Old Habits Die Hard

by yourgaydad

Summary

Keeping everybody around them safe was a priority for both Peter and Tony. Family, friend or stranger, there were no second thoughts, no exceptions.

The importance of keeping themselves in good condition was lost somewhere along the way, but asking somebody else to take care of them was just an abstract concept. Did people actually do that?

Notes

I suck at summaries...

Its basically Tony and Peter learning to let other take care of them.

I hope its fluffy enough. Enjoy ^^
Chapter 1

The sun started to hide between buildings as Peter got ready to patrol his neighbourhood. The homework for next day was done and a long, peaceful dinner with May eaten. That meant he could swing around the city for the next few hours without any unnecessary interruptions.

He was really excited for an evening like that but, as it often happens, his plans were changed with a single message.

“Peter” Karen got his attention when he was still in earshot of his apartment building, “the Bad Habits protocol was activated.”

The boy landed on a nearby roof gracefully. Apparently he was going the wrong way.

“The report states over 60 hours without sleep as well as need for hydration and nutrition.”

“60 hours?” Peter did the calculation quickly, “So he hasn’t slept since I last saw him? Oh boy… Looks like we have a tough mission today. City or Upstate? Do we need transport?”

“Manhattan apartment since 3PM today. Should I plot the route?”

“You read my mind, Karen” Peter jumped off the building as directions that he already knew by heart appeared in front of him.

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Peter’s knowledge and skills together with Stark technology meant he could hack his suit without any bigger problems. Although, the many lectures on safety from his father made him reluctant to change the features and functions of Spider-Man suit again without a good reason. Instead he found a better way of testing himself and doing something useful.

FRIDAY and Karen had a connection which allowed Tony to keep an eye on the teen and alarmed him of any safety protocols that had been activated. Peter discovered that he could easily use the connection the opposite way. Implementing few extra protocols into FRIDAY took him less than studying for a spanish quiz.

The Bad Habits protocol was one of them and the first one to ever be activated. It was time for test ride.

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Swinging through the city at his top speed left him breathless when he reached the roof garden of the penthaus. He stumbled inside greeting FRIDAY and grabbed two water bottles before directing his steps to the workshop downstairs.

Tony was surrounded by papers and coffee mugs. His hair was greasy and his clothes rumpled. Mechanic’s hands moved frantically around the creation in front of him. The bloodshot eyes looked up at Peter as the boy cleared his throat.

“Pete? What are you doing here, kid?” his voice showed clear signs of tiredness as he straightened up his back.

“I heard you were in the city, thought I would swing by, say hello” Peter tried to act casual as he
handed the man an open water bottle with a smile and drunk from the other one himself.

“You heard, huh?” Tony looked at ceiling suspiciously before taking a sip of water reluctantly, “Wonder what else you heard.”

“Well... There might have been something about a meeting tomorrow morning? Important one, apparently, if you haven’t slept since Monday because of it.”

“Okay- I don’t know how you found out, but excuse me. I stayed up because of a different thing entirely- And then today I realised the meeting was tomorrow. Well, Pep asked if I remembered and I lied. I wouldn’t need three days to impress some old ass-” Tony said with a roll of his eyes, but Peter didn’t let him finish.

“Oh, come on, Dad” he sat down on the desk. “What is this? Old man acts like he is still in college? Dorm life 101? Should I be taking notes for future?” Peter wrinkled his nose “Ew- I’m supposed to be the smelly teen. You need a shower. Right now. Then we will eat dinner and you will take a nap” Peter put all his confidence into this little rant, but it didn’t change much.

“No no no. Thanks for the gesture kid, but I really don’t have time for that today. I bailed on this guys twice already and it’s gonna be a PR hell if I do it again. Seriously Peter. You can hang around but I have work to do” Tony tried to focus on his desk.

“Daaad” Peter whined with irritation. “You know what they say about oxygen masks on planes, right? First, you have to take care of yourself. Then you can help others. Simple as that.”

Tony seemed very confused, “Sorry kid, I’ve never been on a commercial flight. I don’t think they say that on private planes” he scratches his beard. “At least I’ve never heard it. Well, I don’t really listen to what they say anyway.”

“It’s a metaphor, Dad. Ugh. You know what I mean” Peter stood his ground, not mentioning the fact that he had never been on a commercial flight either.

“They give metaphorical life lessons on commercial flights? Man, I’ve been missing out.”

“I’m not joking Dad. This is your last chance. For real” the teen did his best serious face, but the man only huffed at him.

“Let it go, Pete. Better skedaddle out of here. For real.”

“Well, if that’s how you want to do it-” Peter made a heavy pause but Tony still didn’t pay him any attention. “FRIDAY, activate the Sleep Tight Protocol.”

The workshop turned dark and silent as all the computers, machines and lamps around the room turned off. Tony slowly blinked in the dim light falling in through the windows.

“What the hell did you just do” it wasn’t even a question. The man looked at his son and took a deep breath. “Turn it back on, Peter. I need to work.”

“No, you need to eat and sleep. Come on” the boy jumped of his place at the desk and strode towards the exit with too much energy, like he didn’t just swing through half of New York City few minutes earlier.

“I can’t believe you hacked FRIDAY. It feels like treason. And what’s the point? I can just hack back in and delete that ridiculous protocol” Tony reached for his phone, but a web snapped it out of his reach.
“I left traps Dad. Duh. Hacking in will take you at least an hour. Just take a break, eat something and I will unlock it” Peter’s head was sticking out sideways from the doorframe. “Maybe take a shower first. You smell. I’ll make some food.”

“My own son. Locking me out of my workshop. Using the AI I created against me. Unbelievable” Tony murmured before getting up grudgingly.

He could use a break. An hour wouldn’t kill him.

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An hour later Tony laid unconscious in his bed as Peter stood above him and studied the man’s peaceful face. He rarely saw his dad asleep, since he was the first one to go to bed usually. Peter made a mental note to change that as he calculated the dose of sleeping pills once more in his head, making sure it wasn’t too much.

