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**All Those Left Alone**

by [dgoldenofficial](http://archiveofourown.org/users/dgoldenofficial)

**Summary**

[Contains Marvel Spoilers]

Peter Parker is dead.

Thanos won and half of the universe has been reduced to dust, trapping them in another world.

The fallen heroes of Infinity War need to band together to escape the soul realm and team up with the Avengers before it's too late to save everyone else.

**WARNINGS:** Contains major Marvel spoilers, obviously. Also contains mild to moderate language, graphic depictions of blood and gore as well as self harm and suicide and mentions of mental illness, descriptions of anxiety attacks, and self esteem issues. Do not read if you are sensitive to such topics.
Warnings: This chapter contains descriptions of panic attacks and near death experiences. Do not read if you are sensitive to such topics.

See the end of the work for more notes.
"Mr. Stark? I don't feel so good." Peter said, voice faint. He stumbled toward the man who had taken him under his wing, taken him as his own.

"You're alright." Tony said, stepping toward the boy.

"I don't- I don't know what's happening." Peter fell into Tony's arms, the older man pulling the son he’d never had close.

"I don't wanna go, I don't wanna go. Sir please. Please, I don't wanna go. I don't wanna go." Peter stuttered, his life fading so much quicker than he ever deserved.

"I'm sorry." The final words spilled from the teenagers lips as his figure disintegrated under Tony's heaving chest.

The older man watched as the highschooler perished long before his time, his ashes cascading over his open palms. He gripped his hand to his chest, breath coming short as he realized he was the reason this boy had just died in his arms.

Peter's chest heaved as he shot up from his spot on the ground. He pulled himself up onto his knees as he looked around, eyes searching for Tony, Star Lord, Doctor Strange, Mantis. He found himself completely and utterly alone, in a place he didn't remember being in before.

Below his knees was soft but oddly pale grass instead of the rust colored dirt of Titan. He scanned his surroundings, seeing everything seemed fuzzy and as though seen through a grey film. The world around him seemed off. He was sat in the middle of a field, flanked by forest.

"Star Lord?" Peter asked loudly, pausing to wait for response. He felt his heart rate quicken.

"Doctor Strange?" He called out again, once more pausing, hoping to hear the voice of the haughty doctor call back.

"Mantis?" Peter said, beginning to panic.

"Mr. Stark?" He yelled, the loudest of all. He heard nothing back.

"MR. STARK?" He hollered again, a lump forming in his throat.

"MR. STARK!" He screamed at the top of his lungs, tears welling in his eyes. They began to flow as he fell to his knees, his vision tunneling and his chest heaved with shallow breaths.

Peter panted, hunched over, hands fistng the grass beneath him as he struggled to breathe. The panic attack caused all sense of reality to slip through his fingers, memories of falling into Tony's arms God only knows how long ago flashing before his eyes. He remembered feeling the pain in his chest as he tried to catch his breath, mumbling apologies and pleads to Tony.

Peter sobbed, falling over on the ground, his body shaking and his mind blurred. He whimpered to himself as he wrapped his arms around his body. The boy balled his body up in attempt to comfort himself, though it didn't work as well as he planned.
He had anxiety. He always had, while he was alive. He'd have the occasional panic attack but they'd pass as soon as they came. He'd never had one like this. This felt like it had been going on for hours. When he'd had panic attacks before, he'd always had someone with him, Aunt May, Ned, Liz.

His chest was on fire. It felt like he was drowning, and his lungs just wouldn't expand to take in the oxygen he so desperately needed. His body was convulsing, his vision nearly black, the smallest pinpricks of light coming through, but probably the worst part about this was that he was entirely and cripplingly alone.

His mind blurred as he zoned out, the only thing registering in his scattered brain being his need for oxygen. His thoughts swam, from his death to the last things he'd said to his friends, to Aunt May. The tears fell quicker than before now.

Slowly, his crying stopped and his trembling ceased, his breathing evening and his vision returning to normal. He sat up and looked down at his hands, realizing he had torn up the grass. He shook the blades off his sweaty palms and stood slowly on shaky legs. The teenager looked from one side to the other and decided to head toward the right treeline.

Peter wandered for days. The sun would rise every morning and he would walk until it set again at night. He realized he needed sleep and also needed to eat, which was completely different from what he thought he knew about death before. So, he foraged for fruit and drank from streams, settling in to rest every night when the sun fell in the sky. He came across various types of plants, both poisonous and not, but he never seemed to find any other life. The world around him seemed empty but for the most part, benign.

Peter decided it better not to think about it too much.

He began walking again, farther into the woods when he felt something brush against his leg. He looked down to find a tabby cat. The cat looked up at him with big green eyes and meowed, rubbing its face against his suit clad calf again.

Peter bent to reach the cat. "Hey sweetie." He cooed, reaching out to stroke the feline's head. As the animal purred, he noticed a pink collar around its neck. He checked the tags to find the cat's name was Missy.

Missy mewled once more, pressing her head into Peter's hand insistently, waiting for him to start petting her again. He caved and scratched gently behind her ears. Peter stood by the cat, looking down at the animal. She looked back up at him and mewed another time.

"Okay, okay," Peter sighed as Missy put her front paws up on his leg. "Come on." he leaned down and she jumped right into his arms.

Peter stood and as he did, Missy climbed up onto his shoulders. She perched next to his head as he started walking again.

They walked, well, Peter walked, until the sun fell in the sky and Peter waited for his eyes to adjust to the dark. He began looking for a place to sleep. He found a good tree with a sturdy branch and poked Missy to wake her. She looked at Peter and hopped into his arms. He held her body close to his chest with one arm as he flicked the hand of the other towards the tree branch. He flung himself up onto the branch and nestled in, webbing his legs and his torso to the plant as Missy, completely unphased by Peter's powers, made herself comfortable in his lap. He webbed her loosely to his thighs as a precaution and she merely looked at him before laying her head down on her front paws and
going right to sleep.

Peter decided it best to do the same and closed his eyes, falling asleep to the soft noises of the forest.

He woke the next day to Missy trying to adjust her body but upon finding herself unable to, meowing loudly to wake Peter. The teenager woke up to her noises and dissolved the webs binding her to his lap before detaching himself from the tree and held the cat close again as he jumped out. Once on the ground, he let Missy down as she decided she would walk on her own today and Peter began his daily trek.

This continued for about another two weeks and Peter was beginning to wonder if he was alone, but continued walking. He found himself thinking about his old life a lot. About how by now finals would have already begun. He thought about his friends and peers, how they'd be faring right about now.

He stopped thinking about it when he realized some of them may very well be dead as well.

The teen was glad for Missy's company. He'd never had a pet while he was alive, the closest thing being Mr. Delmar's cat, Murph. Damn, he would give anything for one of the man's sandwiches right now.

As if on cue, the teen's stomach grumbled.

"God, I could go for some grub." Peter said out loud, looking down at Missy who was padding quietly beside him. She gazed back up at him. "Let's go find some food."

