in.

"Hm? Not bad." He mumbled. "It wasn't so bad...I was...fine before…"

"Bruce thinks that your metabolism was fighting off the flu, but now that you're hurt, your healing has slowed down. That includes your ability to fight off things like the flu." A cool washcloth rested on his forehead and he sighed, shivering a little. "Rest, kiddo. You'll feel better soon."

"Mkay." Peter agreed easily. Tony didn't leave until after he fell asleep again.

When he woke next he felt worse. A lot worse. So hot...like he was on fire. Too weak to sit up. Groaning he, forced his eyes open, not having the energy to grab for his phone. "Dad?" He asked, voice weak and barely there. He wasn't alone in the room...there was another heartbeat. His eyes drooped again, and he wondered when it had gotten so hard to stay awake. "Dad?" He asked again, trying to speak a little louder.

A cold hand rested on his forehead and he jumped, peeling his eyes back open. "I believe the Artificial Intelligence has informed your father that you are calling for him." That was a long sentence...longer than his exhausted, fevered brain could make out.

"Dad?"

"He is on his way." The voice tried again, not sounding as exasperated as the words made him out to be.

"'M so hot…"

"Yes. I can tell." The cold hand shifted to his cheek and he shivered a little, gripping the sheet in his hand so tightly that he felt it rip. "Here. Drink." The hand slipped behind his neck, helping him sit up enough to take a long drink of the room temperature water. Loki, he realized. Loki was the cold one. Something about ice...ice giants. Maybe. That didn't seem right.

"Time is it?" He slurred a little.

"Nearly four in the morning."

"Did...I woke...I woke you up?"

"I am an early riser," Loki assured him almost gently.
"Thanks for helping me." Peter murmured. "I couldn't...climb out...cause they'd know."

"I beg your pardon?" Loki asked, helping him lay back down on the bed, then pulling the sheet back up around him.

"The room...windows...but I couldn't let them catch me. If they saw me climb out...can't...can't let anyone find out..."

"Find out what? That you're a mutant?" Loki pressed. "Could you have climbed out of that room?"

"Spider..." Peter murmured, letting his head sink into the pillow.

"Peter?" Another voice joined theirs, and he turned his head toward the door.

"Dad?"

"Yeah, buddy," Tony murmured, and suddenly Loki was gone. That was okay. He wanted his dad. Another cool hand pressed against his forehead. His dad's. "You're really hot, kiddo."

"Mhm."

"Alright. FRI, get Bruce up here. We need to get that fever down."

"Fever..."

"Yep. You've got the flu, and it looks like your freaky metabolism finally gave up on fighting it. Could be because of the concussion...or the broken ribs. Who knows. Either way, the fever is getting a little too high for my liking, so we're going to try something else Bruce is still working on that medicine. Hey, bud?"

"Huh." Tony patted his cheek.

"Stay with me, kiddo." His voice was soft and calm, not sounding worried at all, and Peter nodded. Tony wasn't worried. He was fine. Everything was fine.

"Everything's fine." He muttered.

"That's right."

"Tony?" Someone else asked, a deep voice rumbling from a few feet away.

"Not now, Point Break." Tony muttered, rubbing a thumb over his cheek.

"Loki said the boy was ill..." Thor? Was Thor in his room?

"Yeah, and we're waiting on Bruce to bring some medicine, so..." Tony trailed off and Peter fought sleep. "Stay with me, Pete." He ordered again. "Thor, get me a glass of water, would you?" He slipped an arm behind Peter's back, sitting him up carefully and leaning him against Tony's side. "You can go back to sleep as soon as you take some medicine, okay, Pete?"

"Mkay." Tony wrapped a blanket around him, rubbing a hand up and down his arm.

"Shouldn't be sick...didn't think Spiderman could..."

"Me either. And keep the whole 'Spiderman' thing quiet, kiddie. At least while Point Break and the wonderful Wizard are around."
"I was afraid...dad...I couldn't let them find out...I could have got away but..."

"You did good, Pete. You did real good. No one is going to find out." A hand combed through his hair from where he rested his head on Tony's shoulder. "You knew we were coming. You had it handled."

Then there was something pressed against his mouth, and Tony supported the back of his neck. "Drink up, Pete." So Peter did, blinking heavily and swallowing the water.

"Is he alright?" Thor demanded, his voice closer.

"He's sick, but he's going to be fine."

"Tony?" Bruce appeared then, and Peter wondered if all of the Avengers were going to cycle through his room. "Let's try this."

"Will it work this time?" Tony all but snapped.

"I'm doing my best, Tony. I don't exactly have a lot to go on." There was a sigh, and then Tony rubbed circles on Peter's back.

"I know. I'm sorry. Thank you." Something was held to Peter's mouth. "Buddy? Wake up. You with me?" Peter mumbled in agreement. "His fever is too high." Then he was talking to someone else...or was he talking to Peter? "Pete?" Right. He was talking to him. "Swallow this, okay?" So Peter did, opening his mouth and then swallowing the pills that Tony placed on his tongue, following them with some water.

"Okay...FRIDAY what's his temperature?" Bruce asked.

"103.4."

"Okay...okay..." Bruce muttered, and a cool hand touched his forehead. "Thor, can you get me an ice pack and a washcloth? That medicine should lower his fever soon."

Tony eased Peter back down onto the bed, and after a moment, something cold was resting on his forehead. "There you go, bud. You're okay." Tony murmured, a hand resting on his shoulder.

"I'm fine." Peter tried to assure him. Tony was probably tired. He had stuff to do... right? Tony was busy. So were the others. "You can go...I'm fine."

Tony brushed some hair out of his face, shifting the cool washcloth-covered ice pack so that it rested on his forehead more securely. "I'm not going anywhere, Pete. You rest, okay? I'm right here." Peter was too tired to argue...too drained to do anything except close his eyes and rest. He just wanted to sleep, but he was too hot and miserable. Still, fingers combed through his hair, a soft voice soothing him. "I know this sucks, but you'll feel better in the morning."

And, since Tony had never lied to him, Peter nodded, trying to focus on taking deep breaths and the fingers combing through his hair instead of how miserable he was. Finally, after what felt like forever, he fell asleep and he dreamed that he was sitting next to Tony in the lab, the man's arm around him, and that everything was fine. It was a great dream.
The boy took a long time to fall asleep. Too long. Tony knew he was in pain. He knew that the boy was hurting and sick and miserable, but he finally, finally fell asleep. He felt a wave of regret. He shouldn't have snapped at Bruce. But the medicine hadn't been working and his kid had been suffering, waking up every few hours in pain and sick with a fever that kept rising, and he was exhausted. Tony was just glad that Loki had been sitting with him, although he wasn't too sure why. Still...he was glad someone had been with the kid. Loki seemed pretty fond of Peter, which honestly, Tony was grateful for. The guy was a good ally for Peter to have.

According to Bruce, Peter had been sick for days, probably close to a week, and his metabolism had been working full time to fight it. But now, with broken ribs and a concussion to focus on, his body had given up fighting the flu, so the kid was miserable. And feverish. He wondered how the heck he'd missed this...but of course, Peter hadn't wanted him to know, and the boy was good at hiding things when he wanted to be. Heck, he'd been Spiderman for months before May had found out, and he had lived with her. The kid didn't want to bother him...didn't want to be a burden. And Tony wondered if that was how the kid would always be. Worried about bothering him. Worried about burdening him. He hoped not. Tony hoped that Peter would realize how much he meant to Tony. How much he loved him. Realize that Tony needed him to come to him with these kinds of problems. Saying it was rule number 4 certainly didn't guarantee that Peter would listen to him.

Peter was Spiderman. The kid was superhuman...strong and smart and quick...he could have handled himself. He trusted Peter. Had the utmost faith in him. Had the kid not been worried about his secret identity, Tony had no doubt that he could have gotten himself out in no time.

But Peter wasn't bulletproof, and it had been terrifying to see him sitting in that chair was blood on his face, a gun pressed to his head. Had reminded him of Afghanistan...had reminded him of being held by terrorists, guns pointed at him. Peter was vulnerable to guns. They could have shot him. Killed him. They could have killed Tony's kid. He shook his head, trying not to think about that. Peter was smart. He was strong. He was fine...despite the flu. But in that moment, it hadn't mattered that Peter was Spiderman. It hadn't mattered that the kid could bench press a car with almost no problem and climb walls and had developed a web formula on his own in secret in a high school chemistry lab. All that had mattered was that he was Tony's kid and that he'd been surrounded by men with guns who had wanted to kill him.

He ran a hand through Peter's hair, watching the slow rise and fall of the boy's chest. "FRIDAY?" He asked, his voice pitched low. "What's his temperature."

"103.4." He sighed, shaking his head and removing his hand from the boy's burning forehead. At least it hadn't gone up any. He had to assume that it was his weird spider metabolism attacking the flu virus, not to mention his concussion and even the broken nose that was causing the fever. He knew the boy was miserable. He hadn't even been able to keep his head up when Tony had been changing his sheets. Now the kid coughed even in his sleep, shivering under the blankets despite the fever. Tony tucked the covers around him, patting him on the shoulder one last time before he stood.

"Keep an eye on him, FRL." Bruce had left the room a few minutes earlier, right as the kid had fallen asleep, telling Tony that he was going to keep working on some medicine that would work for Peter, but Tony had told him to go to sleep. Get some rest. He sure looked like he'd needed it. "You can keep working after a nap, Bruce. You look exhausted."
It was nearly five am, and Tony could feel his own eyes drooping as he stumbled back to his own room, crawling into bed beside Pepper who blinked up at him. He caught her hand, kissing the back, then pulling her close. "Is he okay?" She asked, tucking her head under his chin.

"Fever's holding steady at just over 103, but Bruce gave him something that might help. Hopefully." He shook his head, dropping his head on the pillow and pulling the blankets around them. It was Sunday, so he wouldn't have to wake up early, but he knew he'd need to be there for Peter if the kid got sick. Sicker. Still, even though he was worried about the boy, he felt his eyes drift shut and the next thing he knew, someone was shaking him awake.

"What? What..." He rasped, looking around wildly, mind flashing back to the last time someone had demanded he get up. Armed gunmen kidnapping his son. Pepper was crouching beside him, eyes wide and worried. "Pep? What..."

"Tony, it's Peter. His fever rose..."

"Why the hell didn't FRIDAY..."

"Bruce is with him..."

Tony swore, throwing his legs over the bed and hurrying across the hall. "FRIDAY, why the hell didn't you wake me?"

"Doctor Banner was with Peter and you needed your sleep. Also, you requested that I keep an eye on him, not that I wake you."

Tony glared at the ceiling before opened Peter's door, coming to an abrupt halt when he saw Loki at the head of the bunk bed, hand on Peter's forehead as the boy slept. Bruce was sitting beside him, blankets pulled back as he placed a wet rag on Peter's cheeks. "Bruce?" Tony demanded.

"It's not going down..."

"Then let's get back to work. We have to come up with something...what's his temperature?"

"103.9," Bruce muttered, shaking his head. "We have to get it down. Now." On the bed, Peter seemed to gasp for breath in his sleep, but otherwise, he was almost deathly still. Tony approached the kid's bed and Bruce got up, taking a step back and letting Tony take his head, a hand resting over the cold cloth. "I'm going to run a bath...we need to try and get his fever down. I have no idea how much his body can take but..."

"Go...his bathroom's through there," Tony told him, pointing. "Can't you do something? Magic his fever away?" He asked Loki, voice unfortunately cracking. His watch told him it was 10:24 am, so at least he'd gotten some good sleep, but the kid obviously hadn't. He continued to shiver under the blanket, the movement more noticeable now that Tony was closer.

Loki didn't even look up at him. "No."

"Right," Tony muttered, looking up at the kid's face. He reached up, touching the boy's hot cheek, Loki's hand never moving from his forehead as he stared down contemplatively at Peter. "Never thought I'd see the day that Loki, god of mischief and being a pain in my ass, would actually care about a teenager." He wasn't sure what made him say it. As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he almost regretted them. It had mostly been a joke, but he worried that the Asgardian would take offense, which he didn't want to happen when the man was so close to Peter.

"Yes, well, I couldn't expect a mere human to understand my motives, Stark." For a second, Tony
felt a flutter of worry, but when he glanced up, Loki was almost smiling.

Just then, there was a knock on the door frame, Steve appearing in the doorway and looking worriedly down at the boy. "Tony? We were making breakfast for everyone...is he...is Peter okay?"

"He's fine," Tony muttered, unable to forgot how Steve had, without even being asked, immediately been on board for saving Peter. Tony hadn't even invited the guy, but Steve had grabbed his shield and he'd been ready to go. "He has a fever and..." He sighed, not sure how to phrase it without giving anything away about Peter. "We can't get it to go down."

Steve furrowed his brows, stepping into the room and staring down at Peter in concern. "Does he need medicine or..."

"We're working on it," Tony told him, all of them glancing back as Bruce appeared in the doorway of Peter's bathroom. "Ready?" Bruce nodded. "We're going to get him into a bath...try to force his temperature down."

"An ice bath?" Steve asked.

"No. Um...room temperature...we don't want to send his body into shock." Bruce shook his head as Tony pulled Peter's covers back.

"Alright, bud. We're going to get your fever down." He murmured, and Loki removed his hand as Tony started to lift him.

"Wait...I can carry him." Steve offered, stepping forward, and Tony hesitated for a second before nodding. Picking the kid up over and over wasn't going to do his back any favors, especially considering he wasn't wearing his suit.

Fighting the urge to tell him to be careful, Tony watched Steve put a careful hand under Peter's shoulders, angling the boy's head so that it rested on his chest, then got an arm under his knees, lifting Peter easily, as if the kid weighed nothing. Peter didn't even stir though, not even when Steve carried him into the bathroom and lowered him carefully down into the tub, a hand under his head to keep him from accidentally inhaling any water. Bruce hurried back down to the lab to continue working on the medicine, and Tony knew he should go help...but he couldn't...not yet. He couldn't leave Peter like that.

So he knelt by the tub, moving his hand under Peter's head instead and taking Steve's place. "Can you get him some water?" He asked, and Steve nodded, jumping up and hurrying out of the room.

And then Tony was alone with the kid. "Alright, Spiderling. I'm going to need you to wake up. Think you can do that?" He asked, squeezing his shoulder. "Kiddo? Wake up." He spoke a little louder, and Peter shuddered, eyes peeling open after a moment, dropping his eyes to the water, then back up to Tony.

"Dad?" He asked, lifting one hand slowly and watching the water drip from his pajama-clad arm into the tub.

"Yeah, bud. You with me?"

"I'm...taking a bath?" He asked. Tony shook his head, heart clenching for the boy and doubting he'd remember any of this later.

"You were too hot, Pete. Your fever was too high. We had to cool you off."
"Oh." Peter murmured, closing his eyes again and not seeming too concerned about any of it. "My head...it hurts. Everything hurts."

"Yeah, I know, Spiderling. That's the flu. Bruce is getting you some medicine that'll help." Tony ran his hand through Peter's hair, water from his hand wetting the curls, and Peter shivered a little.

"It's so cold…"

"The water's almost warm, buddy. You're just too hot."

"Dad? Can I get out?" He asked, weakly trying to push himself up, but Tony put a restraining hand on his shoulder, even more worried when that worked.

"Not just yet, Pete. Give it a few more minutes." Peter took a deep breath, groaning as he dropped his head back against the tub. "It's okay, kiddo. Not much longer. Bruce is going to bring you some medicine and then you can rest again."

"Okay." He muttered, and Tony moved closer, close enough for Peter to rest his head on his shoulder instead as he kept an arm wrapped around the kid.

"FRIDAY? Temperature?"

"103.4."

"Alright. We're getting there." Tony murmured just as Steve returned with a glass of ice water that he passed to Tony. Tony grabbed it, holding it to Peter's lips and tilting it so that he could drink. Peter managed a couple of sips but turned his head away, and Tony didn't push, knowing he couldn't force the boy to drink, but he did have him suck on a piece of ice, hoping to get some kind of liquids in him.

He kept Peter in the bath for about ten minutes, lowering the fever to 102.9, but by then the kid was shivering and he didn't want to risk keeping him there any longer. Instead, he helped Peter sit up, then had Steve return from where he'd gone to change Peter's sheets, once more without being asked, and lift the boy from the bath. By that point, Peter was a little more coherent, although he was still exhausted and needed Tony's help drying off and changing into new pajamas. Steve stepped out to give them some privacy, and Peter was thankfully not quite coherent enough to care that he needed help. Once Tony got him changed, he led the boy back into his bedroom, easing him down onto the bed and giving him another drink.

"You need to eat something, Pete. Think you can keep anything down?" Peter groaned but didn't say no, so Steve popped back up from where he'd sat down in Peter's desk chair.

"I'll get him something. I made pancakes but...uh...do you want something else?"


"Thanks. Really."

Steve's face relaxed into a smile and he nodded. "Of course."

Tony got Peter to take a couple of bites before the kid was throwing up into a trash can, head practically dropping into the bin after he was done, Tony's arms the only thing keeping him upright. "Alright, buddy. It's okay. FRIDAY, any news from Bruce?"

"No, sir."
Tony swore under his breath, giving Peter another drink of water and more ice to suck on, doing his best to keep him as hydrated as he could. The kid was still boiling. Sitting down beside him on the bed, he wrapped an arm around the boy, moving his head to his chest and stroking his back as Peter was wracked with chills. "It's alright, kid. We're gonna get you through this. You're going to be fine." Peter hummed in agreement but didn't respond otherwise. Tony knew it was just the flu...knew that Peter was going to be fine. He was still worried. "Pete? You with me?"

"Mhm."

"You wanna try some more applesauce?" Peter shook his head. "How about some soup? Chicken broth?"

"Jus' wanna sleep."

"I know." Tony soothed, wondering when exactly he'd turned into the kind of person who could soothe a sick kid. Maybe when he started thinking of himself as the kid's father.

Steve hovered in the doorway of Peter's bedroom, disappearing for a while before reappearing, offering more water, more food, and to fetch medicine. Tony couldn't exactly tell him that regular medicine wasn't going to work on Peter, so he assured the man that he could go...that Peter was going to be fine.

Peter stirred a little when it was just the two of them, whimpering and shifting at Tony's side. "Hey, Pete. It's okay, bud. Just rest for a little while."

"Hurts." Peter murmured, lips trembling.

"Yeah, I know." He rubbed circles into Peter's back, taking his hand and squeezing gently. "I know, bud. It's okay."

"Don't feel good...what happened?"

"You've got the flu, Pete." Tony reminded him. "You're going to be fine. You want to try and eat something?"

"No. Stomach's sick."

"Okay." He nodded, knowing how that felt. "Here." He pushed another ice cube against his lips and the boy bit down, making him flinch at the sound of ice crunching. "Doesn't that hurt your teeth?"

"No."

Bruce took another thirty minutes, during which Tony did his best to keep Peter drinking water once ice cube at a time and wrapped in blankets, the boy dozing miserably against his shoulder. When he finally came up, Peter's fever was up again, a coughing fit shaking his whole body, but at least he hadn't thrown up again. "What have you got?" Tony asked.

Bruce hurried over, black bag in hand as he took Peter's hand, pinching the skin of his arm and shaking his head. "He's dehydrated."

"I can barely get him to drink anything."

"Alright. I'll set up an IV after I inject him. This should lower his fever." He pulled out another
needle, slipping it into the crook of Peter's arm, and the kid barely flinched. As soon as the medicine was injected, Tony moved from his side, taking the needle for the IV and injecting it into the back of Peter's wrist, letting Bruce attach it to a bag of fluids and hang it on the wall, looping it over a thumbtack that he found in Peter's desk drawer.

"There you go, bud." Tony murmured, brushing some hair back.

"I'm sorry it took so long..." Bruce started, but Tony shook his head.

"Not your fault. You haven't stopped trying...thank you."

"I don't even know if it'll work yet."

"It'll work," Tony said with more confidence than he felt. Peter was going to be fine. The kid was asleep once more, mouth open, head sunk into the pillow, and Tony pulled the covers more firmly around him, tucking him in and pushing his hair back.

"Come get something to eat, Tony." Bruce urged. "He's okay...he's going to sleep for a while."

"Yeah...okay." Tony murmured, taking a step away from Peter's bed. "Alright, kiddo. I'll be right back."

Peter didn't respond but Tony was sure that he would be fine. He had to be.
For a long time, everything hurt. Not bad. Just...aching. Deep aching. Bone-deep aching. And Peter couldn't stop the noises sometimes...the pained groans and whimpers and exhausted, frustrated cries. Someone touched him sometimes...other times he felt alone. Scared. Occasionally, something cold rested on his forehead. He really liked that. He also liked it when Tony spoke to him. Called him Spiderling. It was his favorite nickname. But he got the idea that maybe not everyone was supposed to know that Tony called him that. He wasn't sure why.

Tony was worried. He hated it when Tony was worried. But he couldn't do anything about it! Couldn't make himself talk or try to reassure his dad. All he could do was sleep and wake up, eating sometimes, other times taking a drink of water held to his lips. But he was always tired. Weak in a way he hadn't been since before the bite. And everything hurt. Everything. His whole body ached like when he'd been bitten.

Peter dreamed sometimes. He dreamed about swinging through the city and he dreamed about sitting on the sofa with May. He dreamed about Iron Man. And Captain America. And he dreamed about Tony...Tony sitting with him in the lab and wrapping his arms around him. Telling him he loved him. In his dreams, he heard voices. He heard Steve Rogers and Rhodey. Loki, sometimes. Once, he was sure he heard King T'Challa asking if he was alright, which was odd. Wasn't King T'Challa in Wakanda? He tried to ask but couldn't make his mouth work. So he tried to keep sleeping.

His chest and side burned when he breathed, and pains went up and down his arms and legs, so he tried to sleep. He just wanted to sleep. Once...or maybe more than once, Tony sat beside him, spoon-feeding him broth that he thankfully didn't throw up this time. He was pretty sure those weren't dreams. He was kind of awake...but then he closed his eyes again, relaxing into his pillow.

"Good...keep the IV and try to get him to drink some water." Someone else said. Not Tony.

Water...he was thirsty. But he couldn't get his eyes open to ask for anything.

Then he felt different. Cooler. He'd been so unbearably hot, but then he was cold. Shivering, he let his eyes pop open, gasping softly for air, and was surprised to find someone sitting at the head of his bead, a hand on his forehead.

"Loki?" Peter croaked, looking up at the Asgardian who was sitting beside him. "What...what's going on?"

"Your fever has broken," Loki told him, voice soft. "Your father is on his way."

"Oh…" Peter murmured, looking around the room and yawning. He was so tired. Heavy. His body was heavy. But he didn't feel so hot anymore. Now he felt tired and still achy, but mostly just tired. Heavy. "Wha' time?" He slurred.

"Almost eight in the evening."

"Oh."

"Are you unable to form complete sentences?" Loki asked, a smile quirking his lips.

"Huh?"

"May I ask you a question, Peter?"
"Mhm." Honestly, he didn't want to answer any questions but he was asking really nice and maybe...had saved him? Right? Did that happen?

"You mentioned before that you could have crawled out of the room where you were being held hostage."

"What?" Peter wasn't sure what Loki was getting at...he was so tired. Hostage...he'd been held hostage. He remembered that...sort of. But he couldn't let anyone know who he was so he hadn't been able to escape. And then the Avengers had come but he had been sick...right? He was sick. But what was Loki asking?

"What did that mean?"

"I...I don'..."

"Pete?" He glanced over at the door and found Tony approaching from the doorway, wiping away his confusion about whatever Loki was asking him. "Hey, kiddo." Tony crouched beside him, a gentle hand on his forehead replacing Loki's. "How do you feel?"

"I'm...I'm tired."

"Yeah? Your fever broke...think you can get up and take a shower? Change into some new clothes?" He didn't want to, but he nodded anyway. He'd do whatever Tony asked.

"Okay." Peter agreed, letting Tony pull him upright.

"I'm going to get Bruce to take a look once you get changed. Want to make sure that medicine is still working. Just let me take out the IV."

"What? Why?"

"You were dehydrated so we had you on fluids," Tony explained, gently removing the needle from the back of Peter's hand that he hadn't really noticed in the first place. He pressed a cotton ball to the back of his hand, then placed a little Iron Man bandage over it. Once that was done, he wrapped an arm around Peter's shoulders, slowly pulling him up until Peter was standing somewhat on his own. "There you go, buddy. You going to be okay to take a shower?"

"Mhm." Peter nodded. He wanted a shower...he felt gross. But when he went to take a step, he stumbled, knee giving under him. It really was just like when he'd been bitten by the spider.

"Okay...okay, buddy. Let's get you into the bathroom." Tony's voice was gentle...patient. He walked with Peter through the door at the side of his room, then helped Peter sit down on the toilet lid, turning on the shower. "I'm going to get you a change of clothes...I'll leave them on the sink. Sound good?" Peter nodded again, and Tony ruffled his hair. "Alright. Jump in the shower and you can lay down again. If you need help, call for me."

"Mhm...okay." Peter muttered, wiping his eyes and forcing himself upright. Tony had turned on the shower, so he pulled his old pajamas off, kicking them over to the corner to take care of later, and climbed under the stream of water, surprised at how quickly it woke him up. He blinked, eyes wide as he let the water run over his body. He grabbed the shampoo, washing his hair, but that was all he could do. As the water washed the suds from his hair, he felt the world tilt and he stuck his hand to the wall, closing his eyes and taking a couple of deep breaths. He was fine...shutting off the water, he stepped carefully out of the tub and wrapped himself in a towel, giving in and sitting on the toilet lid. Pressing a hand to his head, he
waited for the dizziness to pass.

There was a soft knock on the door, and Tony's voice came, asking if he was okay. "Yeah...yeah, I'm fine." He assured him, standing back up and changing into the pajamas that Tony had left him. Once he was dressed, he brushed his teeth to get the gross taste out of his mouth, then swallowed some water from the sink. Before Tony could knock on the door again, he stepped out of the bathroom and under Tony's arm, leaning his head on the man's shoulder.

"You want to go to bed? Or would you rather lay on the sofa?" Tony asked.

Most of the exhaustion had passed, although his body was still heavy...heavy and weak, and his head spun. "Sofa?"

"You got it, bud." And then they were making their way to the living room where Peter was surprised to find Doctor Banner digging through a black bag.

"Hey, Peter. How are you feeling?"

"Hey...Dr. Banner." He muttered, easing himself down onto the sofa and curling up in the blanket that Tony wrapped around him. Wait...hadn't Dr. Banner told him to call him Bruce? "Bruce...hi, Bruce." The man smiled as Tony disappeared, pulling out an instrument. Thermometer, the kind that went in your ear. He closed his eyes and let the doctor press the instrument to his ear, yawning a little but trying to stay still.

"98.6. Much better." Bruce told him. "How are you feeling?"

Right...Bruce had asked that before. "Um...tired. Not sleepy but...heavy. Tired."

Bruce nodded. "You're still sick but your healing seems to be kicking in. I was able to find a medicine that works for you. Are you feeling nauseous? Dizziness?"

"Um...not really." He shrugged. "I'm really thirsty."

Just then, Tony reappeared with a glass of water that Peter almost lunged for. Tony chuckled, pushing it into his hands and taking the seat beside him on the sofa, an arm resting casually behind his shoulders on the back of the couch. "Easy, bud. Don't choke." He warned but otherwise left Peter to guzzle the water. "You hungry?" Peter nodded. "Cap made dinner...everyone's downstairs. I think he made meatloaf. Or we have soup?"

"Soup, please." Peter murmured, starting to get up. "I can make it…"

"Oh no. You are restricted to this sofa for the foreseeable future." He ordered, pointing a finger and pulling himself up. "I'll make you some soup, then we can watch TV for about five minutes before you fall asleep." Peter wanted to argue...but honestly, he was probably right.

"Was King T'Challa here?" Peter asked, glancing over at Bruce. The man smiled a little, shaking his head and pulling out a blood pressure cuff. Peter held out his hand, letting him slip it over his arm.

"No. He's still in Wakanda. But he did call your dad...Shuri saw what happened on the news and they were worried."

"Oh...that's nice." Peter murmured. Bruce nodded.

"Steve was worried too...Natasha. Sam...everyone was trying to come check on you but Tony locked the elevator." Bruce told him with a chuckle. "Tony, Pepper, me, Loki, and Rhodey only."
"What about Thor?" Bruce shook his head.

"Nope. He only let Loki up here because he was willing to be an ice pack."

"Oh…" He smiled a little, remembering how he'd woken up to Loki's hand on his forehead. "Loki's nice." The doctor rolled his eyes with a snort.

"Never thought I'd hear those words."

"I find your tone offensive, Banner." Loki seemed to materialize in the hallway, lifting an eyebrow at Bruce who tightened the cuff around Peter's arm, fingers on his wrist.

"Alright. Your blood pressure is normal...keep drinking fluids and get lots of rest. You should be back to normal in a couple of days. Tell someone if you start to feel nauseous or if you throw up."

Loki took a seat in a chair in the corner, eyes on Peter who closed his eyes again, still tired and heavy. Tony returned after another minute or two with a bowl of soup that Peter managed to eat, then dropped his head against Tony's shoulder falling asleep five minutes into whatever TV show was playing.

When Peter woke up next time, he was in his own bed, and it was almost light in his room. He wondered how he'd gotten there...the last thing he could remember was sitting on the sofa with Tony and maybe watching TV. Feeling blindly for his bedside table, he found his cellphone plugged in, fully charged. He grabbed it off the table, turning it and looking at the time. 9:30am. Tuesday. How was it Tuesday? They'd rescued him on...Saturday? And...well, the rest was kind of a blur. Yawning, he stretched, pleasantly surprised to find that he didn't ache so much anymore. His ribs were kind of sore, and he didn't feel as strong as he usually did. But he was awake and didn't feel as sick as before, so he sat up, going to his text messages.

There were a lot of them, all from MJ's phone, but it seemed like most of them were from Ned. He'd have to ask Tony if they could get Ned a replacement phone, considering it was Peter's fault they'd destroyed his old one. Most were asking if he was okay, saying he had seen the news, asking what had happened...the last one urged Peter to call him, so he put his phone to his ear, dropping back onto the bed and calling MJ's phone.

"Peter?" MJ's hushed voice came through the phone, and Peter realized that they were probably in class. Whoops.

"Hey. Just wanted to let you know I was alive...sorry...I didn't think about the time."

"Don't be stupid. Are you alright?" MJ asked, still murmuring.

"I'm...I'm fine. Mostly. I had the flu…"

"Okay. Shit...I have to go. I'll tell Ned."

"Call me later?"

"Yeah." She murmured, then hung up. He dropped the phone back on his nightstand, then climbed out of bed. He was starving...figuring he could find something to eat in the kitchen, he left his room, shrugging a robe on, but was surprised to find Tony standing in the hallway, looking him over with wide eyes.

"Pete? Are you okay?"

"Yeah...just looking for breakfast." Tony nodded, moving forward and pressing the back of his hand
to Peter's forehead. It was such a dad thing to do...such an Uncle Ben or Aunt May thing to do, that Peter had to blink back the heat in his eyes. There was no reason for this, he told himself. He was just...emotional from being tired.

"Still cool. How are you feeling?"

"Mostly fine." He told him with a shrug, and Tony patted him on the back, seeming to relax a little.

"Alright, bud. Let's find you some breakfast."

After eating two bowls of cereal, two granola bars, and a Poptart, Bruce checked him over again, assuring both him and Tony, but mostly Tony, that Peter was doing much better. "Do I have homework? Did they reschedule the competition? Is everyone else okay?" Peter wondered as Tony led him back to the sofa.

"Everyone else is fine. You can get your make-up work when you go back to school. And I did not ask if they were rescheduling your nerd-club meet as I was kind of busy making sure you didn't die." Tony's tone was light, but Peter could see the tightness in his eyes as he sat beside him on the sofa, Peter wrapped in a plush blanket once more.

"I'm sorry." Peter murmured, glancing down at the ground. He'd worried Tony. Worried all of them.

"Rule number 1."

"I thought rule number 1 was only for a month." Peter pointed out with a smirk. Tony chuckled, the sound almost reluctant.

"I'm changing it. Rule number 1 stands forever. No more apologizing for things that aren't your fault. Ever."

"What are the other rules?" Peter jumped at the booming voice behind them, and both turned to find Thor looking puzzled, but also happy. Happy to see Peter? He couldn't be sure, but the Asgardian was smiling at him. Tony gestured for him to answer, waving a hand at Peter who grinned, a bit self-conscious.

"Um...number 2 is I can only be on the treadmill for an hour. 3 is, if someone hurts me, I have to fight back. And number 4, if I'm sick, I have to tell Tony."

"Those sound as though they would be common sense." Loki put in, pushing past his brother and moving to sit down, a granola bar in hand. Slowly, he peeled back the wrapper, inspecting the food closely before taking a bite and making a face at the taste.

"You'd think so, right?" Tony asked, mock exasperated, and Thor smiled, joining them in the living room and placing a hand on Peter's shoulder.

"I am glad to see that you are feeling better, Peter."

"Oh...uh...thanks, Thor." The larger man nodded.

"How are your injuries?"

"Um...fine...I'm okay. Just...um...they're healing." He shrugged. Mostly it was just broken ribs, but otherwise, he was fine. Mostly fine. Either way, there was no reason for Thor to be worried about him. "Thank you, um...thanks. For asking...I..." Beside him, Tony snorted, and Peter let himself trail off. Thor wasn't laughing at him though, just smiling.
"That is good. You heal very quickly for a human."

Loki was giving him a strange look, but Loki almost always everyone weird looks, so Peter ignored it, leaning against Tony as the man wrapped an arm around him, pulling the blanket up and wrapping it around both of them. Tony flipped the TV on as Peter shrugged a little.

"Um...yeah...it's the mutation."

"And what kind of mutation might that be?" Loki wondered. Tony shot him a look.

"Um...like I said before I..." He glanced at the TV, uncomfortable. "Just...I can heal fast. And I'm strong..."

Loki hummed under his breath, nodding, and Tony bristled. "You got something you want to say?" Loki smiled a little, shaking his head.

"Not at all, Stark."

"Then stop interrogating my kid." He snapped, tightening the arm around Peter's shoulders.

Peter closed his eyes, cuddling up against Tony who didn't object. In fact, he held him closer, stroking his back. The TV was playing some sitcom that Peter liked and seemed to have captured Thor's attention. "Did King T'Challa really call you?" Peter asked Tony, voice soft. The man nodded.

"He did. Shuri was worried."

"What about those guys? The ones that...that wanted Loki?"

The Asgardian himself glanced up at that, but Tony was the one who answered. "They're in custody. Don't worry about them." He hesitated. "Natasha found one of them tied up in the corner...I told her he must have turned on the others...tried to free you." Peter swallowed hard, nodding.

"Yeah...uh...he had a change of heart, I guess. Freaked out when he found out that you were coming," Tony hummed.

"I figured...told Nat that it was something like that." He hesitated. "Steve wants to talk to you."

"Why?"

Tony sighed, and Peter could feel it, moving a little with the man's chest. "Cap wants a debrief. I told him to keep his distance until you were feeling better, and if you still don't want to talk to him, you don't have to."

"No...I mean...I can talk to him. Just...tell him what happened?"

"Yeah, pretty much. Since the Avengers basically assembled to get to you, he wants to be able to put as much in his report as possible or something." He shrugged. "We can do it when you're feeling better."

"I'm fine." Tony gave him a skeptical look, lifting an eyebrow. "Really...I mean...I'm kind of tired, but otherwise, I'm fine. I can talk to him today." Honestly, he thought, it would be better than sitting around and watching TV all day.

"You sure, Pete?"
"Yeah. Might as well get it over with. Right?" Tony kept his eyes on him, seeming to look for something, then he nodded.

"Yeah, alright, kiddo. They're all worried about you anyway. FRI, call Capsicle up here. Tell him Peter wants to talk to him." Squeezing him a little tighter, Peter felt Tony rest his chin on his hair, and he melted against the man's side.
Interview

Steve Rogers sat across from Peter, smiling, hands clasped in his lap. Beside Peter, Tony kept his arm tight around his shoulders. Peter got the feeling that Tony would kick Steve out of the room with very little provocation. Still, he leaned against the man, feeling his head spin. He was still weak. Still tired. But he wanted to get this over with. And he had come to like Steve. The man had helped Tony rescue him, after all. He’d been nice. “It’s good to see you, Peter. How are you feeling?”

“Um...I’m fine. I mean, I’m doing better. Thanks.” Peter stammered, fully aware that this was Captain America he was talking to. Captain America who he hadn’t trusted and who he’d almost hated but who had helped Tony rescue him and who he thought he might trust now. The man seemed genuinely happy to see him, his eyes bright blue and earnest. He didn’t look like Captain America who was about to interrogate him. He just looked like Steve.

“Good. You look a lot better.” Peter nodded a little, even though it made the room spin even faster. “Peter?” Tony squeezed his shoulder a little, rubbing a hand over his arm. “He’s still not feeling great, Spangles. Let’s keep the interrogation to a minimum.”

“Of course.” Steve nodded. “I just wanted to get an idea of what had happened from the time those men took you until we got there. Since several Avengers responder, we need to write up a report.”

“Sure.” Peter rubbed a hand over his face. Tried to focus. He was so tired, which didn’t make a lot of sense. He’d been asleep for a long time. Right? But he was so tired and heavy and focusing on Steve was more difficult than it should have been. “Um...it was, like...9:30 or something...” Steve smiled a little, face encouraging, but didn’t interrupt. “I think. Um...I heard the footsteps and the gunshots...we all hid under the tables. And then they opened the doors and said they were looking for me. So I said I’d go with them. And uh...they asked for my phone but I told them that I’d given it to Ned and they destroyed it. Oh...” He turned to Tony, feeling a bit sheepish. “Um...could we get Ned a new phone?”

Tony smiled, nodding. “Sure thing, kid. I’m sure I have an extra Starkphone lying around somewhere.”

“That was smart, Peter.” Steve told him, leaning in. “So you went with them.” He prompted.

“Yeah. Um...I got into the van and then they hit me in the head with something...I think they drugged me too.” He rubbed a hand over his neck at the memory. “When I woke up, I was in that room tied to a chair.” Steve nodded. “Then, uh...I mean, later you guys got there.”

“Oh...I clumped his hands in front of him, glancing over at Thor and Loki who were still in the room, silent observers. It seemed like Loki had moved a little closer, eyes intent on Steve. Peter wasn’t sure why. Honestly, he would have liked to lay down on the sofa, but he did want to get this over with. And go back to school. Talk to Ned. Maybe text MJ. Get his homework. Move on with his life. Get back to his version of normal. “So they held you in that room...roughed you up some,” Peter nodded. “Is that how you got the broken ribs?”

“Yeah. They uh...they wanted me to shut up.” He told him with a weak smile, and Tony snorted. Steve smiled too, but turned serious pretty quickly.
“We found one of the men tied up...he had been knocked out, and the police took him before we could talk to him. Can you tell us what happened to him?”

“Um...he…” Peter swallowed hard. This wasn’t good. He’d hoped that Tony would have explained it, but apparently Steve needed to hear it from him too. So he decided to go with the simplest version of the story he’d told before. “He said he, uh...said he didn’t want to be there.” Peter dropped his eyes, clasping his hands tight in his lap. Tony patted him on the arm. Lended silent support. “He started to untie me...said he was sorry but...the other guys came in and knocked him out. They were going to leave him for the police, I guess.”

He knew it sounded ridiculous. They would have just killed him, but he couldn’t think of a better story. Steve was looking at him closely, eyes narrowed a little, and Peter decided to take a chance and lay it on a little thicker. “I’m sorry...I don’t really know anything, Captain Rogers. I just, uh...I should have fought harder, I know.”

Immediately Steve shook his head. “No, son, you did a great job. This wasn’t your fault.” He hesitated, glancing at Tony. “We’re going to talk to all of the men that...um...the ones who were taken into custody.” He said, delicately stepping around the fact that a couple were dead. Peter stiffened. If they talked to the guy he’d taken out...the guy would rat him out.