“FRIDAY, monitor his vitals and alert me if anything changes” he said without a break and pulled the covers up to Tony’s chin.

“Of course, Peter. What about the Sleep Tight protocol in the workshop?”

“Password: Don’t Let The Spider Bite. Let’s get to work. What do you know about the meeting tomorrow?”

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It was close to midnight when Peter’s work was interrupted by a call. He found his father’s phone under the papers and smiled at the caller photo before answering.

“Hi Pep! How are you? And where are you?”

“Peter? Hi-” there was a moment when the woman must’ve checked if she was calling the right number. “Why aren’t you with May? And please tell me you aren’t binge watching something with Tony again…”

“Nope. I just came around to have dinner with Dad and stayed for the night.”

“So he ate something? That’s great. He has a big meeting in the morning so please don’t distract him. I’m in LA for few days and- Is it midnight already at home? You should be in bed, Pete! I hope you aren’t missing school again, huh? I’ve talked with your father about it, he can’t keep taking you out of classes for no reason.” There was a calming breath before she spoke again, “So why are you answering Tony’s phone? Everything okay at home?”

“Of course! Nothing to worry about. Nope. Everything ready for the meeting.”

“Okay” she didn’t seem convinced. “Well, don’t stay up late, Petey. See you next week.”

“Night!” the teen responded and ended the call before opening a new energy drink.

It took Pepper some time to realise that Peter never told her why Tony didn’t answer the phone himself.

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When James Rhodes agreed to make sure that Tony will get to the meeting on time, he knew right away it wouldn’t go smoothly. The event was supposed to start at 8am and who even planned it that
way? It was an ungodly hour for Stark. Did they want to make it hard for him on purpose?

Arriving at his friend’s penthouse an hour early, he was ready to find him asleep and with no clue about the meeting. Instead he walked in to see Peter hunched over a bowl of cereal and got hushed before even saying anything.

That left him standing in the middle of the room with furrowed eyebrows and open mouth.

“Do we have to go now? I just need to brush my teeth and then I’m ready” was the only greeting he got.

And if Pepper and Tony could see Peter, all dressed up in a clean pair of jeans and a white button down, a file full of papers clutched under his armpit and a prototype ready to show off in his arms, with those wide brown eyes, blinding smile and a confident stance, they wouldn’t blame him for doing whatever the teen wanted without asking any questions.

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There was some weird history of a bet and a favor that explained why Tony Stark was so personally engaged in the project, but the details didn’t matter now. The people that he already bailed on twice turned out to be the representatives of NYPD and the prototype he was working on, a reconnaissance drone. Peter quickly realised that the gadget was a bigger and less advanced version of little Droney that lived in his suit. In just seven hours, he was able to get to know all the documentation by heart and finish building an operational prototype, which still left him a whole hour for a power nap. That’s how you do it.

Walking into the conference room full of NYPD Captains, all staring at him disapprovingly, it was easy to feel overwhelmed. They noticed that he was not Tony Stark and huffed with dissatisfaction. Maybe he should’ve worn a suit.

“Is this a joke?” was the first reaction and as Peter explained that Mr. Stark couldn’t attend the meeting because of health issues, there were much more angry comments.

Public speaking wasn’t Peter’s strong side, but he was determined to do it. All he needed to do was act like his father but try to not disrespect the people in the room and everything would be great. Introducing himself as an intern at SI and personal assistant of Mr. Stark didn’t go as well as he planned.

“Sending an intern to a serious meeting” the man in his late sixties looked furious. “How else is Stark going to humiliate us before you realise we should have went to OsCorp straight from the beginning?”

“If I may-“ Peter found himself talking through gritted teeth. “OsCorp is a bioengineering company so asking them for reconnaissance gear makes absolutely no sense” he smiled sweetly at the older man. “Mr. Stark is a busy man and his health isn’t in the best condition. You should have been aware of that before insisting to work with him personally. I would like to start the presentation now, if that’s okay.”

“Let me ask you something, so we know you have any idea what are you talking about” the same man again, to Peter’s irritation. Come on, guys, he still had school that day.

The teen listened and stared at the man in silence after he finished. “I’m sorry, was that the question? The answer to that is in chapter six, page 37 of the documentation, haven’t you read it? I was waiting for a question that would actually require some extra knowledge.”
The man got all red, but before he could open his mouth, a younger woman smiled at Peter and told him to start the presentation, few other people nodding in agreement. The guy didn’t interrupt him again.

And, silently sitting in the back, James Rhodes couldn’t feel prouder of his nephew as he recorded everything.

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Tony opened his eyes in the dark room as he steered awake for a third time this morning. “FRIDAY, time?”

“It’s 3.47am, boss” came a neutral whisper.

The man turned to his other side. It felt like ages since he woke up the first time this morning. He didn’t want to get up this early, even if he was going to miss the stupid meeting again, but he knew he wouldn’t fall asleep again.

“Open the blinds, Fri. I’m getting up” he said and suddenly, instead of the gentle light he anticipated, he was met with a blinding sun. “What the actual fuck. Did you break Fri? It’s not four in the morning.”

“Sorry, boss. It was part of the Sleep Tight protocol. It’s 11.22am.”

And before Tony got his mind around what just happened, a familiar voice came from the speakers. The man relaxed into the pillows as he listened to his son’s rambling.