The teen scraped by in terms of food on a mainly berry diet. He tried to catch a squirrel once, but he couldn't bring himself to kill it and realized he wouldn't have been able to skin or gut it without a knife. The arrangement worked fine for him but Missy was a bit more picky, opting instead to chase the ground mice around and catch her dinners.

That night, after dinner and a drink from the river he and Missy had posted up beside, Peter settled into his spot in a tree, Missy in his lap, shutting his eyes. He let his mind fill with the memories of his previous life. His lips quirked in a soft smile as he drifted off to sleep.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Peter finds himself in painful circumstances.

Chapter Notes

Contains: graphic depiction of blood and gore
Do not read if you are sensitive to such topics.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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Several weeks later and Peter was beginning to lose hope. Missy was the only sign of sentient life he had encountered besides the woodland creatures. The time was dragging on and it never felt like he was driven to continue walking, more so that he had to. Sometimes he would end up asking himself what he was doing, why he was still pushing forwards despite his current success rate, or lack thereof. When he would catch a glimpse of himself in the water of a particularly still pond he would notice how different he was beginning to look. He was thin, nearly too thin, and spindly. His jaw was speckled with thin scruff from not shaving and he had horrible tan lines from his suit.
Every day Peter would repeat the same routine. Wake up, wake Missy up, start walking. When the sun would set, he foraged for berries, watched Missy hunt the forest mice, and go to sleep.

This morning was the same as always. Wake, walk, and he was on his way to eat and sleep when things began to go south.

Just as the sun was setting, Peter felt the hair on the back of his neck prickle. Missy who was now on his shoulder, tensed and the fur on her back stood on end. She jumped down from her perch and hissed, arching her back and fluffing herself up, looking towards the now dark forest. He immediately wished he'd never let his guard down about the weird world being safe.

Peter squinted to see in the dark. His eyes didn't offer much in the near complete lack of light, even with his enhanced vision, only inky shadows. He heard a low growl and was about to call to his suit to activate night vision, but before he could there was already something slamming itself into his body.

Peter yelled "Activate night vision!" and the suit responded, fixing his sight. Above his face he saw the snapping jaws of a doberman. Peter hastily raised his arm to the dog's neck, pushing back on its throat but the dog shifted its head quickly to instead catch the arm in its mouth. Peter yelled in pain and the dog dug its claws into his chest, blood immediately beginning to flow from the stinging wounds. The teen shoved the dog off with all of his superhuman strength but the animal flipped and dug its paws into the ground to catch itself before lunging back in, snapping at Peter's chest, narrowly missing his throat as he pushed his hands against the animal's shoulders.

Tears began to form in Peter eyes as he felt his skin being torn open beneath the animal but he heard a yowl from Missy and then a yelp from the dog as the cat flew in to latch its jaws onto the canine's throat. Missy shook her head viciously as she dug her claws into the doberman's chest to steady herself. The dog was crying and howling and stumbling around trying to shake Missy off. His throat was severely torn when he finally managed to shake the cat.

The canine was shaking his head violently, Missy swinging from his throat, hanging on only by her small mouth clamped on the dog's larynx. With the combination of hysterical persistence and aggressive swinging of his head from one side to the other, Missy came loose from his neck. Once she was off, the dog snatched the feline up from the ground by her nape, snapped his jaws quick and with all the force he could muster, breaking Missy's neck. Killing her instantly.

Peter let out a loud cry of "NO!" as the tears welling in his eyes from the pain began to fall. He felt his wounds sting fiercely as he began to sob over the loss of his friend. He watched as the dog collapsed, throat bleeding profusely. The animal began to pant, struggling for breath and Peter half paid attention as he crawled weakly over to his companion. He held Missy in his arms, crying over her small body. The only sign of life before that monstrous dog he had seen on his entire journey.

The teen found silent tears making tracks in the dirt and blood spattered across his face for nearly two hours later. His mind was reeling, still trying to process the fact that just a few hours ago Missy had been very much alive, trotting beside him as he walked and now he was cradling her cooling body to his chest. He was silently begging to feel her stir in his arms, feel her little rib cage begin to rise and fall with her breath. But it never happened. What he got was his first pet and loyal companion's head lolling at an odd angle over his arm and her small body having become stiff and cold by the time he
reached a nice spot.

The place he had come across and ultimately decided on was a clear patch by a riverbed lush with
wildflowers. The sun was rising above him now and his wounds were throbbing with extreme pain
but the boy went on, picking up a sturdy fallen branch and digging it into the ground in the clearing,
preparing a shallow grave.

Peter placed his friend into her final resting pace, tears falling silently from his eyes again as he
limped to the river to collect flowers. He made a vibrant bouquet, half of which he placed on the cat's
body, the other half he set aside by his feet. He then tossed the dirt over Missy's fallen form, filling
the grave, all the while tears beginning to stream down his face again.

He packed the earth down flat once he was finished, placing the remaining half of the bouquet on
top. Finally, he found two sticks and used his webs to lace them together in the shape of a cross,
which he stuck at the head of the grave.

The tears still silently flowing, Peter moved back to the running water of the fresh, clean river and
went to get undressed. His hand went to the spider on his chest and tapped it but nothing happened.
It took his clouded mind a moment to register he was now wearing a new suit and he sighed.

"Karen?" He asked. "How do I get out of this suit?"

"The suit is responsive to your thoughts, Mr. Parker. It will adapt to your needs." The female voice
sounded in his ears.

Peter shut his eyes, feeling slightly foolish as he imagined the suit disappearing. He heard the soft
clicking of the new suit's nanotechnology retracting away from his body. When it had finished it
became nothing more than a disk that stuck to the chest of his older suit model. He pulled it off and
set it down on a log before tapping his chest, the suit loosening and he slipped out of it, his boxers
coming next.

Once he was undressed, the teen waded into the water. He felt it wash over his wounds, stinging at
first, but then soothing them. The water around him became stained a rust color but it was quickly
washed away by the soft current. Peter rinsed his dirty hands thoroughly in the water before gently
rubbing his fingers around his wounds. He hissed in pain and watched as the blood began to flow
again, but stopped after a short while, not long enough to worry.

As he cleaned himself, Peter wondered what this meant for both the dog and Missy. Obviously this
wasn't heaven, because an animal like the doberman wouldn't be here if it was. Peter was pretty sure
they were dead, but why and how did they all end up here? Was this the afterlife? Was there no
Heaven or Hell, no dark or light, no separate places for the bad and good, only a sort of After-Earth
where they all existed together? What happened if they died here? Did they start over again, was
there a respawn point like in video games? Did they just cease to exist? Peter chose to stop thinking
about it because it was beginning to hurt his head.

When his body and wounds were clean, Peter washed his suit and underwear, stepping out of the
river and wringing the excess water out before draping them over a low branch once they were
sufficiently cleaned. He sat himself on a log afterwards and looked at his wounds. He didn't have any
spare shirt or pants to use as bandages but he looked to the web shooters he had taken off with the
suit and picked them up, pulling the bracelets on. He then put webbing tightly over his wounds and
called it a day, hoping it would be enough.