“Um...right.” He shrugged. “Yeah. I, uh...that’s all I know. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry. You did just fine.” Tony assured him, squeezing him a little tighter, probably able to feel his anxiety. Tony could fix this...right? He could make sure that guy didn’t talk or...or make sure that no one else found out.

It hit him, then. Steve was going to find out. They all were. He hadn’t been careful enough. And despite liking Steve, and despite mostly trusting him, he didn’t want them to know. He wasn’t ready. Feeling sick, he closed his eyes for a moment. Took a deep breath. “Peter?” Steve asked, and he opened his eyes again, meeting Captain America’s wide, blue eyes with his own. “Are you alright, son?”

“Yes. Just...I’m tired.” Steve nodded.

“Of course. I’ll write everything up.”

“You guys aren’t in trouble or anything, right?”

Tony shook his head but it was Steve that answered. “No. No one is in trouble.” He assured Peter. The super soldier glanced over at Tony, the two of them seeming to have a silent conversation before the man stood. “Alright, Peter. Why don’t you get back to resting? I’ll tell everyone that you’re alright.” He stood, reaching out and patting Peter on the shoulder. “I’m sure they’d be happy to see you whenever you’re feeling up to it.”

“Yeah, I’ll have the team up once he’s better.” Tony threw in lazily.

“Thanks for talking with me, Peter. I’ll see you later?” Peter hummed in agreement, then slumped in relief when Steve was gone. Tony squeezed his arm, hugging him closer.

“You good, Pete?”

“Yeah.” It wasn’t like he could go into detail about his worries with Thor and Loki there. So he did as he’d been asked...he rested. He ate and watched TV and the day passed, him texting Ned and MJ sometimes, other times dozing on Tony’s shoulder. The man didn’t seem to mind, holding him close until Loki and Thor left them alone. Once they were gone, Peter finally spoke.
“He’s going to find out.”

“He won’t.” Peter shook his head.

“He will. That guy will tell.” Tony sighed, rubbing a hand over his back. “Should...should we just tell him?”

Tony sighed, rubbing a hand over his face. “That’s up to you, Peter. It’s your secret.” He sighed. That was entirely unhelpful. “Look, he’ll keep your secret. We can trust Cap with your secret identity if that’s what you want to do.”

“But...but we’ll have to tell the others too.” He murmured. Tony nodded.

“Most likely.”

He hesitated. “They’ll be mad.” Tony looked down at him, surprise clear on his face. “They’ll blame you and…”

“Hey, you let me worry about me, kid. Look, how about this. If they start asking questions, you can tell them the truth. If you want. If not, I’ll come up with a decent lie. Okay?”

Peter agreed, not sure he had a choice.

Later, as it was starting to get close to dinner time, Peter looked up from his phone where he’d been texting Med. the two of them had spent practically the whole day in communication while he sat with Tony on the sofa. The man had long since pulled out a tablet, working on some kind of project. Probably the nanotech. He was almost done and had promised to equip Peter’s mask with it if he could get the bugs worked out.

“Tony?” He asked. The man hummer but didn’t look up. “Can I go to school tomorrow?”

“I thought teenagers hated school,” Tony muttered and Peter grinned.

“I’m not a normal teenager.”

Tony snorted. “You got that right, kid.”

“Please?” The man sighed, putting his tablet down and looking over at Peter.

“How are you feeling?”

“Fine.” Tony lifted an eyebrow. “I mean...I’m sure I’ll be fine by tomorrow. I just...I want to see Ned and MJ…”

“They can come here.” Tony reminded him mildly. “Hell, you can all have a sleepover.” Peter sighed, shifting a little on the sofa so he could see Tony better. The man held out for another minute, then released a long breath. “Why don’t we have Bruce look at you tonight.” He relented. “Maybe...if Bruce says it’s okay, then you can go. But only school. Nothing else.”

“I don’t mind taking the subway…” He started, but Tony shot him down immediately.

“Nope. Straight home, Happy’s driving you. At least for a week.” Peter sighed, well aware of what exactly that meant. No Spiderman. But he couldn’t exactly argue. Just a day ago, he’d been practically delirious with a fever.

“Fine.” He muttered, and Tony squeezed his shoulder. It wasn’t too much longer before Pepper
joined them, taking her seat right beside Peter and pulling him into her arms without hesitation. If Tony was starting to be like a dad to him, did that mean….

He didn’t want to think that. Didn’t want to open himself up to that kind of pain. He’d never really thought of May like that, especially not when he was older. She was Aunt May. Always. His aunt that he loved and listened to and respected and usually obeyed. Who he rarely lied to. But he’d lied to her about Spiderman. Shaking that thought away, he hid his face in Pepper’s shoulder and let her hold him. Let himself feel her comfort. “Are you feeling better?” She asked. He nodded immediately.

“Yeah, I’m fine.”

“That’s exactly what you said before. Right before your fever spiked and you spent a full two days incoherent thanks to a ridiculously high fever.” She pointed out, a smile in her voice as she ran a hand through his curls.

“Why don’t we order some dinner?” Tony asked, and Peter felt him stand, then heard him reach down and kiss Pepper on the forehead, a hand rubbing his back for a moment. “How about pizza? We’ll have the team up. Then Bruce can look at you.”

“Do you ever eat vegetables?” She asked, still smiling. Peter closed his eyes, resting against her, and she gave him a quick squeeze. It was just so nice to be held by her...so nice to feel loved. Not that Tony didn’t make him feel that way. But this was like it had been with May. This was how she’d made him feel.

“Only when forced.”

“You know that teenagers need vegetables, right?” She asked, giving Peter a critical once-over.

“Do they?” Tony asked, shooting Peter a look. He shook his head.

“Not really.”

“Tony.” Pepper lifted an eyebrow and he chuckled at admonishment.

“All right, fine. I’ll also order a salad. Lots of pizza, lots of salad, and hey, kid, don’t you like peppers on your pizza?”

“Yeah!” Peter sat up, not at all upset when Pepper kept an arm around him.

“See. Peppers count as vegetables too. Problem solved. Peppers for Pepper.” With that, he pulled his phone out, heading to the kitchen to order their dinner, and Pepper turned her full attention back to Peter.

“How are you feeling? Really?” She asked, bringing a hand up to push some of his hair back. It was a curly mess...he really needed to put something in it and comb it back, even if he suspected that Tony enjoyed ruffling his curls. They drove him nuts, especially when they fell in his face.

“I’m fine. Really. Just kind of tired...which doesn’t make sense because I haven’t done anything today.” He shrugged. “Just sat around and watched TV. Didn’t even do any homework.”

“You needed your rest...you were really sick. Tony was worried. We all were.” She smiled. “I’m glad you’re feeling better though.” Pepper hesitated, glancing back at the kitchen where they could hear Tony ordering the pizza. “And I want you to know that you can come to us. If you’re feeling sick. If something’s wrong…”
“Tony made it rule number 4.” She smiled.

“That sounds like him. But I want you to know that you can always come to us.” He noticed the use of ‘us.’ It wasn’t just Tony that loved him, he knew. Pepper was saying that she did too. And she’d shown him that she loved him, even if she hadn’t said it exactly like Tony had. She’d been there. She’d kept her distance when he needed her too and given support when he’d needed it.

He missed May. Still. But it was like a part of him now. Like an old scar. It hurt, but less and less all the time. Or maybe he was used to the pain. Either way, getting close to Pepper no longer felt like so much of a betrayal to her. He had a feeling that she might even be happy to know that he was getting closer to Tony’s soon to be wife. That she might not see it as a betrayal, but as something healthy. Something good.

He’d worried, too, that Pepper would have a problem with Tony taking him in. That she might want her own kids or feel like a teenager was too much trouble. But so far, she hadn’t seemed like that was an issue at all. Maybe she didn’t mind...maybe she wanted him too. “Thank you.” He told her softly. Her smile softened, and he suddenly realized that maybe he could ask her the question he’d had in the back of his mind for almost three weeks now...the one that he barely allowed himself to think about. “Um...Pepper? Can I...can I ask you something?”

“Of course.” She followed his gaze to the kitchen, immediately picking up on the fact that he didn’t want to risk Tony overhearing. “Come on.” She hopped up, holding out a hand, and he followed, glancing back at the kitchen to make sure Tony didn’t see. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to talk to Tony about this...he just wanted to...to make sure.

Pepper led him to his own room, shutting the door behind them, then took a seat on his desk chair. His room was clean, with fresh sheets on the bed, and he sat on the bottom bunk. “What’s on your mind?” She asked.

“Um...I just…” His words caught in his throat and he took a deep breath. “I was just thinking that, uh...I...I don’t want Tony to be...to be my guardian anymore.” Her eyes widened a little but he hurried on, not wanting her to get the wrong idea. “I mean...I don’t want him to be just my guardian. Because at first...when I asked him if he’d adopted me, he said ‘not yet’ and if...if that was something...I mean, I didn’t know because you...I know you guys are getting married and I know you probably want your own kids and...”

“Peter.” She interrupted softly, reaching out and touching his knee. “Take a breath, honey.” Pepper urged, and he did, realizing he’d been practically gasping for air. When he’d caught his breath, she took a deep breath of her own. “Peter, I know that Tony loves you. And I know that he would love to adopt you. I think that’s been his plan all along...he’s just been waiting for you to be ready. If that day ever came. And...and yes, Tony and I are getting married. And I know that one day, we might want to have kids but...” She moved her hand to his shoulder, looking him right in the eye. “You’re already his kid. No matter what the legal papers say. You’re Tony’s son, and if you want to be, you’ll be my son too.”

Pepper moved to sit beside him, Peter watching through blurry, wet eyes as she wrapped her arms around him, her chin resting on his head. “I don’t know...if I’m ready, I...”

“That’s okay.” She whispered. “You don’t have to be ready yet. You can take all the time you need. Okay?” He nodded, trying to catch his breath and control the tears. She pressed her lips to the top of his head, squeezing him once more, then pulled away. “Hey, why don’t you wash up? Get ready for dinner? I think the whole team is coming up to eat. Steve and Sam are still here...they were worried. And Wanda and Vision.”
“Okay.” He whispered, voice hoarse from the sudden tears. She ruffled his hair a little, dropping another kiss on the top of his head, then left him to get ready.

After cleaning up and washing his face so that Tony wouldn’t see the tear tracks, he rejoined them in the living room, noticing that his guardian was giving him a strange look, but didn’t ask any questions. Loki, Thor, and Rhodcy were the first to join them, with Bruce coming soon after, then Sam, Steve, Vision, and Wanda, who had apparently moved back in, or was in the process, returning right before the pizza arrived.

Both Sam and Steve asked if he was really okay, and he assured them that he was, uncomfortable with being the center of attention. They seemed to notice and went to their own conversations, grabbing slices of pizza when it came, and Peter was sure to get some salad which he held up to Pepper who smiled at him, lifting her own salad in acknowledgment. She and Tony sat together at the head of the table, Peter on his left, and, to his surprise, Wanda grabbed the seat beside him. While everyone else talked, she turned to him.

“Hello, Peter. It’s good to see you well.”

He started to ask if she’d seen him unwell but remembered that Tony had restricted access to his floor when Peter had been sick. “Oh, uh...thanks. It’s...it’s good to see you too.” She smiled, and he remembered the projectiles she’d thrown at him when at the airport. “So, you’re moving back in?”

“Yes. Tony said that it was alright if I returned to my old room. And Vision is here.”

He hadn’t seen Vision in a long time, considering the man...android...had been with her for the last few weeks. The man in question leaned in, smiling at Peter over Wanda. “It is good to see you again, Peter. How have you been?”

“Oh, good. Thanks. How are you?”

“I’m doing quite well. It is good to be home again. And I am glad that you are okay after what happened.”

“Oh, yeah. I’m fine.” Peter waved a hand, then took a bite of his salad, not comfortable remembering that, very soon, the rest of the Avengers might know who he was. Of course, he’d always known that one day, he might have to tell them. But...but he wasn’t ready. He wasn’t ready for them to be angry with Tony over him and wasn’t ready to jeopardize his...his family. Tony was his family now. Tony and Pepper and Rhodcy and even Thor and Loki. They were his team and his family and the more people joined...the more rogue Avengers came back, the more nervous he got.

So he tried to push it down, eating his pizza and salad and, once dinner was over and he and Pepper did the dishes, Tony stepping in to put them away, he and Tony followed a reluctant Bruce to the medbay. “Peter, even if you’re feeling better, you might want to give your body some more time to rest.” The scientist warned as Peter hopped up on the bed, ready to be declared well again.

“I’ve been resting for days.” Peter reminded the man who rolled his eyes, a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth.

“No, you were mostly unconscious for days, and then you rested for about one day. Maybe.”

“To be fair, he has been resting all day.” Tony put in with a smile as he leaned against a wall by Peter. Bruce took his blood pressure, slipping the cuff over his arm, and then attached a pulse monitor to his finger.

“Any dizziness? Vomiting?” Peter shook his head.
“I was kind of dizzy this morning, but I’m better now.”

“Trouble focusing?”

“Nope.”

“Is the aching gone? Any pain at all?” Peter shook his head and Bruce pressed a thermometer to his ear, a hand on his head to keep him still. Peter let him, kicking his feet against the bed as he struggled to sit still. Once Bruce got the readings he took a step back, regarding Peter critically. “Okay. Here’s my medical opinion. No exertion for another day or two. You’re healing remarkably quickly, but your fever came on fast, so we need to be careful. School should be fine, but no gym class.”

“You can write him a note. And Happy will be taking him too and from school.”

“Good. Also, no treadmill or jogging for a few days.” He placed the clipboard he’d been taking notes in down onto the table. “I’ll write you a note for gym. If at any point you start feeling bad again, you need to come home. Rest. Let me run tests.”

“Happy and I will be on call.” Tony put in, and Bruce nodded.

“Just don’t overdo it and you should be fine.” He told Peter with a soft smile, reaching out and patting him on the shoulder, and Peter jumped off the bed, digging his phone out.

“Thanks, Bruce! I’m going to go tell Ned!” He cried, and Tony waved him off with a chuckle, Peter racing to the elevator and taking it up to his room so he could call his friend. He knew his friend was freaked out...and it would be good to finally assure him that he was okay. Really, truly okay.
School Days

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much to everyone who has read and reviewed! I appreciate you all more than I can say.

As an answer to the people asking when I update: I try to update every Sunday :)
about the source of this whole thing…Tony had told him the night before who had leaked the information to the press. Peter hadn't been particularly surprised.

"Right…". He'd grinned at Happy, waving as he'd headed into the building.

And that had been that. In the hallway, Peter dug through his backpack and pulled out a box, handing it to his friend with a smile. Ned stared down at it with a lifted eyebrow, then opened it, never one to refuse a gift. When he pulled out the brand new Starkphone, his eyes shot open, mouth dropping. "Dude…is…is this…"

"Sure is. Tony made sure you got to keep your old number and everything."

"Oh man…this is so much cooler than the replacement phone mom got me." He cried, pulling out the flip phone and rolling his eyes. "She got it on sale…said it was just as good as my old one, but this…man, this is…this is a Starkphone!"

"Yeah. I felt bad that they destroyed your phone because of me…"

"This was not your fault, Peter!" Ned cried, obviously preoccupied with the phone. Peter caught a teacher eyeing them and winced.

"You might want to play with it later…I can't promise that Tony has another one if you get that taken away. That one hasn't even come out yet." Ned followed his gaze to the teacher and nodded, shoving the phone in his pocket.

"Tell Mr. Stark thank you and…and that he's my hero and that I've looked up to him ever since I was little and that if he has any jobs at Stark Industries…"

"Yeah, I'll just tell him you said thanks," Peter told him with a chuckle, so glad to be back.

MJ was the next to approach him, and to his surprise, she threw her arms around him. He returned the gesture, holding her close and taking a deep breath, his nose in her hair. "Don't do that again." She warned softly.

"I won't." He lied, forcing a smile.

He wanted to talk to them about what he'd talked to Pepper about, but that was a private conversation. Of course, everyone and their mom now knew that he was living with Iron Man, even the ones who hadn't really believed his story about the internship. A lot of the other students were throwing him strange looks, and a few had wandered closer as if they were about to try and talk to him. But so far, none had. He hoped it stayed that way. Not that he didn't like talking to people...he just didn't want to deal with people that just wanted to ask questions about Tony and the Avengers.

His teachers were all good about giving him his homework, promising that he could take as long as he needed. They all seemed pretty freaked out...no one called on him if he didn't raise his hand and he didn't' even get in trouble for talking to Ned in Chemistry when they got caught.

Tony sent him a text while he was at lunch as he sat beside Ned and MJ, the three of them just getting started on their chicken patty sandwiches. As usual, the three were at a table alone. "Hey, kid. How's school?"

"Fine." He typed back quickly with one, taking a bite of his sandwich. Then, "Boring."

"You could have stayed home." Peter chuckled, pocketing his phone and going back to his lunch.
"So...are you gonna...you know, after school?" Ned asked, the three of them leaning forward to talk without anyone else hearing...not that anyone seemed to be listening. People usually ignored them at school. It was fine...Peter had long since given up on being popular, unlike Ned who still held out hope.

"Nope. Tony said I had to come home right after school for the rest of the week...I don't know why. I feel fine!" He whined a little, rolling his eyes. It felt strange to be whining about Tony Stark, his guardian, and almost-father, but also...good. Like this was normal now, and he was happier for it.

"Dude, you were really sick," MJ informed him. "Right?" Peter shrugged.

"That's what Mr. Stark said." Ned put in, and Peter lifted an eyebrow, putting his chicken sandwich down.

"What?"

"Yeah, man! I kept trying to call your phone and he finally answered. He said you were really sick...like, he sounded pretty freaked out." Peter blinked at him, glancing over at MJ who nodded, her own face solemn. "He was really worried about you."

Peter hadn't known that...hadn't known that Tony had talked to Ned...or that he'd been so worried. Well...he'd figured that the man had maybe been a little worried...but in every memory he had of Tony checking up on him, the man had been completely calm. Then again, he didn't have a ton of memories of being sick. It was all kind of a blur. He sort of remembered Loki...and maybe Steve Rogers. Tony almost always being there.

But Tony had been worried.

"So, no Spider stuff." Ned pushed past the awkward pause, glancing around to make sure no one was close. Peter was getting plenty of looks, just like he had been all day, but no one had approached their table. One boy, probably a freshman, kept glancing over from his spot two tables away, but so far, he hadn't said anything. Peter gave him a half smile before turning back to Ned.

"Yeah. Not until Bruce clears me."

"Does that mean you can hang out?"

"I don't know...Tony said to come right back to the tower."

Peter had considered talking to Ned about his plan to talk to Tony. About his plan to see if Tony still wanted to adopt him. But it seemed like too much to talk about at school, and in front of MJ. He really liked Michelle...sometimes he thought he might like her a lot. But it would be hard to talk about something like that with her. He'd known Ned since elementary school...he'd only been friends with Michelle since right after Homecoming.

"So...do you know who talked to the press?" Ned asked, leaning in, thoughts of hanging out after school apparently forgotten. Peter hesitated, glancing around once more, then leaning in.

"Yeah. Tony told me...it was Flash's dad."

"Damn," MJ muttered.

"Seriously?" Peter wasn't sure why Ned was surprised. The man obviously hated him...he remembered the way the man had glared at him...the way he'd all but threatened him. How he'd said that Tony wasn't his real father. It hadn't been a surprise to him, and he honestly didn't plan on
confronting Flash about it. After apologizing for his dad the first time, Peter didn't feel like the guy was responsible for his father and didn't expect him to do it again. Flash hadn't been as big of a jerk recently, either. Even during their meet, he hadn't been friendly, but he'd mostly left Peter alone.

After lunch, the three headed off to class, and before Peter knew it, the day was over. And he was surprised, to say the least when he found Flash waiting in the hallway beside his locker. Ned threw him a strange look, the two of them hesitating, then Peter went ahead and moved over to his locker. He wasn't scared of Flash, and he doubted the guy had stuck around just to insult him after school. His old bully had been pretty quiet all day.

"What's up, Flash?" Peter asked, opening his locket and stuffing his books in his backpack. The other guy hesitated, gaze lingering on Ned who was hovering protectively. Peter shot his friend a look. "I'll text you when I'm on my way home?"

"Sure man," Ned muttered, holding out a hand for Peter to do their secret handshake. Peter obliged, and he almost had to laugh at the eye roll from Flash, making him wonder how hard Flash had to fight not to make a comment about what big nerds they were.

As soon as Ned was gone, Peter lifted an eyebrow at Flash. "So, think we should come up with our own secret handshake or…"

"Oh, fuck off, Parker." Flash snapped, but he was almost smiling, so Peter counted it as a win. Plus, he'd take 'parker' over 'penis' every time. "Look...my dad...he was the…" The other boy ran a hand through his hair, groaning a little and looking put out. And nervous.

"Tony already told me," Peter told him, putting him out of his misery. Flash sighed.

"Yeah."

"It's not your fault, Flash," Peter assured him. "Really."

"Still...it was a shitty thing to do and…" He shrugged. "Just, you know."

"Yeah. I do." Flash nodded, crossing his arms awkwardly. "And, look...I told him. About how you saved me." Peter waved him off.

"I didn't…"

"Yeah, you did. You pulled me under the table...I just froze like an idiot and...they might have shot me if you hadn't...so...thanks." He muttered, speaking as though he'd never said those words before. Peter almost chuckled, but instead, he managed to keep it to a smile.

"Don't mention it."

"Yeah, don't worry," Flash grumbled. "But...I told my dad and, uh...he shouldn't be doing anything like that again." Peter nodded. "So, anyway...see you around, Parker."

"Sure." Peter watched him go for a moment, then tossed his backpack over his shoulder, heading in the same direction. Checking his phone, he hurried out the door, flinching a little at the black car out front...and the person leaning against the hood, surrounded by his classmates who all kept their distance. A little nervous, Peter hurried down the stairs, passing Flash who had come to a stop at the bottom of the staircase and was watching their classmates with a strange look on his face.

"I can't believe you actually knew Tony Stark this whole time," Flash muttered, shaking his head. Peter snorted, hurrying past him and toward Tony who removed his sunglasses when he caught sight
"Hey, Pete. You have a good day?" He asked, moving around the car to climb in the driver's seat. Peter followed suit, trying not to pay any attention to the kids watching.

"Uh...yeah. I thought Happy was picking me up."

Tony lifted an eyebrow. "What? You not happy to see me?"

"Oh...of course, I just..." Tony cut him off with a chuckle and Peter let himself smile.

"I gave Hap the afternoon off. How do you feel?"

"Fine. I'm completely better. 100%." Tony grinned at the road as he pulled into traffic. "So good, in fact, I think I could probably go back to all my after-school activities."

"Oh, right. Like Academic Decathlon."

"Yeah."

"And...oh, right. marching band."

"I quit marching band, Tony."

"Bummer. What did you play?"

"Snare drum." His guardian hummed under his breath.

"You play anything else?" Peter shook his head.

"Nah. Tried flute for a while, but I sucked at it." Tony hummed again. "Anyway, I mean my other after-school activities."

"You're right, kid." The man told him with a nod. "It's about time you got back to robotics club." Peter rolled his eyes and sighed, making Tony laugh out loud. "We'll see what Bruce says, okay? You'll probably still need to wait until next week, but maybe. If you promise to take it easy. Maybe!" He stressed when Peter perked up. "Food first. Then homework. And then we'll have Bruce take a look at you." Peter nodded, slumping back in his seat.

"If he says no, can I still go to Ned's?" He wondered. Tony glanced over at him.

"Why not have Ned come to the tower? I'll bet you anything he'd love to meet Captain America himself." Peter snorted.

"Yeah, he probably would."

"You could invite Michelle too," Tony suggested, his voice too innocent. Peter fought the flush, staring out the window.

"Oh, yeah...she might like to see the tower." He made his voice light, shrugging a little.

"Yeah. She's the captain of your Academic Decathlon team, right?"

"Yeah. She's...yeah."

"She must be pretty smart."
"Mhm." Peter nodded, not liking where this conversation was going.

"So maybe you can have both of them come over some time." Peter hummed again, and out of the corner of his eye, he saw the barely contained mirth on Tony's face. He knew he could just play along...but something struck him. Tony had been taking care of him for days.

"Um...this weekend, if you wanted to do something with Pepper, I can go over to Ned's or do something with MJ. Like...if you wanted…"

"Hey." Peter risked a glance at the man whose face had gone soft. "That's not something I want you worrying about, kiddo."

"I know, I just mean...like...I know you've been busy with me and…"

"Taking care of you isn't a chore, Pete. You're...you're my kid. You know that. Right?" Peter nodded, eyes on his lap. "Look, we'll all go on a vacation soon. Just the three of us. How does that sound?"

"Oh...yeah, that...that sounds cool. I mean...I could stay at the tower if you two…"

"Peter, I want you to come. It's a family vacation. With my family. And that includes you now. Don't worry about me and Pepper, okay? We're fine. She's always happy to have you around." Peter nodded, swallowing hard around the lump in his throat as Tony pulled into the parking garage.

Tony already thought of him as his kid...but that didn't make the thought of asking Tony if he wanted to adopt him any easier.

He would wait for the right time...and he kind of had an idea of when that time might be.

Wanda and Vision were in the kitchen of Tony's floor when they arrived, Wanda stirring something in a pot and Vision standing beside her, the two of them having a soft conversation. They both threw Peter smiles when they caught sight of him, nodding their greetings. "It's good to see you, Peter. How was school?" Vision asked.

"Uh..fine, thanks." Peter smiled, uncomfortable with being the center of attention. Shifting his backpack, he pointed to his room, glancing up at Tony. "Do, uh...do you mind if I do my homework first? I mean...do I have time?"

"Sure thing, Pete. I'll have Friday get you when it's time for dinner. Pepper should be home soon, and I think Natasha is going to eat with us too. As soon as dinner's over, we'll as Bruce to check you over."

"Are you alright?" Wanda asked.

"Oh, yeah." Peter tried to wave it off, and Tony took over for him.

"Just a checkup. Make sure he's doing okay." His guardian put his hand on his shoulder, squeezing gently, and then gave him a push toward the hallway. "Go on, kiddo. I'll let you know when it's time for dinner."

Peter hurried off down the hallway, shutting his bedroom door behind him and dropping onto his bed, tossing his backpack down beside him. Pulling his phone out of his pocket, he opened his last message to Ned, then, making double sure that this would only go to Ned, he typed and retyped the words a few times before finally sending a message.
"I was thinking about asking Tony to adopt me."

As soon as the words were sent, he fell backward, dropping his head against the pillows and wondering if he really should get started on his homework.

But his head was too full of other things to worry about homework. Like the fact that he was agonizing over whether or not he should ask Tony to be his father. Or the worry that the others were going to find out who he really was...and then get angry. He kind of liked Steve now. And he had a feeling that Tony and Steve were getting along better. He didn't want the Avengers to break up again...not over him.

And then there was the guilt that came with not patrolling as much. With not being in Queens, protecting the people there.

The chime of his phone distracted him, and he practically lunged for it. "Dude...that's so cool! How are you going to ask him?" Peter smiled a little at the message, curling up on his side and typing up a response.

"Well, Father's day is in a few months..."
Chapter Notes

Thank you so much to everyone who has been reading and reviewing! I appreciate your reviews more than I can say, and I love reading them so much :) Here is the new chapter a tad bit early!

Reveal

Tony stood with his arms crossed, watching with a half smile as Peter swung his feet from the side of the bed, pausing only when Bruce walked in front of him. It was Saturday morning and Peter thought that if he didn't get back to Spidermaning, he might actually go crazy. Tony had wanted to wait another day or two, but, thankfully, the man had finally given in when Peter had begged, groaning and throwing himself on the couch, arm draped dramatically over his face. "Are you going to do that until I give in?" He'd asked, and Peter had smiled into his arm.

"Yes."

"Fine. But we're not waking Bruce up. You have to wait for him...and you're eating breakfast first. Come on." He had tapped Peter on the knee as he'd passed, grinning when Peter had jumped up, practically flipping himself off the couch. "Easy, kid." He'd admonished, but Peter had just grinned, knowing that he was fine. His ribs didn't hurt anymore, and his head was alright. So he continued with the acrobatics, practically hanging off the ceiling and sighing and groaning until Bruce finally stumbled in. Peter had made sure to sit like a normal human then as Bruce had eaten his breakfast, talking Avengers business with Tony until finally, finally, Tony had asked Bruce if he would mind taking a look at Peter...clear him for gym class.

"Well...it looks like your ribs have healed. No sign of a concussion or trauma. No dizziness? Nausea?" Peter shook his head. "Alright." Bruce put the stethoscope down, putting a hand on Peter's shoulder. "Looks like you're good to go, Pete." He smiled. "If you start to feel bad, let someone know, okay?"

"Promise."

As Peter stood in his bedroom later that day, pulling his suit on after making sure his door was locked, he felt like things were finally, finally getting back to normal. He was caught up with school. He could be Spiderman again. And more than that, he felt normal. Like, he missed May, of course. Every day. But it was like an old ache. A healing one.

It had been a good couple of days, despite being mostly confined to either school or the tower. Okay, not confined, he admitted. It hadn't been like a prison or anything. Happy had been nice and it had been good to see his friends and go to Academic Decathlon practice. The meet had been rescheduled and Peter would admit that he was anxious about it. He'd talked to Tony about quitting, and for a minute the man had looked so sad that Peter had wanted to take it back.

"I'll make sure your classmates are safe, Pete. We'll be prepared next time, don't worry." With a firm hand on Peter's shoulder, Tony had given him a soft smile. "Things might change now...I think we might need to do an actual interview...go ahead and talk about this with the press so they leave us
alone. But no matter what, I'll make sure no one bothers you at school. Well...no one from the press.
Can't do much about the other kids."

And Peter had accepted that, nodding and ducking away with a grin when his guardian had gone to
ruffle his hair.

Now he stepped out onto his balcony, looking around to make sure no one was around. Of course,
he was high enough that no one would see him. Still, it paid to be careful. Climbing onto the railing,
he leaped without hesitation, adrenaline filling his body as he grinned under the mask and shot a web
at the last second, swinging himself back up into the air and toward Queens.

He'd promised Tony that he'd be back by 1 for lunch, so he had a few hours to patrol. It was good to
be back. "Hey, Karen!"

"Hello, Peter." His AI greeted. "How are you today?"

"Oh I'm good. Glad to finally be back in the suit. How are you?"

"I'm doing very well, Peter." She answered with what sounded like a smile. Would you like me to
scan the area?"

"Yeah. Anything going on in Queens?"

One of the upgrades they'd installed to Karen had been the ability to hack into the police scanner, so
she'd gotten pretty good at alerting him to the crimes closest to him that the police might not be able
to stop in time. Of course, a lot of crime happened in the evening and night, so he got to see more
action when he was able to patrol after school, but there were still things to do in the morning.

His first mission, should he choose to accept it, was an elderly Hispanic man with an armful of
groceries. Dropping to the ground behind the guy, he grabbed one of the bags before it hit the
ground. "Hey. Need some help, sir?"

The man responded in Spanish, so Peter repeated himself in that language instead, grinning when the
man seemed to light up. In the end, he carried all of the groceries up to the man's second-floor
apartment, waving away his effusive thanks.

The next mission was a little more difficult.

"Spiderman! Help!" A little girl, probably about nine or ten called out her window, and he landed on
her fire escape, crouching in front of her.

"Hey, kiddo. What's the matter?" The tiny girl with fluffy hair in a poof on top of her head was red-
eyed and crying, so he glanced past her to a seemingly normal bedroom but didn't see any reason for
her to be crying. "Are you okay?"

"I can't...can't find...Susie!" He held up his hands, placating as he spoke softly.

"Okay...okay, I can help. Don't cry. Who's Susie?"

"She's my friend! I opened her door and she flew away! I didn't mean to leave the window open."

He frowned under the mask. "Okay. So...Susie is a...bird?"

"She's my parrot." The girl explained.

"Right. Um...how long has she been gone?"
"She just flew away!" She cried.

"Alright. I'll try to find her." He hurried to soothe her.

Like any child, she believed him immediately, her tears drying as she smiled. "Thank you, Spiderman!"

"Of course. Don't worry...I'm sure she's fine." Never mind he had no idea how he was going to find her. He had no idea how to tell the little girl that, so he climbed up to the roof of the apartment building, crouching on the ledge. "So, uh...Karen?"

"Yes, Peter?"

"Can you scan the area for a...parrot?" He tried, able to hear the doubt in his own voice.

There was a pause. Then, "I'm not sure I have that capability."

"Right...um...can you scan the internet to see if anyone's posted anything about seeing a parrot around Queens?"

"Of course, Peter."

No one had posted anything online in the last hour, which kind of figured. So he circled around the apartment building, then around the block, keeping an eye out for brightly colored feathers. He found plenty of pigeons. "Anything yet?" He asked after what felt like a long time but was actually more like 15 minutes. Tony had joked about his inability to summon any kind of patience more than once, and Peter had to admit, the man wasn't wrong.

"Sorry, Peter. I haven't found anything yet."

He groaned, checking his phone. Tony had sent a text, just asking how everything was going. Peter started to type a reply when Karen spoke to him again. "There was just a mention of a parrot being spotted on Twitter, three blocks from your current location just now."

He put his phone back on his pocket, immediately jumping off the roof he'd found himself on and followed the directions Karen gave him to the last seen location of Susie the parrot. "Awesome! Thanks, Karen! Keep looking!"

"Of course Peter. Incoming text from Tony Stark." She informed him as he landed on a roof near the tree where someone had tweeted a picture. "He asks if everything is alright. This is the second text he has sent you."

"Yeah..." He scanned the area, finding that a couple of bystanders were also searching the trees. "Um...tell him...it's fine." He muttered. "Hey" Peter called, leaping into a tree close by and waving down at the people. "Anyone seen a parrot?"

"Spiderman?" One guy asked, wide-eyed. Peter nodded, gesturing a little impatiently. "Uh...yeah. He flew that way."

"Great. Thanks." Peter waved, swinging in the direction he'd been pointed.

He spotted the bird in a tree a few minutes later and did his best to sneak up on it while onlookers watched from the ground, crawling hand over foot along the branch and very, very aware of the fact that he probably looked ridiculous. He was pretty sure that people were taking pictures, but there wasn't anything he could do about that.
Karen's voice startled him a little just as he was within reaching distance of the bird. "Incoming call from Tony Stark."

Before Peter could ask Karen to decline it, Tony appeared in a corner of his mask. "Hey, kiddo. How's it going?"

Susie chose that moment to take flight and Peter shot a web, jumping off the tree and swinging after her as quickly as he could. "Yeah, good. Fine!" He cried, jerking his web and swinging himself forward, arms outstretched. The bird was just out of reach, winds beating the air as she escaped. He couldn't let her escape!

"Pete?" Tony prompted.

"Yeah!" Peter swung even faster, jerking himself forward once more, not worried about form so much as speed. Making sure to secure a web to the closest building, he reached out, gently wrapping an arm around the bird and then screaming when the parrot turned around, scratching at him with surprisingly sharp talons, screaming bloody murder and attempting to bite him with the beak that was a lot bigger now that it was coming at his face. "Shit, shit, shit!" He screamed as he swung, down then up, the web keeping the both of them from plummeting to the concrete below

"Peter?" The man demanded.

"Just a second!" He kept one arm around the parrot and pulled himself up to the closest rooftop where he landed in a crouch, careful not to hurt the bird. Susie, on the other hand, had no problem with hurting him, squeaking and biting him as many times as she could manage, wings struggling against his hold as blood ran down his cheek. Who would have thought that a beak could cut through his suit?

"What are you doing, kid?"

"Susie! Hey, I don't want to hurt you!"

"Who the hell is Susie?" The man asked, sounding mildly concerned.

"Um...let me...let me call you right back!" Peter cried, managing to pin her wings to her body, avoiding the talons for just a second before one stabbed him in the arm.

"Nope. No calling me right back. What's going on? Do you need help?"

"Nope! I got her!"

"Got who?" The man cried, exasperated.

"Alright, let's get you home." He muttered, then paused. How was he supposed to get her back to that apartment building? He didn't want to risk swinging...he didn't want to hurt her...even though she didn't mind the fact that he was now bleeding from a new set of scratches and bites. "Shit."

"Language." Peter blinked, looking back down at his display and catching sight of his concerned guardian's face, realizing that the man was probably seconds away from coming after him. "What exactly are you doing? Is your face bleeding?"

"Um...probably." He gave a sheepish smile. "I, uh...had to catch Susie."

"Yeah. Got that. Who's Susie?"
"Um...she's some little girl's parrot." He admitted, and Tony's eyes widened...then he barked a laugh.

"You just lost a fight to a parrot?"

The parrot in question chose that moment to squawk indignantly, trying again to bite Peter in the face. "Uh, no! I won the fight, thank you very much." He craned his neck away, looking away from the bird so that she couldn't bite his face. Again. Tony snorted.

"I can see that. According to Karen, you're bleeding from at least six places." He sounded more amused than worried, so that was a plus, so Peter grinned.

"Now I just have to get her home."

"And how do you plan to do that?" Tony asked, a grin obvious in his voice. Peter glanced down at the bird, then smiled, the expression sheepish.

"Um...you don't happen to have a cage laying around, do you?"

"I'm on it kid. Just stay there."

Tony only took about five minutes to reach him, and there were pictures of Iron Man carrying a bird cage online by the time Peter carried the same cage, this time with a still-angry parrot, back to the little girl who'd lost her. "Make sure you keep the window closed from now on." He told the delighted girl who threw her arms around him.

"I will! Thank you, Spiderman!"

"Sure thing, kiddo."

"It's weird to hear you call someone 'kiddo.'" He found Tony in his armor on the roof of the apartment building and grinned, crouching on the ledge. "You almost ready to come back and eat? Or do you want to hunt down some more birds? Maybe a pigeon this time?" Peter chuckled, ducking away from the hand that shot out to ruffle his hair and jumping down off the ledge to stand in front of him.

"Yeah. I'll be back soon."

"Alright, Spidey." This time Peter stayed where he was, letting Tony rest an iron-covered hand on his head. "Be careful. When you get back, you might want to put something on those scratches...you don't want to get bird flu."

Peter rolled his eyes under his mask, turning and leaping off the roof, smiling when he heard Tony's laughter behind him. "Karen, scan the area? I still have some time."

Everything was pretty quiet, though. Karen was keeping an eye (so to speak) on the police scanner with no luck...there was apparently no criminal activity happening in Queens. Well...nothing Peter needed to handle. Apparently, the police were on it. Besides, it was about time to head back to the tower for lunch, so he swung himself to the closest roof, about to pull out his phone and text Tony to know that he was on his way back when his senses made goosebumps erupt all over his arms.

"Hello."

Peter froze, spinning and feeling his heart stutter in his chest as he came face to face with Loki who was leaning against a wall, one eyebrow lifted. "I have heard Stark speak of you. Spiderman, correct?" Loki asked, a hint of a smirk on his face.
"Uh...yeah...uh...nice to meet you, man." Peter greeted, lowering his voice as much as he could. The smirk grew. "You're Loki, right."

"Yes." Loki took a step forward. "And you are..."

"Spiderman."

"Right. Of course." He moved a little closer, and Peter had to fight the urge not to take another step back...or jump off the roof. "I'll admit, I only heard about you by chance. Stark was talking to Colonel Rhodes in his kitchen. I don't believe he knew I was there." Peter felt his stomach drop. "He mentioned a vigilante called Spiderman and I'll admit, I was intrigued. Especially considering a conversation I had with Stark's son."

"Oh...uh...well, I don't really know the guy. Uh...his son, I mean. Or Stark...Tony Stark...uh...Mr. Stark. I mean, I met him once but, uh..." He swallowed hard, struggling to keep his voice low.

"Really?"