“Morning, Dad. Hope you slept well!” was followed by a short chuckle. “Sorry about the trick with time” he didn’t sound even slightly apologetic. “Don’t be mad at FRIDAY about it, it’s not her fault. I know, I know- You’re gonna say that AIs don’t have feelings, but we both know you made her better than that” Tony just rolled his eyes and smiled at the ceiling. “Don’t worry about the meeting, I have everything under control. I’m your intern after all, I can handle it. Fri taught me everything I need to know and the prototype is almost ready. I’ve got this” it seemed like Peter needed to hear it himself. “Maybe I’ll see Captain Holt, haha. That’s a morning Brooklyn99 reference for you. We still need to finish the last season! You have no idea what-” the kid stopped, took few deep breaths, mumbled “Not important right now” and cleared his throat before continuing. “I assumed you wouldn’t want me to test my IV injection skills at you so you’re really dehydrated right now. I left a water bottle by your bed, together with some painkillers, but don’t take them if you don’t need them” sure enough, there was a bottle and pills at his bed stand. “You also need to have a good breakfast. I already told FRIDAY what to order for you so it’ll be there in half an hour after this message. Nice, huh?” the boy sounded very proud of himself and Tony couldn’t help but smile. “And about your phone- You’ll get it back later today, don’t worry. Just take the morning off and relax, Dad. Spider-Man’s orders. I’m going back to Queens after school, but I’m gonna make an educated guess that I’ll see you today. Tomorrow” the man could almost hear the eye roll. “See you later. Love you, Peter” Tony thought the recording ended, but then, “You probably knew it was me all along, right? You should have known- Didn’t you? Well, that’s awkward. But it was me, Peter. Your son Peter? You know- The only one? Yep, I’m gonna stop now. Bye.”

Tony listened for few more seconds, but this time the recording ended for real. His exhausted groan turned into a chuckle halfway through.

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“Where is that little punk?” Tony was waiting right by the penthouse’s entrance and looked into the
elevator when only Rhodey walked out.

“The amazing son of yours made me pick up his backpack from Queens and drive him to school, just in time for math- Or was it chem?” James walked by him and sat down on the couch.

“He is so dead when I see him” the man said without any real anger and joined his friend. “Don’t you have my phone by any chance? Squirt sent quite few messages in my name when I was out. May, Pepper, his school- The list goes on.”

“Oh yeah” the device was thrown onto his lap, “I’ve sent you the video already.”

“What video?” Tony asked cautiously, did he even want to know?

“From the meeting. Your kid kicked ass. You need to see that sass when he basically called one of them an idiot. It was priceless” Rhodey seemed too excited for the others man liking.

“Are we just gonna ignore that he drugged me?”

“To be honest- Everybody that cares about you tried it sooner or later to make you sleep. And he succeeded on his first go! What a kid! Huh. Your kid, obviously.”

“He made FRIDAY lie to me! I woke up at eight but she told me it was 3am so I went back to sleep. And then every time I woke up again, she said that only few minutes passed. I laid in bed till eleven sure it wasn’t even four!”

Rhodey couldn’t help but snicker as Tony got irritated but was also clearly proud of his kid.

“You have a son, Tones. You need to take care of yourself. Unless you want him to follow your example and web around the city half asleep. Come on, man. He looks up to you.”

“He is smarter than that. And I wouldn’t let him. There are protocols for that.”

“Protocols won’t help when he needs his dad. If you’re not taking care of yourself, how can Peter trust you to take care of him?”

Tony leveled his friend with a calm look before getting up.

“He only slept an hour today, he shouldn’t be in school right now” he said and picked up car keys. “You coming, Uncle Rhodey? My kid had his first business meeting today, we’re gonna celebrate. And sleep. And punish him just a tiny bit so he won’t do it again.”

“Sounds like a plan” Rhodey chuckled before following Tony.

“Did I ever tell you about the time I drugged Howard’s coffee with laxatives? I was eight or nine or something like that.”

“I’m guessing he wasn’t happy?”

“Well, that’s the best part, he never found out it was me. I know my kid drugged me and I’m gonna take him out of school to have lunch. I’m a cool dad. Yep. That’s how parenting works my friend, take notes.”
Hi! I did it!

Sorry I kept you waiting so long. I fell into a writer block hole and couldn't crawl out... But here I am! And the chapter is much longer than what I originally planned... I have a problem :p

Thank you for all the comments! Each one warms my heart and makes me want to write more :)

And now, enjoy soft Irondad taking care of his goofy Spiderson^^

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tony Stark was a busy man. He was also a very private one, his celebrity status only an old memory these days. His personal contact info was a well kept secret and even if you had his phone number or email, you still had to be let through by FRIDAY to actually light up the screen of his phone.

There was a very limited group of people who had the highest priority, allowing all their messages through without any kind of check up. And somebody clearly wasn’t aware of it.

It was impossible for Tony Stark to receive a generic, copy and paste message, addressed to a whole community instead of his person specifically. And yet, here it was. The man was ready to mark it as an error but one detail caught his attention.

‘Midtown School of Science and Technology’

He looked at the beginning once more.

‘Dear Parents and Guardians’

Oh. Right. That was him. Of course.

The email was from three hours ago, when his phone was put into emergency mode for the time of a business meeting. He read again from the beginning, actually paying attention this time and doing his
best to not bump into people while making his way to the exit of the building.

Disappearing behind the tinted windows of the car he acknowledged Happy with a glance and dialed May as they merged into the afternoon traffic.

“Is it my favorite Auntie?” he greeted teasingly after she picked up but didn’t hear the laugh he was expecting.

“She is still at work so no stupid jokes please” Tony didn’t comment on her tired voice, it wasn’t a good moment to have that conversation again. “What’s up?”

“Well, I, a parent and guardian, received the email from school. Just wanted to ask how is our kiddo doing. You know very well yourself that calling him would get me nowhere.”

“What email, Tony?” the tiredness changed into wariness and the man felt even worse.

“About the flu outbreak at school? I think they sent it to everyone automatically, you didn’t get it?”

“I’m looking at my mail right now. There’s nothing from the school. They have my address, I don’t understand-” There was a tense moment before Tony heard a deep sigh and May murmured, “Oh Peter… I’ve got the email, Tony. It was in the trash. Together with ten other school messages from the last year. Looks like they were deleted right after arriving, I’ve never seen any of them.”