The slashes were doing really well considering how bad they had been, having healed a good
amount overnight thanks to his powers, but he knew they'd heal even quicker if he let himself just
rest. Peter laid himself out on the log he was sitting on, basking in the morning sun while he waited for his clothes to dry. He drifted off, falling quickly to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

And that's the end of chapter two! I hope you weren't too attached to Missy. I encourage everyone to heed the warnings both in the description and at the beginning of every chapter. I put them there to ensure you know what you're walking into but I can only say so much without spoiling the plot.

On the terms of chapter lengths. I'm trying to find the best places to end what I've written and put it in a story, whether that be with a cliff hanger or a resolution, but it could be cool if you guys commented on what you'd like to see.

I've already written the majority of the chapters, so suggestions on what to include in terms of plot won't really do me any good, but suggestions on the layout, length, or breaking up of the storyline would be much appreciated!

Finally, if you liked it, you should vote for it! I appreciate all my readers, and all the ones that may be to come, so voting lets me know I'm doing something right.

Thank you all for reading and I'll see you in the next chapter,

-xoxo, Denise.

P.S., slight continuity error in terms of Peter bathing, even though yeah sure this means he hasn't gotten clean for a hella long time, in his (and my) defense, he's got bigger issues. So I know I said he took a bath in the last chapter, I really wanted to have an in depth exploration of how the new suit works here and I changed what the last chapter said.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Someone new comes along.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Once he was undressed, the teen waded into the water. He felt it wash over his wounds, stinging at first, but then soothing them. The water around him became stained a rust color but it was quickly washed away by the soft current. Peter rinsed his dirty hands thoroughly in the water before gently rubbing his fingers around his wounds. He hissed in pain and watched as the blood began to flow again, but stopped after a short while, not long enough to worry.

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When his body and wounds were clean, Peter washed his suit and underwear, stepping out of the river and wringing the excess water out before draping them over a low branch once they were sufficiently cleaned. He sat himself on a log afterwards and looked at his wounds. He didn't have any spare shirt or pants to use as bandages but he looked to the web shooters he had taken off with the suit and picked them up, pulling the bracelets on. He then put webbing tightly over his wounds and called it a day, hoping it would be enough.

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When he woke, the sun was rising the next morning. Peter sat up, yawning and stretched his arms over his head. He quickly realized he felt minimal pain in his wounds. He dissolved the makeshift bandages and checked to see that they were almost completely healed. He reapplied a small amount of webbing to his wound to keep the scabbed slashes from ripping back apart.

He got up off the log and put his boxers back on before turning to find a man sitting at the base of a tree by his log. He was wearing a navy blue leather jacket missing one sleeve, revealing a metal arm, and dark olive green cargo pants with a pair of black combat boots. His shoulder length chestnut hair was parted down the middle, framing his strong jawed, stubbled face that looked at him with icy blue eyes.

Peter yelped, scrambling to cover himself up with his suit.
"Don't worry kid, I served in the Army for three years, it's nothing I haven't seen before." The gruff voice said, chuckling, but turned away for Peter's privacy.

Peter was still blushing as he hastily dressed into his older suit, realizing that, despite having been severely damaged yesterday, had fixed itself overnight.

The look of awe on his face must have been enough for the man to notice because he said, "Yeah, Stark's tech'll do that."

Peter looked up at the guy, scanning his face in more detail. He realized he knew him.

"You're that dude from the fight with Captain America!" He said as he stuck the disk of the new suit to his chest and imagined it forming to cover his body, the tech following his mental command. "Woah! Cool arm! Well, I mean not that your old one wasn't cool but this one? Wow, is this Vibranium? I read about it once." He fawned over the tech of the man's left arm, forgetting to ask for permission as he lifted it gently for a better look.

"That's what Shuri told me." The man said, allowing the teen to inspect his prosthetic.

"Who's Shuri?" Peter looked up to make eye contact with him.

"She's the sister of this guy I know who's king of this place in Africa called Wakanda." The man shrugged.

"You've been to Wakanda?" Peter asked excitedly. "You know King T'Challa and his sister? Who even are you?"

"Bucky Barnes." He introduced himself.

"You're Bucky Barnes? As in James Buchanan Barnes? The James Buchanan Barnes?" Peter asked, his jaw dropping.

"The one and only." Bucky responded with a grin.

"I thought you died like seventy something years ago!" Peter said, still in shock.

"Not many people know I'm still kickin'." Bucky shrugged.

"Wow. Woah. It's an honor to meet you sir." Peter fumbled. "I'm Peter Parker, by the way. Spiderman."

"I know, I remember. Steve talked a lot about you. He said he was surprised Tony brought a kid to a fight like the one you two met at."

"I'm not a kid!" Peter exclaimed, his voice cracking, causing him to blush. He crossed his arms petulantly over his chest.

"Sure you're not." Bucky chuckled, his face soft and happy. Peter was looking at the smile that reached his eyes when he began to wonder if the man wasn't really as bad of a guy as he thought, even if he did side with Cap.

"Mr. Stark wanted to test me to see if I was good enough to join the Avengers, but he sent me right back to Queens after the battle." Peter said, sitting down by Bucky.

Bucky turned to him. "Steve said you were a New York kid. He sees potential in you."
"I think Captain America's pretty cool," Peter said. "And I know that he and Mr. Stark used to be really good friends and I just don't get why that changed so quick."

"It was my fault." Bucky said solemnly. "Did Stark tell you about me?"

"No." Peter said, looking at Bucky with his eyebrows furrowed.

"Did he tell you about Steve?" Bucky asked.

"He didn't have to, everyone knows about Captain America. They used him in all our school's Health class videos." Peter responded.

Bucky laughed heartily then. "I'd love to see those sometime."

Peter laughed with him.

When they had stopped laughing, Bucky picked the story back up.

"Anyways, way back before Steve even joined the army we were best friends. Had been since we were kids. I was enlisted just a few days before he was, and I got sent off in the 107th Infantry Regiment. We were captured in battle and assumed killed in action."

Peter nodded along.

"After Steve was injected with the serum, he went on a rescue mission to Azzano and he saved the remainder of the 107th, including me. But later, when we were trying to combat Red Skull and H.Y.D.R.A, we were in a train and an explosion threw me out. Steve didn't get to me in time and I fell. I don't remember much of it, I just remember seeing Steve reach out for me and then waking up in a place I didn't recognize."

Peter leaned forward, listening intently to Bucky speak.

"I'd lost my arm and they were torturing me. They'd given me some sort of serum, something that had made me stronger and harder to kill. They brainwashed me, turning me into some super assassin. I became known as the Winter Soldier."

"I think Mr. Stark said something about that. I just didn't know that was you." Peter said, his brain working through the new information.