"Yeah. I mean, I don't, uh...haven't had much of a chance and...". Loki was staring at him, smirking, an eyebrow lifted. Peter released a breath, crossing his arms and scowling beneath the mask. Loki's face softened then, his smirk turning into an almost gentle smile.

"You can remove the mask now, child."

"I'm not a child." He grumbled, ripping the mask off and glaring at the Asgardian who's smile didn't falter. "You shouldn't...you shouldn't do that." He told him plaintively, earning a chuckle from Loki.

"I'm assuming your father knows."

"Yeah." He crossed his arms again, then felt his heart clench in worry. "You didn't tell anyone, did you?" Loki shook his head.

"No. But you will most likely have to soon. You were the one that took out that guard." It wasn't a question but Peter nodded anyway. "They will want to know what really happened."

"I know," Peter told him, voice small.

"And you know that you will still be safe. Even when your identity is found out." It wasn't a question, but Peter felt like he needed to answer.

"They'll be mad at Tony...they'll blame him." Peter confided softly, plopping down on the ledge of the roof, grateful that they were so high up and wondering how exactly Loki had gotten up there. "Tony recruited me when I was fourteen. They're going to say that's too young...but I was already doing this, being Spiderman, before Tony ever came along. He just made me a better suit that had features in it to protect me and then he mentored me and was helping...". Peter trailed off, having said more than he'd meant to. "I just...I don't want them all to fight again. Not over me."

Loki joined him then, sitting down on the ledge of the roof and staring out at the city. Then, slowly and almost hesitantly, he placed a hand on Peter's shoulder, the cool hand resting gently there for a moment. "I could wipe their memories."

Peter snorted, laughing out loud. "Could you really?"

"Of course."
He shook his head. "Nah. Don't do that." He swung his legs, kicking his heels gently against the bricks to make sure he didn't damage them. "Tony would be mad."

Loki dropped the arm. "You are not responsible for their reactions." He told the boy softly. "Your father is capable of protecting himself, and my brother and I are on your side."

"Thanks." Peter's voice was practically a whisper as he turned to smile at Loki. The Asgardian continued to stare at the city below them, the only acknowledgment a slight nod. "Um...I better get back to, uh...you know."

"Of course." Loki stood fluidly and Peter hopped up.

"You want a lift back down?"

"I suppose." Then, before the Asgardian could continue, Peter slipped his mask back on, hooked an arm around Loki, then jumped, grinning under his mask when the arm holding him tightened, Loki clutching him like a drowning rat. The boy had to fight a laugh as he shot a web, lowering them gently the rest of the way to the ground.

"There you go," Peter said with a cheery smile, ignoring the glare the Asgardian shot him.

"Brat," Loki muttered, making him laugh again.

"See you later."

"Yes, yes. Go save an old woman from a tree or whatever it is you do." Rolling his eyes, Peter shot another web and took off, feeling a familiar exhilaration as he swung away. Loki knew...he knew and nothing terrible had happened.

One down. Quite a few more to go. He supposed it was time. He couldn't keep his identity a secret from the Avengers forever.

As Peter swung back to the Tower, he tried to decide how to bring that up with Tony, adding that to the list of things they needed to talk about.
"Peter? Are you okay?"

Peter froze as he opened his bedroom door and came face to face with a concerned looking Rhodey who looked as though he'd been poised to knock. He'd crawled in through his bedroom window and was planning on heading straight down to lunch, but as luck would have it, he'd still been bleeding. So he'd done his best in his bathroom, wiping the cuts on his face and arms and putting band-aids on the bad ones, which had resulted in two huge band-aids on his face. Thankfully, the ones on his arms were easily covered by a long-sleeved t-shirt. He couldn't exactly wear a ski mask to lunch though, so he didn't really have many options there.

"Yeah...hey, Rhodey. How's it going?"

"Fine...what happened to your face?" The man asked, lifting an eyebrow.

"Nothing...I mean...uh...I went out as, well, you know, and uh...there was this...bird."

"A bird?" The corner of Rhodey's mouth twitched and Peter sighed.

"A parrot." He muttered.

"Yeah?" The man asked with more interest, smiling outright now. Peter rolled his eyes, crossing his arms across his chest.

"A little girl lost her parrot and I...caught it."

"Looks like the parrot caught you first." Peter grumbled under his breath but had to grin when the man threw an arm around him, tugging him close and half-hugging him. Peter let himself be tugged, smiling and resting his head against the man's chest for a minute. "How long are those going to take to heal?"

"Probably the rest of the day." He shrugged, and Rhodey patted him on the back.

"In that case, you'd better think of an excuse. We have guests for lunch."

Peter nodded but remained under Rhodey's arm as the two made their way into the kitchen where they found Tony and Pepper at the stove, the two of them cooking together. Tony was stirring something while Pepper crouched, opening the oven and pulling a baking sheet out. Bruce and Thor were standing together at the island, talking about...the Grandmaster? He couldn't really understand much of it. The most surprising part wasn't Natasha setting the table...but the fact that Steve Rogers was helping.

Captain America glanced up from the napkin he was setting on the table, then did a double take. "Peter?" He asked as Peter slipped out from Rhodey's arm, grinning when the man patted him on the back. "Are you alright?"

Peter caught the smirk on Tony's face as he struggled not to laugh, shoulders shaking as he stirred what smelled like pasta. "Yeah. I'm fine." Peter grumbled a little.

"What happened?" Steve asked, moving closer to get a better look. Peter was glad he'd put band-aids
on the worst of it.

"Uh...I went over to my friend's house this morning for a bit to see his new...parrot." Tony couldn't stop the laugh then, apparently, the harsh, barking sound catching everyone's attention. Steve gave the man an incredulous look, but Peter only rolled his eyes. "The parrot doesn't like me." He added dryly, and Tony tried to cover his laugh with a cough. It didn't really work, and Steve sent the man a strange, confused look.

"Do you need me to look at anything?" Bruce asked, also looking concerned, but Peter waved him off.

"No. I'm fine." He didn't want to say that he was healing already...not in front of Steve and Natasha. But, on the other hand...he almost did want to say it. Loki knew, and nothing terrible had happened. Would it really be so awful? Not that just blurting it out in the middle of lunch would be the best idea, but he could imagine himself telling them. They were safe...Tony had promised. His senses were calm around them. They weren't going to hurt Tony or him. And even if they did get angry with Tony...well, the man could handle himself.

Tony seemed to get a good look at his face then, and his amusement softened into something more contemplative, "Come here, Pete. Let me take a look." He offered, jerking his head toward the hall. Peter followed, slipping past Captain America and Bruce and the two took the elevator to Tony's lab where they weren't likely to be overheard.

As soon as the elevator doors opened, Peter spoke, the two of them stepping into the lab. "Loki knows."

"What?" The man demanded, spinning to look at him.

"He...I think he heard you and Rhodey talking...I mean, about Spiderman and I guess he..." Peter shrugged, and Tony closed his eyes, taking a deep breath and bringing a hand up to pinch the bridge of his nose. He didn't know why, but Peter felt compelled to apologize. "I'm sorry." That caught Tony's attention and the man jerked his head up, eyes narrowed in confusion.

"Why are you sorry? I'm the one who should apologize, kiddo. This is my fault."

"No...it's not...I mean, you didn't mean to. Besides, he already suspected." Tony nodded, jaw tight.

"I'm still sorry. I should have been more careful..."

"It's okay." Tony gave him a quick, weak smile, reaching out and squeezing his shoulder. "And uh...I think...I think we...I...I should tell the others too." Tony frowned at that, ducking his head to get a better look at him.

"Tell the others..." He repeated, expression serious. "Pete...are you sure? Because you don't have to."

"I know, but..." He shrugged. "I mean, I might as well, huh."

Tony shook his head. "No, not might as well. I don't want you doing this because you think you have to."

"I know." The man squeezed his arm, apparently not ready to let the subject drop.

"I mean it, Pete. If you don't want them to know, I'll figure something out. I won't let Loki..."
"He isn't going to tell." Peter interrupted, then stared down at the floor, hoping he hadn't made the man angry. Tony just waited, though, apparently ready to listen. "I...it was fine, you know?" He looked back up at his guardian. The man that he didn't want to be his guardian anymore...but his father. "It was fine that he knew. And...and even if the others get mad or something...I mean, they might not but even if they do I still...I mean...I still have..." He couldn't quite bring himself to say it, not when he was facing Tony and thinking about Father's day and what he wanted to ask...but the man's face softened anyway. He put his hands on Peter's shoulders, both of them, then pulled him close, resting his chin on Peter's head.

"Yeah. You do."

His guardian pulled away after a moment, smiling down at him with a look that was almost proud. Then his eyes turned mischievous. "So...your birthday's coming up pretty soon." Peter nodded, not sure where this was going but sure he wasn't going to like it. "Sixteen...sweet sixteen. That's a big one. Anything in particular you want?"

He shook his head. "Um...not really." He spoke slowly. Wary. "Just, uh...maybe to see Ned and MJ."

Tony waved a hand. "Of course. We can have your friends over. I'm sure they'd be more than happy to hang out with the Avengers. But I was thinking more along the lines of presents."

"Oh...um...no, you don't have to..."

"I know you might get lonely here sometimes." Tony was still grinning and Peter sighed as he realized where the man was going with this. "I know that a pet can really help kids...maybe a parrot?"

"You're the worst."

He laughed then as Peter spun on his heels and headed back toward the elevator. "Do we need to install some updates to your suit after we repair it? Maybe make it talon-proof?" Tony hurried to catch up with him, and Peter let him wrap an arm around his side as the two took the elevator to the main floor.

Peter leaned against his guardian and thought about what he would be asking soon...about what Tony's reaction would be. Surely he'd say yes, right? Pepper seemed to think so. But...a terrible, small, nagging part of his brain refused to accept this...what if he didn't? What if things got awkward and uncomfortable? What if Tony...what if he decided he didn't want this? Any of this? "Kid?" Tony asked, apparently able to feel him stiffen, his heartbeat increasing as the scary thoughts raced through his mind.

"I love you," Peter whispered, and Tony stared down at him, shifting a little so that he could get a better look. He had wanted to say it...needed Tony to know it...because if there ever came a time that Tony didn't want him anymore...if he lost someone else…

"I love you too, Pete." The man murmured, and the elevator stopped as if FRIDAY knew that they needed a minute. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah..." His voice was still weak, and he cursed himself for making Tony worry.

"We don't have to tell the team. I promise, Peter. It'll be okay."

"No, I...I want to. I just..." How did he say it? How did he say that he was still so afraid of losing everything? His thoughts went back to his aunt...when had he last told her how much he loved her?
He shrugged, not sure how to put any of this into words that Tony would understand. But the man seemed to get it, hugging him once more.

"I love you, kiddo. No matter what...we'll figure out how to tell the team today if that's what you want. Sound good?" Peter nodded, ear against Tony's chest where he could hear his heartbeat. "Alright, Pete. You ready for lunch?"

"Yeah." Peter swallowed, smiling up at the man who looked down at him just like Uncle Ben had...just like he imagined his own father had.

By the time they'd reached the main floor, he'd managed to put those thoughts away. He had a plan...kind of. Buy a father's day card. Write something...something meaningful. Something that would show Tony exactly what he meant to Peter and how much Peter loved him...how much he appreciated everything Tony had done for him.

Then ask the question.

No one commented on their absence, Pepper reaching out and touching Peter's shoulder as she ushered him over to the table where he sat between Tony and Rhodey. "So, this parrot...it attacked you?" Thor asked, and Tony grinned down at his pasta as Peter grabbed a breadstick.

"Yeah." He muttered.

"A parrot must be a very worthy adversary in order to have won in battle against you." This time Rhodey laughed aloud and even Pepper was smiling. Peter sighed, wishing they could find something else to talk about. "Tell me, what is a parrot?"

"A bird." He answered shortly, then took a bite of pasta. Surely this conversation couldn't go on forever.

"A large bird?" Thor asked. Peter nodded, ignoring Tony who shook his head and held his hands about a foot apart.

"So, Peter, what are your plans for the rest of the day?" Bruce asked, apparently taking pity on him.

"I thought he'd come and work in the lab with me for a bit." Tony put in.

"Do you want to help too, Bruce?" Peter asked, knowing what he was asking...knowing exactly what they were planning to do in the lab. Tony lifted his eyebrows, looking at Peter for a moment, then nodding with a small smile.

"Um...sure. What are we working on?"

"New project," Tony told him simply. Peter took a bite of his pasta, then devoured another breadstick. Thankfully they'd made plenty of food for everyone, including Captain America who could eat as much as Peter.

"Salad?" Pepper asked, passing him a bowl of greens, and he took some, figuring it was less of a request and more of a strong suggestion. He passed the bowl to Rhodey who also forked some greens onto his plate. As Steve and Natasha talked about a mission they'd been on and Peter listened, Loki entered the room, taking a seat beside Thor and accepting the pasta bowl that Pepper passed his way.

Peter almost expected Loki to make some kind of comment about their run in earlier, but the Asgardian just focused on eating, and no one asked why he was late. It wasn't like they ate all of
their meals together, anyway. But Peter did wonder why they ate on this floor sometimes. It was Tony's private floor...usually just him and Pepper and now Peter, but the others hung out there too some days. Other times they'd all eat on the common floor.

After dinner, Peter headed to the sink to start on the dishes, but Pepper beat him to it, a hand on his shoulder turning him back toward the dining room. "Go on down to the lab," She urged with a smile, squeezing his shoulder before releasing him.

"Oh...I don't mind helping."

"I know. But I can get these loaded into the dishwasher in no time." She took his plate from his hand, placing it in the sink to rinse off, and, giving up for the moment, he headed back to his room to grab his backpack, then hurried down to the lab where Tony and Bruce were already waiting. Bruce looked confused as he stared down at the empty table in front of them, glancing over at Tony, then up at Peter who stepped off of the elevator.

"So..." Bruce started, glancing around the room and down at the empty metal table they'd all gathered around. "What are we working on?" Peter's eyes darted over to Tony who only smiled a little, gesturing with a hand for him to go ahead.

"Um...so...we need...um, I need to do some repairs and upgrade my suit." He told the man whose eyes narrowed, brow furrowing.

"Your...your suit?" He asked. Peter decided that it would be easier to just show him, so he unzipped his backpack and pulled out the spider suit, placing it on the table along with the mask for Bruce to put the dots together. "This..." He reached out, picking up the material by the edge and fingering a rip in the fabric before glancing up at Tony who stayed quiet, pulling out a tablet and connecting to Karen so he could figure out what exactly needed fixing.

Peter took a deep breath, reminding himself that he trusted Doctor Banner. "You know, uh...Spiderman?" He tried, not sure what else to say.

Peter could almost see the moment it clicked, Brice's huge eyes coming up to meet Peter's. "You...". He whispered. Peter nodded.

"Yeah."

"You're...you're the...Spiderman?" Peter nodded again. "From the news." It was more of a statement than a question. I saw...I saw the car crash and...I've seen you on Youtube."

"Yeah." He muttered again.

"You're..." Doctor Banner trailed off, then looked over at Tony. "You said...he's your son? Right?"

"Biologically, no," Tony told him with the air of someone who'd had to say that too many tims. Peter smiled a little down at the suit. "It's a long story...basically, I found the kid on youtube and figured out who he was. Upgraded his suit, gave him an internship." He waved a hand. "Et cetera."

"Wow...wow. Okay. That..." Bruce looked down at Peter, smiling a little. "So, you got hurt being Spiderman today, right?" Peter nodded. "Well, I have to admit, the parrot story was a little hard to believe." The man chuckled and Peter hurried to speak before a delighted Tony could butt in.

"Yeah, uh...anyway, we're going to repair my suit. I need to fix some of the tears and every once in a while we do updates. Plus I make my web fluid here."
Tony did keep quiet about the parrot incident, taking over the actual updating, while Bruce joined Peter at his usual workstation as Peter made his web fluid. "Who knows?" The man wondered.

"Um, Tony, Pepper, and Rhodey. Loki just figured it out. And uh...you." Bruce blinked down at him, a strange look on his face and Peter felt the strange need to justify himself. "I mean, you already knew I was a mutant. So, I mean...I trust you. I'm going to tell the rest of the Avengers at some point too but..." He cut himself off when Bruce laid a hand on his shoulder, a small smile turning the corners of his mouth.

"Thank you, Peter." He smiled back up at the man.

"Yeah, of course. Um...do you want to help? I've been messing with the formula to try and make it last longer, but I haven't had much luck. The longest I can get it to stick around without dissolving is about 2 and a half hours, but I'd like the option to make it last longer. At least 4 hours. But when I start to mess too much with the formula, it starts to get too sticky, or it won't shoot out of my webshooter." Bruce nodded, brain obviously working, and as Tony turned on ACDC in the background, the two began to tweak his formula. He shouldn't have been surprised that, almost immediately, Bruce would have plenty of ideas. The man was a genius, just like Tony.

Tony joined them after a little while, the three of them sitting at Peter's workstation, mixing chemicals and trying out new formulas, Peter's webshooters in the middle of the table, ready to be tested. Bruce was midway through mixing up a new batch, eyes alight with curiosity and excitement, when Tony's arm slipped around Peter's shoulder, squeezing him to his side for a quick half hug. "I'm proud of you, kid." He told Peter softly, and for a moment, it felt like Peter's heart might burst. Not wanting to embarrass himself by crying or something similar in front of Doctor Bruce banner right after revealing to the man that he was a superhero, he rested his head on Tony's shoulder for a moment before the two once more focused on Bruce.
Peter was at school when he heard the news.

It was a Tuesday morning, a week before his birthday, and he had already downed a coke from the vending machines in a failing effort to keep himself awake enough for his English class. Not that he didn't like English, but still. He and Tony may have stayed up too late the night before in the lab. They'd been working on his suit, mostly, and then his web fluid. Tony was messing around with the formula, trying to help Bruce, the three of them working to make it last longer. And maybe do some more cool stuff with it. It had been almost one in the morning when Tony had looked up at the clock on the wall, eyes going wide.

"Crap, kid you've got school. You shouldn't probably get to bed." He'd yawned, putting his stuff down and agreeing easily. He'd been exhausted, so after wishing the man a sleepy 'good night' and dragging himself to bed, he'd been ready for a couple of hours of good sleep.

But then he'd had a nightmare.

Not a bad one. Well...not one that had had him waking up screaming. More just...gasping for air, heart pounding. Eyes wet, he'd stared at the ceiling, feeling like he was getting his air through a straw, and then he'd jumped out of bed, slipping out onto his balcony and taking gulp after desperate gulp of the slightly chilly spring air.

It had been may again, of course. His aunt in a car, reaching out for him. This time he'd been on the sidewalk, watching. Then he'd been kneeling at her side, hands over a bleeding wound on her stomach, just like with Ben. He'd smelled the blood...heard the sirens and cars and felt the tears dripping down his cheeks. It had been a blur from then...sobbing and begging her to hold on and feeling her hand on his. But then...then she'd looked up at him with so much pain in her eyes.

"How could you forget me?"

Then he'd woken up. And of course, he knew he wasn't forgetting her. He could never forget her. That was just his subconscious...just his fear. Fear that he would forget his family. Fear that they would be ashamed of him from wherever they were. That he was hurting them, somehow. It was bad enough that he could barely remember his parents. Bad enough that he'd forgotten his uncle's voice...that the man had started to sound more and more like Tony in his mind. And now...now he would start to forget May's voice too. He would forget her perfume and what she smelled like. He would forget her face one day.

Because she was gone now. She was gone and no matter how much he still loved her and no matter how much he missed her...she was never coming back. He'd never see her again.

"Pete?" Tony had asked from his balcony door a few minutes later, sounding hesitant. Worried.

"Hey." He'd muttered, closing his eyes and leaning his head on the balcony railing, trying to wipe a tear that had escaped away. Silently, the man had made his way over to where Peter had been leaning forward, a hand moving to his back. "I just...couldn't breathe in there." Peter had explained after a moment.

"Do you want to talk about it?"
He'd shaken his head. "What time is it?" He'd asked instead, trying to change the subject.

"Almost five. Why don't you try to sleep some more." He'd nodded, too tired to argue, and had let the man lead him back inside, then tuck him into bed like a little kid, a hand running through his hair. "You okay?" Peter has nodded, and almost immediately he'd fallen asleep again.

Barely an hour later he'd been up again, although Tony had assured him that he could miss school if he needed to. Peter had insisted that he'd be fine, so Happy had driven him to school, even though he'd said he could walk. Apparently Tony hadn't wanted to take any chances. He wasn't sure what the man had thought would happen...that maybe he'd fall asleep on the train and miss his stop?

"Dude?" Ned hissed, and immediately he had Peter's attention, jerking him back to the present.

"Hm?"

"Look!" Ned slid his phone over. Peter grabbed it, glad their teacher's back was to them, and his jaw dropped as he read the tweets. Aliens in New York. Actual aliens. Not a wormhole like before, but still...no one knew where they'd come from.

The Avengers has assembled and were on the scene.

"Dude," Ned whispered again, and Peter shot his hand up in the air, giving Ned his Starkphone back before his friend could say anything more. Like trying to talk him out of it.

"Yes, Mr. Par…"

"I don't feel good." He spit out, already reaching for his backpack. "Can I be excused?" His teacher barely had time to blink before he was racing out the door, phone buzzing in his pocket.

He pulled it out just as he was bursting out of the double doors at the front of the school, knowing that he was going to get in trouble for this. "Stay at school. We have this handled." He had no idea how his dad had figured out what he was doing and he didn't care. Tony might get mad at him, but there was no way he was sitting at school and waiting for the fight to be over.

He was Spiderman!

He ducked into the closest alley and yanked his shirt and jeans off, pulling his suit on and webbing his backpack to the wall behind the dumpster, then pulling the mask over my head. "Hey, Karen!" He called into the mask, taking off at a sprint and shooting a web to swing himself onto the roof.

"Where's my dad?"

He didn't even notice he'd said the words until Karen brought up a picture of Tony in the corner of his mask, a path lighting his way to the man. "The aliens appear to be isolated to upper Manhattan but are moving south."

"Thanks, Karen."

He swung as quickly as he could, focusing on speed rather than on doing cool tricks as he made his way to the spot Karen had illuminated in his mask. He didn't let himself worry about the fact that Tony was going to be angry. Or the fact that this could very well lead to the team finding out who he was. All he could think about was that the Avengers had assembled and may need his help. And he was going to be there.

"Any ideas where the aliens came from?"
"No. I cannot find that information anywhere. The only thing I know is that there appear to be several alien life forms much like those that attacked New York several years ago."

"Right...okay." He muttered. "Can you show me what they look like?" She did, showing him a picture of an ugly looking alien that looked almost exactly like the ones he'd seen in old blurry pictures from the battle of New York. "Awesome...okay. Any idea how the battle is going?"

"It appears as if the Avengers have this handled." If he wasn't mistaken, there was a little bit of judgment in her voice. He ignored it.

He spotted Hawkeye first. The man was crouched on top of a building, his back to Peter. "Karen, patch me into the comms." Almost immediately there was an explosion of noise in his ears. Captain America was giving terse orders, and it sounded like he was in the middle of a fight, not that Peter could see him. Landing soundlessly beside Hawkeye, Peter held up a hand when the man spun, an arrow pointed right at his face.

"Hey! Same side." Hawkeye looked him up and down, then nodded, lowering the bow.

"Hey, kid. You're late to the party."

"Yeah, well. My invite got lost in the mail." The man chuckled a little, shooting an arrow past Peter who only flinched a little, then turned and found that the arrow had found a new home right between the eyes of one of those aliens. "What should I do?"

"Ask Cap," Hawkeye ordered, moving to the edge of the roof to get a better view.

Swallowing hard, Peter put a hand to his ear, knowing that Tony was about to be upset with him. "Captain America, sir? This is Spiderman. You guys need a hand?" He asked, voice tentative.

There was silence on the comms for a minute, then Tony's incredulous voice. "Kid, I told you to stay..."

"Yeah. Think you can web them up from the air?" Steve interrupted.

"You got it, Cap?"

"Kid..." Tony started again.

"We could use the help, Tony!" Steve all but snapped, sounding stressed. Tony was silent then, but Peter knew there was a talk in his future, and he wouldn't enjoy it.

Swinging around the corner, he all but ran into one of those aliens, barely managing to duck out of the way before shooting a web to try and slow it down. They were riding...something. They couldn't fly on their own but they were riding some kind of scooters or something. Hoverbikes? Peter had never seen anything like them. He wanted to ask but was hoping that, if he kept quiet and did well, Tony would forgive him for disobeying direct orders to stay at school.

He stayed in the air for a while, shooting webs at the hoverbikes or whatever they were, sending the aliens crashing to the ground. Doing his best to stop the bikes from crashing to the ground, he webbed them to various buildings, leaving them dangling in the air. He swung from building to building, occasionally catching a glimpse of Rhodey or Falcon, but not Tony. He hadn't heard anything from him in the comms, though, so he didn't worry about it...okay, he worried about it. But he tried to push his worry back, doing his best to focus on staying out of the way and webbing the aliens.
But that was before he caught sight of the people on the ground scurrying into a building, apparently looking for cover. He started to speak into the comms and tell the others that there were civilians that needed help, but everyone else was busy. So he swung down to the ground, landing on his toes and taking off in a sprint toward the building. "Karen? What's the closest safe location for them?"

"It seems that the barricade created by the police and the Avengers is three blocks south."

"Got it." Reaching for the door, he was had to stop short when one of the aliens rounded the corner, spotting him right away. "Shit." He stepped away from the door, not wanting the alien to figure out that there were people hiding in there...although he had no idea if these things could reason. "Karen?"

"I would suggest attempting to use taser webs."

"Yeah...do it." He muttered, pointing his wrists and shooting the electric webs at the creature which writhed and screamed when they found their marks. However, the webs didn't quite hold, so after a few seconds, it ripped out of them and charged.

Jumping out of the way, Peter gripped the wall, then jumped over its head, barely managing to avoid the electrified stick thing that it swung at him. "Karen?" He asked, shooting more webs and then aiming a kick at the thing's side, knocking it back a few feet. The thing screeched, and he had to duck the shoky stick again. "Any other ideas?" Shooting a regular web at the things legs, he punched the thing as hard as he could in the head once, twice, then a third time, finally knocking it out. He had no idea if it was dead or not, but he had to get those people out before something happened to them.

Before the building came down.

Nope. He couldn't think that way. He was going to get to them! So Peter took off once more, yanking the door open. "Hello?" He called, searching for the people, then came up short when two more of those things appeared. Hoping that the people hadn't been hurt by the aliens, he shot more webs, aiming for the legs. "Hello?" He called again, jumping onto the wall and crawling up. "Karen? Scan the building?"

"It appears as though there are five civilians, including one child, and they are all making their way to the top floor."

"Great. Okay...anymore of these alien things inside?" He asked, dodging a shoky stick swung at him by one of the aliens he'd managed to web it to the ground. He'd have to be careful...his webshooters were getting low, and he wouldn't be able to web all of them to the ground. "Will you guys chill? I'm trying to talk to Karen!" Peter snapped, then bit back a scream when the second one got him with the stick. Electricity coursed through his body, knocking him flat, and he found himself gasping for air on the ground. "Ouch. Okay...avoid the sticks." He grumbled, pulling himself back to his feet, a little dazed, glad to find that they were both still stick. The next time one of them swung the thing at him, he grabbed the stick, yanking it out of its hands and smacking the alien upside the head with it, glad when that blow to the head knocked it out. The other one had a stick with a blade on it, and he had to jump back to avoid it, gripping his own weapon. He didn't use weapons. He hated them. But this...it would have to be a special case because he had to save those people! Tony was counting on him...the Avengers were counting on him.

"There do not seem to be any more aliens in the building."

"Thanks, Karen."
Shoving the shocky stick (he needed to figure out what they were actually called) into the thing’s chest, he held it there while the monster alien creature whose name he also didn't know screamed. He hated that too...but he had to save those people.

"Spiderman? Anyone got eyes on the kid?" Came Tony's voice through the comms.

"I'm in the uh...I think it's a bank. There are civilians in here." He told the team, racing toward the stairs and starting to sprint. "They're heading to the roof."

"Okay...I'm tracking your location, Spiderman." Rhodey cut in. "We'll get them to safety."

Peter exhaled in relief, glad to have some help as he hurried up the stairs. He caught up with them on the fifth floor, holding out his hands when the four adults stumbled to a halt, hiding a little boy behind them. "Woah...hey. I'm a friend." He promised, not taking another step forward until they relaxed, shoulders drooping. One of the women was crying, and another had a death grip on the little boy who peeked around her hip.

"Spiderman!" The boy cried, pointing at him with a huge smile, fear apparently forgotten.

"Yeah. Hi. I'm Spiderman. War Machine is going to meet us on the roof. We'll get you guys to safety, okay?" The adults agreed instantly, and Peter crouched. "Want a piggyback ride, buddy?"

"Mommy, can I?" He cried, and his mother nodded, eyes still darting around the empty stairwell. Peter straightened, making to the boy was secure before he began running up the stairs once more, leading them up the remaining three flights. By the time they burst through the door to the roof, the adults were exhausted, but the little boy, who had promptly informed him that his name was Micha, was practically bouncing on Peter's back, chattering non-stop. Peter had learned not only his name, but also what grade he was in (second), his favorite subject in school (science), and his favorite Avenger (Captain America.) Peter supposed he couldn't hold that against him.

As they stepped out onto the roof, Peter crouched to let the boy jump down, reaching out to grab his mom's hand, and Rhodey landed on the ledge as the last of the adults finished climbing the stairs. "Alright, Spiderman. You cover them. I can take the kid first, then I'll be back for the rest of you. Falcon?" He asked, switching to the comms. "I've got five civilians and a kid on the roof of his bank, and we need to get them to safety. You free?"

"On my way." Rhodey grabbed the child who immediately began sharing his life story with the superhero, and Peter was able to spot Falcon approaching. "I see you Spiderman. I'll be right there." Of course, that was when another alien appeared, jumping onto the roof, holding its huge staff, blade pointed at Peter.

"Get inside." He ordered, pointing at the door, and the four hurried to follow orders. "Karen? How am I on web fluid?"

"You are very low, Peter."

"Great." He muttered, ducking under the blade, then flinching when the alien slammed a foot into his side, knocking him down to the ground. Groaning, he rolled over and jumped back to his feet, moving in close in the hopes of getting a good punch in. These things were a lot stronger than humans, and it took more to knock them out. Not to mention, it was hard to get close. Ducking a punch and dodging the staff, he managed to jump back, flinching when the blade swung back around and sliced the front of his suit.

He shot a strand of fluid at it, managing to web up one of its feet, then had to duck again, gasping in
pained when it nicked him in the shoulder. Sam chose that moment to land, wings folding. "Kid, down!" He ordered, and Peter ducked out of the way, grimacing at the explosion of bullets that took the alien down in seconds.

It died screaming and Peter thought he might throw up. But he had to keep it together. This was his chance to prove himself to the Avengers. Well...the ones that didn't know who he was yet. He had a plan for telling them who he was...but this might be better.

"You good, Spiderman?" Sam asked.

"Yeah." He muttered, glancing down at the cut in his suit...and the blood dripping down his chest. "Fine. We've got four more civilians."

"Got it, kid. I'll get them to safety. Loki said we've got most of them...we found some kind of spaceship. Guess that's how they got here. Loki and Thor are looking into it." One of the civilians, the one who Peter was pretty sure was the little boy's mom, stepped forward just as Rhodey returned. The two of them took turns getting the last of the civilians to safety, Peter keeping watch until they were done, and then Captain America was back on the comms.

"Alright. We've taken out all but a handful. Everyone, get back down to the ground and help us out."

"Except you, Spiderman." Tony cut in. Peter sighed, running a hand down his face over his mask, then shot a web, leaping off the roof. Tony was going to kill him.

That was his last thought before his webs ran dry, and he plummeted to the ground.
Okay. As an apology for the cliffhanger, here is a surprise Tuesday chapter. Enjoy!

Crash Landing

Tony couldn't believe this. Couldn't fucking believe it. How the hell had this even happened? Aliens again? Where had aliens come from? They'd gotten the call to assemble in the middle of lunch, him and Steve eating with the rest of Tony's houseguests. There had been more talk about the revised accords. More mentions of Spiderman that Tony had ignored, catching Bruce staring very seriously down at his own notes, not looking anyone in the eye. And then...Aliens.

Mostly, Tony was just too distracted to deal with this. Peter had had another nightmare the night before, and that morning he'd looked pretty rough. Tony had wanted to insist he stay home from school but had decided against it. If the kid wanted to sleep his way through school, that was his business. But he'd warned Peter that he had to come home right after school. No patrolling until he got some real sleep. The last thing he needed was for the kid to fall asleep in the middle of saving some old lady from a mugging.

And then Peter had shown up in the middle of this shitstorm, even after Tony had told him to stay at school. And Cap had been on the kid's side, telling Tony that they needed the help. As if Spiderman was in any way equipped to deal with giant murderous aliens. The kid wanted to lay low...stick to the ground. Help the little guy. He wasn't ready for this. These things were out to kill. They'd managed to evacuate most of the surrounding area and create a perimeter. Public opinion of the Avengers was still kind of shaky, so they were also doing their best not to cause any kind of outrageous property damage, which was why Bruce was on standby.

"Boss, Spiderman is down." Friday's words made his blood freeze, and he came to a jerking halt beside Steve who was still fighting, not even seeming to break a sweat.

"What the hell do you mean, down?" He barked, dodging a swipe from one of the aliens after him and lifting himself up higher so he could focus. He needed to get back in the air...start taking them down from above like Peter had been. At least then the boy had been further from the action. But the last thing he'd heard was that Peter was getting some civilians to safety with the help of Sam and Rhodey.

"He fell from a building and sustained an injury to his head."

Fell from a building. The words seemed to echo in his brain as he shot off toward the beacon telling him where Spiderman was. "Tony?" Steve asked. Tony ignored him, dropping to the ground in front of the mouth of the alley and hurrying around the corner.

Peter was on the ground. Not moving. And Tony's heart stopped, body freezing in place for a solid ten seconds before he raced to the boy's side, dropping to his knees and resting a gentle hand on his torso above the huge cut spanning the kid's whole chest. "Peter...come on, buddy. I need you to talk to me." He choked out, rubbing gently on the boy's sternum. "Friday, connect to Karen!" He ordered, glancing up when he heard footsteps, only to find Thor approaching from the street at a jog. Great. He needed to get the boy's mask off and he was about to have an audience. But it couldn't be helped.

"Stark? Is that..."
"Spiderman."
Tony finished for him. "Think you can keep a secret?" He asked, well aware of how terse he sounded. Thor gave him a strange look but nodded, kneeling on the other side of the boy whose chest was bleeding pretty badly. He needed to stop it, but first, he had to make sure Peter's head was okay. "Friday, why did he fall?"

"It appears as though Peter's web fluid ran dry and he fell from approximately the second story of this building. He lost consciousness when he hit his head but seems to be stirring."

"Alright, kiddo."
Tony murmured, reaching around to the back of his head and gently pulling the mask off. His hand came back bloody and he had to swallow his panic as he eased Peter's head back down to the concrete. Across from him, Thor went still, a hand hovering over the boy.

"He...Peter is…"

"Yeah."
"And I told him to stay at school."
He couldn't keep the bitterness out of his voice. The kid had been pretty good at listening so far...Tony should have known that an Avengers mission would be the thing to make the kid rebel. Pressing two fingers to his neck, he released a breath.

"Will he be okay?"
Thor asked then, sounding strained. Tony forced himself to nod.

"Yeah...yeah, it's not too bad. He's a pretty tough kid. A pretty tough kid who's about to be grounded." Thor lifted an eyebrow. "It means he's in trouble. You hear me, kid?"
He asked, voice cracking a little. He'd meant to sound upset. Stern. But his eyes were hot, and his hand was covered in his boy's blood, and he just needed Peter to wake up.

"Spiderman? Tony?"
Steve asked in the comms just as Loki rounded the corner, jaw tight as he took in the sight of Peter sprawled on the concrete. What the hell...were they having a party in the alley or something?

"Spiderman is down. We need Bruce."
He barked into his comm.

"What do you mean, down? What happened?"
Rhodey demanded in his ear.

"He fell." Tony bit out, glancing up as Loki knelt beside his brother, lifting a hand that Tony had to fight not to slap away. Instead, he watched as Loki pressed two fingers to Peter's forehead, and the boy groaned, green light hovering around his head for a moment.

"I'm on my way to your location," Bruce told him, and Tony put a hand on Peter's shoulder. The kid groaned again, fingers opening and closing as he seemed to try and wake up. "Pete? Talk to me, kiddo."

"Dad?"
Peter murmured, Loki pulling his hand back and watching as the kid shifted on the concrete.

"Yeah. I'm right here, bud. Take your time."
Tony all but whispered, terrified that he was going to lose it in front of the Asgardians...afraid that the dam would burst. He had always held himself together in front of the Avengers. It was a skill he'd learned as a kid thanks to his father. So the number of people who'd seen him lose his shit could be counted on one hand. But that number might just increase if his kid wasn't okay.

"What the..." Peter blinked his eyes a few times, then squinted at Tony, then glancing over at the other two men at his side. It seemed to take him a minute before he realized that his mask was off and his eyes flew open. He was starting to sit up when Tony pressed a hand to his shoulder.

"Nope. You're grounded, kid. Figuratively and literally. Stay down."
"I... I fell?" He asked, apparently confused. "I'm not... my mask isn't..."

"Yeah. Thor knows your secret now, sorry." Tony told him, fighting to keep his tone disinterested because it was either disinterested or complete mess at this point. "Your web fluid ran out."

"Oh..." His kid muttered, bringing a clumsy hand to his head. "Crap."

"Yeah. That's one word that comes to mind." Despite his tone, he kept his hand on Peter's shoulder, holding him down. "Stay there for a second. Bruce is on his way."

"I'm fine...". The boy started, but Tony shook his head. He knew that he should be angry. Knew that Peter had blatantly disobeyed him and then he'd gotten himself hurt... the cut across his chest was still bleeding sluggishly, and Loki grabbed a piece of cloth that seemed to appear out of thin air, pressing it to the wound. His father would have been furious had he so blatantly disobeyed him. No, he had been furious, as Tony had disobeyed him more and more every year. There would have been lectures and cutting remarks, and when he'd been younger, there had been glass shattered. Dishes broken.

Punches thrown.

But Tony wasn't angry. Not really. He was terrified. Had been terrified ever since Peter had spoken through the comms, announcing his presence in a fight he wasn't ready for. Because Peter was smart, and he was good at this. Good at being Spiderman. He was a superhero. But this was above his pay grade. He hadn't trained for this... didn't go around killing aliens. Or anything for that matter. Peter didn't even have weapons. Didn't want them. And now he was hurt. He didn't want the others to know how afraid he was... how his heart raced as he stared down at the dazed kid on the ground who flinched as Loki pressed a cloth to his chest to stop the bleeding.

He wanted to lecture. Wanted to make sure Peter never tried something like this again. But his kid was a superhero. He was Spiderman. It was who he was. It was how they'd met. There was no way he could ever take that away from Peter. So he just kept his hand on Peter's shoulder, rubbing his thumb back and forth until Bruce joined them in the alley.

"Hey, Pete." Bruce murmured, kneeling on Tony's other side, the man shifting to make room for him, but not letting go of his kid. He couldn't let go... not until he was sure that Peter was okay.

"You knew as well? Who else knows?" Thor asked under his breath.

"Only Rhodey, Pepper, and Vision," Tony told him distractedly.

"And me as well." Loki put in with a smirk, and Thor whirled to face him, incredulous. Not interested in their family drama, Tony turned to watch Bruce shine a light in Peter's eyes. The kid moaned in pain, turning his head a little, but Bruce put a hand on his cheek, keeping him still.

"Can his AI tell us if there's any spinal damage?" He asked, jaw tight as he held the boy in place.

"That's my biggest concern right now."

"Karen?" Tony asked through Friday, heart fluttering in his chest.