“You think, Peter-” Tony didn’t even finish, they both knew the answer, “That little shit” he tried to lighten the mood and May chuckled sadly.

“Wonder who he got it from” she teased him back before remembering something. “Dammit. I promised to do a double shift today. I won’t be home until early morning.”

“What did we say about the double shifts, May?” the man tried to show his concern without being too intrusive.

“Well, colleague asked for a favor and I agreed. It wasn’t about the money so your rule doesn’t apply” she sighed heavily again. “Can you look after Peter today? I don’t want him to be alone if
he’s not feeling well. Somebody has to stop him from patrolling and don’t let him-

“Hey, hey- Relax May, I’m already on my way. Don’t worry. I’ll stay with him over night. It’s possible he didn’t even get sick with his super healing and all, you know?”

“Super healing vs. Parker luck” she sighed heavily, “Sounds harsh, but I’m betting on the latter.”

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May had never exactly given him an extra key to the apartment and neither did Peter, but Tony had it anyway. So sue him. Of course he did. The neighbors wouldn’t like it if he broke down the door every time there was an emergency and he needed to get in. May probably wouldn’t appreciate it either. Well, he just assumed that no one wanted to deal with getting a new door on a monthly basis so he got himself an extra key. Simple as that.

He was now standing in front of the aforementioned door, searching for the damned key in all his pockets and feeling the glare of somebody from across the corridor on his back. It felt like eternity and he was starting to consider just blasting the door down after all, when suddenly it opened.

“Dad?” Peter’s voice was quiet as he looked at Tony with surprise, “What are you doing here? Why didn’t you knock?” The man let those questions fade away as he followed his son inside and took a good look at him.

The most noticeable feature was an oversized hoodie that made Peter look even smaller than usual, the sleeves went over his fingers and the hood covered half of his face. The boy blinked sleepily, brown eyes glistening unhealthily, and was breathing through his slightly open mouth, nose obviously stuffed.

“You look truly terrible, buddy” Tony said in an upbeat tone but his face showed the concern that he really felt.

“It’s really not that-” Peter tried to argue but a nasty sneeze interrupted him. The man took the opportunity to hold his shoulder with one hand and feel his forehead with the other.

“Dad- I’m-” Peter didn’t have the energy to get out of his grip so he didn’t even try.
“Don’t say fine. You are burning hot” he spun the boy in place slowly and pushed towards his room, “Go back to bed, squirt. I’ll get something for that fever and be with you in a minute.”

Peter mumbled something and complied. Or so Tony thought, but when he came back from May’s room with a bag of enhanced medicine they kept in secret from the boy, he saw the bed still perfectly made and the teen sitting at his desk.

“What are you doing?” the man stopped in shock.

“Homework” the teen answered simply, without looking away from the paper in front of him, “Need to turn it in tomorrow. And can’t go on patrol before it’s finished.”

Tony stood there speechless for a long moment before letting out a dramatic huff and moving into action. Pink shades found their way out of his pocket and he was soon speaking out a long list of symptoms as Peter became more and more hunched over the desk, his face hidden under the hood but presumably blushed with embarrassment. “And a 102F fever” Tony finished, took the glasses off, moved to stand by the bed and lifted up the covers. “The only patrol on your schedule today is guarding this bed with your own body.”

“I was joking about the patrol, Dad…” Peter spun on his chair and looked at him pleadingly, “But the home-”

“Ah ah ah” Tony didn’t let him finish, only motioned at the bed, “Get in. You’re late for your shift. It started hours ago, buddy. What were you thinking, leaving this poor bed all alone and-”

“Okay Dad, you can stop now, please” Peter sluggishly got in and was instantly tucked in all the way up to his chin.

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Once Peter let himself relax, his eyes closed almost immediately, long before the meds he took had a chance to kick in. Tony occupied the chair, rolled over from the desk, and spoken softly about random little things as his eyes never left the boy’s face.
Sometimes he still found it hard to believe that anyone would trust him like that. He, Tony Stark, responsible for such a young and innocent being, it’s life and future dependant on him. And, even harder to imagine, he actually welcomed that responsibility with great pride and joy.

His words quieted down once he was sure Peter was deeply asleep, the boy’s breaths deep and calm, his body relaxed in the cozy confinement of the warm bed. He watched the peaceful face for a moment, brushing the sweaty hair away from the too hot forehead and searching for any signs of discomfort.

He let himself sigh before standing up and getting his phone out. There were things he needed to do before Peter woke up and the sooner he was done, the sooner he could get back to sitting at his bedside and being a reassuring and constant presence.

First, a call to May, letting her know everything was under control.

“I put him to bed- Yes, 102F- No, he’s not- Maybe- No studying. Yeah, no kidding May- Oh? Okay, copy that- Will keep you updated, don’t worry too much.”

Next on his mental list was to consult a doctor, he never took care of a sick kid before, after all. He didn’t want to mess up and made Peter feel even worse.

“What is it this time, Stark? Bleeding again? Broken bones? Head trauma? I’m beyond surprised that your kid is ever not grounded. Aren’t you afraid of leaving him out of sight for any length of time? And don’t tell me he got shot again” Dr. Cho’s voice was teasing but Tony knew that she cared for the boy just as everyone else who had a chance to meet Peter.

“Ymm…” he suddenly felt silly for calling with such a down to earth problem. “Well, he’s not bleeding out. He just-” the man cleared his throat before giving in, concern still greater than the embarrassment. “He has the flu, Helen. Any tips?”