Bucky nodded. "For decades they used me to kill powerful people. By the time Stark and Steve were fighting, I was escaping the tail end of my brainwashing." He shook his head. "It's complicated. I was myself, most of the time, thanks to Steve, but I still had a ton of memory gaps and if someone were to say a certain set of words, I'd fall back under." The man's eyebrows were knit together.

Peter watched as Bucky cleared his head before speaking again.

"At the time, there was someone trying to frame me named Helmut Zemo who lived in Sokovia. He pinned a bombing on me to make Stark think Steve was working with a terrorist. He wanted them at each other's throats as revenge for when his family died in the battle against Ultron. I guess he thought that if he couldn't kill them himself, the next best thing was to get them to kill each other."

Peter was beginning to understand. "Did Mr. Stark ever find out that that guy was impersonating you?"

"He did. Steve and I were already at the facility where they had made me into the Winter Soldier,
Zemo's hideout, but Stark caught up. He told us about how he had misjudged me and that he was going to help us kill Zemo, but-" Bucky cut himself off, his eyes gleaming with regret. "But he showed Stark footage of me- of me assassinating his parents."

"Oh." Peter responded. His mind was running a mile a minute and he found himself not looking the man in the eye.

"I didn't want to do it." Bucky quickly explained. "I didn't want to do any of the things I did as the Winter Soldier. They took everything from me. They made me into a mass killing machine. I was trapped in my own mind. I saw everything I did, I felt the blood on my hands, I remember the screams and pleas for mercy, but I couldn't control my own body." His face was twisted with pain from his past.

Peter looked at Bucky with sympathy then, his brown eyes soft.

"Stark went for me, and he tried to kill me. Steve held him off while I tried to climb up to the hatch in the ceiling but he got it closed before I could make it out. Stark caught up to me, asked me if I remembered. I told him the truth, and he tried to drag me back down. Steve made it to us, and he and Stark fell all the way down but I landed on a platform above them."

Bucky looked up to see Peter still listening closely.

"Steve told him that killing me wouldn't fix what happened, but Stark said he didn't care because I'd killed- I'd killed his mom." Bucky's face was warped by self hatred.

"He jumped on top of Steve and he was beating him and I came down to help. We were tag teaming on him, and it wasn't fair, but he was stronger than Steve. Stark blasted him back and it was just me against him. I had him against the wall and I was close to winning but he- He blew my arm off."

Bucky seemed lost in the memories.

Peter began to feel conflicted.

"He took Stark on by hand at first, but then he picked up the shield. He was hitting him so hard and when he raised his arms to hit him again and I really thought he'd go for Stark's face but in an instant of mercy, he slammed the shield into the arc reactor instead. Stark said that Steve didn't deserve it, that his father had made it, and in surrender he gave it up. Threw the shield down at Stark's feet." Bucky said.

Peter felt like he was being torn in two. This man, who he knew for a fact spared no mercy in
fighting for Steve's sake against Tony, and Tony who had tried to kill both Bucky and Steve in revenge for his parents' death. He didn't know who he should be siding with but he felt as though his loyalties were beginning to shift, one way or the other.

"I don't blame Stark. He was hurting and grieving. I don't know much about his family but I can tell you one thing for sure. Howard Stark was no father to that boy. All Stark had was his mom. And I just-" Bucky cut himself off.

"You can't blame yourself." Peter found himself saying strongly. "You didn't make those decisions. They weren't conscious. You were brainwashed. It wasn't you."

"I wish it was that easy to shake the memories, kid. The guilt." Bucky shook his head as though he was recalling the feelings.

They were quiet for a moment before the older man spoke once more.

"They hadn't talked in years." Bucky said, "before Thanos started collecting the infinity stones. They probably never would've talked again if the lives of the universe weren't at stake."

"Mr. Stark almost didn't call." Peter said.

"I know." Bucky replied. "Pride destroys people and I saw it destroy two of the strongest, most honorable men I'd ever met in my life."

"I'm so sorry." Peter said.

"It's not your fault, kid. You had nothing to do with it." Bucky replied.

"I sided with Mr. Stark without even knowing your end of the story." Peter said.

"You couldn't have. You had no one to tell it to you." Bucky said, his face soft. "You trust Stark. He offered you the experience of a lifetime. He let you become a true superhero. There's nothing wrong with siding with him over a guy you'd never spoken to and another guy you never knew existed."

Peter looked down at his hands but Bucky put his own hand on the teenager's shoulder. "Really kid. I got nothing against you." the man said with soft eyes and a smile. Peter smiled weakly in return.

The moment was broken by the sound of a voice yelling in the distance.

Chapter End Notes

Behold! Chapter three! We're going to be seeing the appearance of some of everyone's favorite characters soon, along with some of the villains you hate to love (oooooh mysterious). Take that how you will.

This chapter was a little short, but I wanted to have there be the lil cliff hanger there for those of you avid readers. The next chapter will get posted tomorrow evening and the publish times will shift to evenings on the weekdays and mornings on the weekends.

Thanks again for reading and until the next chapter,

-xoxo Denise
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Peter looked down at his hands but Bucky put his own hand on the teenager's shoulder. "Really kid. I got nothing against you." the man said with soft eyes and a smile. Peter smiled weakly in return.

The moment was broken by the sound of a voice yelling in the distance.

"WHERE ARE YOU BROTHER?" The voice hollered.

Peter and Bucky jumped to their feet. Bucky looked on edge but Peter was excited to find another person.

"HELLO?" Peter yelled out.

"HELLO!" The voice called back.

Peter took off in a sprint toward the voice. His heart rate picked up as he flicked his wrist toward a tree branch and launched his body forward. He swung through the forest, Bucky running with super soldier speed behind him. He weaved over and around branches as he shot web after web, searching for the owner of the voice.

"HEY!" Peter called, hoping for a new response.

"HELLO?" The voice called back, close and somewhere a bit off to Peter's left. He swung that direction, looking down to see Bucky following his movements from below.

Peter spotted a tired looking tall man standing in a clearing of the forest. He was dressed in deep green and black leather, his black hair slicked back from his thin, pale face. His blue eyes stared down at Peter as he landed in front of him.

"Hi." Peter said, panting slightly. Bucky, unphased by the exertion, stopping behind him.

"You're merely a child." The man said, shocked. "Who are you?"
"I'm Peter Parker- er- Spider Man." Peter said.

"I am Loki, prince of Asgard, Odinson, the rightful king of Jotunheim, God of Mischief." The man replied, his arms crossed over his chest as he looked disdainfully down at Peter.

"Wait wait, you're Loki? Thor's brother?" Peter asked.

"I give you my full title and all you pull from it is 'Odinson'?" Loki asked, looking at Peter with salted disappointment.

"Well that's really the only thing in there that made sense to me. I don't know where Asgard or Jotunheim are, I don't know what God of Mischief means so..." Peter said, trailing off.

Loki rolled his eyes, sighing. "Yes, brother of Thor, do you know where he is?" The man's face remained under a veil of annoyance, but his eyes glimmered with hope.