"It appears as though his spine and neck are uninjured. He does have a mild concussion and the cuts on his chest and head are still bleeding. Otherwise, he is developing bruising all over his back, but should fully recover." Tony relayed all of that to Bruce who put the penlight away.

"Okay. That's good. Peter, squeeze my hand." Bruce ordered, placing his hand in the kid's right one. Peter did, fingers curling hesitantly over the scientist's, "Good. Now squeeze Thor's hand." Thor
hurried to put his hand in Peter's and the kid did as he'd asked once more. "Can you bend your legs?" This time the kid struggled, probably because of the bruising, but he managed to bring his knees up a little. "Alright. What's your full name?"

"Peter Parker."

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"How did you get that cut on your chest?"

"Uh...the alien had a stabby stick." Loki snorted at that, and even Bruce smiled a little.

"Alright. Are you taking him back to the tower? He needs to rest for a few hours. The concussion is pretty mild, but he'll still need to avoid looking at bright lights or screens for a couple of hours. Nothing strenuous."

Tony nodded. "Pete? I'm going to get your mask back on, okay?" The kid hummed in agreement. It didn't seem like he'd been paying attention, which worried Tony, but he was more worried about getting him home. The man carefully slipped the back over his head, trying not to think about how the back was wet with blood.

"I'll let the others know that you have Spiderman. We'll meet you at the tower?"

"Sounds good. Thanks, Bruce." And with that, Tony carefully scooped him up in his arms, making sure to be easy with his head, then took off. The kid was practically frozen in his arms, and Tony held him close, keeping him as still as possible. Just because there was no spinal damage didn't mean those bruises didn't hurt. The kid had to be sore, and he'd be sore for a few days.

Peter was silent the whole way back to the tower. Tense. As if ready for a shouting match. But Tony wasn't Howard. Couldn't ever be Howard. He had to be better. This was his kid and no matter how scared he'd been, he wasn't going to start screaming. He wasn't going to yell at his kid. Wasn't willing to risk losing control like that.

He remembered being a child...remembered his dad's voice as he'd screamed at him. Remembered huddling in a corner and his father's hands on him, shoving him away. Then he thought about Peter...no. He could never let that happen. Not with Peter.

So Tony landed on the landing pad, then carried Peter inside, up the elevator, through the living room, and down the hallway until they reached his bedroom, the two of them silent the whole time. He kicked the door aside, then carefully sat Peter on his bed. The boy, now that he was more awake, was stiff as he pulled his mask off, dropping it on the floor beside his bed. For a moment, he just stared at the boy, all too aware of the bleeding from his chest...the blood matting his curls.

"Let's get you out of the suit. We can repair it tomorrow." He told Peter, and the kid pressed his hand against the emblem on his chest, the suit deflating around him. Tony grabbed a first aid kit from Peter's bathroom cabinet, pulling out a washcloth and a bottle of alcohol. For a long moment, he just stood in the kid's bathroom. Stared at himself in the mirror. Did his best not to see his father staring back at him. He wasn't his father. He was Tony Stark. Iron Man. And Peter's father. He loved his kid...would never hurt him. Taking a deep breath, Tony carried the supplies back to Peter who had pulled on a pair of jeans and was sitting against the pillows at the head of his bed, the kid's torso and sides mottled with darkening bruises. The boy was ready. Tense. Watching Tony as though the man were a mad dog that might attack at any time.
He wasn't going to attack. He wasn't his father.

"This is going to sting." He warned before cleaning the cut out with alcohol, flinching when Peter clenched his jaw, head thrown back, a low whine escaping. "Sorry, kiddo." He murmured, cleaning the cut as quickly as he could, then wrapping it in gauze as the boy gasped for breath, eyes shut. "There. All done, Pete."

Once that was done, he put the supplies away, and the kid was tense once more, eyes following him as he walked to the bathroom and back. But Tony just patted him on the shoulder, not sure how much longer he could hold it together. No sure how this was going to look. And he wasn't going to be like Howard. He wasn't going to risk hurting his kid. "Rest for a few hours. Tell Friday if you get hungry. Bruce can bring you up some food when he gets here."

And then he was shutting the kid's door behind him, stepping into the elevator, mind blank and furious, and heading to the conference room where he found Steve and Bruce sitting together. Both glanced up at him, Steve jumping to his feet, nothing but concern on his all-American face. "Is Spiderman alright?"

Tony swallowed hard, lifting up a shaking finger and pointing it at the super soldier's face. "The next time I tell you that Spiderman stays out of a fight, he stays out of it. Do you understand me?" He asked, glad that they were at least alone. Or, well, kind of. Bruce pulled himself to his feet as Rhodey stepped into the room, and one look at Tony had him locking the door behind him lest the rest of the team show up.

"Tones. Is Spiderman alright?" Rhodey asked again, obviously worried.

"Do you understand me?" Tony repeated, heart racing as he stared Steve down and ignored the others. The man had the audacity to shake his head, speaking to Tony as though he were a child. "Tony, we needed the help…"

"If I say he stays out of a fight…"

"But why do you get to decide for him?" Steve snapped, looking irritated, and Tony felt every ounce of that rage boil over as he slammed his hand down on the glass table hard enough that there was a loud crack.

"Because that's my son!" He half screamed, and he felt more than saw the looks Rhodey and Bruce were giving him. "Fuck." He whispered then, putting a hand over his face, eyes hot once more. That was his son...his son had fallen in the middle of a fight that he shouldn't have even been in and his stomach churned as he remembered turning the corner and seeing the boy sprawled out on the concrete, the back of his head wet with blood.

How would he have coped if it had been worse? What if that blade had cut deeper? What if the fall had been from a higher building?

"How many secret kids do you have, Tony?" Steve asked him then, voice incredulous, and Tony just stared at him. Bruce dropped his head, and Tony thought he heard Rhodes snort. He didn't trust himself to speak just yet...he was too aware of the heat in his eyes that would most likely make his voice crack. So he just stared, waiting for Steve to work it out, heart pounding.

This hadn't been his secret to share. He'd just given away the kid's identity.

What if Peter hated him now? He was a mess, so it wasn't like Tony would blame him. He couldn't handle seeing his kid hurt but when it happened, he just left him alone in his room...walked off
because he was so afraid that the boy would see him break down. Was so afraid that he'd start screaming like his father would have...not that his father had ever cared about him getting hurt. But when he'd disobeyed him...Tony couldn't let that happen.

He could almost see the wheels turning in Cap's brain. His gaze went from Tony to Rhodey and then to Bruce, all of whom stared back, silent. Then he was back to Tony, and the man watched it click. He had been expecting anger or judgment. Not the sorrow and weariness that took over the soldier's face. "Peter?" He asked, his tone begging someone to tell him no. Tony just nodded, wiping irritably at his eyes when a tear finally escaped. Rhodey stepped forward then, dropping a hand on Tony's shoulder.

"How is he?" He asked again.

"I couldn't...I was afraid I'd..." He shook his head, swallowing back nausea.

"Come on." Rhodey urged, leading him out of the room and through another door that led to a separate room, this one smaller with a couple of tables set up. "Friday, soundproof."

"Yes, sir."

Tony felt his legs give out, and Rhodey hurried to wrap his arm around him, easing him down into a chair. He was shaking, all the while telling himself how stupid this was. How idiotic. Needless. He heard his own father's voice, telling him how weak he was being. Peter wasn't even hurt that bad. There was no need for him to be acting like this. "Fri, can you get Bruce to check on Peter?" His friend asked the ceiling.

"Yes, sir."

"Okay, Tones. Peter's going to be okay. Bruce is going to take a look at him. Now talk to me."

"I didn't want to yell at him." He choked out, knowing he owed his friend that much. "I...I was afraid I'd start screaming. I can't be like him. Not with Peter."

"Tones, hey. Look at me." Rhodey urged, and after a second, he did. "Howard was an asshole. And you are nothing like him. You love that kid, and you show it better than your father ever did. You love him enough to protect him. You spend time with him. Hell, everyone that's seen you two together just assume that he's your secret love child, and you certainly don't argue. Neither does he. Peter loves you so much, Tony. He calls you 'dad' half the time."

Tony let out a shuddering breath, wiping a hand over his eyes. "And look, I'm not saying that having a superhero for a kid is ever going to be easy. If anything, now you know how I feel watching your stupid ass decide to fly around in a tin can so he could fight crime." Tony snorted. "But you built him a suit to protect him. Yeah, he needs some more training...and we can give him that."

"So...you don't think he should be in trouble?" Rhodey rolled his eyes.

"Uh no. The kid ditched school, blatantly disobeyed you, and got himself hurt because he was in the middle of a fight he wasn't ready for. He should definitely be in trouble. But just because he's in trouble doesn't mean you don't love him. As long as you make sure he knows that, you guys are going to be fine."

Tony took a deep breath, wiping his eyes and nodding. "You know, you aren't going to be his favorite uncle anymore when he finds out that you're the reason he's grounded." Rhodey chuckled, patting him firmly on the shoulder.
"Go talk to him, Tony. You got this."

Knowing he was right, Tony nodded. He needed to talk to the kid. Really talk to him. Because he wasn't going to hurt him. Wasn't going to scream at him. He wasn't his father. He was Peter's father. And they were going to be fine.

Tony stepped into Peter's bedroom after tapping on his partially open door, finding Bruce sitting right next to his kid. Bruce glanced up, expression grim, and Tony felt his heart drop. Peter looked bad...pale and almost sick. Had something happened? Was he sick? Maybe there had been an injury that he'd missed. Was that possible? Could Friday and Karen both have missed something?

"I'm going to grab you a tray of food," Bruce told Peter softly, patting the kid's knee, then passed Tony with a half smile. Immediately, Tony was sitting beside Peter on the bed, a hand pressed to his forehead. He didn't feel hot, but the bags under his eyes were dark and almost bruise-like, letting Tony know that Peter hadn't gotten even close to enough sleep the night before. Not to mention the fact that he was shaking. Tony knew he should have insisted the kid stay home that day. He opened his mouth to ask if he was feeling okay, but before he could get the question out, Peter was speaking, tripping over his words that came out in a rush.

"I won't do it again. Please...I'm sorry. I won't...I won't do it...I didn't...". He cut himself off with a whimper, pressing his hand to his mouth and squeezing his eyes shut. "Don't make me...please don't...don't send..."

Tony understood exactly what he was asking, and it made him want to throw up. Moving to sit closer to the kid, he wrapped his arms around him, closing his eyes when Peter burrowed against his side. "I'm not sending you away, Peter." He murmured. "Never. No matter what. You're my kid and I love you. Always. I would never make you leave." The boy seemed to go boneless at that, sobbing into Tony's shirt as his head dropped forward. So the whole time Tony had been gone, Peter has been worrying himself sick. "You're my kid, Peter. I love you...so much. And seeing you hurt like that...I was freaking out. I thought...I was afraid that..." He closed his eyes, hiding his face in Peter's hair. "I was afraid that you were hurt. Really hurt." Peter gripped his shirt, staying as close as he could. "I don't know what I'd do without you, Pete. I just...you're my kid." He thought that if he kept saying it, the boy would get it. Would understand how important he was to him.

"I'm sorry," Peter whispered, voice breaking, and Tony felt his kid's tears soak into his shirt. "Dad, I'm so sorry."

"I know. You're okay. I mean, you're definitely in trouble, but you're okay." Peter nodded, struggling to catch his breath. Tony continued to rub his back, pulling the blankets up around him and holding him as he reclined against the pillows. "As soon as you eat something, you can sleep for a while, kiddo. I know you didn't sleep much last night."

"Okay." Peter nodded, slumped against his side. Any other time, Tony would have worried about his easy acceptance of that, but at the moment, he was more worried about the fact that the boy was exhausted and hurt.

"And when you wake up, how about we go ahead and execute that plan." Peter glanced up at him in confusion and Tony sighed, realizing that he needed to tell Peter what he'd done. Would the kid still want to be held by him once he knew? "I was, uh...yelling at Steve and I...I told him that Spiderman was my son."

Peter blinked up at him, a strange look passing over his face, and then he was hiding his face in Tony's side again. "Pete?"
"Okay." He whispered, sniffing a little, and Tony felt sick. He'd made the kid cry? Again?

"I'm sorry, Peter. If you aren't ready then we can…"

"No. No...we should just tell them. I think...I mean, I'm ready for them to know." Tony nodded, not sure why the kid was crying but not about to ask and upset him even more.

"Alright, Pete." Just then, Bruce stepped into the room, tapping his knuckles against the door, and Peter hurried to wipe his eyes. Tony sat up a little, shielding him so he could try to pull himself together a little. "Yum. What did you bring me?"

"You? Nothing." He made a wounded noise, smiling when Peter laughed behind him. "But for Peter, I bought lasagna."

"Thanks, Bruce." The boy murmured, sitting up a little more, and Tony took the tray, holding it as Peter got situated.

"Sure, Pete." Bruce hesitated, then looked up at Tony. "The team is debriefing. Steve didn't say anything." Tony nodded.

"Good. I'll be down in just a minute."

"Alright. Rest up, Peter." The man ordered, shutting the door behind him, and Peter stared at his tray of food.

"Eat, kiddo. I'm going to head down and meet with the others. Maybe we can have that meeting tomorrow. Sound okay?" Peter nodded, moving his fork around the plate. "Eat." He ordered again, gently cupping the back of Peter's neck. "I'll check on you later, but try to get some sleep when you're done. I'll have Friday looking out for you. Tell her if you need anything."

"Okay." Peter murmured, and Tony pulled him to his side, careful not to mess up the tray.

"I love you, kid. We'll talk later."

"Love you too." Squeezing Peter one last time, the man pulled himself to his feet, shutting his kid's door as quietly as he could behind him.

"Watch him, Fri." He ordered.

"Yes, sir."
The Big Reveal

Tony was sitting at the head of the table, hands on the table, fingers laced as he stole glances at Peter. Beside him, dressed in the suit with the mask on, Peter had to fight the urge to fidget. Drum his fingers. Jiggle his leg. But Tony was taking calm, even breaths, not looking worried at all. On Peter's right was Rhodey, dressed in sweatpants and a black t-shirt, and on Tony's other side was Thor who wore something similar, both of which made Peter feel strange to be in his suit. He hadn't been going for a dramatic reveal or anything. But he'd wanted to make sure they believed him when he told them who he was. He didn't want to have to explain.

The others filed in slowly, Vision and Wanda first, then Natasha. Clint and Sam. Then Steve who paused in his steps, eyes widening for a moment. But then the man just looked sad. Tired. Then he nodded, giving a soft smile that Peter wouldn't have thought him capable of. He lifted a hand, saluting a little. "Hey Cap." The man chuckled a little, dropping into a chair across from him and nodding a hello.

"Spidey."

Loki joined them next, sitting beside his brother after giving Peter a long look, and the boy wondered if anyone would object to the Asgardian joining what seemed to be an official Avengers meeting. But no one said anything as Bruce joined them, and then they were all there, sitting around a round table, the huge window behind them showing the city skyline on a warm, April day. It was getting warmer outside every day, and Peter wondered briefly if Tony would care if he went out to do some patrolling later...then again, he doubted it. He had thought about trying to sneak out, but he was sure the trouble he'd get into wouldn't be worth it.

Tony had insisted he stay home from school and had made him a huge breakfast that morning, including waffles, sausage, bacon, eggs, and muffins, which Peter had mentioned might be overkill, but then he'd eaten two whole plates full of food, and Tony had given him a smug, satisfied smile. Then Thor had joined them and had eaten the rest of the food, asking Peter if he had recovered and generally being pretty nice about the fact that Peter was actually Spiderman.

He just hoped that the rest of the guys were as nice about it. Steve seemed okay, and that's who he was most worried about. Sure the man looked unhappy, but not angry. And as far as Peter knew, he hadn't said anything to Tony about it. Of course, there was always time. His senses were pretty quiet, though, so although his heart was racing and his palms were a little sweaty, the fact that Tony was surrounded by Thor, Loki, Rhodey, and Peter himself made him feel a lot better. He knew his fears were irrational. He knew that no one was going to hurt Tony.

But he'd lost everyone else. He couldn't lose Tony. Not now. Not when the man was everything he had left...not when Tony had told Captain America that Peter was his son. His son. And of wasn't like he hadn't done it before...he'd said it to Flash's father in the principal's office. But still...Peter hadn't been someone's son since he was little...it had been years. He'd been a nephew, and that had been great. He'd loved his aunt and uncle so much...he still did. But now...Tony was all he had left and Tony had told him that he loved him. Had said from the beginning that he wanted to adopt him. And now, Tony Stark, Iron Man, had told Captain America that Peter Parker, a nobody kid from Queens who had lucked his way into some cool powers, was his son. Not his ward. Not just his 'kid.' His son. That word held more meaning somehow. Son. Peter wanted to be his son. He wanted Tony to be his father.
2 more months until Father's Day. He really needed to get together with Ned and go over his plans.

"Alright, everyone. Let's get this thing started." Tony spoke, slapping a hand down onto the table. Immediately, everyone was quiet, eyes going to Tony, a few of them glancing over at Peter. Peter, who was still wearing his mask and who felt kind of dumb. "First order of business." He gestured with a hand towards Peter. "Spidey. He's going to be working with us more and we thought it was time we let everyone know exactly who it was we're letting on the team. He's not officially an Avenger yet, but he will be."

And then, all eyes were on him. Tony had asked if Peter wanted him to introduce him before he took the mask off, but Peter had said that he wanted to show them first. Now he was regretting it as everyone stared at him. The Avengers. The Avengers were all staring at him, and even though he knew all of them, and even though some of them already knew who he was, he still felt his heart beating too loudly in his chest. A hand landed on his knee, and he glanced over to find Rhodey smiling at him, giving him a quick nod.

Taking a deep breath and hoping he didn't look like a terrified kid, he grabbed the mask, pulling it off and giving a brief smile. "Hey, everyone."

The others were silent for a moment, and when Peter chanced a look around, it was Clint who looked the most upset, eyes laser ing in on Tony. But Steve spoke up before he could open his mouth. "How long have you been Spiderman, Peter?" He wondered. Peter was glad he'd spoken first...he'd already known, so he wasn't as shocked. Then again, Natasha didn't look shocked either.

"Um...since I was fourteen. Got bit by a radioactive spider on a field trip and…" He shrugged. "I wanted to do something good." The man gave a small, almost rueful smile as he nodded. Natasha didn't look surprised for some reason, while Sam seemed stunned.

"Fourteen?" Sam repeated, eyebrows raised. "What the hell kind of field trip was that, kid?"

"Uh, we went to Oscorp."

"They had radioactive superpower spiders at Oscorp? While children are there?"

Peter felt his cheeks heat up. "Well, I...uh...I kind of...wandered off." Sam snorted.

"Yeah? And your dad didn't sue them for all they were worth?" The man asked with a chuckle. Peter flinched a little, eyes dropping. Tony. His dad. He hadn't known Tony then. Only Ben. And because of him...because of his powers, Ben had died.

"Doesn't matter." Tony cut in. "Peter isn't an Avenger yet, but he's going to be working with us sometimes..."

"He's fifteen years old." Clint cut in, voice hard. Out of everyone, he was the only one who looked angry. Everyone else looked...surprised. Maybe a little sad, which Peter didn't get. Sam look impressed, honestly. But Clint looked furious, and it took everything in Peter's body not to stand up...to block Tony from whatever angry thing Clint was about to say. But Tony put a hand on Peter's shoulder, grounding him. "We're going to let a fifteen-year-old kid on the team?"

"This fifteen-year-old can kick your ass, Barton," Tony told him, just a little bit of warning in his voice.

"This is the life you want for your son, Stark?" The archer asked, incredulous. "This life is dangerous and it sucks and he is a child. Since when do the Avengers recruit child-soldiers?"
"He is not a child soldier." Tony snapped.

"Yeah? You give your fourteen-year-old son a super-suit and let him run around the city fighting crime? What the hell kind of parent…"

Peter jumped up then, eyes hard, fists clenched as he glared at the man. "Don't talk to him like that." He growled, well aware of the absolute silence surrounding him.

"Pete…" Tony started, but he ignored him.

"Kid, you don't…" Clint started, softening a little, but Peter plowed on.

"I started doing this long before I met Tony. He built this suit to keep me safe! I was doing this alone when he came along, and he made me a suit and an AI and he looked out for me. He saved my life...made sure I didn't have to do this alone." Clint blinked, swallowing hard. "I'm not a child soldier. I got these powers...I have the ability to help people. And if I don't...if I don't at least try to help people when bad things happen, and I have the power to…"

"I get it, Peter." Steve cut in when he trailed off. "That's why we're all here, isn't it?" The man asked, glancing over at Clint mildly.

"He's a child." The spy reminded him again as if everyone didn't already know.

Before Peter could be offended, the Black Widow spoke up. "So we look out for him." Natasha cut in, giving Peter a quick smile. "He can be a junior Avenger. Avenger in training."

"I guess we needed a mascot." Sam cut in with a chuckle, and Tony smirked as he pulled Peter down by his arm, urging him to sit back down. "Might win us some points with the public."

"That was the idea," Tony told them, one hand still on Peter's shoulder. "Well, not making him a mascot. But...junior Avenger. Avenger in training. He's stronger than all of you, but some training wouldn't hurt."

Peter couldn't argue with that, but he still felt his cheeks up a little, embarrassed at being called out like that. Tony squeezed his shoulder though, giving him a quick smile. "I think that can be arranged." Steve put in. "We used to have training sessions several times a week. I think maybe it's time we start it up again. This time, you can join in. How does that sound?" Peter nodded, trying not to look too eager. But Captain America had just asked him if he wanted to train with the Avengers. So...yeah...that sounded good.

"Yeah...yeah. Okay." Tony chuckled a little beside him.

"Good. We can start next week."

And that was that. Everyone knew. Everyone knew that Peter was Spiderman and no one was angry...okay, so Clint hadn't been happy at first. And maybe Clint still wasn't happy. But nothing terrible had happened. No one had attacked anyone...no one had been hurt. Or tried to hurt Tony. Honestly, it had all been a bit anticlimactic, Peter thought as he made his way back to his room to change. He pressed the emblem on his chest, shutting his bedroom door behind him, then stepping out of his suit.

Peter had expected things to be a little different once the whole team knew who he was, but honestly...they weren't. Not really. The next morning he was eating breakfast in the kitchen when Tony told him that Steve and Sam were moving back into the tower as well. Clint would be staying there part-time, as he apparently had a family somewhere upstate. So...that was just about everyone.
They would all be moving back into the Tower. Peter would be living with the Avengers. "If that's okay with you."

Peter blinked at his cheerios then glanced up at Tony who was eating his way through his own bowl of cheerios. "What?"

Tony furrowed his brow, putting his spoon down. "I said, if that's okay with you."

"We can't...uh...we can't just tell them they can't live here." Tony lifted an eyebrow. "I mean...can we?"

"It's my tower." The man reminded him, taking another bite. Peter glanced at the clock and hurried to follow suit. He was going to be late if he didn't hurry. "They're going to be on their own floor, so everyone will still have their own space." That was fine with Peter. Even though Thor and Bruce and Loki came over plenty of mornings to eat with them, and sometimes they went down to the common floor for other meals, Peter found it comforting to know that they had their own floor...like their own home. It made him feel safer, even though he knew that he didn't really have to worry.

"Kid?"

"Huh?" He asked, rubbing a hand over his face. He hadn't had any nightmares, but it was also ridiculously early and he hadn't exactly gone to bed at a reasonable hour. Ned had been texting him all night about his birthday that weekend, which Ned somehow thought was going to be a huge, Avengers themed party. Peter honestly wasn't sure what was going to happen...he knew that Tony had gotten him something and that there might be something parrot themed. He also knew that Ned and MJ were coming over. When asked if he'd wanted to invite anyone else, Peter had shaken his head. It would be his first birthday since...since May. He didn't want anything big. Didn't want to do anything, honestly.

"You alright?"

"Yeah. Yeah, just...uh...I'd better go. I need to find my backpack before school."

"You didn't leave it at school?" The man asked, looking confused.

"No...my suit was inside. So I kind of...webbed it to the wall in an alley." Tony lifted an eyebrow. "And then I...uh...forgot about it." He snorted then.

"Yeah, alright. Text me if you can't find it. I can write you a note or something if you need to replace your books. And maybe stop leaving your backpack in random alleys? Not that I can't buy you as many backpacks as you want but still." Peter laughed, dumping his bowl in the sink and pocketing his phone. Tony stood up, reaching out and throwing an arm around him and pulling him to his side. "Seriously, text me if you need another backpack. I'll get you an Iron Man one." He didn't ruffle Peter's hair since the boy had slicked it back and combed it, but he did put his hand on the back of Peter's neck, squeezing gently. "Actually, why don't you let me give you a ride?"

"Don't you have meetings or something?"

"Not for a few hours." Tony put his own bowl in the sink then grabbed his keys from the kitchen counter. "Come on, Pete. Let's explore the alleys of New York."

Peter gave him directions to the alley, jumping out of the car when Tony pulled over, but his backpack wasn't there. "Dammit." He grumbled, crossing his arms and glaring at the empty wall beside the dumpster.

"It's fine, Pete. I'll get you another one." He remembered that Thai restaurant then...remembered
telling May that he needed a new backpack. Remembered her expression. Remembered feeling
guilty. And then a hand was on his shoulder. "What's going on, kid? Talk to me."

"Nothing," Peter swallowed hard, then took a deep breath. "I just...uh...I'd better go. I'm going to be
late."

"Pete," Tony turned him around, both hands on his shoulders and looking at him a little closer.
"What's going on?"

"I'm just...the last time I lost a backpack and...my birthday's coming up and..." The man's face
softened and Peter went on. "I was just thinking about May." Tony nodded, patting Peter on the
shoulder.

"Yeah?"

"I...I miss her."

"I know, bud." Peter leaned his head forward, resting it on Tony's shoulder for a second. The man
put his hand on Peter's back, rubbing circles there for a second, not pulling away until Peter did.

"I'd better go. Maybe they'll let me turn my work in late."

"Alright, kid. I'll write you a note and grab you a new backpack. Maybe I can stock up so I have
plenty on hand for next time." Peter had to smile a little as he climbed back into the car. "What do
you think, Pete? Should I buy out a backpack warehouse? Do you get backpacks at a warehouse?
Where did you get your last backpack?"

"Uh...Walmart." Tony lifted an eyebrow. "What? It was only seven dollars."

"Right." The man snorted. "Well, I'm sure I can swing that. Here you go, Pete." The man pulled into
the circle at the front of the school right in front of the front door. "I'll see you right after school?"

"Yeah," Peter muttered, reminded of the conversation they'd had the day before. He'd woken up that
morning, hoping against hope that Tony had somehow forgotten the fact that Peter had openly
disobeyed him and was supposed to be grounded. But after breakfast he'd lead Peter down to the lab,
considering they'd had a few hours before the Avengers meeting where Peter would tell everyone
who he was, and as Tony had begun bringing up the stats for his ripped up suit, the man had turned
to him.

"So...how are you feeling?"

"Oh...I'm okay. I mean, I feel fine." Tony had nodded.

"Good. Then you're feeling up for a talk?" Peter's stomach had dropped then, but he'd nodded.

"Okay." He'd whispered. Tony had moved to his side, dropping a hand on his shoulder. He'd known
that Tony wasn't going to send him away...wasn't going to make him leave. That had been his
biggest fear after the man had carried him back to his room, patched him up a little, and then left,
having barely spoken a word. That had been terrifying...to watch the man walk out of his room
without so much as a backward glance. Bruce had come into his room after Tony had left, giving
him a quick checkup and asking if he'd needed anything. But Peter had been inconsolable. Sure that
he'd screwed everything up. Sure that this would be the last straw...that Tony wouldn't want him
around anymore. But then the man had come back, wrapping his arms around him and promising
that he would never send him away. That he loved him.
"You know you're grounded, right?" Tony had asked, voice serious but not unkind. Peter had nodded, muttering a 'yeah.' "No Spiderman for a week. You can go to school, but that's it."

"Okay." He'd murmured, staring despondently at the suit that they would work together to repair. Since then, he'd thought about sneaking out after school and logging a few hours as Spiderman, but he knew that man kept pretty close tabs on him. Besides, he wasn't about to jeopardize his place with Tony. No matter what the man said...he couldn't risk being sent away. Couldn't lose Tony. Couldn't lose the only family he had left. He had to be careful. So he would go to school and come right back and he wouldn't complain. Of course, the man had told him, that didn't apply to his birthday as Tony already had something planned. Otherwise, it was the tower and school.

"I love you, kiddo. You sure you don't need a ride home?" Peter shook his head, pulled back to the present as he opened the car door.

"Nah. I can take the subway. I'll come right home." The man's face softened, and he reached out, squeezing his shoulder.

"I know you will, kid. I trust you. I'll see you later."

"Bye…" Peter hesitated, turning back with a quick, hesitant smile. "I love you too." Tony smiled, waving as Peter shut the door behind him, hurrying toward the school and hoping to catch up with Ned before class. He'd only taken a couple of steps toward the school, however, when he heard someone calling for him. Hesitating, he looked around for a minute, then found the source of the call coming from the student parking lot.

"Hey! Parker!" Peter frowned, turning and finding Flash of all people waving him over to his car...the one his father had bought him after Peter had wrecked his other one. Accidently. Peter hesitated, glancing over at Tony who was pulling out of the traffic circle and onto the street, then, checking his phone to make sure he wasn't going to be late, he hurried over to Flash's car. He doubted the guy was going to attack him or anything, but he was still confused as to why he would want to talk to him.

"Dude, class starts in ten minutes. What…" Peter froze. Flash was leaning against the passenger side of his car, passenger door open, and in the front, propped up against the seat, was Peter's backpack. He glanced from the backpack to Flash who nodded to him, face unreadable as he jerked his chin in the air.

"Sup, Spiderman."
"Sup, Spiderman." The words made Peter's stomach drop, eyes going wide as he struggled to maintain some kind of poker face. He could do this. He had to. There was no way Flash actually knew. Because Flash couldn't know. Because if Flash knew, then surely everyone would know soon. And Peter had lost his aunt and he'd been outed as Tony's ward and he now had to worry about the paparazzi following him when he went out. He didn't know what he would do if he lost his secret identity too.

"Wha...what do you mean? Where did...where did you get...my backpack?" Peter asked, pointing at his backpack, getting to class on time suddenly the last thought on his mind. It probably would have been more convincing if his voice hadn't squeaked.

Flash lifted an eyebrow, face still flat. "Found it in an alley."

"But...like...why would you say I'm...Spiderman? Like, that's crazy, dude." Peter gave a weak laugh, but Flash just stared at him, making his stomach drop, and the laugh trailed off into awkward silence. "Anyway, thanks for grabbing my backpack. I was scared I'd lost it. We'd better get to..." He started to reach for the bac, but Flash stepped sideways and blocked his way, arms crossed. "Dude, I need to get to class."

"I followed you." Peter blinked, throat going dry.

"Wh….where? Followed me where?" He asked, trying to look confused. Trying to look like things weren't clicking into place.

"I saw you running down the hall and I said I had to go to the bathroom." The other boy told him calmly.

"But...I….why…." He shook his head. "Flash…"

"You were gone by the time I caught up. This was webbed to the wall."

"Oh, well...um...Spiderman could have...could have webbed it. To the wall. Like, if he happened to run across a backpack on the ground and…” Flash's expression hadn't changed. "...and, you know...not wanted it to get stolen. So…" He waved a hand at the backpack. "Anyway, I've got to go…” Flash didn't move. "Dude...give me my backpack."

"Make me."

Peter felt a flare of irritation. "Seriously, Flash…"

"No, seriously, Spiderman. Make me. You're strong enough."

"Stop calling me…”

"Spiderman? Why? Isn't that what you call yourself?"

"No! Because I'm not Spiderman. I just...he must have found my backpack and webbed it to the wall to keep it safe." Even to himself, that sounded like the stupidest thing he'd ever said. Flash lifted an eyebrow, letting Peter know exactly what the other boy thought of what he was saying. Peter took a
deep breath, glancing around the now empty parking lot as the bell rang. He was late. Flash knew, and he wasn't going to let this go.

"Have you told anyone?" The other boy scoffed.

"Of course not. As if anyone would believe me anyway." Flash rolled his eyes but Peter saw something else on his face. Remorse? Maybe.

"Are you going to?" Flash met his eyes then, jaw tight.

"Why would you keep it a secret?" Peter glanced around once more and Flash stepped aside, gesturing to the open car door. "Get in." Peter hesitated, then climbed into the car, placing his backpack on the ground between his feet. Both boys shut their doors, and then Peter turned to Flash, surprised at how serious the other boy looked.

"Because I wanted to protect my friends and family." He told him, opting for honesty. "If the people I stopped found out who I was, they might hurt the people I love." Of course, the Vulture knew. Mr. Toomes. But so far, it seemed like he hadn't told anyone, which Peter hoped never changed.

Instead of making a joke or something like Peter had expected, Flash just nodded, eyes dropping for a second. When he looked back up, the curiosity in his expression rivaled Ned's. "So, how did it happen? You haven't always been cool."

Peter rolled his eyes, unable to help the quick smile. "The field trip to Oscorp."

"You weren't in school the next day." Peter nodded. "So that's when you...like...turned into a mutant or something?"

"Yeah."

"Shit, Parker." He muttered, snorting a little. "So the internship?"

"Uh, yeah. It was...me being Spiderman."

"So you really knew Tony Stark?"

"Yeah. He made me the suit."

Flash shook his head, leaning back against the seat. "That's why he adopted you?" Peter flinched at that, dropping his eyes. Tony hadn't adopted him. Not yet.

"Um...he's my guardian." Peter clarified. "And yeah, because he knew me...and uh...May too."

They sat in silence for a while, staring straight ahead. Peter thought about getting out of the car...trying to get to class before he was marked absent. But it didn't seem right, somehow, to just leave on his own without finishing this conversation.

"Who else knows?"

"Just Ned And MJ." And the Avengers, he thought about saying, but he didn't want to talk about the Avengers with Flash. Not right now. He didn't entirely trust Flash, even though the other boy was being pretty cool about all this.

His phone buzzed in his pocket and he pulled it out, glancing at the text from Ned asking where he
was. He sent him an answer, letting him know that he had gotten held up, vowing to give him the whole story later. He hadn't really given Ned the full story about what had happened after the alien attack, and he knew that both Ned and MJ would have questions. "You told them?" Flash asked.

"Ned caught me in the suit. I told MJ."

More silence. Peter knew that he couldn't force Flash to keep his secret. Although it probably wouldn't make Peter seem like any more of a loser, Flash still might want to out him. But despite what his father was like and despite all of the name-calling and taunting and unfriendly competition, Peter has started to believe that maybe, just maybe, Flash could be a decent person.

"Are you ever going to tell anyone else?" He sighed.

"I don't know."

Flash looked like he wanted to say something more...like he needed to ask something. Several times over the next few minutes, he opened his mouth and then closed it. School had started almost a half hour ago. Finally, Flash spoke. "Why?"

"Why?" Peter repeated, knowing what Flash was getting at but not sure how to answer it.

"You, a total loser, go on a field trip and get superpowers. And then...you just anonymously start saving people around Queens in a crappy homemade suit? Then Tony freaking Stark shows up and you get a new suit...and you still don't tell anyone. Not even at school. Do you know how popular you could be? You're Spiderman, Parker. Like..." Flash made an almost frustrated gesture and Peter shook his head.

"It's not about that."

"Then why?" He sighed, running a hand through his hair as his phone vibrated in his pocket again. Figuring it was Ned again, he ignored it.

"Because..." Peter hesitated, eyes darting out the window. The parking lot was full of cars but empty of other people. "Because my uncle always told me that if if you have the power to stop bad things from happening but you don't...then when bad things happen, they happen because of you." Flash just stared at him, silent. "Look, I have these powers, and if I just used them to show off at school or sat at home...and then people got hurt...when I could have helped them..." He trailed off, shrugging uncomfortably. "I just...I feel like that would make it my fault."

"You can't protect everyone, Parker," Flash told him, refusing to make eye contact, but his words were sincere. "Surely your new...guardian told you that."

Peter blinked, dropping his eyes to his lap as he needed. "Yeah...he did." And Tony had. More than once. But it was strange to hear those words from Flash, his high school bully and rival. The one who'd punched him in the face and called him 'Penis Parker' and had once tried to actually shove him into a locker. Like they were in an eighties movies about high school bullying. That guy was sitting in a car with him and who knew what was probably his biggest secret and telling him that he couldn't protect everyone...in a really nice way.

Before either of them could speak, Peter's phone was vibrating again, over and over, and he pulled it out, surprised that it was Tony calling. "Crap." He muttered, hitting the answer button. Flash, who had leaned over a little to glance at the screen, sat back in his seat, eyes wide. "Hey, Tony." He answered, voice a little sheepish.

"Hey, Pete. Wanna tell me why your school just called and told me that you never showed up when
I dropped you off in the parking lot?" Tony didn't sound angry. More...concerned. Peter hated that he'd worried him. He was always worrying him.

"Yeah. Um...I...got distracted."

"Distracted like you're going to get to class soon or distracted like you need help." The man asked.

"Distracted like..." He glanced at Flash. "Someone knows who I am."

Immediately Tony's voice went hard. Serious. Ready for action. "I'm on my way back."

"No...you don't...it's Flash." There was a pause. "But, uh...on the bright side, I don't need a new backpack."

"He found your backpack webbed to a wall, didn't he?" The man asked with what sounded like a wry smile. Peter sighed.

"Yeah."

"Maybe you should consider a different method for hiding your backpacks." He suggested. Peter almost groaned.

"Yeah."

"You want me to talk to him?" Tony asked.

"No...it's fine. He's...he's not going to tell." Peter glanced over at Flash who nodded. "He's not."

"Okay. You going to head to class?"

"Yeah...we're on our way." He knew Tony had something else to say...could imagine the contemplative look on his face. How he'd hesitate before speaking.

"Are you sure you can trust him, Pete?"

Honestly? No. Maybe. Peter wasn't sure. Not really. But he didn't see another choice that didn't involve bringing Iron Man into it. Locking eyes with Flash, he nodded. "I can trust him. He won't tell."

The two of them hurried to class, grabbing tardy slips from the front office. "You going to get in trouble?" Flash asked as they made their way down the hall. The two had their first period together and Peter adjusted his backpack strap, hitching it higher on his back. "With Tony Stark?"

"No...he's not mad," Peter told him, wondering why he kept referring to Tony by his full name. He glanced over at Flash, then, the next words feeling strange in his mouth. "Will you?"

"Probably." He didn't ask any more questions, and the two reached the classroom, halfway through the lesson. Their teacher gave them a warning look but accepted the slips of paper, pointing them to their seats. Peter hurried to his desk beside Ned, pulling out his notebook and opening it to the latest page, glancing over at his friend's notes to try and catch up.

He didn't get a chance to talk to Ned until after class, the two of them walking with their heads together as they headed to their lockers, Peter ditching some of his books before his next class. "So...held up?" Ned asked, lifting his eyebrows and obviously hoping for some cool Spiderman stories.
"Flash knows." He muttered, and it was almost funny to watch the blood drain from Ned's face.

"Are you serious? What the hell...how...what happened? You just ran out of class and the Avengers were fighting those aliens and then..." Ned shook his head, looking thoroughly overwhelmed. "What's going on?"

"Okay, so first, aliens. No idea how that happened. But I kind of got hurt. I'm fine but...I'm also kind of grounded."

"Grounded? Tony Stark grounded you?"

"Second, Flash found my backpack. He saw me leaving school and followed me."

"Creepy." Ned cut in, and Peter had to smile. He should have texted Ned more when he was stuck at home, but he'd been kind of busy outing himself to the Avengers. "Wait...you said you got hurt. Are you sure you're okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. And Flash isn't going to tell."

"Are you sure about that? Because he regularly calls you Penis Parker. Plus he punched you in the face several times a few months ago."