There was a long moment of silence, before he heard a chuckle and a carefree sigh, “I’m not a pediatrician, but- I guess I’m like Peter’s personal doctor by now. Don’t stress it too much. His fever can get higher than is usual for teens because of his enhancements, but unless it goes over 108F you are fine with the pills I gave you. Cold compresses for the head are always nice with fever. And other than that- Just keep him rested and hydrated. You can do it, Tony. Call me if google doesn’t have the answer. And tell the little one I said hi.”
The conversation left him feeling better, more at ease with taking care of Peter in his bad state and
not screwing up. It was just a flu. Even Tony Stark himself had those few times in his life. He could
do it.

Tony moved around the kitchen with a new found confidence, rummaging through cabinets and
checking the fridge, the grocery list kept by FRIDAY growing quickly. The call from Happy few
minutes later wasn’t unexpected.

“Yeah- I don’t know, sweats and a T-shirt, anything to change out of the suit- Great. The groceries?
Of course it’s a priority. Yes, everything! I don’t know what Peter’s sick go to food is- Well, maybe
he will feel like eating canned peach- It’s a fruit, sure it’s healthy, has vitamins and stuff- And
remember the chicken soup. You know the place right? The one Pep goes to- Yeah- But don’t ring
the doorbell- Kid is asleep and needs lots of rest. Don’t wanna wake him- Just text me when you’re
here.”

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Of course the elevator wasn't working. Was it ever? Not in this apartment building. Not one time
when he had to come here.

“Parkers” Happy muttered as he climbed the last flight of stairs and finally got to the right apartment.
The overflowing bags in his arms moved precariously before he resigned with a sigh and simply
kicked at the door. At least his feet were free.

“What did I tell you?” Tony hissed quietly in a way of greeting and put a finger to his mouth before
letting the other man in. Happy went straight for the kitchen, wanting to get rid of the shopping bags
as soon as possible. He put them down trying his best to not make noise but got shushed by Tony
anyway. He eyed his employer before handing him a duffle bag with few changes of clothes. He
could understand the sleeves rolled up for comfort, but why were they wet? A quick look around
revealed a sink overflowing with foam and a stack of freshly washed dishes. He decided not to
comment on that.

“So. The kid. How bad is he?” the man asked, his voice emotionless as always. He obviously cared
about Peter but he didn't need to show it to the whole world. And who was he even trying to fool,
people that mattered knew the truth anyway.

“It's just the flu” Tony bit down on his lip, “His fever was high but it lowered. It'll probably just take
him two or three days to get back to normal with his enhancements.”
Happy nodded along. “His aunt is still at work? Should I give her a ride home after the shift?”

“Already offered. She has her car though, so don't worry about it. I do need you to-” Tony's words didn't quite make it to Happy as the man noticed a movement over his employer’s shoulder.

Peter stood in the doorway of his bedroom, face blushed feverishly and hair sticking to his sweaty forehead. He clearly just woke up and looked ready to fall on his face but somehow found the energy to wave at Happy with a small smile, then put a finger to his mouth and winked before disappearing back in the room.

Happy sighed internally. He was not getting tied up in this one. Peter looked really sick and somebody should definitely check up on him. He had to stick with Tony on this one.

“Boss” the man was putting away the groceries and didn't look at Happy at first, “Your kid is awake.” That got his attention right away.

“What? How do you-” he looked around and kept whispering but his brows furrowed.

“I saw him and he didn't want me to tell you.”

“How would he do that if I was right here?” Tony crossed arms over his chest and was darting glances at Peter's bedroom door.

“He winked. And almost keeled over.”

The taller man didn't move from his spot, leaning against the counter, and watched Tony open the bedroom door slowly before a gasp escaped him.

“Hell no!”

He disappeared into the room only to come back with arms full of textbooks, notebooks and loose papers, Peter tailing behind him pouting.
“Unbelievable” Tony huffed, dumped the school stuff on a table and went back to unpacking the groceries, muttering under his nose.

“Hey Happy” the teen greeted the man with a stare that was supposed to be angry but only made him look more childish.

“Sorry kid but that's my boss. Don't want to get on his bad side.”

When he was leaving the apartment few minutes later Peter was back in bed and Tony was convincing the boy to eat some chicken soup.

“I already had that today."

“May made chicken soup? Well. That's good, but you should have more. It's healthy.”

“No, May never cooks soups. I had chicken flavored instant noodles. Same thing, right?”

“No, it's not! That's the opposite of healthy!”

Happy couldn't help but snicker. Tony deserved nothing less than an amazing son like Peter, but Learning what it was like to deal with a person with no care for their own well being? Stubbornly sticking to what they wanted? Giving sassy comebacks to your every word? Yeah, he had that one coming too.

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“So… I'm in bed... I ate the soup… I'm feeling better…” Peter counted slowly with a hopeful voice, but Tony just looked at him with a raised eyebrow. Was the kid really talking about homework again? Did he actually believe the man would let him study?

“Don't say it, Pete.”
“But Dad… Just- Let me explain?” he was pouting again and Tony couldn't help but smirk in amusement.

“You are the only kid ever that gets sick, has a perfect excuse not to study, and still can't stop thinking about homework. It's not healthy” the man wanted to end the topic with that, but Peter gave him a pleading look. No one could ever fight those puppy eyes. Tony sighed dramatically before giving up.

“Give me one reason why it's so important. Five words or less.”

There was a moment of silence, the teen focusing on what to say, and then an innocent, “Do articles count?”, which earned him an eyeroll and a pained comment.

“They do now.”

“Mr. Byrde is a dipshit” Peter answered confidently at last.

Tony frowned, not sure what to think of it. His kid spoke kindly about all his teachers, what did this guy do? “Okay, you got my attention. Elaborate.”

“He is really strict with deadlines. Like, crazy strict. I could be on my deathbed but he wouldn't accept a late assignment” Peter looked adorable with the angry frown. “You missed the due date because you were dying? Well, that's a zero, Mr. Parker” he pretended a strict voice and wiggled a finger in the air before deflating back onto the bed. “I have a perfect score in his class, I don't want to ruin it with one assignment that I could do in my sleep. It's just triple integrals in spherical coordinates. I need twenty minutes to finish it, dad. Half an hour tops. Please.”