"No, I'm sorry." Peter said, watching the hope fade from Loki's eyes.

"Where are we?" Loki asked.

"I don't know. I think-" Peter hesitated. "I think we're dead. At least- I'm dead."

"Valhalla." Loki's voice said.

"No. We're in the Soul Realm." A voice chimed in from behind them.

Loki, Peter, and Bucky turned around to find Doctor Strange, floating in on his cloak.

Loki's eyebrows knitted together, his eyes narrowing. "Warlock."

"I could say the same to you." Strange responded.

"I am a god!" Loki snapped. "Do not undermine me!"

"You are nothing here." Strange said emotionlessly.

Loki flicked his arms, throwing his hand at Strange lightning quick, a knife flying toward the doctor. Just as quick as Loki had thrown the knife, Stephen's hands spread in front of him, glowing with orange magic, deflecting the weapon. Bucky pulled his handguns from the holsters on his thighs and he had them with the safety off and cocked in less than a second, pushing Peter back and aiming one at each of the fighting men.

"Don't make me pull these triggers." He said gruffly.

Loki sneered at Strange and Strange looked him dead in the eyes, face unyielding. Peter stood to the side, a little scared. "Look guys," Peter said. "I don't know what's happened to you two in the past, but whatever it was I don't think it's that important right now. We still don't really know where we are or what to do about it."

Loki looked at the boy, his eyes softening slightly as he sighed. His shoulders untensed from puffing his chest out and he returned his knives to his coat. Strange relaxed as well, his hands falling to his side, the magic dissipating. Bucky uncocked his guns, putting them back in their holsters.

"I know we're in the soul realm," Strange said finally. "And I know that has something to do with the soul stone on Thanos's gauntlet. However, I don't know how to get out of here, or how much time we have to get out of here in case something goes wrong."
"I am groot." A voice came from behind them. A tree like creature about as tall as Peter walked out of the trees clutching a handheld video game to his chest.

"Woah! Hi Groot!" Peter said, walking to the tree who looked back at him in confusion.

"That's not what he said." Loki chimed in.

"What'd he say then?" Peter asked.

"He said 'I guess we'll have to figure something out then.'" Loki replied.

"You speak Groot?" Bucky asked.

"I learned it in high school." Loki said.

Everyone just looked at him in confusion.

"It was an elective." He added, crossing his arms over his chest and sticking his chin up haughtily.

"I am Groot." Groot said.

"What'd he say now, what'd he say now?" Peter asked Loki excitedly.

"It's great you two're getting along but I think we have some more important things at hand." The God responded.

"Loki's right." Bucky said. "Like that guy," he added, gesturing to Strange.

"Strange. Dr. Stephen Strange." Strange replied.

"Who are you, 007?" Bucky asked, squinting at him in disbelief before rolling his eyes.

"Like Strange," He corrected himself. "Said, we don't know how much time we have to make it out of here."

"I honestly don't even know if we can get out." Strange said.

"Have you tried the portal?" Loki asked.

"They don't go anywhere but within within this realm." Strange replied.

"And you call yourself a powerful magician?" Loki scoffed.

"I'll throw you back into one of those portals, don't think I won't." Strange deadpanned.

Loki glared at him and made a move for his knives but Peter lunged forward and grabbed his forearm. "Mr. Loki let's not pick any fights. I don't know what happens if we die again in here." He said quickly.

"You say that like I care." Loki replied staring at Strange with a look of loathing, though his arm relaxed and he withdrew it from his jacket.

Peter pulled his hand away from Loki, the man looking down at him with soft eyes but a straight face. The teenager smiled wide at him, and the mischief god's lips twitched at the corners and he looked away.

Peter turned back to Bucky who smiled at him.
"So what's the plan?" Bucky said finally, turning to Strange.

"No idea." The doctor responded. "I have a theory about how the veil between these realms may be thin in some places, and if we can find one of those places I may be able to get through. When I tried using the portals, it was like it would work but I could only see through it for a split second before it would cut out."

"Like a bad connection." Peter said.

"Exactly." Strange replied. "So maybe if we can get to a place where the veil is thin enough-"

"We can make it out of here." Bucky cut him off.

"Sounds like a good plan, now let's try and find one of those places before something goes sour." Loki said, clapping his hands together, smiling nervously.

"How do we find one of these places anyway?" Bucky asked.

"I can feel it. Kind of." Strange said. "It's like, this realm has almost a different...texture than earth does. But in a place where the veil is thin, it feels more like earth."

"Okay, well I guess we kind of just wander until we find someplace where the veil is thin?" Peter asked.

"I guess so." Strange replied.

"I think to defeat Thanos, we should find as many people we can from the Avengers and the Guardians of the Galaxy before we leave." Peter suggested.

"That's-" Loki began, ready to shut Peter down but stopped himself, his eyes widening in realization. "Actually a good idea. The child speaks truth."

"I'm not a child!" Peter said. "I'm seventeen!"

"And I'm a few thousand years older than that. You're a child." Loki replied.

Peter's face fell and the Odinson's face softened before he sighed. "Would you prefer I call you Peter?" He relented.

"Yeah." Peter said smally.

"Okay, Peter. You have a good idea." Loki gave a very small smile, closer to just a slight quirk of his thin lips.

Peter smiled brightly up at the man in response.

"I am Groot." Groot cut in.

"What'd he say?" Bucky asked.

"He said we should get going." Loki said.

"Well then let's go." Bucky responded.

And they began their trek through the forest. Strange seemed detached as Loki, Groot, Bucky, and Peter conversed.
As the sun was setting, they heard the sound of running footsteps. Everyone stopped dead in their tracks, turning towards the noise. Strange focused on the sound as well, snapped out of his search. Bursting through the trees came a dirty man with sandy blond hair in a red leather jacket and black jeans. On his face he wore a look of terror. Bounding out of the trees behind him was a giant wolf.

"Oh dear God." Loki said, his face becoming even paler. He turned to run.

Chapter End Notes

Cliffhangers cliffhangers. I know my chapters are getting shorter and shorter but I'm working on it I swear.

Thanks as always for reading and until the next chapter.

-xoxo Denise
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"Oh dear God." Loki said, his face becoming even paler. He turned to run.

Everyone took off in a sprint in the opposite direction.

"WHAT IS THAT THING!" Bucky yelled over the sound of the men's footsteps and the thudding of the running wolf.

"IT'S FENRIS! MY SISTER'S PET!" Loki screamed in fear.

"PET?" Bucky hollered in disbelief. "WHO THE HELL IS YOUR SISTER?"

"HER NAME IS HELA. SHE'S THE GODDESS OF DEATH, ODIN'S FIRSTBORN. SHE RESIDES IN HEL AND SHE'S SUPPOSED TO BE DEAD SO I ASSUMED FENRIS WOULD HAVE GONE WITH HER BUT APPARENTLY NOT!" The tall man said, his arms pumping by his sides as his long legs propelled his body at top speed away from the wolf.