"He won't tell."

Just then the bell rang, and Peter flinched at the noise, rubbing a hand over his face and Ned changed the subject. "So, grounded...does that mean you don't get to celebrate your birthday Saturday?" He asked, hurrying along beside him as they headed for their next class.

"No...you and MJ can still come over."

"Will the Avengers be there? Wait...is it going to be a big party? Is there going to be a band? Holy shit did Mr. Stark get Fall Out Boy to play at your birthday, Pete?" He snorted, shoving his friend off carefully when Ned shook his shoulder, practically jumping in place beside him.

"I don't know, no, and probably not. I don't think Tony knows who Fall Out Boy is."

"But he could totally get them for your birthday?" For just a second, Peter imagined asking. And it was with a strange, warm feeling in his chest that he realized that yeah, Tony would probably get pretty much any band he wanted to play for him for his birthday if Peter asked. Tony was rich. Richer than rich. There was almost nothing he couldn't buy. Not that Peter cared much about that. Mostly, he just cared that he loved the man like he'd loved his uncle. That he wanted Tony to be his father and that hopefully, Tony wanted the same thing.

Tony was the one to pick him up from school that day. He hadn't brought his suit, mostly because he hadn't had his backpack, but also because he was grounded. Still, he was surprised to find Tony there. Usually, it was Happy. But the man smiled at him as Peter climbed into the passenger seat, and Peter wasn't surprised to realize that he was glad it was Tony. Not that he didn't like Happy...since Tony had taken him in, Happy had been a lot nicer to him. Still, he was always glad to see Tony. "Nice backpack." Peter smiled a bit, running a hand over his face and fighting a yawn. "Long day?"

"Yeah." And it really, really had been. Catching up on stuff he'd missed the day before. Trying to catch Ned and MJ up on everything that had happened and explaining that Mr. Stark had grounded him from being Spiderman because he'd gotten hurt and kind of blatantly disobeyed him. And then he'd told him about the Avengers between classes and whispered while the teacher's back was turned. At lunch, the three had huddled together and Peter had answered questions, mostly Ned's.
And now all he wanted to do was sleep. But he had a lot of homework to do so...sleep probably wasn't going to happen for a while.

"All of your stuff inside?"

"Mhm."

"You gonna nap on the way home?" Peter laughed a little, closing his eyes and not moving when Tony ruffled his hair, the hand remaining on his head for a moment, sliding back to the back of his neck and squeezing.

"Maybe."

Tony was quiet for a moment, the only sound in the car the rock music on low. "Are you sure about Flash? Because I've met that kid's dad and if he's anything like that asshole…"

"He isn't." Peter grimaced, eyes still shut. "Okay, he kind of is. But not, like...as bad. He was cool about it. And he didn't…" Peter trailed off, sighing softly as Tony placed his hand on his shoulder instead. "I don't think he's going to tell anyone."

"Alright, kid. It's your secret. If you think we can trust him, we trust him. But if he starts causing problems, Iron Man might have to have a chat with him."

"Sounds fair," Peter told him with a smile.

"So...do you want to invite him to your party?" Peter snorted then, opening his eyes and grinning over at the man.

"Yeah...I don't think we're there yet."

Tony chuckled. "Good. Because if Loki was in the same room with the kid that broke your nose, we might have a problem."

"Wait...is Loki going to be at my birthday..." He trailed off and Tony lifted an eyebrow.

"...party?" He prompted. "Did you just forget the word 'party'? Should I be concerned?" Peter was struck then by the fact that Tony, too, looked happy to be in a car with him. Even though Peter had disobeyed him and was grounded at the moment. Tony looked happy to see him. That thought made him smile, shaking his head as he answered the man's question.

"No, uh...I just...I didn't think it was a party. I mean, Ned and MJ are coming to the tower but I figured you wouldn't want, like...an actual party at the tower."

"You thought I wouldn't want a party? Me? Tony Stark? I thought you'd looked me up before. No one does parties like Tony Stark, kid."

He grinned. "But it's not that kind of party, Tony. It's, like...a normal party. For a high schooler. And I've only got 2 friends coming."

"Oh. Well, the rest of the Avengers are going to be pretty hurt that you don't consider them friends but it'll be funny to watch you tell them so..."

"Wait! The Avengers are actually coming to my birthday party?"

"They do live in the building." Peter kept staring at him until Tony chuckled. "Yes, Pete. They hounded me until I agreed to let them stop by. I tried telling them that you wouldn't want a bunch of
old people at your party but..." He shrugged, glancing over at Peter with a soft smile. "They like you, kid. They want to celebrate with you."

"I don't know if Ned is going to be able to keep himself together when he meets all of the Avengers at once."

"Eh, I wouldn't worry about it. They're used to fans." He paused. "But if you don't want them to come, I'll tell them. They won't be offended. It's your party, kiddo."

"No...um...it'll be cool."

As subtly as possible, he pulled out his phone, thoughts of Flash and aliens flying out of his brain. "Dude, so the Avengers ARE coming to my party." He texted Ned as fast as his fingers could move. "You've gotta be cool."

Ned's response was just a bunch of heart, excited, and explosion emojis, and, not sure how to respond to that, he pocketed his phone as Tony pulled into the parking garage. "Um...Tony?" The man turned to him, the two of them making their way to the elevator, and Peter realized not for the first time that this all seemed normal to him now. Living at the tower. Taking an elevator run by an AI to the private floor where he lived with Tony Stark and sometimes other Avengers. And Loki. "Did you guys ever figure out where those Aliens came from?"

"Loki and Thor are still looking into it." The man told him, ordering Friday to take them up to their floor. "You don't need to worry about that."

"But...aliens just appeared from nowhere and attacked New York and..."

"And that's official Avengers business, Pete."

"You invited me to join the Avengers!"

Tony snorted. "Yeah, and you said you wanted to be friendly neighborhood Spiderman."

"But..." He hated how whiny his voice had gotten, so he tried to tone it down. "But what if they come back?"

Tony softened a little. "If they come back, we'll handle it. But Loki thinks it was an isolated attack. We're looking into it."

"Who were they?"

"Chitauri. Same ones that attacked before."

"Why would they attack us?"

"Previously they attacked us at the bidding of the being I told you about before." Loki cut in, appearing out of nowhere as they turned the corner toward the kitchen.

"What I want to know is why you hang out on this floor when you and Thor have your own floor. Designed specifically for you." Tony grumbled, not looking all that put out as he grabbed an apple and tossed it to Peter who snatched it out of midair.

"And this time?"

"We are still trying to figure that out. Thor managed to capture one, and we have it in custody."
"Where?"

"That is confidential. As soon as there's something to know, I'll tell you. Okay?" Tony told him, pointing at the backpack he'd dropped onto a barstool. "Don't you have homework to catch up on." He sighed, grabbing the bag and throwing it over his shoulder.

"Yeah, fine." He threw one last hopeful look at Loki who lifted an eyebrow, and Peter wondered if he could get the information out of him or Thor later. Pulling out his phone, he headed for his room, resolving to ask Ned and MJ what they thought about all this.
Tony woke up at six am on Saturday morning thanks to an alarm he'd had set for two weeks. Everyone had gotten invitations and instructions for when to arrive, and he knew that Steve and Natasha were already down on the common floor where the party would be happening, setting up decorations. It wasn't going to be a big party...he doubted Peter would want that, mostly because he was Peter, and Peter didn't feel comfortable as the center of attention. He knew that much about the kid. But also because this would be his first birthday without May.

No matter how hard Tony tried to focus and think back, he couldn't remember a single thing about his first birthday after the death of his parents. He was sure there had been plenty of alcohol involved. Probably some women. Definitely drugs. If he asked Rhodey, his friend could probably fill him in, but he didn't really want to know.

That wouldn't be Peter. Peter would have a support system. He had friends and Tony and the team that was slowly coming back together. As much as Tony worried about the Avengers, Peter seemed to be at ease with them for the most part. That was good enough for Tony.

Some of Peter's presents were in his closet already. Tony had hung the multiple shirts up in the kid's closet the night before when Peter had been doing homework in the living room. The kid's system was kind of flawed...he tended to turn on the TV, do a couple of questions, text Ned or MJ or whoever else he texted, do some reading, then watch more TV, but as long as he got his homework done and was happy with his grades, Tony didn't care.

Peter was like Tony in that way. Self-motivated. The kid loved to learn and loved to improve...he wanted to get good grades so he did. Tony was glad...he was pretty sure he could get the kid into MIT regardless but it didn't hurt that he had an unweighted 4.0, was on his Academic Decathlon team, and had an internship with Stark Industries, although they'd need to start that up again at some point.

Pepper was still asleep for once when he woke, and he pressed a kiss to her hair before slipping out of bed and making his way to the kitchen. The party wasn't starting until eleven, and he'd already ordered enough pizza to feed everyone twice over, but breakfast was going to be homemade if it killed him.

The kid had to eat a lot. He'd known that for a long time. So when he'd planned the menu for Peter's birthday breakfast, he'd started with something he knew the kid liked: chocolate chip waffles. Then bacon. Eggs. Sausage and fruit. A lot of fruit.

Rhodey came into the room about a half hour into this endeavor, his lips turning up into a smirk when he saw that Tony was wearing his "kiss the cook" apron and trying to fry bacon while also keeping an eye on the sausage. The waffles would be last because warm waffles with butter and syrup were a must for a birthday breakfast.

"I'm here to help," Rhodey told him with a grin, pulling his sleeves up and saluting. Tony chuckled.

"Think you can cut up the fruit without losing a finger."

"That certainly would put a damper on things, huh,". He chuckled, doing as Tony had asked and chopping up strawberries which would go on the waffles. "I dropped his present off downstairs."
"When are his friends getting here?"

"Uh, I think around eleven when the party starts." He glanced over at his old friend. "What did you get him?"

Dropped it off downstairs. Guess you'll have to wait just like everyone else." Tony rolled his eyes but was distracted by Pepper who entered the room with a yawn and a tired smile. Giving her a quick kiss, he turned away from the stove for just a second before starting on the batter.

"What time does he usually get up on weekends?" Rhodey wondered.

"According to Friday, he was up all night texting Ned, so I'm guessing he'll sleep until I wake him." Tony told him with a grin. The boy had slept through the night...no nightmares, no late night trips to the gym to run on the treadmill. That meant that there had only been one nightmare that week.

He was getting better.

He'd been surprisingly non-sulky for a grounded teenager...not that the grounding affected anything but Spiderman. He was still getting his birthday party. Still got to go to the lab and help repair his suit and still made his web-formula. Still had his phone and his laptop and could still watch TV...on second thought, made Tony needed to ask someone what 'grounded' actually meant. All he knew was that the kid wasn't allowed to be Spiderman for a week. Then again, he hadn't asked to go to a friend's house or anything. Peter usually didn't...Tony figured he just stopped by and saw his friends while he was patrolling.

Breakfast was done and on the table by 7:30. Tony had gotten dressed, as had Pepper, when Tony headed to Peter's bedroom, tapping his knuckles against the door. The boy didn't respond, so he pushed the door open, glancing around the dark room. "Fri? Curtains?" He asked, and they slowly parted, flooding the room with early morning light. The kid's room was practically spotless...LEGO's pushed to the corner, backpack right beside his desk. His hamper was full of dirty clothes but otherwise, it was oddly clean for a teenager's room. Not that Tony was complaining...still, he hoped that the kid felt comfortable there.

Peter was cocooned in blankets, only his hair and one foot sticking out. Chuckling under his breath and wondering how he could love someone this much, he put a hand over the blankets where he figured the kid's back was. "Pete?"

There was a groan from the blanket cocoon.

"Don't give me that, kid. Not my fault you stayed up until 2 am texting your friend. Who you're going to see today, by the way."

The boy groaned again, swatting at him, and Tony laughed aloud, taking a seat on his bed and resting a hand on his blanket-covered form, shaking him a little. "Dad…". The boy whined, and Tony felt his whole heart melt a little.

"Time to get up, Pete." He murmured. "Breakfast is ready." At that, the boy poked a little more of his head out. "There you are. Happy Birthday, kiddo." He smiled at that, ducking his head a little.

"Thanks."

"You ready for breakfast? Rhodey and Pepper are here."

"Rhodey's here?" The boy sat up at that, and Tony pressed a hand to his chest.
"Oh, I see how it is." Peter laughed, leaning forward and placing his forehead against Tony's shoulder. He wrapped an arm around the kid, laughing along with him. "Get dressed, Pete. I'll wait for you in the kitchen."

Tony hesitated outside of Peter's closed door, listening for a moment, then grinning at the inevitable bark of laughter. Peter had found the shirts. Grinning, he shoved his hands into his pockets, ambling back to the kitchen.

Pepper and Rhodey were placing plates of food on the table when Peter emerged dressed in a shirt featuring Thor and Loki, both dressed in full, ridiculous, Asgardian costume. Rhodey lifted his eyebrows. "Wow...that...now that's a shirt."

"I think it glows in the dark," Peter told him with a grin, and Tony moved forward to wrap an arm around his shoulders.

"It sure does. Happy Birthday." He waved a hand at the spread on the table and Peter's stomach growled as if on cue. "Eat up, Pete." He invited, and the kid practically jumped to the table, all of them piling their plates high with food.

"Mm. Is so good." He mumbled around a mouth full of waffles. Tony snorted.

"Don't choke." He cautioned, taking a bite of his own food. The boy grinned, eyes shining as he dug into his waffles, and Tony caught Pepper smiling softly down at the boy.

Tony had thought about asking Peter if he wanted Tony to adopt him on his birthday. He'd even gone so far as to talk to his lawyer and see what that process would be like. Gotten them to draw up paperwork. But before he'd gotten up the nerve, he'd gone to Pepper. Because if he was going to be Peter's father, then his wife would be Peter's mother. And he wanted to be 100% sure that this was what she'd wanted.

The day before, while Peter had been at school, he'd pulled her aside, the two of them sitting in his office, their entire floor locked so Loki didn't come wandering in and overhear some more stuff that he could share with the kid. Tony was about 90% sure that Loki had told Peter more about the alien attack while he hadn't been around, but he hadn't bothered to ask. "What do you think about me asking to adopt him tomorrow?" Pepper had been quiet for a moment, so he'd rushed on. "After the party. After everyone else leaves. I wouldn't want him to say yes because people were watching. I just...". He didn't know how to explain that Peter was already his son, just like Pepper was already the love of his life.

"I think that you should wait for him to come to you." She had finally told him, a gentle hand taking his. "I think that...after all the things that have happened to him, that Peter should be in control of this." She'd placed a hand on his cheek when his face had fallen a little, lips curved into a small, sweet smile. "You've already mentioned to him that you wanted to adopt him, right?" He'd nodded. "I say, let him come to you."

And so Tony had put the papers away, vowing to listen to Pepper for the time being. He didn't want to pressure the kid. His kid. He just...he wanted Peter to be his son. Legally. Beside him at the table, Peter ate seconds, and then thirds, finally slowing down after his fourth plate. Rhodey just shook his head. "Kid eats like that and is still skinny as a rail."

"Tell me about it." Pepper lamented.

The party didn't start for a few hours, so as Rhodey and Pepper did the dishes, waving off Peter's offer to help, the two of them headed down to the lab where they worked for a while, installing
updates, messing around with the armor, and mostly just hanging out while the Avengers set up the party downstairs.

When it was finally time, Tony moved over to Peter's workstation, dropping a hand on his arm. "Alright, kiddo. You ready?"

"Uh...yeah." The kid looked nervous, so Tony took a seat beside him, waiting. "I just...". He shrugged a little. "I know I should be excited. And I am! I...". He shook his head, dropping his eyes and taking a deep breath. "I still miss her. She would have...she would have planned a party too. And...and I'll never have another birthday with her. We'll never celebrate another Christmas...I'll never get to see her again." He finished in a hoarse whisper.

Tony didn't say anything, just leaned forward and wrapped his arms around his kid. Closing his eyes, he pictured the woman's face...how she'd opened the door the first time he'd come to her apartment and had only been star struck for a few seconds before asking him if she could help him. 'I'm sorry about what happened to you. I'm sorry that you don't get to see him grow up. But I love him so much...I'm going to do the very best I can. He'll be my son.'

Peter pulled away after a second, sniffing and wiping his nose on his sleeve like a toddler, making Tony smile a little. "I'm sorry." He whispered, then immediately rolled his eyes. "I know, I know. Rule number 1."

Tony felt his face soften as he cupped the back of the kid's neck. "I love you, Pete. So much. You're the best spider kid I could have asked for." The boy laughed, cheeks turning faintly pink.

"I'm really glad that you're my dad." He whispered, not meeting Tony's eyes, and Tony wondered if it would be possible to frame that moment. To remember forever how it felt to be told by his son that he was glad to have Tony as a dad.

"I'm really glad that you're my son."

They sat for a moment, the silence warm and the best kind of heavy, and then Peter cleared his throat. "So...you ordered pizza?" He laughed.

"Sure did. Ready to go to your party?"

"Yeah."

Peter leaned against the wall beside him as Friday took him up to the common floor, and Tony hoped that everything was ready. Friday would have told the others that they were coming. It was a little after eleven, so they should be fine. Still, Tony found that he was a little nervous, not least of all about his own present for Peter. What if he didn't want an old junky car? What if he wanted one that actually worked. Tony would have bet anything that the Flash kid's father had gotten him a real car for his sixteenth birthday.

The elevator door opened and Peter jumped a little when he saw the Avengers, plus his two friends, gathered in the common room, a huge banner hung from the ceiling that said, in red and blue letters, Happy Birthday Peter! Someone, or a couple of someone's, were blowing noisemakers and party horns, while Ned looked on the verge of passing out, his eyes darting from his friend to the multiple Avengers, mostly lingering on Steve.

Tony stepped out of the elevator, arm slung around Peter as he lead the boy forward. Everyone was smiling, at ease, and Peter dropped his eyes to the ground, suddenly shy. Ever the master of planning and running parties, Pepper invited everyone to the buffet table set up with boxes and boxes of pizza.
Immediately everyone dispersed, and Tony sent the kid off with his friends, chuckling when Ned started animatedly telling him all about the last ten minutes he’d spent with the Avengers while MJ rolled her eyes, a reluctant smile on her lips.

There were tables set up along the edge of the room, all of them grabbing plates, filling them, and taking seats at the tables. Peter sat with his friends, the three of them huddled together and chatting about whatever teenagers talked about, laughing and gesturing. Tony, Pepper, Rhodey, and Happy all sat at a table beside them, letting them catch up on all of the things they’d apparently missed since seeing each other less than 24 hours ago.

He caught the other Avengers watching the teens with smiles and chuckles as they ate. Ned was doing his best to keep his voice at a whisper as he talked about how he’d just met Captain America and how cool he was. He caught MJ glancing over at Wanda and Natasha and figured that was about right. Those three were all kind of scary.

Once almost everyone was done eating, Pepper told everyone that it was time for cake. They didn't sing...he’d figured that that would make the kid too uncomfortable, but she did have him blow out candles, her hand resting on Peter's back as he did so, and then Tony began cutting slices of cake and Pepper passed them out, Peter and his friends getting the first slices, and then the rest of the guests. Loki joined Peter at his table as Tony was passing out the cake, and although he tried to keep an eye on that, all he really caught was Loki complimenting his shirt, expression dry and almost amused.

He knew that Peter wanted to know more about the aliens, but Tony didn't want Peter worried about that...didn't want Spiderman involved. At all. All he could think about was the cut across the boy's chest...his limp body on the ground in that alley. Still, he lost track of the two of them at one point, as Pepper had recruited him to help carry presents over, which was no small feat considering everyone had gotten him something.

He’d worried, at first, about having everyone gather around Peter and watch him open presents...had worried that it would overwhelm the kid. But Peter lit up when he saw the gifts, smiling shyly at the growing number of boxes and bags taking over the floor beside him.

Tony let the boy's friends go first, unsurprised when Ned gave him a LEGO set. Those two loved LEGOs and Tony was about 90% sure that the two of them had devoted at least hundreds of hours to building those sets if not more. Of course, if Tony had had any as a kid, he would have done the same thing. Next was MJ who had gotten him a book, which...okay, that was no surprise, really. What did surprise him was the way Peter laughed, flipping through the pages and grinning. Tony could only figure that it was some kind of inside joke.

Tony let the Avengers go next, and the surprise on the boy's face was both endearing and a little sad. Had the kid thought that the Avengers would all come to his party and not bring any gifts? They were mostly small things...a puzzle box from Natasha, a notebook from Rhodey that would automatically scan handwritten notes to his computer...Sam got him a 'My first science' kit which made him roll his eyes and laugh, and Clint got him an Iron Man backpack, which made everyone laugh.

Loki's gift had been the most surprising. Honestly, Tony hadn't expected the Asgardian to get him anything, but Peter extracted a necklace that looked like it was made of leather interwoven with metal. A single charm, a green dagger, hung from the necklace, and Peter ran his fingers over it in wonder. Something made Tony think that it wasn't just an ordinary necklace, but he figured he'd ask later.

Then it was Bruce's turn. He handed Peter a small bag, smiling a little. Peter took it with his usual 'thank you' which was always genuine, pulling something out, then freezing. Tony felt his smile
"You...you knew". Peter murmured, and Tony watched as the Avengers all stopped their quiet side conversations, the chatter dying down.

"It was one of my first jobs after I got my Ph.D. Well...the first one. We only worked together for about a year but...we kept in touch on and off until...well...". Bruce trailed off. Peter stared at what Tony realized must have been a picture of his father...his real father, for a few more seconds. But then he looked up at Bruce, a smile lighting up his whole face.

"Could you tell me about him sometime?" Bruce nodded immediately.

"Of course."

They moved on, Tony pushing his gifts forward, not giving any of the Avengers time to ask the kid any questions. "Alright. My turn." He told the boy, holding out a box. Peter unwrapped it, eyes widening when he pulled out the watch. It was 100% designed by Tony, a one of a kind piece that no one else would have with a leather band, durable enough for a teenager who also happened to be Spiderman, but also nice enough to wear to whatever fancy events he might have to attend.

He was quiet for a moment, and then he grinned over at Tony. "There's a tracker in this, isn't there?" Tony laughed, followed by the others.

"Among other things." He allowed, gesturing for Peter to hand it over. The boy did, and Tony took the kid's arm, fastening the watch snugly around his wrist. "The tracker can be activated by myself, Pepper, or Rhodey. If you need help...". He flipped the boy's wrist over and showed him a button almost flush with the rest of the watch. "Press that three times. It will signal me, but if I'm not available, it will go to the closest Avenger."

The boy swallowed, then nodded, smiling up at Tony. "Thank you." He murmured, and Tony ruffled his hair, chucking when the boy ducked away with a groan.

Next, we're the Bluetooth headphones. Peter didn't ask about the tracker in those or the ones in the new shoes he was given, but Tony did plan on telling him about both. The boy was stared at the headphones in wonder, obviously glad not to have to worry about wires anymore, and Tony wanted to tell him that he would have just bought him some if he'd asked.

He didn't though. He just let the boy enjoy his birthday. It was probably best he didn't spoil the kid, as tempting as it was. Tony wondered what he'd usually done for his birthday. He had missed the last one...but he'd be here for the rest, for as long as he was able.

After presents, Peter ate more pizza, the Avengers dispersing into groups once more, sometimes stopping by to talk to Peter and his friends. Ned has a billion questions for both Steve and Sam who answered them with grins, the three of them in a circle as they chatted. MJ stayed at Peter's side, the two of them talking with their heads close together, her laughing every once in a while, and Tony couldn't help but notice the goofy smile on Peter's face every time.

Leaving them alone for a while to flirt or whatever they were doing, he joined Pepper where she was talking to Natasha, moving a hand to her hip and pulling himself to her side. She turned with a soft smile, a hand resting on his back. "I think he's having a great time." She told him, leaning in so only he would hear. "When are you going to give him the last one?"

He'd had the car moved to his lab during the party, not wanting to chance Peter seeing it early. "After
the party." Tony was nervous about this one...had considered just getting Peter a nice new car. An Audi, like his own, or maybe something a little less flashy. Ultimately, though, he'd already gotten it, and already had it moved to the lab, so he decided that he'd just go through with it.

After another hour or so, people had started to disperse. Most had already wished Peter a happy birthday, and by the time most of the Avengers had gone back upstairs, Tony and Pepper had taken a seat with Rhodey and Natasha, Thor and Bruce joining them. It felt like old times. Good old times. Or maybe new times.

Tony liked the sound of that one better.

When he finally glanced back to find Peter, the kid was nowhere in sight, nor were his friends. "Fri?" He asked, pulling himself to his feet. "Where'd the kid's go?"

"Peter and his two friends are currently on the balcony." Tony frowned a bit at that, moving over to stand by the window. Sure enough, Peter and MJ were huddled close together, and for a second he thought he was going to accidentally catch a stolen kiss or something equally teenagerish. But then he realized that Ned was out there too, leaning against the railing.

He couldn't see the girl's expression, but Peter's was sad, jaw tight, eyes lowered...after a moment, the girl shrugged, turning away and leaning on the rail beside Ned while Peter stayed frozen. Tony wondered why his weird senses weren't telling him that Tony was staring at him...but of course, those only warned him about danger.

Tony left the teens to their conversation, not about to meddle. If Peter was going to trust him, he'd have to let the kid come to him. Instead, he rejoined the others, and after a while, the three came back inside, looking more or less as happy as they'd been earlier. Tony couldn't help but speculate. He was almost sure that Pete liked the girl...had she rejected him? Had he rejected her? Had there been a fight?

Either way, Ned's mom arrived to pick them up around 3 to pick both her son and MJ up. Tony had offered to let Peter have a sleepover at the tower, but some conflict or another had come up with one of the kids and so it was rescheduled for the next weekend. That was fine with Tony who wanted to give Peter his last present, just the two of them. So he led Peter down to the lab, an arm wrapped around the boy's shoulders as he tried to stop himself from asking what was going on with his friends. Instead, he asked if Peter had had fun.

"Yeah! It was great!" He was back to smiling, looking up at Tony with wonder. "I can't believe the Avengers came to my party."

"Think Ned was impressed?" Peter laughed.

"Yeah. I think even Flash would have been impressed." Tony snorted.

"Thinking about inviting him to your next party?"

"Uh...I don't think so." Tony squeezed his arm as he led the boy into the lab, then paused, moving the hand to cover Peter's eyes. The boy stopped beside him, and he felt him furrow his brow beneath Tony's hand. "What..."

"Alright, Pete. I've got one more present."

"Tony...you already got me so much!" Peter whined, and Tony shook his head, unable to believe this kid sometimes.
"Well, you'll have to accept one more gift." He told the boy, guiding him a little further into the lab and around a corner. In front of them was the car...well...that was a generous description. It was more like a pile of rust that needed everything from actual tires to an engine. But still...by the end of the coming summer, it would be Peter's first car.

Tony took a deep breath, trying to squash the nerves building in his stomach, then removed his hand. Peter's eyes had been closed, but now he opened them, and Tony watched his kid's mouth drop open. "Is that…"

"I know it isn't much…". Tony began, ready to explain himself. Ready to justify his choice. But the boy took two bouncing steps forward, then spun on his heels to face Tony, jaw unhinged.

"Is that a car?"

"Well...". Tony shrugged a little. "It will be..."

"Can...". Peter glanced back at the rusty frame, practically bouncing on his toes, his eyes huge and hopeful. "Can we maybe build it together? I mean...if you aren't too busy?"

"Yeah, bud," Tony told him, softening as he smiled, stomach flipping in excitement and just...love. He loved this kid so much. "That was the plan."

And then Peter was in his arms, head pressed against his chest, arms holding him almost too tightly. Tony put his hand on the boy's hair, another on his back. His shoulders were shaking, and Tony rubbed circles on his back. "You okay, kiddo?"

"Yeah," Peter whispered. "I just...I never thought I'd get to...I mean...after Ben...". He sniffed, giving up on explaining himself, and Tony leaned over to rest his cheek on the boy's hair. "Thank you. This is...it's the best present."

Tony closed his eyes, letting those words ease his worries. Ease the fear that, somehow, he'd misread the boy...that Peter wouldn't want to spend the time to build a car with him.

Peter loved him. He loved him like a father, and Tony had never been surer of that. Smiling a little, he held the boy closer. "Happy birthday, Pete."
Chapter Notes

Sorry that this one took a bit longer. I've been sick all week and Game of Thrones premiered tonight so not a ton of writing happened.

Happy Birthday Chats

Peter lay on his floor, the concrete cold against his back, staring up at the underside of the car, his shoulder pressed against Tony's. They had been laying there for almost an hour, Tony pointing out various things underneath the rusty car. There was no engine, but that didn't stop Tony from pointing out everything they could see. Peter was listening. Really, he was. But more than that, he could feel the warmth from Tony's shoulder against his, and he could hear the man's heartbeat. In a way, it reminded him of Ben. This was how he'd felt when he'd spent time with Ben. And maybe with his dad, too. He couldn't remember. But here...he felt like he could fall asleep, despite the cold concrete floor. Like he was safe. Like he could just lie here beside Tony, beside the man that he'd started to see as his dad and just...be.

"Kid? Did I lose you?" The man asked, and Peter could hear a smile in his voice. Peter shook his head.

"Nope. That's the...muffler." He guessed, unable to stop his grin when Tony made a buzzer noise with his mouth.

"Close. Come on." He slid out from under the car, and Peter followed, scrambling to get up and grabbing the hand that Tony held out to him. The man grabbed a white handkerchief from a table, wiping what Peter had to assume was grease off of his cheek, a hand bracing his face to keep him from squirming away, not that Peter was trying too hard. The man's eyes were soft, and Peter felt his stomach clench a little, warmth spreading through him as Tony put the handkerchief down and ruffled his already messy hair. "Happy Birthday, Pete."

Peter smiled, leaning his head forward and resting it against Tony's chest. The man wrapped his arms around him, patting him on the back. "Thank you. For everything." He took a deep breath, smelling engine grease and rust and cologne. "I love you."

"I love you too, kiddo." Peter noticed that it was easier to say...for both of them. All day, he'd missed his aunt. All day, his mind had wandered back to May, even when he'd been opening presents (from the Avengers!) or eating cake or just hanging out with Ned and MJ. May had always done her best to make his birthday special, especially after his uncle had died. When he'd first woken up, he'd known immediately that it was his birthday...and that May was gone. May wouldn't be here for his birthday. And he missed her. Even though the nightmares were not' happening quite as often, he still missed her.

He'd thought about trying to go through her stuff again, but then he'd remembered the first time...how it had felt to sit on the floor and sob until Tony had found him...how he'd had to fight to breathe. Peter knew that, one day, he would need to go through her stuff. But Tony hadn't said anything about it, and he knew that he wouldn't push him. So he would keep putting it off.
Tony had seemed to know that it would be hard. Then again, if Peter thought about it, it made sense that he would understand. Tony had lost his parents pretty young, even though he'd been older than Peter. So, of course, Tony would know that this would be a hard day. But he'd done everything he could to make it better. He'd made him an awesome breakfast, and then they'd worked together in the lab, which was one of Peter's favorite places to be, especially with Tony. And even though he'd been told that the Avengers would be at his party, he hadn't really been expecting all of them to show up...with presents. Like, really nice, thoughtful presents.

He had spent his sixteenth birthday with the Avengers. And he'd gotten a car! Okay, so...car might be a generous term for the thing that Tony had gotten him, but more importantly, he'd gotten Peter a project for the two of them to do together. Not to mention all the shirts. And the really nice watch. And the shoes. And the headphones. Peter had never had so many nice things all at once. He was pretty sure that Tony had actually made the watch and the earbuds...he was also almost certain that there was a tracker in at least one thing besides the watch...he just couldn't figure out which one. And he wasn't going to try to hard to figure it out. Peter couldn't begrudge Tony wanting to look after him.

When he finally pulled away, Tony smoothed his hair down from where he'd ruffled it. "Alright, Pete. Are you getting hungry?" Peter nodded, despite the fact that he'd eaten just a few hours ago. Thanks to the weird spider metabolism, he was pretty much always hungry. It had been a bit more difficult when he'd lived with May...he'd suddenly preferred going out to buffets where he could eat until he was full without costing May any more than he had to. That wasn't an issue with Tony who had groceries delivered every week, and who had given him permission to order food whenever he wanted, not to mention the twenties he would find in his wallet that he sparingly used to buy lunch at school, sandwiches at Delmar's...and that was about it.

He had a lot of money in his wallet and he had no idea what to do with it. Ned's eyes had popped out of his head when he'd saw Peter's wallet a couple of days ago. Since Tony seemed intent on 'sneaking' them into his wallet every week despite how many he already had, he'd started just keeping them in an old piggy bank from his old apartment.

The two of them headed to the garage where Tony pulled the keys out of his pocket and Peter hopping into the passenger seat, wondering for a second when he got so completely comfortable sitting in a car with Tony Stark. Sometimes that thought hit him...he would glance over at Tony and wonder how this could be his life. The man glanced over at him, lifting an eyebrow and smiling a little. He didn't comment though, just pulled the car out of the garage. "So...what were you and Loki talking about?" Tony asked as he pulled onto the road.

"Uh...nothing really." Peter tried to lie. Tony was silent, turning to glance at him but keeping his eyes on the road for the most part. "He liked my shirt. So do I, by the way. Thank you." The man smiled and nodded, but didn't say anything. "He didn't really know anything." Tony lifted an eyebrow. "He just said that it looked like a recon mission, but they still have one of them in holding."

"I don't want you worrying about that."

"I'll have to if they come back." Peter murmured, and Tony took a deep breath.

"I know." Peter glanced over, and the man met his eyes as he pulled up to a stop light. "But not yet. We don't know anything for sure."

He hesitated, then decided to ask. "Loki said that the last time they came, it was because of some...like, really powerful alien guy."

"Did he?"
"He said that we didn’t have to worry about him…” Peter trailed off.

"He was right. You don’t have to worry about any of that. Not yet. If it becomes a problem, then we’ll all have to talk about it.” Peter wanted to ask more…wanted to ask what they’d gotten out of the alien they’d been trying to communicate with...if they’d even been able to communicate with it. Loki really hadn’t told him much...mostly just that they’d been trying to get information and failing somewhat. Still, he didn’t want to push too hard...didn’t want to risk upsetting him. So far, he’d managed to avoid making Tony angry, and it wasn’t like he thought that the man would kick him out if he got angry but…

Okay. Maybe there was a tiny part of him that worried about that.

"You know, I got you a car for your birthday...can you even drive?"

"Um…” Peter hesitated. "I mean...May taught me a little...in parking lots…” Tony nodded, and Peter figured he'd better just go on. "And I...I kind of crashed Flash's car." The man turned to him fully then, eyes wide.

"You what?"

"On Homecoming night...I was trying to follow the Vulture and...um...I flipped it and I think...I'm pretty sure I totaled it." Tony snorted. "I mean, it was his dad's car and I no one was hurt."

The smile dropped a little and the man beside him gave him a serious look. "Have you driven at all since?" Peter shook his head. Honestly, the thought of driving a car terrified him. After crashing Flash's car, he'd been kind of nervous about it. But after his aunt...after the nightmares and the barely-there memories of sounds like crunching metal and screaming...sometimes it was hard to climb into a car. Sometimes he had to force himself into the car. But the thought of driving...more than that, the thought of driving with someone else in the car...honestly it wasn't something he wanted to think about. At all. Ever. "Do you want to?"

Tony had gotten him a car. And for some reason, Peter hadn’t once thought about the fact that he’d drive it at some point. All he’d thought about was building it...putting it together with Tony. But when it was done, it would be a car. A car that he would probably be expected to drive. "Um...yeah. Of course."

The man nodded slowly, lips pressed tightly together, and Peter prayed that Tony wouldn't ask him to drive right then...surely he wouldn’t ask Peter to drive in the middle of New York...right? But as they pulled into the parking lot of a very nice restaurant, Tony choosing a parking space in the back, Tony placed the car in park, then turned in his seat to face him. "Because you don't have to. " Drive. You don't have to drive if you don't want to."

"But...I mean...you got me a car."

"Yeah. We can still build it. It will still be your car But you don't have to drive it. Not until you're ready. Hell, we live in New York. You can take the subway pretty much anywhere. And Happy will drive you anywhere else. Or I will. Or you could probably hire a full-time driver with all the twenties you have saved up.” Peter felt his ears turning a little red, and Tony grinned, reaching out and clasping him on the knee. As dumb as he felt, it made his heart stop racing to hear Tony tell him that he didn't have to drive if he didn't want to.

"Okay.” He whispered. Tony squeezed his knee. "You ready to eat?” Peter nodded, climbing out of the car and following him into the restaurant. It was nice enough that Peter worried a little about his
outfit, but no one said anything. He'd gone out to nice places enough with Tony and Pepper by this point that he was almost used to it. The water led them to a table in the back and left menus, taking their drink order and leaving them to look at the menus.

Peter wondered when he'd gotten so used to going to restaurants where a burger cost $35. Still, he told himself not to look at the prices. Tony had taken him to this restaurant before and knew that he had really liked it. So he ordered a steak, the same as Tony, and very stubbornly didn't try to add up the cost of the two steak dinners, the drinks, and the extra side salads that Tony had ordered. "Pep said that she wanted to come, but she had to do a conference call." The man told him as they waited for their food.

"She has a lot of meetings." Tony smiled as Peter took a drink of his water.

"She does. This summer, we're going on a vacation. No meetings. No superheroing. Just relaxing at our new beach house."

"You bought a beach house?"

"Yep." Tony popped the p, then took a drink of his own water. "It's nice. Not as big as my old house in Malibu, but very nice. The lab is still being set up...our rooms too."

"Our...rooms?"

"Yeah. kid. You think I was going to make you sleep on the beach?" Peter smiled a little, but honestly he hadn't given it much thought. "It'll be fun. We'll all go for a couple of weeks...maybe just stay for June?"

June. Father's Day. Peter hesitated, then nodded. He would just have to get everything done before that. "Yeah. That sounds really fun."

"Did you guys ever go on vacation? With May and Ben?" Tony asked hesitantly. Peter nodded, swallowing hard.

"Yeah. Yeah, we uh...we went to Connecticut for a couple of days once. Uncle Ben wanted to see all the museums. It was fun. Most years we would just do stuff in New York though."

"Sounds like fun." Tony smiled, eyes gentle. "Maybe your friends can come some time? Fly out for a week or two?"

"Oh...yeah, that would be...um...that would be fun." The man frowned a little, leaning in.

"You sure?"

"Yeah. Definitely. Ned would really liked that."

"Michelle could come too." Tony told him, his voice casual. Peter nodded, taking another drink of his water. He had a feeling that Tony had seen him and Ned and MJ out on the balcony, but the man hadn't asked yet. "We have a couple of guest rooms...of course, if she's more than a friend, we might have to set up some ground rules."

It took a second for Tony's words to sink in. Blinking in surprise, he jerked his head up. "What?"

"I never asked if you two were dating…"

"No...she's not...we're not…" Peter shook his head, hands waving in the air before realizing that they
were in public, and he dropped them quickly. "We're not dating." Tony hummed. "She's just a friend."

Tony chuckled a little. "Alright. Either way, she can come to California for a week or two if you wanted to invite her."

"Right. Um...thanks." The waiter brought their food then, and for a moment, they ate in silence. But then, Tony spoke again.

"So, I saw you guys talking out on the balcony yesterday." Honestly, Peter was surprised that it had taken him so long to bring that up. "Everything okay?"

MJ had been staring down at her phone after Peter had opened all of his presents, the three of them sitting together as Peter had eaten more pizza. The Avengers had all been talking quietly in their own groups, and Peter had met her eyes and had been surprised to see her biting down hard on her lip, obviously trying not to let on how upset she was. Jerking his head toward the balcony door, he and MJ had snuck out, Ned following close behind. No one had seemed to notice.

"Yeah." He shrugged, even though that wasn't really true. Taking another bite of his absolutely delicious steak, he glanced up to find Tony giving him a distinctly worried look.