Tony hold Peter's stare for a long moment before getting up and walking out of the room.

The boy didn't dare to get out of bed again but sat up and waited excitedly. The man came back carrying few sheets of paper and sat at the desk ignoring Peter's outstretched hand.

“Dad?”
“The examples you solved are okay, you clearly know what you are doing. So- I have a deal for you. I finish your assignment and take it to Mr. Byrde tomorrow. You stay in bed, rest and don’t think about school until you get better. And I mean really better and not ‘my fever dropped by one degree’ better.”

“I'm not sure it's-” Peter started, scratching at his head in thought, but was interrupted right away.

“That's your only option, kid. Take it or leave it” the man spun on the chair with a raised eyebrow and smiled at the teen's reluctant nodding.

It was few minutes later, Tony solving the math problems and Peter browsing on his phone half asleep, when the man spoke in that fatherly way where the words are soft but leave no place for discussion.

“Don't think I didn't notice you called this guy a dipshit. I better not hear it again, kiddo.”

“You shouldn't say it if you don't wanna hear it, dad” came a muttered response, the smirk in his voice evident. Of course Peter didn't understand the concept of ‘no place for discussion’.

“Better go to sleep before I change my mind about that homework. Or make a mistake. Triple integrals are tough” Tony teased the boy and tried to keep a straight face.

“No they're not. Unless you're a dipshit.”

Tony turned around, staring at his son with mixture of amusement and shock, but his features softened as soon as he saw the boy's closed eyes, face cuddled into pillow.

“Is your fever back?” the man whispered lightly, a tender smile on his face.

“Mm… Don't know… Gonna nap a bit…”

“Yeah. You do that, squirt.”
Waking up was slow and painful.

His body was burning. The heat in his head made his eyes water. He couldn't breath through his nose and his throat felt impossibly dry. Pushing the covers away was almost too much, the muscles in his arms weak and hurting.

There was a moment, just few seconds, when he really wanted to call out for someone. But he quickly abandoned that foggy thought. There probably wasn't anyone else in the apartment.

He made sure that May wouldn't be bothered by the e-mails from school. It wasn't necessary. She would get an actual call if it was important enough. There was a high possibility that she was working at the moment and he shouldn’t interrupt that. They needed the extra money for him, after all. Food, clothes, school. It was expensive to raise a kid.

Peter slowly blinked his eyes open. The room was dark, the only light falling in from the hall through the slightly open door. He ignored the dizziness in his head and sat up sluggishly, feet resting on the cold floor. Only then did he notice the man sitting at his bedside.

“Ben?” he mumbled quietly but no. That wasn't right. He was sure of it for some reason. It was hard to remember why but he knew Ben wasn't around anymore.

The figure jostled awake with a sharp intake of breath, but Peter paid it no mind. It wasn't his uncle or aunt and who else could it be? A feverish dream. That's all it was.

“Peter? What's wrong buddy?” the hallucination spoke and leaned his way, the voice sounding strangely familiar. “Are you gonna puke? Shit.”

The man ran out of the room and next moment there was a loud clatter coming from the bathroom. Peter ignored the weird illusion as he got on his feet and started walking slowly, grasping at the furnitures for balance.

“I'm here, Pe-” the man almost run into him in the doorway. “Woah- Easy kid.”
His fever must've been really bad, because how was it possible for a dream to hold his shoulder? Only then did he look up at the figure and hummed in confusion. His brain was a strange thing.

“Tony Stark?”

“It’s- Tony Stark. Yeah. But- It's me, Pete- It's-”

Peter blinked slowly but the man didn't finish his thought, only sighed deeply and ran a hand over his face.

“Let’s get you back to bed, kiddo” he said and tried to turn the boy around, but that reminded Peter why he got up in the first place.

“No- Too hot- And quiet-” the boy mumbled and pushed himself of the doorframe he was leaning against. His feet stumbled but he didn't fall, a strong arm holding him up.

“Okay- Pete- Where are you going- Take it easy, bud- Let me help-”, soft words filled his persistent walk to the living room. The boy would simply collapse on the couch but somehow he was lay down gently. His eyes closed the moment his body changed to horizontal position, but there was one more thing. He outstretched his arm to the coffee table, searching blindly with the last of his energy until the remote appeared in his hand.

“That's what you're looking for?” the soft voice was back and Peter opened his eyes to look at the man again.

“Don't like it quiet- Alone-” he mumbled and somehow got the tv on, senseless chattering filling the background.

“You're not alone, Peter. I'm here with you buddy. Not going anywhere.”

“Mm… Thanks, Mr. Stark.”

***
It was middle of the night. Peter lay asleep on the couch, cuddled into a blanket. His fever much lower now, but a fresh cold compress still present on his forehead. The tv was on, set on teleshopping channel, but muted.

Tony, keeping a close eye on the boy, was full of mixed feelings and thoughts. The guilt for dozing off and not noticing his kid’s fever rising. The heartbreak of being called ‘Mr. Stark’ together with the horror of Peter looking at him with no recognition. And the realisation that Peter thought he was left alone, abandoned in sickness by everyone. That was the worst feeling of them all.

And Tony wasn't going to let his boy think that way again.

So he did all he could think of to let Peter know he was there with him. An armchair was moved as close as possible to the couch so the man could reach out to him at any moment. He held the boy's hand, gently brushed his hair or simply kept his hand on Peter's calf, massaging little circles with his thumb. Tony thought it would be also good for Peter to hear him. At first he let the tv play and commented whatever was on, but that got boring quickly. Then he switched to explaining a theory he had been working on but also abandoned that topic pretty early on. He wanted Peter to relax, not think about quantum physics while half conscious. At last he decided to read the boy a book. After a quick visit to Peter's bedroom and a search through all the sci-fi novels and actual scientific papers, up on the highest shelf, a series of worn out paperbacks caught his attention.