"Goddammit." Bucky said under his breath before grabbing the guns at his thighs. He cocked them quickly, turning to shoot at the wolf. The massive animal barely flinched.

"A LITTLE HELP HERE!" Bucky grunted loudly at the running men.

Peter turned and flicked his wrists at the wolf's big legs, latching onto its shoulder and swinging himself forwards, and then around, binding the front legs of the animal together. He made it off the wolf's body just before it collapsed on itself. Peter then ran to its hind legs, hastily binding them to its front paws, struggling against its thrashing body.

"What do we do now?!" Peter yelled back at the rest.

"Bind its jaws shut." Loki said.
Peter did as told, trying to wrap his webs around the big animal's snapping jaws, no easy feat.

Loki then walked forward toward the wolf. He drew one of his knives, glowing green as it extended into a sword. The trickster drew his arms over his head but turned back towards Peter. "Turn away."

Peter didn't want to, but he reluctantly faced the other way. He plugged his ears just before Loki slammed the sword into the wolf's skull and drew it out, revealing its black blood.

Peter didn't turn back around until he felt Bucky's hand on his shoulder. He turned back to see Loki wiping his sword clean on the fur of the wolf's neck and retracting it to its normal size before stowing it away.

The teenager looked back at the group to find the dirty man who had run out of the woods. "Star Lord?" He asked.

"Hey kid." Quill replied with a small smile. His smile fell when he turned to Strange, who was staring at him with an indiscernible emotion. "Look, I'm sorry I tried to fight Thanos I wasn't thinking and I might have almost been responsible for getting us all getting killed just then but-"

"You did get us killed, Quill." Strange said, his face still showing no emotion but his eyes were fiery.

"Wait what?" The man asked.

"We're dead. We're all dead." Bucky said.

Quill's face fell. "What does that mean?"

"We're in the soul realm. We were sent here when Thanos snapped his fingers and vaporized half the universe." Bucky said.

"I'm not holding anything against you. It's unfair to. He killed the woman you loved, and you wanted to kill him but he was just too powerful. Hopefully, we'll get another chance." Strange said, sighing, his thumb and forefinger going to pinch the bridge of his nose.

Quill said nothing in response at first, just looked to Peter. "I got this kid killed." He said finally.

"It's not your fault-" Peter began.

"I'm so sorry." The man said, his voice quieting. "You might not ever have a real future because of me."

"Look man, really, I don't blame you." Peter said hatily.

Quill was silent for a moment, looking lost before falling to his knees, mumbling incoherent sentences of how he'd lost Gamora and how he'd cost half the entire universe their lives. Peter ran to the man, kneeling in front of him. Quill just looked at him with teary eyes, muttering quick 'I'm Sorry's and Peter leaned forward and took the man into his arms, rubbing his broad shoulders as he sobbed. Groot rushed forward, his tree like hands coming to rest on Quill's lower back.

"I'm sorry about Gamora. It's okay. We're gonna be okay. We're gonna find a way out and everything's gonna be fine." Peter consoled the older man.

Quill's breakdown lasted long enough for Peter to recognize the awkward shifting of the other people in their group. He didn't look at them, instead continued to rub the rocket man's back until he calmed down.
Peter realized this is the first time he'd seen Quill helpless. He'd seen the man tired and broken down and angry and hurting but he'd never seen him utterly helpless. He hadn't known him for long, only a day, but when they'd met he'd seen a fighter. A one less bright than he'd care to admit, but a fighter nonetheless.

He thought for a moment as he watched the man toy with the grass in front of him if he'd always been like this. He hadn't talked to him enough to know about his story, his childhood, how he'd been when he was younger, so he wondered if he'd always been stubborn and cocky. He felt his heart clench at the silent tear that ran down the man's inexpressive face.

It took a little while longer for Bucky to join them. He sat down beside Peter and laid his hand on Quill's shoulder. The blonde looked up, eyes still puffy but he nodded at Bucky in response.

"How you doin?" Bucky asked softly. Quill didn't meet his eyes.

Peter looked to Strange, whose face didn't offer much, and Loki who looked uncomfortable but vaguely solemn.

Reluctantly, Loki came forward to sit beside Peter, and Strange kneeled beside him.

"Do you wanna talk about it?" Peter asked quietly and Quill looked up at him. "It's okay if you don't."

"I miss Gamora." Quill said, barely above a whisper.

When Bucky and Loki looked confused the man added, "She was my girlfriend. Thanos...Thanos is her dad. She and her sister Nebula- he stole them and he turned them into killers. He used them. He kept saying he loved them but they knew he never did."

The group was quiet.

"She hated him. He tortured her and made her compete against Nebula. He made her watch as he took her sister apart limb from limb. Her life was hell. It was hell until she met us. The Guardians. The first time anyone had seen her happy." Quill said, still not looking anyone in the eye.

Peter felt disgust rise in his gut for Thanos.

"And then all of a sudden he just snatched it out from under her. Stole her back, took her from me and he- He killed her. All for a goddamn ring pop." Quill spat.

Groot's hand returned to the man's back, rubbing gently.

"We're gonna fix this. We'll get her back. For all we know she could be here." Peter said.

Quill's head snapped up and he looked at Peter with a newfound light in his eyes. "You really think so?"

"Yeah." Peter said. "Here, tell me about what Thanos did with her."

Quill looked hesitant but after a moment he spoke up. "He took her to Vormir. That's where Nebula the soul stone was. He came back with it and Gamora didn't come back at all."

Peter felt hope for the man burst in his chest. He turned to Strange who looked like he'd made the same connection. "That means he must have traded her for the stone. Either that or she was killed in some sort of fight there but why else would he need her?"
Strange nodded. "There's other possibilities but that one makes the most sense."

Peter turned back to Quill who looked renewed. "I might see her again."

The teen nodded. "You might see her again."
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Hope arises.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

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Peter turned back to Quill who looked renewed. "I might see her again."

The teen nodded. "You might see her again."

It was a few more hours of the group talking quietly before they had an idea.

"Does anyone know how we're even going to find the rest of our people?" Quill asked.

Loki's eyes lit up. "I don't, but I know someone who can. I have no idea how I didn't think of this sooner!"

The man shut his eyes and the rest of the group watched him in confusion.

"Heimdall, I know we're not on the best of terms, but we need your help. Can you find us?" He said, seemingly to nobody.

When Loki opened his eyes again they glowed yellow. He seemed to be listening to someone speak.

Before anyone could question it he was speaking again, saying, "I'll explain everything when you get here. Not that you don't already know." and paused like he was listening again. He nodded when it seemed the person had finished talking.

"He's coming." Loki spoke.

"Who?" Strange asked cautiously.

"Heimdall. He's a good friend of mine. From Asgard." Loki answered.

"Did he have anyone else with him?" Quill asked excitedly.

"He didn't say the name, but yes." Loki answered.

"Did you see what he looked like?" Bucky piped up.
"It was a woman. She had long brown hair. Red jacket?" Loki recalled, looking to the group to see if anyone recognized the description.