"You sure, Pete?" Peter dropped his eyes, taking another drink and focusing on his food for a moment. But when he thought about it, he realized that he kind of wanted to tell him.

"Um...I mean, we're all fine." He shrugged. "It's just...MJ has to stay with her grandparents now."

Tony furrowed his brow, apparently thinking about something, before speaking. "Did she live with her...father before?" He asked. "I thought I heard her talking to him on the phone at the hospital."

"Yeah." He muttered, fingers drumming on his let. "He got arrested last night. He's...he's kind of a jerk, actually."

"Really?"

Peter nodded. "He...I think he hit her sometimes." He kept his eyes down, not wanting to look at Tony when he admitted that.

"Pete?" He sighed, glancing up at Tony who had put his cutlery down. Peter followed suit, taking another drink of his water, their conversation pausing when the waiter came by to refill their drinks. "What aren't you telling me, Pete?"

He glanced around, making sure no one was close. Of course they weren't...Tony had made sure that they'd gotten a table in the back. Far away from everyone else. "He used to hit her. A lot. We didn't talk much before...before she took over for Liz as the Academic Decathlon coach. But we all got to be better friends. And when I found out...when Spiderman found out..." He swallowed. It wasn't that he regretted what he'd done. MJ didn't even know. But it wasn't really something he'd ever wanted to tell anyone before.

Looking up into Mr. Stark's eyes, he remembered that night...remembered following him home after work and throwing him against a wall. Not hard enough to really hurt him, but hard enough to get his attention.

"If you ever touch your daughter again, I'll know." Those had been his words. And he'd meant them.

MJ had never come to school with bruises again.
"Spiderman told him to stop." Peter admitted.

"Is that all Spiderman did?" Tony asked, voice soft and serious. Peter nodded.

"He hasn't hit her again."

"What would Spiderman have done if he had?"

Peter swallowed, but didn't drop his eyes. "He would have stopped him." Tony nodded, softening.

"Good." Peter took another bite of his food, digging into the salad and knowing that Pepper would be proud. "Is she okay?"

"Yeah. They don't get along but..." Peter shrugged. "He's still her dad, I guess." Tony nodded and Peter figured that if anyone could understand, it was Tony. Not that Peter had ever really asked him about Howard Stark. Maybe he would some day.

That night, Peter curled up in the top bunk of his bed, dressed in a pair of new Iron Man pajamas that he'd found in his dresser. Pulling the blankets over him and staring at his phone in the darkness, he scrolled through his social media feed, smiling at all the 'happy birthdays' from his classmates. He'd texted MJ earlier, just checking up on her. Her grandparents lived not too far away from Queens, so she'd still get to go to Midtown. But he knew that she'd been pretty upset before.

Putting his phone down and yawning, he placed his hand on the slightly warm charm that rested against his throat. When he'd asked Loki about it, the man had simply told him that it was an Asgardian necklace. But Peter suspected that there was more to it than that. It was warm, and when he held it in his hand, it glowed just a little. Letting it go and closing his eyes, he resolved to check up on MJ again in the morning...and try to find the Avengers and thank them again for his presents.

Even Sam. That My First Chemistry kit kind of looked like fun.
"Hey, Pete? Can I talk to you for a second?" Peter glanced up from his homework to find Tony leaning in the doorway to his bedroom. It had been two weeks since his birthday party, and already he was struggling to remember how happy he'd been...how much fun it had been. It was like a black cloud had found him recently. Like he couldn't hold on to happiness for longer than a few minutes. He'd laugh at a joke, or go down to the lab and work with Tony and feel at peace, but as soon as he was alone again...he was down. Had been down.

And sure, there had been lots of bright spots. He and Ned had had a sleepover the weekend before, and that had been a lot of fun, especially when Tony had let them play in his lab for a while. The two of them had spent hours messing with his webshooters and Ned had gotten to look at all of Tony's computers. So that had been great. But ever since May things had been so much harder, and he was wondering if that would ever go away.

It wasn't because of nightmares. He'd learned that the first week after his birthday...about three days later. Peter had closed his eyes, curled up in the top bunk, and the dream had started. Sitting in a car, talking to May, and feeling that sense of foreboding....

But then he and May had been on a beach...a beach with soft, green waves crashing around him. And she'd been laughing. Smiling over at him and reaching out from her beach chair to take his hand. "I love you, baby." She'd told him, and he'd woken up to his alarm, ridiculously well rested and...happy. Just for a while, he'd been happy.

No, that wasn't fair. He was happy with Tony. And he was excited about Father's day and their trip to California. But...there was something else. Something heavy and always in the back of his mind that seemed to almost disappear when he was with other people but that was there...somewhere in the back of his mind. It was there. And he thought that maybe he should tell Tony...or maybe someone else. Just...talk to someone. But he had caused so much trouble for so many people, and he was sick of it.

So he'd done his best to smash it down. To focus instead on the good things in his life. And when that failed, he'd talk to Ned or find Tony or Pepper or even Loki and spend time with them. He was pretty sure that Loki knew what was going on. Still, the Asgardian never called him out. Pepper and Tony, on the other hand, always seemed happy to spend time with him and never seemed to notice that he was just trying to cheer himself up.

After patrolling for a couple of hours after school, he'd headed back to the tower to do his homework, texting with Ned throughout. As he sat at his desk, he felt it again, no matter how he tried to focus on his homework. And as he glanced down at his calculus homework, he felt the overwhelming urge to tell Tony. To admit that he felt like something was wrong and that he was just sad and tired and even though he should be happy, he felt...heavy. He loved hanging out with his friends and new family and he loved Tony...but...there were days when he was still sad. And tired.

He shook that thought off when he caught the look on Tony's face. The man seemed almost worried, so Peter put his pencil down, nodding and turning in his desk chair. Tony stepped into the room, ruffling Peter's hair as he passed, then dropped onto the bottom bunk of Peter's bed, making sure to duck his head so that he didn't whack his head. "How was school?"

"Um...it was fine." Tony gave him a closer look then, and Peter realized that he might not have been fooling the man after all.
"You alright, kiddo?"

"Yeay...fine."

"You sure? You've been quiet this week..." Peter shrugged, not sure what to say. "How's MJ?"

To be honest, MJ had been...not great. She'd snapped at both him and Ned more than once when they'd asked how she was doing, and the three of them were existing in a kind of uneasy silence. It kind of sucked, honestly. Earlier that day, he'd told her that he was there if she wanted to talk, and she'd just kind of shrugged him off...which might have explained why he was feeling so crappy that day. So he wasn't really sure how to explain to Tony how she was. He settled for shrugging again, and Tony crossed his arms, looking more concerned than before. "She's...I don't know. Not great."

"Does she need anything?"

Peter bit back the response he wanted to give...that she had barely spoken to him that week. He knew he wasn't being fair. He of all people knew how rough it was to lose someone, even though Michelle hadn't lost her father in the same way...and even though Peter personally thought her father was a douchebag. "I don't think so."

Tony stood then, moving over to Peter's side and dropping a hand on his shoulder, looking down at him seriously. "What's going on, Pete?" And Peter wanted to tell him...wanted to explain. But he didn't know himself. So he just shrugged again, praying that the man didn't lose patience with him. Tony grabbed his arm, tugging him to his feet, then led him over to the bed where he sat back down, pulling Peter to sit beside him, wrapping an arm around his shoulders and holding him close to his side. Peter didn't even hesitate to close his eyes, resting his head on Tony's shoulder and taking a deep breath, trying to push back the unrelenting sadness that seemed to be following him around.

"I don't know." Peter murmured, and Tony rubbed a hand up and down his back, leaning against the wall pulling him closer. "I'm sorry..."

"Rule number 1, Peter." Peter felt a flash of irritation that he hated himself for. He wasn't irritated with Tony. He was irritated with MJ, and with himself for being irritated with her, and just...strangely sad. It was something he'd been feeling on and off since May had died, but after his party, it only seemed to get worse, which made no sense to him. Tony must have felt him stiffen because he squeezed his shoulder, a thumb rubbing over his collarbone. The man took a deep breath, seeming to gather his thoughts, then spoke softly into Peter's hair. "You don't have to apologize for not being happy all the time, Pete. You're allowed to be sad, or angry, or however else you feel."

He wanted to apologize again but managed to stop himself. Instead, he just rested his head against Tony's shoulder, taking deep breaths of the smell of engine oil and cologne and the man that he'd started thinking of as his father. Peter sniffed a little, wiping at his eyes and fighting furiously not to start crying. He was sixteen years old. He shouldn't have been crying over nothing. But his eyes still heated up and he closed them, shuddering as he fought back a sob. "You want to talk about it?" He shrugged. "You know I'm here, right? Like, I'm here for you if you want to talk. About anything. You're my kid."

Peter sat silently beside him for a long time, struggling to stop crying over what felt like nothing and everything all at once. Finally, he spoke, eyes lowered. "I miss May."

"Yeah?" Tony rubbed his back, nodding a little. "I know, buddy."

"I don't know what's wrong." He admitted. "MJ's been really upset and I..." Peter shrugged. "I don't know." He swallowed, cursing himself for giving in so easily. For not trying harder to stop bothering
Tony with every little thing. "I'm just sad." He knew it sounded stupid, but he hoped that Tony could understand.

Of course he did. The hand on his back didn't stop rubbing gentle circles as Tony nodded. "Okay." He murmured, resting his cheek on the side of the top of Peter's head. "All the time?" Peter nodded.

"I mean...not...not all the time but...it's always...there." He tried to explain.

"Okay," Tony said again, squeezing Peter to his side. "Okay, we can do something about that." Peter blinked in surprise, pulling away and looking up at him. Of course, if he'd thought about it, he'd known that Tony would listen to him and be sympathetic. But...he hadn't thought that Tony could actually...do anything about it.

"Do something?" He asked.

"Yeah, kiddo." Tony smiled a little, keeping a hand on his back and holding him close. "We can find someone for you to talk to. We can see if you need to go on some kind of medicine to help."

"I'm not...I don't need...medicine." Peter grumbled a little, ashamed without knowing why. Tony softened.

"I do." He blinked, eyes widening. "I've been through some rough shit, Pete. After my thousandth panic attack, I finally started talking to someone. Went on some anxiety medication. Set up a regular appointment with a real therapist. All that fun stuff."

Peter hesitated, afraid of the hope that blossomed in his chest. "And...it helped?"

"Yeah, kiddo. It really did." He swallowed, nodding, and Tony squeezed the back of his neck. "Maybe sometime this week we can set you up an appointment. What do you think?"

"Um..." He nodded, dropping his eyes to his lap and shrugging a little. "Okay." He wiped irritably at his eyes, fighting the urge to say sorry again.

"Sounds good." Tony patted him on the back, leaning back a little and looking at him straight on.

"So...you needed to talk to me?" He asked, wanting to change the subject.

"Yeah." Tony nodded, looking almost grim.

"Am I in trouble?" He asked, almost joking. It worked, and Tony smiled.

"No, kiddo. You're not in trouble. I was talking to Pep and...well, there's a Stark Industries meeting that I have been postponing for...well, a long time. And I can't put it off anymore."

"Oh...okay..."

"It's actually more of a business trip. I have to leave Sunday, and I'll be gone for about five days. I managed to cut it down from seven days, but Pepper said that was as low as I could go."

"Oh." Peter blinked, forcing himself to nod. He was sixteen years old now, he reminded himself. Way too old to be sad about something like that. He hadn't been away from Tony for that long since the man had taken him in but before that, he and Tony had only seen each other once a week, and before that, twice a month. So this was no big deal. He would be fine. "Where are you going?"

"Hong Kong. It's a big conference or something...I kind of stopped listening." He admitted with a smile, and Peter laughed. "I tried to see if Pepper could send someone else but..."
"No, you should go," Peter told him, not wanting Tony to get behind on work because of him. "Is Pepper going too?"

He nodded. "Yeah. It'll be me and Pepper, but Happy and Rhodey will still be here to look after you."

"I don't need a babysitter." Tony chuckled, crossing his arms and shifting against the wall.

"They won't be babysitting. They'll just be checking in. Thor and Loki are going to be on their floor if you need them, and you can always call me. In fact, I want you to call me. Every day. Preferably multiple times a day. Because I'll definitely be calling you. Unless..." He trailed off. "Unless you want to come."

Immediately that sounded better. Yes. Peter wanted to go. He'd never been to Hong Kong, or anywhere except Germany, really. And he'd be with Tony and...and finals were coming up. He sighed. "I can't. Finals are the week after."

Tony nodded. "Yeah. I figured you'd say that. Well, if you change your mind, we can figure something out."

Peter didn't change his mind. He needed to be in class the week before finals. But there was also something else coming up. Tony's business trip started that Sunday, May 12th and he would return the 17th...and May's birthday was the 15th. It wasn't something he wanted to think about. And he wasn't about to ask Tony to come home early, not when he had already cut his business trip shorter than it would have been. So he kept his mouth shut, spending time with Tony whenever he could that week even as Pepper had more meetings than ever, possibly in preparation for their vacation the following month.

That Wednesday, Tony had his therapist come to the tower so that Peter could meet him and see if this was something he wanted to continue. Tony was pretty sure that talking to this guy would help, but Peter was kind of iffy about actually talking to some stranger, especially considering what he did after school every day. But Tony had promised him that he didn't have to tell the man, whose name was Evan, that he was Spiderman. He had also promised Peter that he could trust him...he'd told Even all sorts of thing about being Iron Man, and because of patient confidentiality, none of that information had ever been made public. "The first session is mostly him just getting to know you. Nothing to worry about. You never have to talk about anything you don't want to." Tony promised as he and Peter stood outside the door to the room that they would be using.

And Tony was right. The first session was more of an introduction, and while Tony sat in another room, working on his tablet, Peter talked to Evan about school and listened to the man talk about himself a little bit. He didn't really ask any hard questions, although he did ask Peter how he'd been feeling, and when Peter admitted that he'd been feeling really sad, the man asked a little more about that. He did his best to explain, fighting the fear that the therapist would think he was crazy or something. The guy was a therapist...like, a professional that Mr. Stark trusted, he told himself as he did his best to describe the sadness he had been feeling.

Evan asked him a couple of questions, never pushing too hard, nodding and repeating his own thoughts back to him in ways that actually made sense. It was almost comforting. He'd been able to talk to Tony, but with the man he considered his father, it was almost harder sometimes, especially when he worried that his emotions and problems would upset Tony. With Evan, this man didn't know him...had no connection to him.

Toward the end of the hour, the man clasped his hands, leaning forward in the armchair where he'd been sitting, taking notes in a notebook. "How would you feel about going on medication to help
"You deal with these feelings?" The therapist asked, face gentle and open. Peter swallowed hard, shrugging a little. He had known that that might be a possibility. Tony had mentioned it, plus the fact that Tony himself was on medication. But it still made him nervous. He didn't want to have to rely on medicine to make him normal...he just wanted to be normal. Like he'd been before everything.

"If you think I should…” He muttered, wanting a way out of this but also afraid. "Like...if you think it will help."

Even put the notebook he'd been writing in down on the arm of his chair, smiling a little. "I don't know very much about you yet, but I do know that you've experienced some traumatic events recently, which can trigger depression and heightened levels of anxiety, especially in adolescents. And I think that medication will help, even if it's not something you stay on for an extended period of time. It's something we might want to talk to Tony about if you're willing to give it a try."

By the end of the hour, he was exhausted, even though they didn't talk anything too serious. Peter touched on May's death, and told him a little about his troubles with MJ and what it was like to be Spiderman. He let slip a little about the pressures he felt sometimes...about how he struggled to balance it all. But nothing too deep. Evan didn't ask him anything more about May or his friend or Spiderman. Just let him talk about anything he wanted to, only asking about Peter's feelings. And it was kind of a relief to talk about them.

When Tony came back into the room, he immediately dropped onto the sofa beside Peter and draped an arm around his shoulders. Peter dropped his head onto the man's shoulder, fitting himself naturally against the man's side. "You okay, Pete?" Tony asked, and Peter nodded. "What do you think, doc?"

Even had assured Peter that he would only share what Peter told him he could unless Peter talked about wanting to harm himself or others, which was fair, and Peter had told him that he could talk to Tony about anything from the first session. He'd already told all of it to Tony anyway, so he sat in silence as Even brought up medication again, mentioning the fact that Peter was exhibiting signs of depression, which were more and more common in kids his age, especially considering what he'd been through. Tony nodded slowly as the doctor spoke, glancing over at Peter and squeezing his shoulder. "I'd rather wait until after my business trip for him to start any new medication."

Evan nodded. "I agree. He will need to be monitored pretty closely for the first week or so, and it would be better if you were close by."

"Why don't we talk to Bruce and see if we need to adjust it for your metabolism, and then you can try it after you finish up with finals?" Peter nodded, still not 100% sure, but glad that he didn't have to start immediately. At least he'd get some time to think about it.

"If at any point while taking this medication and you start to feel worse, or you feel sick, you can let someone know and we can try something else," Evan assured him, probably able to read the apprehension on his face, and Tony nodded.

"No one is going to force you into anything, Pete. I promise. If you try it and hate it, just tell me, okay?" He nodded, letting Tony squeeze him one more time before he sat up, pulling away a little as Tony thanked Evan for coming and setting up an appointment to talk about medication and another session for after he returned from his trip.

Since he'd skipped patrols to have his session with the doctor, Peter practically sprinted to his room, throwing his suit on, then throwing himself out of his window and off his balcony in his rush to get out of that building. Not that he didn't love the tower...but he felt like he was full of pent-up energy...practically vibrating with it. So for the next few hours, he threw himself into patrols, swinging around almost manically, stopping muggings and a drug deal or two, saving a few cats
from trees and earning minimal scratches.

Thankfully he hadn't run into any more lost parrots, but he did find himself climbing to the top of a tree to save an old woman's pet iguana who, surprisingly, allowed herself to be returned to her grateful owner with minimal fuss.

He texted Ned on and off throughout his patrols, keeping him up to date, even though he hadn't mentioned meeting with a therapist. He was supposed to be Spiderman, after all. Ned didn't need to know that a therapist wanted to put him on medication. Peter didn't want anyone's pity, especially not his friend's. Ned asked him about patrols and his opinion on MJ's bad mood, with Peter's advice being to just leave her be for a while until she came to them.

Maybe he'd ask Tony for advice.

When he crawled back in through his window later that evening, he had barely taken his mask off before Tony was texting him, asking him to meet him in the living room. Worried that he'd somehow done something wrong in the last couple of hours, he checked his watch to make sure he wasn't late, then changed into his regular clothes and headed to the living room where he found Tony on the sofa, reading through some paperwork. The man glanced up at him as he entered the room, smiling and gesturing for Peter to join him. "Hey, kid. How were patrols."

"Fine. I saved an iguana." Tony blinked at that, raising his eyebrows. "He was in a tree."

"People in New York have weird pets." The man muttered, shaking his head and chuckling. "Pepper gave me my itinerary for the trip...I'll probably have to leave by noon on Sunday, and I'll be back late Friday night. I talked to Rhodey and he's going to stay here on this floor with you." Peter opened his mouth to argue that the man didn't have to, but Tony held up a hand. "He's not babysitting. But if you're still going to be doing patrols, I want someone here on this floor. He's usually at work until 6 or 7, but he agreed to do as much work from the tower as he can." Figuring that he wasn't going to convince Tony otherwise, he just nodded. "Same rules apply. Home from patrols by six, finish your homework." The man waved a hand as he trailed off. "You know all this. I'm lucky I got a good kid." Peter felt himself flush a little as Tony squeezed his shoulder. "Alright. How are you on homework?"

"I'm almost caught up."

"Good. How about a movie before you finish up?" Honestly, that sounded perfect, so Peter headed to the kitchen to grab something to drink while Tony ordered Chinese food, and that evening found the two of them on the sofa, wrapped up in blankets and watching a movie that Peter was almost certain hadn't even been released yet, but he certainly wasn't about to complain.
Sendoff

Peter woke early on Sunday, heart pounding as his hand went naturally to the necklace around his neck, fingers gripping the charm. His breaths came in gasps as he remembered the dreams...not nightmares. But dreams that had kept trying to turn into nightmares. Hands shaking he sat up in bed, putting a hand over his mouth and trying to calm down.

May's birthday was in a few days.

Tony wouldn't be there.

It didn't matter, he told himself firmly. It wasn't a big deal. Tony had been there for him so many times and the man had to work now! Peter was sixteen years old. He could do this. He was practically grown. He didn't need his...he didn't need Tony there all the time. He had to wonder if the man knew, though. He hadn't mentioned it...but maybe that was because Tony didn't want to upset him.

There was no way he could go back to sleep. Groaning and pushing himself out of bed, he wiped his eyes and fought a yawn. Maybe he could take a nap later. Sundays were always calm around the tower, even with the others around. Throwing on a pair of sweatpants and a tank top, he headed for the elevator, grabbing his phone and new headphones on his way, then took the elevator to the workout room.

And then he was running.

His feet pounded on the treadmill as he ran, earbuds in blasting music as loudly as he could stand, chest aching with his racing heart. He'd hoped that an hour on the treadmill would calm him, but his chest still felt too tight, and breathing hadn't gotten any easier...well, he was running so that was to be expected….but he wasn't running that hard.

He turned the incline up and pumped his arms harder, hoping that he could outrun whatever this was. He'd known that he wouldn't be able to get back to sleep, even though it was just past three am, but Tony hadn't woken up so he guessed that Friday would only wake him if Peter had nightmares.

What if he had nightmares while Tony was gone?

The reminder that Tony would be gone just made his heart race even more and he didn't understand! He was old enough to stay alone! He'd just met the man less than three years ago! And he'd get to talk to him on the phone. Probably video chat…

If he kept this up…

What if Tony thought he was too clingy? What if he was getting on the man's nerves?

It felt like no time had passed before his sixty minutes was up and he groaned as the treadmill slowed down, rolling his eyes at Friday's reminder that he had a limit of one hour. "Yeah, yeah." He grumbled, tugging one earbud out and wiping his face with a towel and feeling the familiar lightheadedness that came with running in the morning. He didn't care. He wanted more. Wanted to absolutely exhaust himself so that his brain had no choice but to stop!

"Peter?" The boy jerked his head up in surprise, pulling his other earbud out and blinking at the man
standing in the doorway.

"Oh...uh...good morning, Captain...Steve."

"Morning." The man nodded, seemingly torn between bemused and concerned. "You're up early."

"Yeah...couldn't really sleep." The man stared between him and the treadmill, and Peter felt the urge to explain. "It shuts off after an hour."

He nodded, looking him over critically, then moved over to the counter, grabbing a granola bar and tossing it to him. Peter caught it easily, but didn't open it. "Come on. Eat that on the way." Steve invited, and hesitantly, Peter did, opening the granola bar and taking a bite as he walked behind the man. Steve led him to the elevator, then down to the ground floor where they headed toward the back door. "Friday? If Tony wakes up, can you tell him that Peter and I went out? We'll be back soon."

"Of course, Captain." The voice from the ceiling told them, sounding almost concerned. Still, she didn't alert Tony that he was leaving and bother him about it which was good. Peter figured that he deserved to spend some time with Pepper at home...of course, they were going on this trip together.

Peter could have gone. He'd been invited.

He shook those thoughts off as he followed Steve into the almost chilly morning air. It would be warm later, but the mornings were still kind of cold. The Captain glanced back at him as they stepped out onto the street, and then they were walking. He followed, hands in his pockets, granola bar wrapper stuffed down in his back pocket where he could throw it away later. Nearly trotting to keep up with him, Peter stayed just a step behind on the empty sidewalk as they made their way across the street and to the park a few blocks away. Peter hadn't asked any questions...figured he was up for an adventure to take his mind off of things.

When they stepped onto the path, he glanced up at Steve again. The man was looking around...and then he smiled down at Peter. "Ready?"

"Uh...sure..." He murmured, taking his hands out of his pockets and glancing around at the mostly deserted park. "Ready for..."

"C'mon." And then Steve took off. He jogged at first, moving slowly enough that Peter could easily catch up...and then he was running. Full out running. Feeling a grin spread over his face, he took off after the man, matching his pace easily, and laughing when Steve did. "Damn, kid. You're fast." Peter shrugged as he ran. "Were you always?" He shook his head with a laugh.

"No. I had asthma."

"Me too."

And then they were running. Sprinting. Racing through the park along the pathway. A few minutes in, Peter started to pull out his headphones, but realized that might be rude. He'd never run with anyone before. But Steve nodded down at him, barely out of breath when he spoke. "Go ahead, kid. I don't mind."

So Peter did, sticking his headphones in his ear and blasting his music and running as fast as he could along Captain America. He was going on an early morning jog with Captain America! He couldn't wait to tell Ned...in fact, he pulled his phone out of his pocket, texting and running. 'Dude, you'll never believe what I'm doing right now!'
It was ridiculously early, but Ned responded after only a few minutes. 'What!?'

'Jogging with Captain America!' 

'Dude!?' And then about twenty emojis. Peter chuckled, pushing his phone back into his pocket and hurrying after Steve who had gotten a little ahead while Peter was texting. Every once in a while, the man would glance back as I making sure he was still with him...making sure he was okay. Peter didn't resent it...it was kind of nice. To know the man was keeping an eye on him, not that he needed looking after. Still, it was cool! He was jogging with Steve Rogers. And just for a little while he was able to forget...to forget that May's birthday was in a few days and that Tony was going to be gone and that he was going to ask the man to adopt him and that he felt like he was on the edge of a nervous....

"Peter?" Steve was glancing back at him, slowing down, and Peter realized he was breathing heavily again. "Peter? Are you okay? Do you need to stop?"

He shook his head, speeding up once more and turning up his music. "Fine. Sorry. I was texting." Steve seemed to accept it, even though he wasn't holding his phone, and the two ran for almost an hour, making a loop around the park. Peter wanted to keep going, and he knew that Steve could have, but the man kept stealing glance at him, jaw tight and eyes worried.

His phone vibrated in his pocket while they were headed back to the tower. Pulling it out, he was surprised to find it was almost five thirty. It was from Ned again, asking if he wanted to hang out sometime that week. Peter told him that he would check, figuring he could go to his place after school on Thursday. He'd check with Tony...or did he even need to? Tony wouldn't be there...he could just go. Text Rhodey.

In the elevator, Peter leaned against the wall, trying not to look as exhausted as he felt. Steve didn't ask how he was, but as soon as they stepped onto the main floor, not Tony's floor, Steve motioned for him to come along. Peter followed, even though he'd planned on taking a shower and maybe getting a couple more hours of sleep. "Have a seat, kiddo. I'm making breakfast."

"What the hell, man? You already went running? It is Sunday morning. Don't you ever take…” Sam Wilson cut himself off when he caught sight of Peter, his head resting in his hand, elbow propped up on the counter where he was sitting on a barstool. Lightheaded and tired, he didn't even look at the man. "What the hell did you do to him?" For a second, Peter thought Sam was asking him what he'd done to Steve, and, confused, he looked up at the man who was standing at the stove.

"He came along for the run. I think we might have overdone it."

"I'm fine." Peter put in, an edge to his voice that he hadn't meant to put there.

Something was placed in front of him and he opened his eyes to find a glass of orange juice on the counter. "Drink up," Sam ordered, and Peter drained it without argument, shifting on the barstool and pulling his phone out of his pocket, placing it on the counter instead. "You alright, kid? Really? Because I really don't want Iron man to come down here and try to kick my ass because Cap decided to take you on a run and then you passed out or something."

Peter snorted. "Try to kick your ass?" The man rolled his eyes, a hand shooting out to ruffle his hair. Peter swatted him away, a reluctant smile turning the corners of his mouth as he tried to smooth his sweaty hair down.

"So he's funny too." At the stove, Steve just smiled a little, shaking his head as he pulled out a carton of eggs.
"Fried or scrambled?" The Captain wondered.

"Um...scrambled?"

Steve nodded, cracking several eggs into a skillet. Sam joined him, opening a bag of bread and throwing a few slices into the toaster. A door down the hall shut, and then someone was heading their way. The necklace against his skin grew just slightly warmer...it had been resting against the skin under his tank top, so it had already been the same temperature as him. But now...it was just a little warmer. And then Loki turned the corner, lifting an eyebrow when he spotted Peter. "Hey, Loki." He greeted, smiling. Sam glanced back over, an eyebrow raised, and Peter got the impression that Sam didn't care much for Loki.

"Hello, child." Loki greeted, taking a seat beside him. "What happened to you?" He asked, looking Peter up and down. Peter could see through his mask by now...he looked unconcerned, but he knew that the Asgardian cared.

"We went running."

"Why?"

"Uh...fun?" He shrugged. "Like...jogging. In the park."

"Was someone chasing you?" The dry question started a laugh out of Peter and he grinned, shaking his head.

"You never go running? Or like...exercise for fun?"

"No."

"What do you do for fun?"

"Stab my brother." Peter laughed again, tickled by the incredulous looks on Steve and Sam's faces. He caught the corner of Loki's lip twitching as Steve began to scoop eggs onto a plate that he pushed over to Peter, then Sam added some toast and passed him the butter.

"I'm making more, but that should hold you for a while."

"Thanks." Peter offered a piece of toast to Loki who took it and ate it dry, despite the fact that Peter wrinkled is nose and tried to give him some butter, then jam. Giving up and feeling like he'd better eat something, he took a bite of his own breakfast, which quickly turned into him scarfing down his own breakfast.

"Maybe you want to chew that?" Sam asked mildly, but Peter barely listened, just focused on stuffing his face, and enjoying how the lightheadedness faded.

"You feeling better?" Steve asked, which caused Loki to give him another long look.

"I'm fine." He assured the man between bites, noticing how Loki wrinkled his nose when Peter spoke with his mouth full.

"Do Midgardian children not observe basic table manners?" Loki muttered under his breath, making Peter laugh again.

Steve was back at the stove, still making eggs, and when breakfast was over, Peter had eaten three plates full of eggs and at least five pieces of toast. They offered him more, but Peter thanked them for
breakfast and said he was going to head back to his floor. No one corrected him...no one reminded him that it was Tony's floor. Loki followed him to the elevator, walking with him even though it was barely twenty feet. When they reached the elevator, Loki turned to him, crossing his arms and looking him up and down.

"How are you sleeping?" He asked, his voice uncharacteristically quiet. Almost gentle. Peter shrugged.

"Fine."

"Nightmares?"

"No."

"Then why were you up so early that you could go running with Captain Freedom?" Peter's lips twitched and he almost laughed.

"I...I woke up." He told him with a shrug. "Just...couldn't sleep.

"Why not?" Peter shrugged again, averting his eyes. "Peter?" He was surprised to hear the man say his name, and he looked up, meeting his eyes. "Are you alright, child?"

"I...yeah. Really...just tired. I'm going to try and get some more sleep."

The Asgardian regarded him seriously, then nodded, stepping back as Peter stepped into the elevator that had been waiting for him. As soon as the doors closed, he closed his eyes and rested his head against the wall. Thankfully, no one was in the living room yet, so he dragged himself to his room, took a quick shower, then dropped onto the bottom bunk, almost surprised when he was able to fall asleep instantly.

The next thing he knew was a gentle hand on his hair, and a weight at his side. "Kiddo? You okay?" He hummed in confusion, and a thumb rubbed against his temple. "It's almost noon."

"Huh?" He asked, eyes shooting open, heart rate immediately racing. "Am I late?"

"No, you're okay." Blinking and disoriented, he looked around the room, feeling uncomfortably warm under the blankets and shoving them off. Tony helped, pulling the blanket off and resting the back of his hand against Peter's forehead. "You feeling alright?"

"Yeah...yeah, I just..." He shook his head, trying to clear it. "I thought I set an alarm." Tony held up a phone, and it took Peter a second to realize that Tony was holding his phone. "Pete? Are you sure you're okay?"

"Where..."

"Cap brought it up. Said you forgot it at breakfast. He also said you two went running." Peter nodded, taking his phone, still feeling disoriented. "Pete? Are you sure you're okay?" He asked as Peter sat up and rubbed his hands over his face.

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm fine. I just...I can't believe I slept that late."

"In all fairness, you did run for a couple of hours first." Tony didn't look mad about that, exactly. He didn't look too happy either, though. "Pep and I are leaving in about an hour. Do you want to come out and eat something?" Although the last thing he'd done before going to bed was eat, he had slept for a little over five hours so he was starving again. Nodding, he pulled himself to his feet, automatically reaching a hand out to Tony to pull him up. The man smiled, taking the hand and
letting Peter tug him to his feet.

Lunch felt rushed to Peter, even though neither Pepper nor Tony seemed to be hurrying. He knew that this would be the last time he saw them for a week. And it was no big deal, he told himself. He was fine. He was sixteen years old now and he wasn't afraid to be without his family for a couple of days. Heck, most teenagers would be excited! They'd be thinking of ways to throw a house party or sneak out with friends...but Peter didn't feel the urge to do any of those things. In fact, he just wanted to lay back down.

When he finished eating, he automatically carried his plate to the sink and started washing the dishes. This once, Tony didn't say anything. Neither did Pepper. But as he was cleaning, Pepper came over to say goodbye, a gentle hand touching his shoulder. "Alright, Peter." She murmured, and he turned to face her, hands still a little wet. He dried them on a towel, and she squeezed his arm. "We'll be back before you know it."

Those words made a knot form in his stomach, a memory from so long ago hitting him full force. "That's what my mom said." He whispered, and he felt more than saw her stiffen.

"Peter..." The woman whispered, breathing out his name with such sadness. "Hey...look at me, sweetheart." He did, blinking back the heat in his eyes, all the while calling himself an idiot...berating himself for worrying her.

He forced his face into a smile, did his best to make it reassuring. "I'm fine."

He should have known he wouldn't be able to fool Pepper. She pressed her lips together, then shook her head. "I think we should stay." His jaw dropped, and immediately he was shaking his head. "No...no you can't! It's important...you have to go!' They couldn't do this. Not for him. "Please...I'm fine, Pepper. You have to go." He could tell she was conflicted, which told him how important this was. "Please. I'm okay. I promise. I'll just miss you guys. But you can call, right?"

"Of course we can." She murmured, both of them making an effort to keep their voices low so Tony wouldn't hear. But he was sure to start getting suspicious soon if they kept whispering like this. For a moment, she just stared at him with eyes that seemed to see everything, but then she squeezed his shoulder a little harder, a hand coming up to cup his face. "I want you to promise me something." He nodded. Of course he would. "If you need us to come home, I want you to tell me. You don't have to tell Tony. You can just text me if you want..."

"But this meeting..."

"Is not more important than our son." The words hit him as hard as the memory had, and he felt like his breath had been taken away. "Do you understand? No meeting is more important than my kid." He swallowed hard, looking into her fierce, serious eyes. "Okay?"

He nodded, feeling his voice crack as he responded. "Okay."

Then she smiled, that hand on his cheek still there, thumb rubbing over his face. "Okay. Good. I'll see you in a couple of days. I love you, Peter."

It wasn't hard for her, he realized, not in the same way it had been for Tony. For her, those words came easily. "Love you too, Pepper." It would be almost exactly a year before he'd call her 'mom,' his voice a little clumsy with the title he hadn't used since childhood. But it would all be worth it...it would make her smile like he'd never seen before, eyes lighting and filling with tears at the same time. Pepper would never forget that first Mother's day they'd spend together as a real, actual, legal
He didn't realize, as Pepper headed back to the living room to grab her bags, that it was Mother's day. Even if he had, he would have felt too awkward to say anything.

Tony joined him at the sink as he was finishing up the dishes, only about a minute after Pepper had left. For a moment, the man just stood beside him, staring out the window that overlooked the city. "Are you sure you don't want to go? Because you can. I'll write notes for your school and we can get your stuff together...or we can get you new stuff. They have clothes in Hong Kong." Peter nodded, fighting the urge to give in. But finals were coming up and he...he had to get through them. Ace them. He didn't know why that was so important, but it was.

"Promise. You don't have to worry, you know? I won't cause trouble for Rhodey or anything." Tony snorted, rolling his eyes.

"I never thought you would. I just…" He cut himself off, then smiled, wrapping an arm around Peter. "I'll miss you kid."

Peter leaned into the embrace. "I'll miss you too." He admitted. Tony turned, pressing a hand to the back of Peter's head, and he felt the man take a deep breath.

"I love you, kid. Call me if you need anything. I mean it. Anything. And text me during the day."

"Won't you be asleep?"

"Don't care. Still want you to text me."

"In class?" Peter asked, voice a little teasing. Tony chuckled.

"Yes. But don't get caught."

"I almost never do." Peter gave a breathy laugh when Tony did.

"Alright, Pete." Tony pulled away, hands on his shoulders. "I'll text you when I land. Just…” He hesitated, then smiled, his whole face softening as his eyes crinkled at the edges. "Be careful. I love you."

"I love you too, Dad." Tony put a hand on his head, not ruffling his hair but just resting it there.

"I'll see you on Saturday."

And then, Peter was alone in the apartment.
Peter was sitting at his desk in his room, flipping through a textbook as he took notes when there was a voice from his doorway. "Wow...what kind of teenager does schoolwork on a Sunday?"

The question startled a smile out of Peter, who had been focusing so hard that he hadn't quite heard the man approach. Of course, his senses hadn't gone off...he trusted Rhodey absolutely. "I have finals next week." He explained, gesturing to his Chemistry textbook. Honestly, he'd just been trying not to think too much about the fact that he was alone now...well, okay, not alone. Not really. He had the team. Happy. He'd texted Ned and had plans to go over there the next day. He'd go to decathlon practice. Wednesday...it would happen. He'd survive it somehow. And then it would be over and he could focus on finals.

Rhodey leaned against the doorframe, arms crossed, and he smiled a little as if he'd seen right through him. "Yeah? Some of us are going to be training down in the gym if you want to join us."

That perked Peter up a little. He had been trying to lose himself in homework, not wanting to risk texting Tony so soon and seeming too needy...or the two of them coming back. He had a feeling that Pepper would do it...that she would somehow push the meeting back again. But he couldn't be the reason that Tony missed even more work.

"Um...yeah. Sure." He jumped up, glad to have an even better distraction than homework which he'd been struggling to focus on. "I mean...if you're sure..."

"I'm sure, kid," Rhodey told him with a grin. "Cap told me to come find you...figured you might like to do some training with the Avengers since you're going to be one."

He looked down at himself, wearing sweatpants and a t-shirt. "Should I wear my suit or..." Rhodey shook his head.

"You're fine as you are, kid. Come on, before Cap starts without us." So he did, hurrying after Rhodey as they made their way to the elevator, picking at the hem of his shirt nervously. Rhodey smirked, batting his hand away from his shirt. "Relax, Pete. It's not a mission...we're just doing some sparring." He tried...tried to smile and relax. Putting a hand on his shoulder, Rhodey squeezed, a thumb rubbing over his collarbone soothingly. And then they were in the gym.

Steve, Sam, Natasha, and Clint were all in the room, and Rhodey took a seat on the sidelines, Peter moving to stand by his side. They were all in nicer workout clothes than him, but no one seemed to have a problem with his presence. In fact, Steve, Sam, and Natasha all gave him quick smiles before turning back to Steve who had apparently been waiting for them to arrive. Clint didn't look at him...but Peter told himself not to worry about that.

"Alright. Let's get started. We're going to be working on close range hand to hand today. Natasha, you and Sam pair up. Rhodey, you're with me. Clint, you're with Peter."

Honestly, Peter would have rather been with anyone else. Anyone. It wasn't that he didn't like Clint...he'd gotten him a birthday present and he'd been nice at his party, but Peter kept remembering how Clint had reacted to finding out who he really was...and Tony's part in it. And yeah, ever since, everyone had been cordial. But he was still wary, and given the way Clint glanced at him before turning back to Steve, he thought the feeling might be mutual.