Deciding on The Lion, the Witch and The Wardrobe proved to be a great choice when Peter shortly awakened during the sixth chapter.

A mumbled, “I love Narnia. Thanks Dad”, was enough to melt Tony's heart. His voice became little raspy for a moment, but he didn't stop reading.

***

May knew her nephew and his habits well. Whenever he was home alone, which unfortunately happened quite often with hers and Ben's jobs, and not feeling good, he would camp on the couch in living room, tv keeping him company until one of them came back and offered actual comfort. Questions about why he didn't call them quietly ignored.

Stepping into the apartment May didn't hear the soap opera she usually watched after night shifts. Instead, the morning silence was softly filled with a calm voice. The woman recognised it, she was expecting Tony to be there, but still found it hard to believe until she peered into the living room and
saw the scene with her own eyes.

As expected, Peter was curled on the couch, asleep under a fluffy blanket. The tv was on, reruns of the soap opera playing, but the sound was muted in favor of Tony reading a book out loud. The man looked weirdly natural in the orange armchair, one hand resting on Peter's shoulder, his attention focused on the story.

She stood in the doorway for a moment, taking the scene in and feeling grateful for Tony Stark. It made her feel so much better, knowing there was always someone ready to take care of her little boy.

The man looked up at her as he turned the page and gave her a little smile. Only then did she notice the dark bags under his eyes and how close to the end of the book was he.

“You should get some sleep” was said by both of them at the same time and they smirked at each other in response.

The woman got closer and kneeled by the couch, brushing hair out of Peter's closed eyes and giving him a kiss on the forehead.

“Tough night?” she asked without looking away from the boy and rearranging the blanket around him, but Tony just sighed and shrugged in response. May stood up and gave the man a reassuring pat on the shoulder. “Come on, I'll make coffee and you can tell me everything.”

The man was still uncertain and didn't move from his spot, “I don't want to leave him alone”.

“Believe me, Tony, I know. But we aren't leaving. We're just going to the kitchen. He will still hear us.” She walked over to the coffee machine and called back teasingly, “And you need a break, move those old bones of yours. No offense, but you can't stay in that armchair forever.”

Few minutes later they were both sitting at the built in breakfast table. Arm in arm so they could both see Peter, fresh pot of coffee between them. It didn't take long for Tony to start talking about the night and everything that happened, emotions clearly showing in his voice. May poured him another cup, leaned on his shoulder, giving and seeking comfort at the same time, and recalled previous times of Peter getting sick and not telling anyone.

They sighed at the realisation that there was an important talk waiting for them when the boy got
better. How do you teach somebody who puts everyone before themselves to be more selfish, needy and asking for attention?

It was nice, having a morning coffee together and chatting about life, but soon it was time for Tony to go if he wanted to get to the Midtown High before classes started. He got ready to leave and gave the still peacefully sleeping boy one more look. “When are you going back to work? You know I'll come sit with him anytime.”

“Don't worry, I'm off until tomorrow morning” May said offhandedly but, seeing the man’s shoulders sag, she quickly understood what was the real question behind it. “Tony, you can be back in five minutes and I won't mind. You don't even have to ask, okay?” she gave him a quick hug. “Peter will definitely be waiting once he wakes up. You didn't finish the book yet and there is six more to go.”

Tony left the apartment without even attempting to hide his content smile.

***

Mr. Byrde wasn't just your regular, strict about rules, dipshit of a teacher. He was a straight out asshole. Tony understood that in the first minute of meeting him.

The guy was in his early thirties, had a perfectly groomed haircut and wore a sharp suit complete with a tie. Tony didn't miss the way the teacher eyed his own jeans, hoodie and, probably disastrous after the night, hair. He smiled fakely to stop himself from commenting on that.

“Morning, I'm here to turn in Peter Parker's assignment. He is sick with the flu and won't be coming today” he passed it over to the other man and looked around the still empty classroom.

“Well, that's simply unbelievable” Mr. Byrde said as he looked through the homework and Tony smirked. His happy bubble was destroyed with the teachers next words, “You can inform Mr. Parker he scored zero on the assignment and will be facing detention when he's back, sir.”

“What now? Detention for what?” Tony spun to look at the other man in shock.

“We have no tolerance for cheating, sir, and it's obviously not Mr. Parker's handwriting so I'll have to inform the principal about it. We treat such behaviors very seriously in Midtown High.”
“I see” Tony did his best to keep his emotions at bay. “Let me ask you two questions. Do you know about the flu outbreak?” The younger man nodded once with a neutral expression. “Will you change the due date for the sick kids?”

“Of course not. The deadline was set a week ago, they could've turned it in before getting sick.”

Every word this guy said made it harder for Tony to stop himself from punching him. He was still looking for a calm and reasonable response when the teacher spoke again.

“I don’t want to assume who really did this assignment, but I can't ignore the fact that somebody not legally involved with Mr. Parker came to turn it in. It does arise some questions.”

That was enough for Tony. He laughed in an absolutely not happy way before leveling the younger man with a sarcastic glare, “Well, I didn’t know that teachers memorise the legal involvements of all their students. I must say, it doesn't really seem right.”

“Let me rephrase that, Mr. Stark. I'll notify the principal about this situation because whatever your involvement with Mr. Parker is, it can't be a good one and-”

He was still talking when the punch landed on his face.

***

“I have good and bad news” Tony said as he set a box full of cupcakes in front of Peter and May. The boy was curled into his aunt’s side and looked much better than in the morning. He reached for a cupcake and bit into it excitedly before giving Tony a confused look.

“Wait, what bad news?” he mumbled with his mouth full.