"It could be Wanda." Bucky realized. "She might be useful as well." but behind him Quill's face fell.

The group waited, sitting against the trunks of trees in anticipation of Heimdall and Wanda's arrivals.

It grew dark and the group negotiated the watch rotation, Bucky, Strange, and Loki taking the first shift as the rest slept. Peter fell quickly asleep as the rest of the group began to drift off in their own time. He didn't wake again until the sun was rising. He sat up, rubbing his eyes before looking up at Bucky, who was sitting against a tree by his feet.

"You were supposed to wake me for the second watch." Peter said, voice still thick with sleep. "You didn't need to take it."

"Don't worry 'bout it, kid. I don't sleep much." Bucky said, giving Peter a small smile.

Peter didn't smile back. "I can do it, Mr. Barnes." he insisted.

"Bucky. Call me Bucky." Bucky didn't address the first part of Peter's statement.

"I can do it." Peter said again, a hint of hurt and annoyance in his voice.

"I don't doubt that. But you don't need to try if I can do it for you." Bucky countered.

"You don't need to do things for me!" Peter whisper-shouted to avoid waking the others. Loki, who was already awake however, turned towards the conversation from where he was leaning against a tree not far from the two, otherwise unnoticed.

"Peter," Bucky said evenly. "You don't gotta push yourself to prove a point."

"Well no one else seems to think I'm worth shit." Peter said angrily. "Not you, not Strange, not Mr. Stark. Not anyone else here."

Bucky looked at him, slightly shocked by his abrasion.

"I, for one, think you're worth, as you put it, shit." Loki chimed in quietly before Bucky could form a response.

Peter turned towards the man's voice. "Thanks, Mr. Loki." Peter said softly, not looking him in the eyes.

"It's just Loki." The god responded.

"Don't listen to him, Peter." Strange said from his spot on the ground by Bucky. "He'll try and use you for his world domination plan later."

"I don't see you validating the boy. He's quickly becoming a man. He managed to survive a fight with Thanos up until he murdered half the universe with the infinity stones." Loki snapped.

"Because actions speak louder than words." Strange replied flatly.

"And what actions have you made, exactly?" Loki asked, his voice raising above his sharp whisper from before.

"Stop!" Peter shouted before Strange could get a word in. He looked at the group quickly after, his
heart pounding in his chest, fearing he'd woken them. He relaxed when he saw he hadn't.

"Stop." He repeated, lower this time. "Fighting won't get us anywhere."

Loki sighed, relaxing against the tree behind him, having leaned forward in his argument with Stephen.

"I don't think you're worthless, Peter." Bucky said when Loki had settled down. "None of us do. I think you're a young man who deserves a good future. I don't want you ending up like me or Steve. Or Tony." He called Stark by his name.

"You guys are three of the coolest, most respectable men on earth." Peter said. "Why shouldn't I be like you?"

"We're three men who never got to be kids. We ran before we walked. Steve and I joined the Army when we weren't even men yet. We were twenty four and twenty five, we were barely adults. We didn't know what we were doing. I don't have very many childhood memories, neither does Steve. Tony especially doesn't. You deserve better than this life of fighting and war wounds, kid. You deserve to finish school and be some crazy smart scientist." Bucky said.

"I know." Peter smiled.

"I know." Peter smiled back genuinely, the most of a positive emotion he'd seen emanated by the Odinson.

Just as Loki turned back to the fire, Bucky and Strange returned with several large salmon. They also returned with a tall, strong looking man. He was dark skinned with golden eyes and long dreadlocks, dressed in red-brown leather. He was followed by a pale young woman with long brown hair wearing a knee length red leather jacket and black jeans.

"Loki." The man said, looking at the god kneeling beside Peter.

"Heimdall." Loki responded. "It's good to see you."

"I've never heard you say that before." Heimdall responded, smiling at the mischief god.

Loki smiled back. "I hope we can forget our ill meetings, we're going to need to to make it out of here."

"I'm a man of sense." Heimdall said, holding his hand out to shake Loki's. Loki took it and shook
Bucky skinned, filleted, and skewered the salmon before leaning the sticks into the fire, rotating them occasionally. When they were cooked, he placed them on some large flat leaves Peter had found and identified as non-poisonous.

As they ate, Loki explained to Heimdall where they were and why, though Heimdall later said he already knew, and, after a fond roll of his eyes, Loki moved on to explaining how they planned to escape and how they still needed to find the missing people.

"We need you to help us find our friends." Loki finished.

Bucky cut in then. "First off, who are we missing, exactly."

"Gamora, Drax, and Mantis." Quill said.

The rest of the team seemed quiet.

"What is it?" Heimdall asked the silent.

"Well I mean, we all died at the same time and I guess we don't really know exactly who died." Bucky answered.

"I only know because we all went together." Quill said.

Heimdall looked troubled. "Okay, well I guess we should look for who we know first. Is there anyone else we're sure about?"

"Vision, but I'm not sure if he really counts. He wasn't exactly a person." Bucky answered.

Heimdall nodded. "I can try and find your friends," He pointed to Quill. "But I cannot guarantee that they will be very close."

"Well we're hoping they're close enough we can find them as fast as we found each other." Loki said.

"Describe whichever of your friends we should look for first." Heimdall turned back to Quill. "Try and include specific details that would differentiate your friends from others. Keep in mind, half of the universe is in here with us."

Loki turned to the group. "Who do you think the easiest to find would be?"

"Drax." Quill said. "He's big and muscly, kind of funny lookin', grey skin with blue eyes and red tattoo things. Never wears a shirt?" He offered.

Heimdall shut his eyes, looking for the man Quill had described.

A few thick silenced moments later, Heimdall said, "I might have found him. He's with another young woman, she's wearing green and she has what looks like...antennae?"

"That's Mantis." Quill answered, his voice hopeful. "You found him."

"He's not very far at all. A mile at most." Heimdall responded.

"Great, well let's go get him then." Star Lord said, excitedly standing.
The group put out their fire and followed Heimdall in the direction of where he saw Drax.

Chapter End Notes

Aaaaaand Chapter six! School has me exhausted but here’s a longer chapter. Editing is a pain but half of this stuff makes next to no sense before I publish it.

Anyways, I hope you guys are having an okay time at school yourselves, if not I hope it gets better soon. Regardless, thank the gods themselves that it’s almost Friday, I’m not sure how much longer I can do this for.

Thanks to all for reading and until the next chapter.

-xoxo Denise
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

The group grows.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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---------------------------------------------

Upon their arrival, the group found Drax sharpening a stick with a knife as Mantis looked at a butterfly she had in her hand. The insect took off as the pack walked into the clearing of the forest. The two looked up at them.

"Quill, Groot." Drax said. "You're alive."

"About that..." Quill responded, rubbing his arm.

Before the man got a chance to explain the story and plan to Drax and Mantis, they heard a female voice from behind them.

"Peter?" A female voice said from behind them.

They both turned in response, finding a green woman with long, dark, red streaked hair wearing black leather.