Peter gave Rhodey a hand up, then followed the man to the center of the room where mats were laid out with large gaps between them. Plenty of space for sparring. Clint moved to the one in the middle...
and Peter followed, standing across from the man who was staring at him with an unreadable expression. He thought the others might be watching...keeping an eye out to see how this went. But Peter was more nervous about accidentally hurting the other man. It was something he'd been working on with patrols, and it seemed like he was mostly in control...but he knew how dangerous a slip up could be.

Almost expressionless, the older man put up his fists, and Peter did the same, his stomach turning. He didn't want to fight Clint. Didn't want to spar with him. Honestly, he was wishing that he could go back upstairs. Do some homework...text Ned. Ned would think it was pretty awesome that he got to spar with the actual Avengers, but it was significantly less cool with Clint looking at him like that...like he didn't want Peter there...or like he couldn't figure out why Peter was there. Shaking that thought off, Peter focused on Clint who stepped forward, feigning left, then swinging with his right.

Peter's senses went off a second before the punch landed and he ducked, bringing his own fist up and swinging at Clint's jaw. The archer pulled back, Peter's swing missing by only a fraction of an inch. Clint landed a blow on his shoulder that barely phased him, and, hooking a foot behind Clint's knee and pulling. The man stumbled, and Peter could have finished him...could have easily landed a blow to Clint's jaw and knocked him out. Instead, he struck him in the shoulder, barely tapping him and then jumping back when Clint swung at him again, this time letting Clint knock him off his feet. The man stared down at him, shaking his head and finally holding out a hand. "C'mon, kid." He ordered gruffly. Peter took the hand, letting him pull him to his feet. "I know you fight better than that, otherwise you'd be dead by now. C'mon. Fight. For real."

"I don't want to hurt you," Peter admitted, voice small. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Rhodey pausing in his match with Steve to watch him. Clint's eyes softened a fraction. "You aren't going to hurt me. Come on, Spider-kid." He put his fists up. "Show me what you've got."

He hesitated, then nodded, putting his own hands up. And this time, he tried. He focused. He pulled his punches, but not quite as much. He ducked and swung and had had Clint on the ground in less than three minutes.

This time, Clint grinned at him. Just a little.

They went five more rounds, and Peter won four out of five, knocking Clint down onto the mat nearly every time. Every time, Clint's eyes creased a little more at the edges, lips turning up. Every time, Peter held out a hand and Clint took it, and Rhodey seemed to be watching them less and less.

Peter matched up with Steve for the rest of the session, and finally, he felt like he could let go just a little. Ease up on his tightly controlled strength and spar for real. Although he guessed, it was good to practice holding back...good to practice restraint. But it was a lot more fun to spar when he didn't have to worry about that. So he let himself relax a bit as he fought Steve, and he could tell that Steve was doing the same, his punches hitting a little harder as they fought.

They fought for longer than anyone else. Steve was better than him, but Peter's senses gave him an edge. In the end, Peter felt himself getting tired, his head swimming just a little as he dodged one punch but the second one got him, sending him sprawling, jaw aching. Bringing a hand up to his jaw and flinching, Peter blinked away the stars that had appeared in his vision, then glanced up at Steve who was staring down at him, wide-eyed.

"Pete? You okay?" Rhodey all but demanded, moving over to stand beside the mat. He nodded, rubbing his jaw and smiling a little.
"Yeah...I'm fine."

"Thought you'd dodge that one, kid," Steve told him, seeming to shake himself out of a stupor as he held out a hand. Peter took it, well aware of the tight look on Clint's face. "You sure you're okay?"

"Yeah." He opened his mouth and closed it, working his jaw around and making sure that nothing was broken. "I'm good."

"Well, now that you've broken the little spider, how about we call it a day?" Natasha suggested, moving forward and throwing her arm around Peter's shoulder. "And next time, you can train with me. How about that?" Peter smiled, nodding as Natasha led him forward. The others fell in line, following Peter and Natasha to the elevator. When they reached the common room on the floor below the penthouse where Peter lived with Tony, he was pushed toward the same barstool he'd spent the early morning in, and a glass of water was pushed toward him as Loki entered the room, lifting an eyebrow. "Did I not find you in this exact position this morning?"

"Hey, Loki." Peter smiled a little, draining the glass. Loki nodded his own greeting, taking a seat beside him. In the kitchen, Steve had started on dinner, Natasha making smoothies while Clint kept an eye on Peter and Loki from where he stood by the refrigerator.

They all ate dinner together, Peter excusing himself as soon as it was made apparent that no one wanted him to do the dishes. He could feel their eyes on him...could almost hear the offer to stay on that floor instead with all of them. He left before any of them could voice it, making sure to grab his phone this time as he stepped into the elevator, thanking them for dinner, then went up to his own floor. To his own room. Rhodey called that he'd be up soon, and Peter lifted a hand in acknowledgment.

Where he finished his homework, he finally grabbed his phone, but just as he was about to text Tony, it rang. He immediately touched the 'accept' button, Tony's face filling the screen. "Hey, Pete. How's it going?" Tony asked. In the background, he could sort of see Pepper who looked to be walking around the plane, and he wondered how Tony had managed to get cell service from an airplane which was most likely crossing the ocean.

"Hey. It's okay. How are you?" He asked, feeling a little awkward. Tony was smiling though, looking perfectly at ease.

"Fine. Ready to be off this damn plane."

"At least it's not coach." Tony gave a dramatic shudder.

"You've got that right, kid. What have you been up to?"

"Um...mostly just homework. I went downstairs and sparred with the team!" Tony lifted an eyebrow.

"Yeah? How did that go?"

"It was...uh...it was fine. I beat Clint and Steve." The man snorted and Peter had to smile a little.

"Natasha said she'd spar with me next time."

Tony lifted his eyebrows. "Make sure Bruce is in the room for that. And tell the other spider that if
she breaks my kid, I'm going to have words with her."

"She wouldn't break me." Tony's expression didn't change and Peter hesitated. "Would she?"

"How about that homework, kid? How's studying for finals going?" Peter let the subject change pass and told Tony all about the finals he was getting ready for. Tony listened, occasionally putting his two cents in or insisting that Peter would be fine. By the end of the conversation, Peter felt a little lighter. Tony was fine and he was going to be fine and everything would be….

Fine.

The next day he woke up and threw on the first clothes he could find, throwing his books and homework into his bag, then hurried out of his room, somewhat surprised to find Rhodey already in the kitchen with breakfast ready. Eggs. Bacon. Sausage. "Oh…" He murmured, glancing up to find the man at the table. "Uh…morning."

"Morning, Pete. You hungry?"

"Sure...but...you don't have to...I mean, you probably have somewhere to be."

"Nope. Don't need to be at work until 9." He gestured for Peter to sit and he did, immediately digging into the food in front of him. "Are you patrolling after school?" He nodded. "Dinner's at six with the team. Try not to be late."

"With...the team?"

"Yeah. The team. Steve. Clint. Sam...heard of them?" Peter laughed a little.

"Yeah, I've heard of them I just...didn't know we'd all be eating together."

"Just for the week. I don't know if I'll be back in time, but Tony left strict orders to make sure you were home by dinner. It was about the only rule he had, other than 'no patrolling without telling anyone.'"

"That's it?" He asked.

"He said you knew the rest of the rules. Something about the 'self-preservation rules' or something." He waved a hand. "You've got my number if you need anything, right?" Peter nodded, stuffing the food in his face and glancing at his wrist. "Chew, kid, you've got some time."

His first day away from Tony went...well, not too bad. It probably could have been worse. School was fine, just as he'd expected. Ned invited him over the next day to binge Game of Thrones since Tony didn't have HBO and Peter hadn't asked him to unlock it. He texted Rhodye from school to make sure it was okay, and the man agreed without hesitation. He texted Tony while he was at school, and the man answered when he could, but Peter knew that he was busy. Decathlon practice was fine too. MJ was a great captain. Then patrols, which went fine. Almost boring. Then dinner with the team. Then more homework.

Day two was basically the same, minus decathlon practice and plus Game of Thrones. He and Ned binged the last few episodes of the season, trading fan theories and arguing over who the best ruler would be...and also who would die next. (Peter's money was on Bran, who he hated, but Ned wasn't so sure.) He ate dinner with his friend and his family, then took the subway home. Rhodey had waited up for him and offered to watch TV or a movie, but Peter begged off, feeling guilty as he went to do homework.
He missed Tony. And Pepper. But mostly Tony. And yes, he'd been able to video chat with him and they texted all the time. Sometimes Pepper texted him too, and the three of them had a group chat where Peter updated them on school and Tony complained about the meetings while Pepper tried her best to keep them both on track. Tuesday night, after hanging out with Ned and avoiding the team, he stayed up longer than he should have texting Tony and asking him all about his meetings, wishing he could video chat with him or even just explain why he was dreading the next day so much. But he never did, and eventually, Tony told him to go to bed.

And then it was Wednesday.

He woke up in a crappy mood, stomach tight and sick, head pounding from what he had to assume was stress. The year before, he'd gotten May flowers for her birthday. A card that he'd written a long, surprisingly sappy message in. And a gift card to a coffee shop she loved...he'd saved his allowance for a month to get her enough for a couple of coffees. She'd hugged him for a long time, tears dripping into his hair. "I love you, baby. So much."

He'd dreamed of that moment the night before. And it hadn't turned into a nightmare, surprisingly. Just when it had started to hurt...when it had become too painful, everything had turned green...a warm, green mist covering everything, and then he and May had been hugging again, and he'd been nothing but happy...until he'd woken up. And he'd known that he would never get to hug her again. He could never buy her another birthday gift...he'd never see her smile at him again. Not really.

And as he stared at the ceiling, he felt that knowledge in his chest...in his stomach. For a moment, he thought he might throw up, but instead, he swallowed hard, hit snooze on his alarm, and curled up in his bed under his blanket on the top bunk. He felt safer up there somehow, forehead pressed against the cool wall, back to the door, knees against his chest. He wanted Tony. Tony couldn't make this better, but just his presence would make it more bearable. He might not know what to say, but he'd hold Peter close, his hand on the back of Peter's head. Keeping him safe. Safe from what, he didn't know. But safe.

"Peter, if you do not get up now, you will be late for school," Friday informed him, her voice grating on his ears and making his head pound even more. Picking up his phone, he realized he must have fallen back asleep because he only had about ten minutes before he had to leave. There was a text on his phone from Tony and he opened it while he climbed out of bed.

"Hey, Pete. I know today's a rough day for you. Call me when you can." He stared at the message for a moment before Friday's voice came back.

"Colonel Rhodes asked me to tell you that you are going to be late if you do not hurry."

He squashed the urge to snap at her and grabbed a pair of jeans and random t-shirt...it turned out to have the Avengers on it, but he didn't much care. Throwing his backpack over his shoulder, he shuffled down the hall and toward the elevator, not stopping when Rhodey called out to him. "Hey, Pete! Come eat something really quick!"

"Not hungry." He muttered, stepping into the elevator and feeling a little bad for being rude. But he couldn't...physically felt like he couldn't.

"Peter!" Rhodey called, but Peter let the elevator doors shut, resolving to apologize later when his head didn't feel like it wasn't going to split open. Happy didn't try to talk to him...he must have seen on Peter's face that he couldn't take it. It wasn't until he dropped him off at school that the man finally spoke.

"If you need to go home, just call." Peter gave a quick not, then hurried into the school, keeping his
head down. Ned found him quickly, putting out a hand for their handshake. Peter gave a weak smile, going through the motions of their long, somewhat complicated handshake, ignoring the looks it always got.

"You sure you're okay to be here today?" Ned asked, and Peter gave a shrug.

"I'm fine." He lied around the pounding in his head and the sick feeling in his stomach.

Ned pursed his lips like he didn't believe him but, blessedly, he changed the subject back to Game of Thrones, and Peter managed to distract himself with talking to Ned and trying to pay attention in class. MJ handed him an apple in first period and he devoured it, taking huge bites and finishing it in under a minute. He hadn't realized how hungry he was. When he finished the apple, she handed him a granola bar that he ate just as quickly, muttering a thanks over his shoulder.

Then it was second period. English. He was tired, and his head was pounding, and the year before he'd gotten her flowers...and now she was dead.

He hadn't even been to her grave.

That thought, more than any of the others, had him raising his hand in the middle of class, telling the teacher that he felt sick and asking if he could go to the nurse. Ignoring the look MJ gave him, he threw his backpack over his shoulder and hurried out of the class, but instead of going to the nurse, he headed straight for the closest exit, knowing that he was probably going to get in trouble for this. That he was probably going to worry Rhodey and possibly Tony if they were able to reach him. But at the moment, he didn't care. He couldn't stand it...couldn't be in that school anymore. Pulling out his phone, he turned it off, then started walking.

He only made one stop. Then, bouquet in one hand, water bottle in the other, he kept walking the several miles to the cemetery. Thankfully it was a warm day since he'd forgotten to grab a jacket that morning. He walked, head down, backpack to light to really notice. He was kind of hungry, but he didn't stop, just carried the flowers he'd bought with one of the twenties that Tony had given him. He was kind of surprised at how expensive flowers were, but he guessed it didn't matter.

Peter liked to think that May would like them.

It was hard to find her grave. It wasn't like they were in alphabetical order, and there were plenty of newer headstones. He'd only been to visit Ben's gave once, so that didn't help either. He'd never thought much of visiting graves...he didn't believe that Ben was there anymore, not really, and he felt the same about May. But it was all he had, so he walked the path until he found the familiar headstone. Ben Parker. And then, right beside him, an even newer one. The headstone matched Ben's for the most part. There was a stone vase between them that looked new...he didn't remember it from his one visit to Ben's grave. But he was glad for it regardless.

Peter took the flowers and placed them gently into the vase, careful to arrange them so that none of the petals were smashed. He filled he vase with water, and the plant food that had come with the bouquet, and then he stepped back, staring at them. And then at the headstone. Her name. Her birthday. The day she died...and underneath were the words that Tony must have chosen. 'Beloved aunt and mother.'

Those words were what finally undid him, and he knelt in the dirt, covering his face with his hands, chest too tight for air. Against his neck, the dagger charm was warm...warmer than it should have been. He gripped it, hunched over so far that his forehead nearly touched the dirt. It hurt. It hurt just as much as it had when he'd first lost her in some ways. Because that's what she had been. His mother. Not in name, and not biologically, but that's what she'd been to him ever since he'd been a
"I miss you." He whispered, one hand pressed into the dirt that covered her corpse. He didn't know what he believed about an afterlife, but she had been Catholic...she'd believed in heaven. And he wanted to. He wanted to believe that her soul was safe, that she was happy somewhere. That in some way, she still lived. Because she was gone from his world. Gone from his life. Fisting a hand in the dirt, he tried to breathe through that pain that filled his chest.

He could have called Tony. He probably should have called Tony, but he'd turned his phone off and he was pretty sure he was already in at least some trouble. He figured he might as well stay for a while. Hands in the dirt, tears dripping down his cheeks and onto the ground by his fingers, he gripped the warm charm and closed his eyes fighting to breathe through it.

He'd given her flowers the year before...and he'd given her flowers this year too. Even if she wasn't there anymore. Even if she'd never see them.

And then there were footsteps. It wasn't like he'd thought the graveyard would be deserted...even though it kind of was. But he was more surprised when the footsteps stopped right behind him. And then a cold hand was on his back, someone kneeling beside him. "Is it a tracker?" He whispered, voice hoarse from crying.

"What, child?"

"The necklace." Peter released the charm and brought his other hand down to support himself, both hands covered in loose dirt where the grass had barely begun to grow. "Is it a tracker?"

"It is many things." Loki murmured, the steady hand remaining on his back. "The colonel is quite upset...apparently your school called. Stark put him as your second emergency contact." Peter didn't speak. "I told them that I would find you and return you to the tower. I did not say when." Peter felt himself smiling, just a little. Sitting up, he turned and buried his head in Loki's shoulder, knowing very well that this wasn't Tony...that Loki might not want to hold him like Tony would.

But Loki did it anyway. The man wrapped an arm around Peter's shoulders, pulling him close. "It's her birthday," Peter whispered. "I never visited her grave...and it's her birthday."

"Would that upset her?" The genuine curiosity surprised Peter, but he didn't look up. "That fact that you were in too much pain to visit the place where her body rests...would that upset her?"

Peter blinked, then shook his head. "No...she'd understand." Loki nodded. "She believed in heaven." He went on, needing to say the words. "I think...I hope that she's in heaven." Loki put a hand on the back of Peter's neck, squeezing gently, his cold fingers grounding Peter to the moment...to the fact that he was kneeling in a graveyard, being held by Loki, who had somehow become a good friend of his, and the fact that, if he thought about it, he believed his own words. He believed that May would have understood...he believed that May forgave him and that she still loved him...that she was somehow, some way, still with him.

"Would you like to return to the tower?" Loki asked, making no move to stand. Peter realized then that man wouldn't...that Loki would wait for him to be ready. He hesitated, not liking the idea of going back if he was going to get yelled at.

"Am I in trouble?"

"I am sure that the colonel will forgive you once he sees you're safe." He smiled a bit, then hesitated.

"Is Rhodey mad?"
"I doubt the man who thinks of himself as your favorite uncle could be angry with you for long." Peter smiled a little, then pulled himself to his feet, reaching out a hand for Loki who took it, then wrapped an arm around him, the weight of it comforting. "Come along, child. It is a long walk back to the tower. And perhaps text your father. He was threatening to come home in his armor if no one could find you."
Bad Days and Bad Patrols

Chapter Notes

First, thank you to everyone who has read and reviewed. I appreciate my reviews so much, and I'm sorry I wasn't able to respond to many this time around. Life has gotten quite hectic. Secondly, I hope you enjoy the chapter! I'd say there are less than 5 chapters left in this story. :) Please forgive errors as it is late and I am quite tired, but I wanted to get this out tonight.

It wasn't that long of a walk back to the Tower, despite what Rhodey had said. Not really. It was mostly warm out, and Peter walked at Loki's side, the two of them moving together in silence for a while. Every once in a while, he would glance up at the Asgardian at his side, but the man seemed content to stare straight ahead and focus on walking.

That was fine with Peter.

He realized that May probably would have liked Loki. He was funny when he wanted to be, and was usually nice. Plus, he was always good to Peter. That had been her most important requirement for liking people.

People on the street would occasionally stop and look, eyes narrowing as they apparently tried to place Loki, but he was in civilian clothes, so they mostly just glanced over and went about their days. "Is it weird?" Peter wondered as they waited to cross the street. "Living here." Loki glanced down at him, lifting an eyebrow. "I mean...since you're kind of well known and it isn't your home...I mean, it is now but..." Peter let himself trail off, eyes dropping.

"Asgard had not felt like my home for most of my life." The man told him, ignoring the guy who was standing at the corner, tracking them with his eyes like he wasn't quite sure if he was seeing things. Peter wiped at his eyes, hoping it wasn't obvious that he'd been crying. In his pocket, he was very aware of his phone which he hadn't turned back on. He needed to text Tony...to let him know that he was fine. Well...relatively. He still wanted to go to bed and stay there...still wanted to be in a dark room alone for the rest of the day.

"Earth can be your home," Peter told him, shrugging a little with a smile, trying to force the cheer into his voice. Loki glanced down at him again, then gave a brief smile in return, his eyes softening. "You're like family, anyway."

Reaching out a hand, Loki rested it on Peter's shoulder, nodding just a little. "Yes...I suppose you're right."

When they reached the tower, Peter followed Loki almost sheepishly into the elevator, hoping he wasn't about to get in trouble. He knew that he needed to turn his phone back on and maybe text Tony, but first, he should probably apologize to Rhodey...not that he was sorry for what he'd done. He'd needed to do it. He'd needed to see her...to be alone with her. But maybe he should have texted Rhodey first...before leaving school. He was sure the man would have understood. Sure that Rhodey would probably have driven him to the graveyard himself if Peter had just asked.

But he'd wanted to be alone.
He still wanted to be alone.

The elevator took them directly to his floor. Peter thought about asking if Loki would just make him invisible so he could sneak off to his room, but he figured Friday would rat him out. So he stepped into the living room and glanced sheepishly up at Rhodey who was holding a phone to his ear. The man stood when Peter stepped forward.

"Here he is. Just a second." Rhodey put the phone down and reached out, grasping Peter by the shoulders and looking somewhere between frustrated and concerned. "Are you okay?"

He shrugged a little. "I'm fine."

"Here." He held out the phone that Peter took on instinct. He knew without looking that it was Tony, and his first words were 'I'm sorry.'

"Are you alright?" He felt a rush of frustration. He was Spiderman! Anger and frustration he could get. Could even accept. But worry? He was perfectly capable of taking care of himself, but he didn't say that.

"Yeah. I'm fine." There was a moment of silence and Peter went on, lowering his voice as Rhodey stepped away and Loki disappeared. "I mean...I'm...". He shrugged even though Tony couldn't see him. "I went to May's grave. I know I shouldn't have skipped school..."

"I'm not mad about that, kid." Tony's voice was quiet but he sounded stressed. "You turned off your phone and didn't tell anyone where you were going."

"I was fine, Tony." Finally, a little of his frustration leaked into his tone, and Tony went quiet. "I'm Spiderman. I can take care of myself."

Rhodey was watching him from across the room, arms crossed. When Tony responded, his voice was measured. "You're a kid, Pete. Whether you're enhanced or not. You're only sixteen. A kid. More importantly, you're my kid."

"I'm not..."

"I don't give you a lot of rules, Peter." Tony went on in the same tone as if Peter hadn't spoken. "Hell, most of the rules I give you are just common sense...ways to take care of yourself. And this one. Don't go off without telling anyone. Because if you get hurt and you don't have a way to contact anyone, what the hell am I supposed to do?"

"I was fine."

"I am halfway across the world, Peter." Tony finally snapped a little. "I cannot be there to help you if you need it. You turned your phone off!"

"I didn't need help! I was at her grave, Tony! I wasn't in danger!"

"I didn't know that!"

Peter closed his eyes when Tony raised his voice to match Peter's. He hadn't even known he'd been yelling. Hadn't realized...his eyes got hot and he hated himself for it. It wasn't even a serious fight...not a big deal. All he had to do was apologize...to promise he wouldn't do it again. Because he wouldn't. But he couldn't say it...couldn't get the words out. Because he missed Tony and he missed May and somehow this had turned into a fight and it was too much.
Rhodey was suddenly right beside him, one hand clasping his shoulder, one taking the phone from him. "Tones? Everyone's fine. I'll call the school and let them know that Peter was sick."

"Rhodey…"

"Get back to your meeting." Peter started to pull away...to sneak off to his room, but although Rhodey didn't so much as look his way, the hand on Peter's arm tightened enough to keep him still. Peter could have pulled away, of course, but he wasn't about to. He stayed put letting the man hold him in place, practically leaning into the contact. "He can call you later. Okay?"

There was a soft sigh that Peter could barely hear. "Okay. Tell him to call me sometime before he goes to bed. And...tell him that I love him."

Rhodey softened when Peter smiled a little, lowering his eyes, the hand on his shoulder squeezing. "He knows, Tones. He'll call you later. Get back to work."

When Rhodey hung up, he eyed Peter critically for a moment. "Come on." He urged, jerking his head, and Peter followed him to the kitchen where he was instructed to take a seat. He did, perching on a barstool as the man pulled out a box of waffles. "It's a bit late for brunch but i think we can make due." He popped two waffles into the toaster and then grabbed a plate. Passing over a bottle of water, he waited for Peter to take a long drink. "He's not even mad at you. Not really. You just scared him. Serves him right for all the times he's scared me."

Peter managed a smile, draining the glass, then taking the bottle of gatorade Rhodey handed him next. When the waffles popped out, Rhodey put them on a plate with butter and syrup and handed them over. Peter ate them in silence, then the two others that he made. When he was done, Rhodey took his plate, placing it in the sink. "Go rest, kid. You look like you need it."

"I'm fine." Rhodey shook his head, reaching out and ruffling his hair.

"Go on. I'm sending you to your room." Peter gave a weak smile at that. "Go on. Go to your room. Turn on your phone and text Tony and do your homework or whatever it is you do in there."

Peter did as he asked, going straight to his room, turning on his phone, then dropping onto the bottom bunk of his bed. His screen was full of messages, mostly from Tony.

"Hey, kid. Text me when you can."

"I know it's her birthday. I know this is rough. Call me, okay?"

"It's okay if you want to go home from school."

"Rhody just called. Call me, Pete."

"Call me, Peter."

"Come on, kid. Please call me."

"Kid, please. Call me. Rhodey is worried."

"I'm worried too."

Peter sighed, opening the last text and replying. "Are you in a meeting?"

Immediately Tony's face appeared on his screen, and he answered the video call. "Nope. Just got out of one."
Peter smiled a little. "Because you left?"

Tony shrugged. "Eh. Tomato, Tomahto. How are you feeling, Pete?"

"I'm fine."

"I've thought about banning that word…" Peter snorted.

"You can't ban words."

"Can too. I'm banning fine. Now, how are you?"

"Satisfactory." This time it was Tony who snorted, and Peter had to laugh a little, the sadness deep in his chest abating for a while.

"I didn't want to be gone on her birthday, Pete. I wanted to be there…"

"It wasn't your fault. You had to work...I get it." Peter assured him, propping his phone up beside his face and laying his head on the pillow.

"You're a good kid. The best kid."

"Even though I skipped school without telling anyone where I was going?" Tony shrugged.

"I once skipped two weeks of college and went on a drinking binge so bad that I had to have my stomach pumped. So if you ask Rhodey, I deserve a kid that scares me every once in a while."

"I'm still sorry."

"Just keep your phone on next time. Please. For my sake." He nodded, eyes dropping a little. "How did Loki find you?" Peter held up the charm on his necklace. It wasn't as warm as before, but it was still warm.

"It's a tracker."

Tony nodded, humming a little. "Imagine that. I think 75% of your birthday gifts were trackers this year." Peter smiled, shrugging. He wasn't wrong. "No patrolling tonight, Pete. Stay in."

"I'm grounded?" He cried, eyes narrowing a little. Tony shrugged, seeming unconcerned.

"You can call it that if you want. Mostly, I just don't want you patrolling while you're upset. Stay in. Do homework. Watch a movie. Heck, go running with Capsicle if you want. Just no Spiderman."

"But…" Tony lifted an eyebrow, and in the background, Peter could hear a couple of people speaking loudly, and what sounded like Pepper calling for him. "Just for tonight?"

"Just for tonight," Tony confirmed, the corners of his mouth tugging upward. "Alright, Pete. I'll be back Friday night. We'll get some dinner together and I'll tell you all about Hong Kong...well, the parts I got to see. Mostly the inside of board rooms. It'll be great."

"Okay." Peter nodded, wiping at his eyes and wishing he could turn off these ridiculous emotions.

"Love you, kid."

"Love you, Tony." And with that, the man's face disappeared, and Peter dropped his phone with a sigh.
It was really a surprise that he was distracted all the next day. He'd elected to go to school despite Rhodey, Tony, and even Pepper via text all assured him that it would be fine if he stayed home...got some rest. Hung out with the team. But Peter insisted on going, reminding himself that the whole reason he'd elected to stay home instead of going with Tony was so that he could study for finals. And this time, he managed to make it through the whole day. Flash had, since finding out that he was Spiderman, left him alone for the most part, still occasionally running into him in the hall, his shoulder knocking against Peter's, but he would wink so ridiculously that it pretty much ruined any effect it might have had.

Peter was almost certain that people were starting to think that they were secretly dating or something.

Still, on Thursday morning, Flash cornered him in the bathroom to ask if he was okay. Apparently, his running out of school in the middle of the day had attracted some notice. Peter assured him that he was fine, then went about his day, struggling to focus, but managing it anyway.

Then he went out on patrol, which went fine for all of roughly twelve minutes.

Peter swore, head slamming back against the brick wall as he let it drop. "Shit!" He hissed, a hand pressed against his side. "You have got to be fucking kidding me!" His last day! The last day he'd have to be without Tony.

"Peter, it appears as though you have sustained…"

"I know, Karen!" He snapped a little, sighing as the anger dropped away.

It had been a long day.

Hell, it had been a long week.

"My protocols require me to contact an Avenger when you receive a stab wound."

"Yeah. I know." He snapped again, dreading this. As if the Avengers didn't think of him as a child already.

"However, considering that many of the Avengers are close by, you may choose which one is contacted."

Of course, Peter knew that it didn't matter...if one of the Avengers knew he was hurt, they all would know soon enough. "Do you have to tell Tony."

There was a long pause. Then she spoke. "Not if you contact him yourself." He rolled his eyes.

"Right. Yeah. Send a text. Tony, got lightly stabbed. Don't freak out." He glanced up at the brick wall across from him and sighed at the man he'd webbed there. "Was it really necessary to stab me, dude? Like...now Tony's gonna be pissed." He didn't pull the mask off but kept talking as he tried to figure out which Avenger to call for. "Not at me, to be clear. At you. You've officially pissed off Tony Stark."

"Peter, who would you like to contact?"

"Uh…". Clint was out. The man already didn't think much of him being a superhero, even though he'd been pretty nice when they'd been training. Rhodey would be the most likely to tell Tony all the details. Steve...well, Steve was fine, but he didn't feel close enough to the super soldier to admit to being stabbed and ask for help. Honestly, he was fine...like, he felt fine. Just... a little light headed.
And his side kind of hurt. So...who could he call. Bruce….Bruce was a Doctor. Surely he wouldn't freak out...right? "How about Bruce? Can you call him?"

"Of course, Peter."

The line rang a few times as he pressed his hand to the wound on his side, swearing again when it stung. "Hello? Peter?"

"Oh, hey Bruce. Um...do you think I could get a hand?"

"Of course. Are you on patrols? What happened?"

"I was...um....lightly stabbed." He tried, flinching when Bruce's voice lifted an octave.

"You were lightly..."

"Yeah." He interrupted. "Webbed the guy up and everything so I'm fine. Just...do you think you could pick me up?"

"Of course. I'm on my way right now. How are you feeling?"

"Like I've been lightly stabbed." He grumbled, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath. Hoping he wasn't coming off as rude, he immediately apologized. "I'm sorry. I just...this sucks."

"Friday set the GPS...I'll be there in about ten minutes. You know, Rhodey could have gotten to you faster in his suit."

"I'm fine. It's not too bad." Even as he said that his side gave a stab of pain and he took a deep, ragged breath.

"Peter? I've got some painkillers that I'm pretty sure will help...you're going to be okay. Did you tell Tony?"

"I texted him."

"You...okay. Okay...can you breathe okay? Does it feel like your lung was hit?"

"I don't think so. It's not that deep." Despite his words, the blood gushed around his fingers. "Just...bleeding a lot."

"I'm almost there. Stay on the phone with me, okay?"

"Okay." He murmured, closing his eyes and feeling frustration bubble up. Why couldn't he go more than a few weeks without a major freaking injury? Not that this was major but still. It was annoying.

"We all get hurt sometimes." Bruce's voice was gentle, and Peter rolled his eyes a little. "You go out on patrols almost every day. You're bound to get hurt more often. If Steve or Natasha did what you did, if they went out every night they'd probably get some bruised and scrapes too...and a couple of minor stab wounds."

"Clint already thinks I'm too young to be doing this."

"Clint will get used to it. He's got a daughter about your age, you know. That's probably why he's having such a hard time with seeing you as an Avenger. But you are one, no matter what he thinks."

Just then, a car pulled up to the alley and Bruce was climbing out, grabbing a black bag and hurrying
over to him. "Hey, kid." He glanced up at the man webbed to the wall across from him, thick webbing covering his mouth.

"He was trying to steal a car," Peter explained, jaw clenched.

"Alright." Bruce crouched beside him. "We can call the police as soon as I get you in the car. Here," He moved Peter's hand and pressed a clean cloth to his side, then pulled out a syringe. "The pain medicine." Taking his arm, the man turned it over, injecting the drugs into his arm. Peter flinched, but Bruce had been so quick that his hatred of needles had barely had time to be a problem. "Think you can stand up?" He nodded, letting the doctor pull him up, leaning heavily on the man.

His phone chose that moment to ring, and Bruce helped him get it out of his pocket. "Want me to…?" Peter nodded, eyes closing as the pain relief started to flow. Bruce opened the passenger side door of a car that definitely belonged to Tony. "Hey, Tony."

The man's voice was panicked on the other line. "Why are you answering his phone? He sent me a text…"

"I know. He was hurt on patrols but he's going to be fine." Peter let his head rest against the window when Bruce closed his door, and for just a moment as the doctor hurried around to the other side, he couldn't hear either of them. Then he was sliding into the driver's seat, the phone sandwiches between his shoulder and ear until the call switched to the Bluetooth of the car.

"What the hell did he mean, lightly stabbed?" Bruce threw Peter an almost reproving look, but he was barely paying attention anymore. He was tired and ready to be laying down and not in pain anymore, although the pain medicine seemed to be doing a pretty good job….or maybe it was just making him sleepy.

"He has a superficial stab wound to the left side. Not too bad. He's going to be fine. I've got him here with me in the car and we're on our way back to the tower."

"Is he awake? Can I talk to him?"

"You're on speaker in the car."

"Pete? Can you hear me, kid?"

"Yeah." He muttered. "Hey, Tony."

"Hey. Maybe don't send me texts designed to freak me the fuck out, huh?"

"Karen said I had to contact you…"

"Yeah, but for things like stab wounds, how about an actual phone call, not a text I'm going to glance at in a meeting." He sounded scared, and Peter was immediately guilty.

"I'm sorry."

Tony gave a soft sigh. "Not mad at you, Pete. Are you okay?"

"Yeah. Sleepy…"

"It's the pain medicine." Bruce put in, lest Tony think that he was falling asleep due to blood loss or something. "The wound isn't too deep. I'll just stitch him up and he should be healed by tomorrow afternoon at the latest. By the time you get back, he'll be fine."
"Yeah, he'd better be. Peter, please, I'm begging you. For the love of all that is holy, just stay in the tower until I get back." Bruce glanced over at Peter with a smile.

"He's fine, Tony. Don't worry about him."

"I don't think I can ever stop worrying about him, Bruce." That made Peter's heart clench, eyes closing for a second as he struggled with the emotion that statement brought to the surface. "Okay, Pepper is glaring at me. Just wait until I tell her what happened. Be expecting a phone call from her, kid, because there's no way she'll let this go."

"Tell her it wasn't my fault." Peter practically begged, head thrown back against the headrest.

"No can do, Pete. I think I'm just going to do what you did and tell her you were lightly stabbed. If I have to be scared to death by you on a regular basis, so does she."

"We're at the tower, Tony. I'm going to patch Peter up, and then he's probably going to need to get some sleep. We'll talk to you soon."

"Try not to let him hurt himself for at least another two hours." The man only sounded like he was half kidding as he hung up, and Peter groaned.

"Alright. Let's get you up to the medbay."

"Great." That was exactly where he'd been hoping to spend his night.
Home Again

"Tony?" The man sighed as he shoved his phone in his pocket, pinching the bridge of his nose and trying not to lose it. Trying not to just say screw it and get on a plane. Yeah, these meetings were important. And yeah, he did work for Stark Industries...was expected to actually show up for things sometimes. But Peter had practically just lost his aunt a few months ago and he was still grieving and he'd spent May's birthday alone and now he was hurt and...sometimes it felt like the kid found trouble. That he practically went looking for it. And Tony knew that wasn't fair. He knew that Peter did his best to stay out of harm's way...that at least half the time, it wasn't the kid's fault.

He was still stressed the fuck out.

"Hey..." Pepper placed her hands on his shoulders, squeezing gently and moving to stand in front of him. "What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing. Our kid just got lightly stabbed." Tony regretted the words as soon as they were out of his mouth. She went pale, jaw dropping, a hand gripping his arm as if to hold herself up, and he shook his head. "He's fine. Peter's fine. Just...Bruce has him. It wasn't too bad. Bruce wouldn't lie about that."

Bruce wouldn't lie about that. He wouldn't dare.

"What does that even mean?" She cried, reaching for her phone as if about to call him.

"Peter is fine. Will be fine. He was patrolling and got hurt. But he'll be okay." He needed to stress that part...stress the part where the boy they'd both started thinking of as their son would be okay. Would recover.

Pepper shot him a look. "So the words you went with were 'lightly stabbed.'"

"His words, not mine. Well...Captain Holt's words but still." She lifted an eyebrow. "Brooklyn Nine-Nine. He's obsessed with that show." To be fair, so was he, but he didn't think that this was the best time to talk about it.

From then on, the meetings drug by, so slowly that he had started staring out the window, wondering if he would survive the jump. They were on the third floor so he might break a leg, but he'd begun to fantasize about getting up and just making a break for it. He was sure he'd be fine. He wanted to go home. Get back to a country where he spoke the language and the place where his kid was. It would have been different if Peter had been with him. The kid would have liked Hong Kong. He could have found things to do in the city and it would have been a vacation for him. And the kid could have used a vacation.

More and more, Tony thought he should have made the kid go. But Pepper had reminded him more than once that they needed to let Peter make his own decisions sometimes. That so much had been decided for him. His life had been thrown into chaos and now he was living with new people and trying to be a superhero and keep up with school and his friends...it was a lot. So Tony had to agree with Pepper, as usual, even if he hated that his kid was hurt and Tony hadn't been there.

Rhodey had been texting him constant updates, from what Peter had eaten for breakfast to what he'd been doing with the team. Then, when Rhodey had told him, pretty hesitantly, that Peter's school had called, that Peter had apparently gotten up in the middle of school and walked out. Just...left. And yes, Tony preferred that Peter not randomly leave school in the middle of the day, but it wasn't really
that big of a deal, especially considering what day it had been. What did bother him was that Peter had turned off his phone. The kid knew that he worried...that everyone would worry.

But he couldn't blame the boy. Not really. He'd just wanted to be there. Felt like he'd let him down. It should have been him finding Peter. Should have been him discovering him at the graveyard and wrapping his arm around him and just...being there! That was his kid. But it had been Loki who had found him. And Tony was grateful, but he was jealous and sad too.

And now Peter was hurt and he'd been gone too long. The next time, he was insisting on bringing Peter. He would fight harder to get the boy to understand...to come with him. He had a feeling that Pepper would too. She called Peter a few hours after he'd told her what had happened, needing to talk to him. That was her son, just as much as he was Tony's son, whether or not the paperwork had been filled out. She loved him, and she would be a mother to him as soon as she was allowed.

When the meetings and talks were finally, finally over, Tony practically sprinted to the plane, having already packed everything up. He hadn't texted Peter yet since the kid was probably asleep, but he was counting the moments until he could see Peter, get him through finals, and then go on that vacation. There was other stuff to deal with too...the fact that Peter might need to go on medication for the depression he'd been feeling and the adoption conversation...but he wasn't worried. He just wanted to see his kid.

The plane ride was excruciatingly long. Leaning against his side, Pepper intertwined her fingers in his, keeping him grounded. She made omelets and he made smoothies, just like they would were they back home. But there was something missing, and they both knew it. Tony had known that this separation might be hard for the kid...he hadn't realized how hard it would be for him.

When the touched down, it was close to eleven pm, later than he'd wanted to arrive, and he hadn't yet told Peter that they were home. It was Friday, almost Saturday, and he'd spent nearly all of it on a plane. And sure, it wasn't coach, but it had still been uncomfortable. All he wanted was a shower and to go to bed, but first, Peter. The Tower was familiar and smelled like home and he'd missed it more than ever, knowing that a part of his family was here. He figured that the others were all probably in bed or at least on their own floor, so he was surprised when, as he stepped out of the elevator, he heard Bruce's voice coming from somewhere close by. "I tried to tell him that it wouldn't work, but he was determined that it would. Bet me fifty bucks, and let me tell you, that job paid almost nothing so fifty bucks was a serious amount of money." There was the familiar sound of Rhodey and Peter's laugh, and Tony felt his own lips turn up at the corners, following the laughter like a beacon.

"Did it blow up?" Came Peter's question.

"Of course it blew up! Your dad walked around without his eyebrows and fifty bucks poorer for about a month."