“So… Good news, you get to do the assignment once again, all on your own like you wanted, and turn it in when you go back to school” Tony grinned at the boy before continuing. “Bad news, your teacher is an ignorant asshole and I gave him a black eye.” Peter's mouth fell open. “But! Good news again! Principal Morita took it well and I'm not even banned from the school grounds. That's clearly a win-win, right?”
Only then did Tony stop his nervous pacing around the room, sat down across from the Parkers and looked at them earnestly. Peter was shocked into silence and just stared at the man, purple frosting on his cheek. May on the other hand didn't seem that fazed by it. She smirked at him and shrugged before picking up a cupcake.

“To be honest, I talked to Mr. Byrde once at a parent teacher meeting and it was enough to want to punch him, so I don't blame you. I just hope you won't get in trouble because of that asshole.”

Peter looked between them confused before frowning and putting a hand to his own forehead, “Is my fever back?”

***

Bringing a box of cupcakes to a sick teenager quickly proved to be a bad idea. Oddly, even ill, Peter had an appetite for sweets and went through half the box before they noticed what was going on. The sugar rush started with him coming back from the bathroom by crawling on the ceiling and dropping in the middle of living room with a ‘boo’, scaring both adults to death. The next five minutes went by with Tony trying to come up with a fun but stationary thing to do, May giving him death glares for bringing the cupcakes and Peter jumping up the walls, literally.

The solution came from the boy himself, as he decided to prove his absolute knowledge of the dialog in Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone movie. With the adults on opposite ends of the couch, he stretched across it, head in May’s lap and feet in Tony’s, and demanded affection from both like a cat. It took thirty minutes of perfect reenactments until Peter deemed his throat too sore and fall silent, only to perk up with random lines, “Ew. Troll bogies”. In that time the adults exchanged numerous looks ranging from impressed, he said everything in perfect timing and intonation, through amused, impressions of Hagrid, to simply terrified, when he included Hedwig’s hoots and screeches.

As the movie finished two hours later, “I'm not going home. Not really.”. Peter had mostly burned through the excessive energy, but still hummed to the theme song as the credits rolled. May on the other hand got caught up with the fatigue of two shifts and reluctantly went to nap after the rest of the party assured her it was okay.

That left Tony and Peter on their own and the boy didn't hesitate about what he wanted to do. The unfinished book was thrown onto Tony's lap and followed by Peter's head as he swiftly turned around on the couch. The man chuckled lightly, one hand opening the book and the other crading through the thick curls.
“High King Peter the Magnificent, huh?” Tony dropped the finished book and rolled his neck.

“Yeah… I always preferred Lucy, tough…” the teen was stretching as well but still stayed glued to his father's side.

“Of course you did, what was I thinking. You're such a Lucy” he ruffled Peter's hair playfully.

“Maybe next time we can do Prince Caspian!” the boy turned on his back and was looking up at Tony with wide eyes. “Or Harry Potter! Or- Oh! I never got to read the Tales of Beedle the Bard, that should be fun” he chattered away excitedly.

“Sure thing, kid.”

“So when I'm sick or get hurt as Spider-Man again-”

“No no no. Backtrack. No getting hurt. Nope” Tony sighed dramatically before getting his voice under control. “We can do it whenever you want, okay? Maybe instead of a movie night sometimes? Yeah?”

Peter nodded happily but then his smile faded. They stayed silent for a moment, the boy pulling nervously at his sleeve and Tony giving him space to think.

“Dad?” he started eventually, a soft hum of acknowledgement telling him to continue. “So- It's cool to have you here- And thanks for coming yesterday- But if you have to go and work or something- You can go. I'll be alright- May is here now- And I can be on my own, no problem- Don't feel like you have to stay.” He said hastily without even glancing at Tony.

“Is that why you didn't call yesterday, buddy?” the man spoke lightly, not sure himself what he should say. “You didn't want me to feel pressured? Thought I was too busy?”

“Well, I honestly didn't think I was that sick- But yeah- That too, maybe?”
“Okay. Let's break that down, Pete” Tony cleared his throat to gather his thoughts. “I love you and always enjoy spending time together like crazy. I want to take care of you. Make my kid feel great however I can. It also just so happen that I'm a billionaire and can get days off whenever I want. You know all that, right?”

Peter nodded in silence, now completely absorbed by the zipper of his hoodie. Tony gave him a moment before gently starting again.

“I know you had it tough and understand you wanted to make it easier, first for May and Ben, and then when it was just you and your aunt. I admire it, actually. But you don't have to do that anymore. You need to get that into that smart brain of yours. Because you are never alone. It's not just you and May. It's not even just the three of us. You have Pepper, and Happy, and Rhodey, and your friends. Hell, even Helen Cho would help you in an instant. Just- Remember we are always here for you, okay buddy?”

The only answer Peter could give was a nod as he angrily wiped at his eyes to hide the tears. Tony cooed at the boy as his own eyes got weirdly wet.

When May came to the living room few minutes later she saw Peter and Tony, making a reading list for their bookclub, both teary eyed. Before she could decide between earnestly asking them what happened and making a joke about it, Peter jumped over the back of the couch and embraced her in a tight hug.

“Sorry I hacked your account, May, I'll change it back to normal.”

“Glad to hear that, sweetie” she kissed the top of his head.

“Sorry we talked without you, but it just came up” Tony winked and gave her thumbs up behind Peter's back. The woman smiled back gratefully.

***

“Hey guys, how are you doing? Feeling better, Pete?” Pepper walked into the apartment, a nice white box in her hands. “I heard that Tony covered all the grocery shopping last night, but I brought you guys a nice treat” she busied herself with opening the box and soon was presenting it's colorful contents with a charming smile. “Cupcakes!”
The terror on both May and Tony's faces and their muttered curses was definitely not what she expected. Peter's reaction was the other end of extreme as he grinned at her like a maniac. He didn't wait with reaching for the treat, but his hand stopped short of the box as his expression changed into concern.

“Did you punch him too?”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!

I really want to write one more fic in this series, but it'll probably be a long time before I get to it so don't hold your breath ;)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!