Peter laughed again, and Tony turned the corner to find Bruce standing across from Rhodey and Peter who were sitting on barstools across from him. Rhodey was grinning, a hand on Peter's back, and Tony was glad to see that, when he took a step forward and cleared his throat, Rhodey's grip turned protective for just a second before he registered that it was his best friend.

"Dad!" The word seemed to fly out of Peter's mouth before he even registered, and Tony found himself with an arm full of teenager before he could blink. Without even thinking, he wrapped his arms around his kid, careful of his side, one hand in Peter's hair which was getting kind of long. He might have to ask if the kid wanted a haircut soon.

"Hey, buddy." He murmured, pressing his lips to the top of Peter's head. "Did you miss me?" Peter nodded, showing no sign of letting him go. "I missed you too. How's the side?"
"Fine." Tony waited, rolling his eyes in fond exasperation.

"The stitches came out this morning. It's mostly healed. Just tender." Bruce told him, leaning against the counter and watching them with a smile.

"Told you." He snorted, rubbing Peter's back, then moving back when Peter let him go, wrapping his arms around Pepper. She embraced the boy, eyes closing for a moment, a sweet smile taking over her face.

"Hi, sweetie." She murmured, cheek against his hair.

At some point, Bruce and Rhodey headed downstairs, but all Tony registered was relief. Relief that he was finally with his family again. His whole family. This was what he wanted. A life with his family. A normal, domestic, happy life with his fiancee and his boy. Speaking of fiancee...they really needed to plan that wedding. Make it official. He wanted his family to be official.

He shook the thought off, rubbing circles on Peter's back as he pulled away from Pepper. "I'm going to go take a shower and go to bed. Don't stay up too late." Pepper cautioned with a smile, brushing some of Peter's hair out of his face. "Maybe tomorrow you can take him to get a haircut." She suggested with a smile, kissing Peter's cheek, then Tony's before heading off to bed. Tony wanted to sleep too, but instead, he draped an arm around Peter and gave him a quick squeeze.

"We got any leftovers? I'm starving?" Peter jumped up, hurrying over to the refrigerator and pulling out three carry out containers of Chinese food that he placed on the counter.

"Orange chicken, sweet and sour, or…" He opened the third, squinting a little. "Um…" The boy sniffed it and Tony snorted.

"I'll take the orange, you take the sweet and sour, and we'll throw that one away." He told the kid, reaching out and grabbing the mystery food from Peter and dropping it into the garbage can. Grinning that carefree grin of his, Peter carried the containers over to the microwave and stuck them in. "How's school going?"

"Fine."

"Yeah? Finals start next week, right? You ready?"

"I think so…" The way he trailed off made Tony think he was more nervous than he was letting on.

"You know, no matter what, I'm proud of you." The boy froze in front of the microwave, turning to face Tony who was leaning against the counter. "I am. So proud. You had a rough semester, but your grades are up and you're set to take finals on time. So regardless of what grades you get on them, I'm proud of you, Pete."

Peter gave a small, shy smile, eyes dropping to the ground. "Thanks." The word was so soft that Tony barely heard him, but he still moved to stand beside the boy, draping an arm around his shoulders and letting the kid lean on him while the microwave heated their food. "I really missed you."

"I missed you too, buddy."

After they ate, Tony ruffled Peter's hair, letting his hand linger there for just a second. "We'll sleep in tomorrow. I'll see you in the morning."

They did sleep in the next day, and Tony's first thought was how good it was to wake up in his own
bed. For once, Pepper was still in bed beside him. He wrapped an arm around her, nose in her hair, taking deep breaths and trying to put off getting up for the day. "Fri, is Peter up yet?"

"Yes, boss. Peter is currently on a run with Captain Rogers."

Tony groaned at the very thought of getting up before nine am to jog. "Of course he is." Pepper laughed beside him.

"You want to join them?"

"I can't think of anything I'd like to do less." He muttered, rolling over and and pressing his forehead to her shoulder.

Friday informed him that Peter had returned with Steve almost an hour later, and that the two were heading straight to their respective rooms to shower. He thought about getting up to make breakfast, but Pepper had turned over, an arm thrown around him, her head on his chest, and had fallen back asleep, so he was loath to wake her. So, taking a rare chance to get more sleep, he closed his eyes and dozed off, promising that he'd only close his eyes for a few minutes.

The next thing he knew was the smell of waffles. Opening his eyes, he found Pepper already sitting up beside him, leaning against the headboard. "Morning." She greeted, holding a plate on a small table on her lap.

"Hey...where'd you get that?"

"Peter brought it in while we were asleep."

"Peter made waffles?" He asked, surprise coloring his tone as he pushed himself upright. She pointed to the nightstand where he found a folded tray table and a plate with waffles covered in syrup.

"Peter and Steve went out and bought waffles." She corrected, letting him hand her his plate while he sat up the tray table.

"And why do we get breakfast in bed?" He wondered, digging into his waffles.

"Because we have a great kid?" He nodded, unable to argue with that.

"That we do."

"Hey, Tony?" Pepper asked suddenly. He hummed, wiping syrup from the corner of his mouth. "Why don't we have the wedding at our beach house at the end of the month? Just a small ceremony...we can invite the Avengers, get married on the beach...what do you think?"

He put the plate down, leaning in and pressing a kiss to her lips, a hand pressed to her cheek. "I think I'd marry you anywhere."
Father's Day

Peter squeezed his fingers together, reaching out and pushing his hands out as far as he could, propelling himself forward, eyes stinging from the salt water, but still marveling at the fish that hurried out of his way. Lungs burning just a little, but not enough to bother him yet, he dove, kicking his feet and reaching. As far as he could. He was close to the bottom...so close! He'd been close before, but he was closer than he'd ever been before. Kicking his feet even harder, he reached.

There! His fingers brushed against the plants that sat along the bottom of the ocean, swaying in the water. All around him, brightly colored fish wove their way through the water, and he sat on the bottom, looking up at the light that filtered down from the bright afternoon sun. He wasn't that deep, not really, but it was still amazing. Still so silent. He'd never really heard silence like this. Never. It was amazing.

Tony had grinned at him when they'd pulled up to the beach house, chuckling at Peter's wide-eyed expression, his hand pressed against the window. Never in his life had he seen a view like that. Sure, he'd been on an airplane and he'd been to Germany and he'd flown over the water, but he'd never been to a beach. Never stood on the sand and stared out at the water that seemed to have no end. He had then, practically falling over himself to get out of the car and race to the beach, on which their house literally sat.

Their house. Tony's house. His house.

"What do you think?" Tony had asked, coming up beside Peter and slinging an arm over his shoulders. "Quite a view, huh?"

"It's...incredible." He'd whispered, and Tony had pulled him close for a moment, nodding.

"As far as beach houses go, my first one was better."

"I can't imagine anything better." Tony had laughed, patting him on the shoulder.

The next morning had found him sitting on the beach in shorts and a tank top, knees to his chest, watching the waves come up and cover his feet, then retreat. It was amazing. Tony had found him there when he'd woken up around eight, coming out to sit beside him on the beach. "You can swim, right?" Tony had asked.

"Yeah." Peter had turned to him with a nod. Tony gestured toward the ocean with a half smile. "You mean...I can…"

"I didn't bring you to the ocean to stare at it, kid." He'd told him with a chuckle. "Just keep your watch on. It's waterproof."

Peter closed his eyes, the stinging from the saltwater soothed for just a moment. It was worth it, though. Pressing his feet to the rock underneath him, he pushed himself upward, feet kicking, arms pumping as his lungs burned. The watch on his wrist buzzed but he couldn't check it until he got to the surface, so he kicked even harder, finally surfacing and gasping for air. He wasn't far enough out that he couldn't see the beach house, but he was probably further than he should have been for Tony's comfort. Still, he hadn't been given limits really, other than stay within view of the house. Whose view, Tony hadn't specified.

At the moment, he could see the man standing on the beach, and Peter checked his watch. It was nearly one in the afternoon, and he'd been in the ocean for hours. The little message bubble on his
watch said simply 'lunch' and so he started to swim back, moving easily through the water. He'd never expected to love the ocean so much...but it had turned out to be just the break he'd needed.

Finals had been…tough.

They'd started out okay, with subjects he knew pretty well. After a weekend of hanging out with Tony and Pepper, hearing all about Hong Kong, and getting back to being Spiderman, he'd felt ready for his tests. Tony had quizzed him plenty of times on chemistry and physics, trig and even English, even though most of those questions would be essays anyway. He and Ned had spent their free periods together between tests, quizzing each other and talking. MJ, who seemed to be in a better mood, had joined them occasionally, getting in on their quizzing sessions or, reluctantly, a tiny piece at a time, giving them details about living with her grandparents.

By the time his last final, History, had rolled around, his brain had felt fried. He'd rested his head on the kitchen counter that morning, feeling like he might break apart if he had to memorize one more thing, and there Pepper had found him, gently rubbing her thumbs over his shoulders. "Are you up for this?" He'd hummed a 'yeah' but she hadn't seemed to believe it. "What time is your test?"

"Ten thirty."

"What time is it over?"

"It should be over by noon." She'd nodded, patting him on the back, then moving into the kitchen to make breakfast, despite his insistence that he could just eat cereal. At 12:30, he had been called from lunch to come to the office and, grabbing his stuff, he'd been surprised to see Tony there, dressed in jeans and a t-shirt with a kitten on it, and without further ado, the man had signed him out and ushered him to the car, which he'd been driving.

"How did it go?" Tony had wondered.

"I think it went okay." He'd nodded.

"Good. I'm sure you did great. I'm proud of you Pete." Peter had smiled when Tony had rested a hand on his hair for a moment. He'd driven him straight back to the tower, but instead of having him go pack for their vacation, which Peter had assumed must have been the reason he'd picked him up early, Tony had led him to the living room, gesturing to the coffee table where pizzas and sodas had sat. Grabbing a plate, Tony had pushed it into Peter's hands, then had him sit on the sofa where Tony had played the first episode of the new season of Brooklyn Nine-Nine. In the end, Peter had fallen asleep against his side, head resting on his dad's chest, Tony's arm tight around him.

It had been great.

After goodbyes to Ned and MJ and promises to text, Peter had set off for the beach with his family, Pepper obviously just as excited for a vacation as he was. For the first time since he'd come to live with Tony, Pepper has stopped working. No meetings. No phone calls. Just some wedding planning, which had been minimal, cooking, and relaxing. At first, he'd assumed that they would want him out of the house so they could have some time alone, so he'd gone out every morning for a couple of days, not coming back until lunch.

Then Tony had asked him to come down to his lab, which was incredible if a bit smaller than the one at the tower, and there he had been shocked to find his car...the one Tony had gotten him for his birthday, still barely assembled, as they hadn't had a ton of time to work on it between finals and Tony being out of town. They had spent the whole day together, working on the car, taking breaks only to eat or, occasionally, drop onto the sofa, Peter's head against Tony's shoulder. And toward the
end of the day, Peter had worked up the courage to ask. "Are you sure it's okay?"

Tony had looked down at him, lifting an eyebrow, a brownie halfway to his mouth. "What?"

"Me...I mean...being here. I know you and Pepper probably want to spend time together."

"Pete, you're our kid." Tony had reminded him softly. "Of course we want you here. Don't worry about me and Pepper. Let us handle that. Okay?"

From then on, the two of them had started spending a couple of days a week in the lab, working on the car. Eating junk food. Playing music too loud. Other days, Peter would swim in the ocean, going out as far as he dared, as deep as he dared. He texted Ned and MJ. Told them about the ocean and Malibu and the beach house. They told him about Queens. About what he was missing. Assured him that things were fine, that crime was being taken care of. He did worry about that, even on days when he was having a great time with Tony and Pepper. Even on days when he was having fun, or swimming, or relaxing. He worried that he was letting the city down. But he'd be back. This was just a vacation.

Surely everyone deserves a vacation.

Yeah, he missed Queens. And the tower. And...even the Avengers, who were starting to feel almost like...like part of his family. Running with Steve. Hanging out in the lab with Bruce. Hanging out with Loki. But there were also things he wasn't looking forward to so much. Like the therapy. And possibly taking medication. Tony had asked him to try. And he would. But he still didn't really want to. He felt okay here at the beach house. Most days he was just...happy. And it felt like nothing was wrong.

He hadn't had any nightmares since he'd come...since Loki had given him that necklace. And in some ways, that was great. Heck, he was kind of afraid to take it off, lest they come back. But in other ways...in other ways, this was almost just as bad. Because he dreamed about her a lot. Dreamed about sitting next to her on the sofa, her lips on his hair. He dreamed about cooking together and cleaning...mundane, everyday things that they'd done together all the time. And every time it started to turn back, the world would go green. And they would be on that beach.

And he'd wake up without her.

A week before Father's day, he went to Pepper. It was a day where she was making dinner, and Tony was down in the lab. He'd just stepped out, telling Tony that he needed to plug his phone in, and he found Pepper at the stove. "How's the car coming along?" She asked, glancing up with a smile.

"Fine. How about the wedding planning?"

"Great. Almost done. We're thinking the end of July, early August." He leaned on the counter, arms crossed as he watched her for a moment. "The others are going to come out too."

"Are you guys going to go anywhere? Like a honeymoon?" She glanced over at him, smiling a little.

"We discussed it. Have you ever been to Hawaii?"

"No...." Peter shook his eyes, then his eyes went huge. "You can't...take me!" Pepper smiled.

"Why not?"

"Because...it's your honeymoon!" She laughed.
"We wouldn't want to go anywhere without you, sweetheart." Pepper reached out, squeezing his shoulder. "You can have your own room at the hotel. Explore on your own if you want to. It'll be fun."

"Hey...Pepper?"

"Yeah?"

"Are...um...are you busy tomorrow?" She'd shaken her head. And then, he'd told her his plan. Asked for her help. And she'd agreed without hesitation.

And then it was Father's Day.

Peter woke up early. Well...he didn't really go to sleep. Mostly, he tossed and turned, staring at the ceiling, thinking about what he was going to do...about this plan of his. Wondering if this was okay. If it was the right thing to do. If Tony would even say yes. Pepper seemed excited. She told him that after they got married, she would want to do the same thing. But for now...Peter had already signed the papers. Folded them up...put them in the card.

He'd agonized over what to write. Had hidden the card in the bottom of his bottom desk drawer under a couple of textbooks. It had been almost impossible to find the right card, even with Pepper helping. Tony had been kind of suspicious when, the next day, Pepper had announced that she was going to take Peter into the city for the day, he'd just stared at the two of them. But then he'd nodded.

"Yeah...okay. Have fun." He'd finally said, shrugging and heading down into his lab.

And before he knew it, it was five am. Peter thought about making breakfast. But he was afraid...afraid that would tip Tony off. And he wasn't sure why he was so afraid to tip Tony off...it wasn't like he wasn't going to tell him. So he stayed in bed. And listened to his heart race. And thought about the card in his desk drawer and wondered what he should do. Give it to him at breakfast? Or wait? Until dinner? Make dinner? Or...or go out to dinner? What did you do for Father's day? It had always been just a little awkward with Ben. Not bad or anything. Just...Ben wasn't his dad. And he was asking Tony to be his dad.

Okay, so he'd called Tony 'Dad' a few times. A handful of times...lots of times. And usually it just slipped out. From Mr. Stark to Tony had been hard. From Tony to Dad had been...not so hard. Difficult, yeah, when he was thinking about it. When he thought about the fact that he'd called the man 'Dad' a few times. It seemed strange. Maybe scary. But in the moment...it always felt right. Like that's exactly what Tony was to him. What he was being. What he'd been from the very first day when Peter had woken up. Hell, before that. When Tony had come running to the hospital.

Ben had been like his dad. Been had been his dad. Even if he'd never used the word. And with Tony, he used the word. Wanted to. He didn't know what that meant, but he knew that Ben would have wanted it. Would have wanted Peter to feel that way about someone again. Would have wanted someone to take care of him. To love him.

"Pete? You still asleep?" Peter jumped when a hand landed on his shoulder, eyes shooting open to find Tony sitting on the bed beside him. "Hey, kid. You alright?"

"Yeah...yeah. What time is it?"

"Almost noon." Tony trailed off, lifting an eyebrow, and Peter realized that he must have dozed off.

"Oh!" He sat bolt upright. "I didn't mean to sleep so long!"
Tony chuckled. "It's fine, Pete. We're on vacation. And it's a Sunday." Sunday. Father's day. Peter knew what day it was. He was sure Tony did too. "You hungry? I thought we could order Chinese and work on the car."

"Sounds great." Peter jumped out of bed, and Tony left him to get dressed.

He grabbed his card on the way to the lab, sticking it in a notebook that he carried down with him often enough that it wouldn't be suspicious. Throwing on a pair of short and a t-shirt, he raced down to the lab where he found Tony already under the car. Peter dropped the notebook on the desk, then crawled down to join him, the two of them working until lunch came.

Peter had thought about waiting for dinner. Waiting until Pepper was there too, or until it was time for bed or until they were on the beach at sunset or...the right moment. But glancing up at Tony as the two of them ate Chinese food at the table in the lab, he realized that this was the right moment. This was it. Him and Tony. His dad. His family, now. The two of them in a lab, eating lunch, working together. Having fun.

"Tony?" He started, getting the man's attention instantly. He looked up, eyes wide as if he was worried that something could possibly be wrong when they were sitting together at the table, eating.

"What's up, kid?"

"I...I just wanted to..." He took a deep breath, then grabbed the notebook. As if sensing that something serious was happening, Tony wiped his hands on a napkin, watching as Peter clutched the notebook. "Um...there's something I wanted to...to give you." He gripped the notebook for a moment, almost regretting it...almost too afraid to go through with this. But...but it was Father's day, and he'd been planning for weeks. "I...um...here." Barely able to look at the man, he thrust the white envelope into his hands. Tony took it, blinking as he looked from it to Peter. On the front, in Peter's best handwriting, was just the word 'Tony."

"What..."

"Just open it," Peter instructed, smiling when Tony did.

"Alright," Tony spoke slowly, drawing out the syllables as he slipped a thumb under the corner of the envelope flap, tearing it open easily. He stared at the card for a moment, then carefully pulled it out. In the front, in almost childishly colorful letters, were the words 'Happy Father's Day.' The man's eyes softened, lips turning up at the corners, as he looked back up at Peter. "Kid..."

"Just..." Peter gestured to the card and Tony chuckled, sniffing and wiping a little at his eyes and opening the card. For a moment, he ignored the folded papers, looking at the words Peter had agonized over for weeks.

'Tony, you're already my father, and you've been the best father I could ever ask for. I love you, and I was hoping we could make it official. I don't want you to be my guardian anymore. I want you to be my dad.'

With surprisingly wet eyes, Tony took the folded papers and unfolded them, staring at the top, then trailing his eyes down to the bottom, a hand coming up to cover his mouth as he took in Peter's signature on the bottom.

Peter opened his mouth, starting to tell Tony that it was okay if he didn't want to. That they could keep things the same as they had been. That he was lucky to have Tony at all. But then Tony put down the card, standing up and moving over to Peter's side of the table, reaching out. "Come here,
"buddy." He murmured, tugging Peter close, and Peter threw his arms around his father's neck, holding on as if for dear life. The man's shoulders shook a little, and he sniffed, taking a long, almost shuddering breath. "I love you, kid." He whispered, giving Peter a quick kiss on the side of his head.

"Um...does that mean yes?" Peter asked, and Tony chuckled, patting him on the back.

"Of course it does." Tony pulled away, just a little, hands firm on Peter's shoulders. "Pete...kid...of course, it means yes. Did you honestly think I would ever say no?" The relief was too much. Too light. Peter slumped a little with that weight removed, surging forward and throwing his arms around his father, taking deep breaths, gripping him tight. "Oh, buddy..." He muttered, rubbing Peter's back. "How long have you been afraid that I'd say no?" Peter shrugged, sniffing and trying not to cry...wondering why the hell he wanted to cry. Why he was crying. "I love you, Pete. So much. You're already my kid. And I can't wait to make it official."
Guys...guys! This is it. I cannot believe that this story is over. I just...I'm so proud of this story, and so grateful to everyone who has been reading and reviewing. I hope you like the final chapter and know that I'll be writing other things if you want to check them out. My tumblr is another good place to read my writing, as I answer prompts and questions, and write drabbles and headcanons there :)

A beach wedding

Peter stood on the beach between Loki and Steve, his shoes sinking a little into the sand. Beside him, Loki glanced down, a small smile turning his lips as he rested a hand on Peter's shoulder. He had to admit, he'd missed Loki. As nice as it had been to be alone with just his new family, it was nice to have everyone together again. Thor and Loki had arrived with Bruce and Rhodey a few days ago and had been the first to be told about the adoption.

It hadn't been a big deal, really. Just paperwork. That night, after Tony and Pepper had made phone calls and signed papers, Tony had grilled out and they'd all eaten together on the deck, just the three of them, and Peter had thought that he could get used to living in Malibu. And then he and Tony had gone into the lab to work on his car. It had been a normal night. A wonderful, normal night.

Peter hadn't changed his last name. Tony had asked if he wanted to, and he'd said no...Tony hadn't made him explain...hadn't even asked. He'd seemed to understand and had assured Peter that that was fine. That he didn't need to. It just seemed too complicated. He couldn't imagine dropping his last name, or his middle name, and hyphenating seemed like too much. So he'd just keep his own name. Tony would still be his dad. A name didn't matter.

They had been sitting at the dinner table with their new guests a few days ago, Bruce and Thor asking Peter how his vacation had been going, and Loki had stuck close to his side, always spending time in the same room as Peter without interacting too much. It had reminded Peter of having an aloof cat that still loved you, but sometimes from afar. "So...we have an announcement." Tony had started, lifting up his glass. Everyone had stopped eating, glancing up at him and waiting. "Peter is...my son." He'd told them with a proud grin. Bruce had lifted an eyebrow.

"Yeah...we know, Tony. You've told us." Peter had snorted, and Pepper had rolled her eyes with a grin, while Tony had just looked offended. Beside his friend, Rhodey had chuckled, already having guessed, apparently, what he'd meant.

"He's officially my son." Tony had clarified, and Rhodey had patted him on the back, grinning over at Peter.

"Congratulations."

"Yes, congratulations!" Thor had echoed, lifting his glass. "To all of you."

The others had found out when they'd arrived after a similar exchange during which Tony announced that Peter was his son and everyone had nodded, stating that they already knew that. It
had just made Peter feel a bit more silly about being so nervous. Tony had been his father for a long
time. They'd just signed some papers to make it official. It hadn't been a big deal.

In every other way, it had been a huge deal.

Everyone had been so supportive. Steve had congratulated. Sam had patted him on the shoulder.
Clint had even hugged him. And here they all were, all of them together, Rhodey as Tony's best
man, Happy walking Pepper up the aisle, and Peter in the front, watching his new dad and his
new...his new mom get married. Yeah...she was his mom. The thought hit him like never before as
she walked up the makeshift aisle on Happy's arm, eyes bright, smiling as she stared at Tony. The
two watched each other as she approached, so obviously in love that Peter had to smile too.

It was a quick ceremony. A beautiful one, on the beach, at sunset. Steve married them, and everyone
cheered, and when it was over, as they started to walk back down the aisle together, Pepper reached
out a hand, snagging Peter's and pulling him along, laughing as everyone clapped. His family. His
real, legal, wonderful family. It wasn't the same as having his parents back. It wasn't the same as
having May and Ben back. But it was good. Wonderful. Happiness. He was so happy.

A new kind of medicine

Peter was miserable. Sick. Tired.

So tired.

And he didn't know what to do about it.

Tony had taken him back to the therapist after their trip to Hawaii...after coming back to New York
where his life and friends and school had all been waiting for him. It was the beginning of August, so
he still had two weeks before school actually started, and Tony had suggested that he go ahead and
start the new medicine sooner rather than later.

Not that he hadn't been happy! He'd been so happy...most of the time. A lot of the time. But there
had still been bad days. Days when, no matter what he did, no matter how amazing everything was
going, no matter how much fun he was having, he still couldn't seem to find happy.

And it made no sense to him! He had new parents that loved him and knew that May was happy for
him. He was getting to visit amazing, beautiful places with his family and had so much fun. But still,
he could be in the middle of doing something with Tony and Pepper or just hanging out in his room
and it might hit him. Apathy and sadness and deep emptiness. Fear...worry or terror...they all came in
turns and he didn't know how to make it stop!

One day in Hawaii, after a day to himself during which Pepper and Tony had gone out to a show or
something, Tony had found him in his room, curled up on his side on his bed, staring at the wall.
He'd been there for at least an hour...and he had no idea why. He also had no idea how to get up.
"Pete? You okay, buddy?" He'd just shrugged, feeling a tear drip from his eye but not really having
any emotion behind it. Tony had run a thumb under his eye, wiping it away, then rested his hand on
Peter's head. "Peter?"

"I don't know." He hadn't had anything else to say. He hadn't known! Hadn't understood why this
was happening. "I should...I shouldn't be...."

"Hey, none of that, kiddo." Tony had muttered, pushing his hair back. "Come on. Let's go watch
something." Peter had nodded, letting his dad pull him out of bed, and the two of them had gone into
the living room of the huge hotel room with a view of the beach, Tony wrapping an arm around
Peter, the TV playing softly in the background. Peter had rested his head on Tony's shoulder, watching without caring.

"I'm sorry, Dad."

"This isn't your fault, Pete." Tony had muttered, kissing his hair.

And when they'd gotten back, he'd met with the therapist and, pretty soon after, started the medicine, enhanced to match his own enhancements.

Now he was miserable. "Peter?" He glanced up from where he'd been laying on the sofa in the tower, meeting the bright green eyes of Loki who was standing over him. Against his throat, the dagger charm was warm.

"Hey." Peter had dragged himself out of bed at noon, and although it was only three pm, he was still so tired. He'd moved from his bed to the sofa, only getting up to eat an apple, and then had curled up on the sofa, too tired to even turn on the TV. Or ask Friday to do it.

"Are you alright?" He just shrugged, letting his eyes close, and then there was a cold hand pressed to his forehead. "Peter?" Loki moved to sit beside him on the sofa, the hand shifting to his shoulder.

"I'm tired." He muttered.

"Friday, how long did Peter sleep last night?" Loki asked the ceiling as Peter let himself drift back to sleep. His stomach felt vaguely sick, but he thought that if he could just get some sleep, he would be fine.

"Peter fell asleep at 10:32 pm and slept until noon."

"Are you ill?" Loki pressed, shaking Peter's shoulder a little.

"I'm tired."

He'd been tired since the day after he'd started taking the new medicine about a week ago. So tired. And he'd tried to get up and do things...he'd tried not to make Tony worry about him, but he knew that Steve noticed he wasn't joining him for their early morning jogs anymore. Bruce noticed that he hadn't been down in the lab as much. And of course, his dad noticed. Pepper too. But the therapist had mentioned that this could be a side effect. So he'd been doing his best to just deal with it.

"Friday, have Stark come up here."

The next thing Peter knew, Tony was by his side, his hand replacing Loki's on Peter's hair. "Hey, bud. How are you feeling?"

"Bad." He answered, being honest for the first time that week.

"Yeah?" Tony scooted a little closer, shifting Peter until his head was in Tony's lap, head resting on his stomach. "I'm sorry, kiddo." There was a hesitation, and then he spoke again. "How about you stop taking that medicine...we'll try something else, okay?"

Peter nodded, letting Tony's hand in his hair soothe him back to sleep.

When he woke up, Tony hadn't moved.

Driving Lessons
School had been back in session for a month when they finally finished the car. Peter had started a new medicine that, although it had made it a little sleepier at first, seemed to be working better. The bad days weren't gone...but they were better. And then, one day in the lab, they finished the car.

For the color, they went with Spiderman red. Iron Man Red. And, staring at the car at Tony's side, the man's hand on his shoulder, both of them covered in grease and a few flecks of paint, Peter knew what he wanted to do next. "Dad?"

Tony glanced over at him, eyes softening the way they always did when Peter called him that. "Yeah?"

"Will you teach me to drive?"

May had taught him a little. Mostly in parking lots. He knew the basics. Stop, go. Park. Reverse. Otherwise, his only real experience was that time he'd stolen (and totaled) Flash's car. "Sure I will," Tony told him with a grin, gesturing for Peter to follow him. Pulling a key out of his pocket, Tony climbed into the driver's seat, Peter climbing into the passenger's side. Tony started it, the sound soft and steady. And then Tony pulled out of the lab, through the side door especially made for cars, and then out of the garage and onto the streets of New York.

It was late, so the streets weren't as busy as they usually were. Still, it was more traffic than Peter would have been comfortable driving in. As if sensing he was nervous, Tony reached over, placing a hand on his leg, then turned on the radio, rock music filling the car. The radio had a cd player and Bluetooth, which was pretty cool...he was also certain there was a tracker in there somewhere but hadn't asked. It seemed reasonable considering everything else that Tony made him had a tracker. If you'd asked him when he'd first met Tony how he would feel about the man installing trackers in everything he used, he would have said it would be invasive. A violation of privacy. He would have said he wasn't a little kid and didn't need to be treated like one.

Now it made him feel like he was important to Tony...like Tony would be able to find him if he needed help.

Tony pulled into a high school parking lot. Not Peter's high school, but a local one, pulling into a sparking pace and putting the car in park. Then he turned to Peter with a smile. "You ready?"

Peter climbed into the driver's seat, Tony taking his place in the passenger's seat, both of them closing their doors almost in tandem and Tony switching off the radio. "Alright, Pete. Put it in reverse, start turning the wheel...exactly. If there were other cars beside you, you'd need to pull straight out until you were clear, but it doesn't matter because the parking lot's empty. Okay...now put it in drive and let's take a lap."

And they did.

First one lap, then two. Three. Four. Peter stopped at imaginary stop signs, learning to tap gently at the brake instead of slamming his foot on it after the first time he threw himself and Tony against their seat belts. "Easy on the brake unless you want to give yourself whiplash," Tony advised with a wry smile, waving away Peter's apology. They didn't bother with parallel parking, not yet. Tony told him that he just wanted to work on getting Peter comfortable with driving.

He showed him how to use the turn signals, how to check his mirrors. The sun was starting to go down, so he also showed him how to turn on the lights. Turn on the brights. When to turn them off. After two hours of practicing, it feels almost comfortable to Peter. His car. Designed just for him, partially made by him.
“What do you think, Pete? You want to drive home?” Wide-eyed, Peter shook his head, and Tony chuckled, patting him on the shoulder.

"Maybe next time?"

"Sounds good."

They swapped places once more, Tony turning the radio on once, more and the two of them headed back home.

Brother

Pepper found him in his room. It had been almost six months since his adoption. Christmas would be in a couple of weeks, and he was doing his best to come up with ideas for presents. Probably some kind of cool LEGO set for Ned. A journal for his almost-maybe-sort-of girlfriend MJ. Pepper had promised to help him bake cookies for the team. But for his dad and Pepper? What on earth could he get his new family that would be good enough?

She knocked on his door, knuckles tapping softly. "Peter?"

He glanced up, smiling. It was a Saturday morning, and he was working on homework. Trying to get it all done before the weekend in the hopes of getting to do more patrolling. He'd gotten to go out as Spiderman for an hour or two after school the day before, but had wanted to get a jump start on his winter break homework packet, which was ridiculously thick. Tony had taken one look at it and had threatened to sue the school.

"You can't sue the school, Tony!"

"Watch me."

"Tony!"

In the end, Tony had agreed, but only after insisting that Peter should not, under any circumstances, stress about it. Peter had promised, raising his right hand in a boy scout salute. "There is no way in hell you were a boy scout." Tony had told him with an eye roll.

"I might have been!"

"I've read your file, Pete. All of your files. And in none of them did it ever mention boy scouting."

"I could have been a secret boy scout!" Tony had snorted, giving him a gentle shove, and Peter had let himself fall off the couch dramatically, an arm draped over his head.

"Boys!" Pepper had called from the kitchen after he'd landed on the floor with a thump, a warning in her voice.

"He pushed me!" Peter had shouted.

"He started it!" Tony had shot back, reaching out a hand to pull him off the floor, ruffling his hair and grinning when Peter dodged away, fixing his hair and grabbing his novel-length homework packet. "Give me half and I'll work on it too."

Peter had lifted an eyebrow. "Isn't that cheating?" His dad had shrugged.

"Who cares? You already know all this stuff."
And so, Peter had relented.

"Hey, Peter...do you have a minute?" Pepper asked, leaning in his doorway and pulling him out of his thoughts.

"Oh...sure." They'd all had breakfast together that morning, then Peter had gone back to his room to work on homework. All through breakfast, he'd felt like something was...not wrong, exactly. Just...weird. They had seemed a bit on edge, but his senses had been calm, so he'd just told them that he wanted to get his homework done and they'd been fine with it. "Is...is everything okay?" He was pretty sure he hadn't done anything to get in trouble in the last couple of days...he hadn't tried to hide any injuries, he'd been in by curfew...hadn't tried to sneak out. He'd been pretty good recently...and okay, maybe that was because he was still afraid. Still afraid that too many mistakes and that would be it.

Maybe he needed to talk to someone about that, he thought absently as he followed Pepper into the living room where Tony was sitting. Outside the giant window, the New York skyline was being blanketed by snow that fell in giant flakes. He watched it for a moment before sitting on the sofa. Pepper was sitting beside him, and Tony moved to sit on the coffee table. "Am I in trouble?" The words came out nervously...almost hysterical. Immediately, Pepper shook her head and started to speak, but Tony beat her to it.

"Have you done something to get into trouble?" Peter shook his head and Tony gave him a wry smile. "Then why would you be in trouble?" He shrugged.

"You're not in trouble, sweetheart." Pepper put in, kicking Tony gently in the shin with a bare foot. "There's just something...something we need to tell you." His heart rate doubled and she gripped his hand, smiling. "It's nothing bad. I promise. It's a good thing. A...a great thing."

"Okay…"

"But first, you're our kid, you know that, right?" She asked. He nodded again, and Tony scooted forward, putting a hand on his knee, getting his attention.

"You're my son, Peter. Our son. Always." Peter nodded more seriously, smiling a little when Tony did.

"So…" Pepper put in, smiling brightly, lips trembling a little. "We got you this." It was a gift bag. Taking it and glancing between the two of them, a tiny smile growing on his lips, he opened it.

It was a t-shirt.

He pulled it out, expecting something Avengers themed, then froze when he read the words, heavy anticipation in the air. "World's Best Big Brother."

"Big brother." He whispered the words, looking up at Pepper who sniffed a little, wiping a finger under her eye. "You...you're...seriously?" He asked, and Pepper nodded. Tony squeezed his knee and Peter looked between them. "You're...you're going to be parents?"

Pepper leaned in, placing a hand on his hair. "We're already parents, Peter. We're just going to have two children instead of one."

He threw his arms around her, more careful than usual, and she laughed softly, kissing his forehead and rubbing his back. Then he turned to Tony who met him halfway, the two of them leaning in and hugging one another tightly. "Congratulations." He couldn't quite believe it...a big brother! Tony and Pepper were having a baby and they already saw him as the big brother! He was going to be a big
brother.

He'd always wanted siblings as a kid. But that dream had been short lived when he'd gone to live with May and Ben. The two of them had never shown any interest in having their own kids, something Peter did his best not to think too much about. Tony and Pepper had never mentioned it either, but they were both so excited and they were including him! They had already adopted him and now...now they wanted him to be a big brother!

"Thanks, buddy."

"Do you know...like...if it's a girl or a boy?" He wasn't sure which would be cooler...either would be great. Either way, he'd still be a big brother.

"Not yet," Pepper told him, her hand reaching out to grasp Tony's, another briefly touching her still mostly-flat stomach. "We won't know that for a while."

"Have you told anyone?"

"Just you." Tony grinned. "How about you put that shirt on and we let the Avengers come to their own conclusions?"

And, laughing, he did.

The Guardian

Tony yawned, stretching and groaning when his back popped. He was getting too old for this, or so he told Pepper who just rolled her eyes. They'd been at meetings all day, which he had to do about once a year. Usually, Pepper managed to get him out of it, running the company almost single-handedly while he was free to work in his lab and spend time with his kids.

Kids.

He had two kids.

Morgan would be three years old in a few months. Three. And Peter...Peter would be twenty in a few weeks. Twenty. He couldn't help remembering the fifteen-year-old boy laying in a hospital bed, connected to tubes and wires, a bandage wrapped snugly around his head. The fifteen-year-old he'd found kneeling in a room, sobbing, surrounded by his dead aunt's things. And then, the good memories. The way Peter had raced out to the ocean almost every day of their vacation, launching himself into the water and swimming as deeply as he could. The times they'd work together in the lab.

The day he'd joined Tony in the lab, a letter clutched in his hand that he'd handed over. From MIT. "Congratulations, Mr. Parker." It had said, and Tony had thrown his arms around the boy, laughing and rocking him back and forth.

"I knew you'd get in."

"You didn't bribe anyone, did you?"

Tony had laughed but had quickly denied it. "Of course not! Now, let's go tell your mom!"

Pepper had been ecstatic.

And, of course, the two of them waiting together at the hospital, Peter letting Tony grip his hand,
Tony's thumb rubbing over the back of his knuckles. "You're already a great dad, Tony." Peter had muttered.

And then, holding Morgan. Placing her gently into Peter's arms...watching his son take his daughter into his arms. The two of them staring at either other for a moment, before Peter smiled, a thumb rubbing over her cheek. "Hi, Morgan. I'm your big brother, Peter."

She called him "Pe'er." He called her "Morgs."

Peter had gone off to college shortly after, and that...that had been hard. Standing in a (very fancy) dorm room with his son, knowing that this was goodbye for a while...it had been hard for both of them. "You got your suit?"

"You think people are going to get suspicious if MIT suddenly has a friendly neighborhood Spiderman?"

"Nah. People usually aren't great at connecting dots. We'll just tell them he's your bodyguard." Peter had laughed, the fear in his eyes never going away. Around his neck, the green dagger had glowed faintly...Peter never took it off. "Pete." He'd clenched his hands together, and Tony had rested a hand on his shoulder. "I am so proud of you, buddy. You're going to do great...you're going to be great."

Peter had thrown his arms around him, hiding his face in Tony's shoulder, and Tony had rubbed his back, the action so familiar and ingrained that he didn't even think about it anymore. "I love you, Dad."

"Love you, Pete."

"I'll see you in a couple of weeks. Call whenever you want. All the time. Please."

"I will, Tony."

And he had.

It was March, and Peter was on Spring break. He'd offered to watch Morgan while Tony and Pepper had their meetings, giving Happy and his exhausted parents a rare day off, so they'd taken it. Stepping into the living room of the tower, he found Loki sitting in an armchair, reading a novel. When Peter was around, Loki always seemed to appear, spending time with the kid as often as he could. Tony also knew that they texted when Peter was at school...Peter had frequent text conversations with Loki. It was a sentence he still couldn't quite believe.

On the sofa, he found Peter. There was a textbook on the coffee table where Tony had sat when they'd told Peter that he would be a big brother, and in Peter's arms, fast asleep, was Morgan, her short brown hair pushed behind her ears, her head resting on his chest. He had an arm around her, his own head thrown back, and she had a hand up, a fist wrapped around the dagger charm that lay against his throat, her other hand a fist at her mouth, sucking her thumb in her sleep. Someone had laid a blanket over both of them, and Tony would have put money on Loki.

Even in sleep, Peter was holding her protectively. Guarding her.

Moving as quietly as he could, he sat down beside them, giving Loki a quick smile that the Asgardian ignored. Wrapping an arm around Peter, he tugged on him a little, noting how the boy's arm wrapped more tightly around his sister. "Hey, buddy. Just me."

He wondered briefly what he'd done...what wonderful thing he could have done to deserve these
kids in his life. There was no way he could have earned this kind of happiness.

Peter opened his eyes blearily, looking over at Tony and smiling before shifting so that his head was resting on his shoulder. "Hey, Dad."

"Hey, bud. Go back to sleep."

And, curled up at his father's side, Peter did.

The End

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!