"Gamora?" Quill said, barely above a whisper, looking at the woman like he had seen a ghost.
"Peter." Gamora responded, taking a step toward the blonde but Quill moved forward, running to the woman, pulling her into a tight hug that lifted her off the ground.

They laughed through tears of relief and Quill put Gamora down, taking her face in his hands and looking into her eyes before she leaned forward and pressed her lips against his. When they pulled apart Quill said brokenly, "I missed you so much. I thought I'd never see you again."

"I thought I'd never see you again either." Gamora smiled softly but her face fell as she spoke again. "But this means you're dead. It means you're all dead." She addressed the whole group then.

"We couldn't defeat Thanos. We almost did, in Wakanda." Bucky said.

"Where's Wakanda?" Gamora asked, tilting her head.

"It's in Africa." Peter answered.

When Gamora still looked confused, Quill added on to the teenager's statement. "It's a place on Earth."

"Oh." Gamora said. "How'd you lose?"

"Thor hit Thanos in the chest with his axe, but it didn't kill him like we thought it would." Bucky explained.

Loki, whose ears had perked up at the mention of his brother's name asked, "Axe? He's never had an axe before."

"He went to go get it forged by King Eitri in Nidavellir to battle Thanos with." Gamora replied.

"You remember all that?" Quill scoffed. "I tuned him out. Bor-ing!"

"You can stop rivalling him. I just kissed you. I've never kissed Thor. Does that mean nothing to you?" Gamora said in annoyance.

"You wish you could kiss him..." Quill said under his breath.

Gamora rolled her eyes. "Maybe I will when we get back if you don't stop acting like a child."

"I am Groot." Groot said.

"He says you're being stupid." Loki translated.

"I know, I heard." Quill said, turning to the tree. "I'll take that video game back from you." He threatened.

"I am Groot." The tree rolled his eyes.

"Language!" Quill exclaimed, offended.

The tree sighed, annoyed, and turned to Loki. "I am Groot." He said.

"You gave an arm for the handle?" The man asked in disbelief.

"I am Groot." The tree responded.

"Stormbreaker. It has a ring to it." Loki replied.
"I am Groot." Groot added.

"Of course he didn't name it. Thor never was any good at naming things." Loki said, shaking his head but smiling fondly.

"You miss you brother, don't you?" Peter asked the God, who turned away from Groot to him.

"Very much." Loki replied. "Though I'd never tell that to his face." He added, backtracking.

"I understand." Bucky chimed in. Loki looked at him, nodding in understanding.

"How're we here anyways?" Gamora asked.

The larger group explained the story to the remaining Guardians, as well as the escape plan. They took it surprisingly well, even going so far as to implement their own ideas and skills into it.

"We don't really know who we lost." Peter had said when the explaining was finished. "Since we all died at the same time, or died before the rest, no one really knows who's gone and who's still alive."

"Well how're we going to know who to look for?" Wanda said.

Peter looked at the woman, the first time hearing her speak since she came with Heimdall.

"I guess we're just going to have to wing it." Peter said, scrubbing his hands through his hair. "I'm not sure how much else we can do."

"We're hoping they'll be just as close as the rest of you were. We need to find as many as we can." Bucky said.

Just then, they heard the sound of something flying quickly overhead and running footsteps. The group tensed, everyone preparing for some kind of fight as they drew back into a huddle, backs against each other and facing outward.

A man with chocolate skin dropped from the air, landing in front of them. He had neatly lined hair cut close to his scalp and an equally neatly trimmed short beard, wearing a black leather uniform and flight goggles with mechanical wings that retracted into a pack on his back. Another man ran into the clearing right after he landed, wearing a black cat-esque suit. He removed his mask, revealing his bistre skinned face. His hair was longer than the other and he had a neatly trimmed goatee. Peter recognized them both from the Cap vs. Iron Man fight as well.

"Seems like we found you first." The man with the wings spoke, flipping up his goggles.

Bucky walked toward him. "Good to see you, Sam." he smiled, their hands reaching out to clasp together as they hugged, patting each others' back.

"You too T'Challa." Bucky smiled at the other man.

"I hope you're doing well, Bucky." T'Challa said in a thick African accent, smiling fondly at Bucky.

"Y'know it's convenient we didn't have to go looking for you. We need to get the hell out of here before we can't anymore." Bucky looked at the two.

"You're welcome. Now let's get to haulin' that ass." Sam said.

"Good plan." Bucky agreed.
The group made sure everyone was set to go in search of a place where the veil was thin. Strange went back to his detached state, focused on searching for a thin spot. Everyone followed him as his senses pulled him along.

"Hey kid." Bucky said to Peter, sidling up to him. "How you feelin'?"

"Ready to kick Thanos' ass." Peter responded, not looking Bucky in the eye, instead watching Strange track the veil.

"Aren't we all." Bucky laughed, putting a hand on Peter's shoulder.

"What do you think life will be like when we get back?" Peter asked, then turning to Bucky.

"Well it hasn't been more than what, a month and a half maybe? It can't be that different. Earth will be missing a few billion people, but hopefully it won't be like that long enough for us to notice if we're too busy fighting Thanos." Bucky answered.

"I hope you're right." Peter replied.

They stopped talking when they realized the group had come to a halt, all of them looking around. It was then Peter heard it, voices.

"So what're we gonna do then?" A male voice said in the slight distance.

"I don't know, sir, it seems we may very well be stuck here." A female voice responded.

Loki flicked his knives out of his sleeves and into his hands. Magic began to crackle at Strange's fingers and Bucky's hands went to his guns. Peter watched as Quill's hand went to a blaster at his hip and Gamora and Drax both drew knives of their own. Peter waited on edge to see what would happen.

"What in the hell are y'all doin'?" The male voice said as he walked into the clearing. It belonged to a bald man with cocoa skin and an eyepatch over one eye. He wore a long black coat with all black clothing beneath it.

"Jesus, Wilson, don't you know your director?" the man addressed Sam.

"Not when we're stuck in an alternate realm, Fury." Sam said, laughing at the man.

Fury laughed back. "Alright then, stand down now."

"He's with us." Sam turned toward the group.

Everyone relaxed.

"Nick Fury." The man introduced himself. "And this is Agent Hill." He pointed to the woman who had entered the clearing behind him, offering a small wave.

"Well I didn't think I'd be seeing you here either, I guess this place is fulla surprises." Fury responded, looking from T'Challa, to Bucky, to Peter.

"No kidding." Bucky said. "You don't know the half of it." He turned back, looking at Loki knowingly, who shuddered slightly at the recollection of his sister's giant wolf.

"Alright well, y'all got a plan or what?" Fury asked.
And once more, they explained their plan and story.

"Let's get moving then." Fury said, and off they were.

Chapter End Notes

This is going to be an extremely long story. We're not even a quarter of the way through yet, so buckle down.

The next several chapters are going to be much more domestic though, but don't let that lull you into a false sense of security, this is still an overall angsty fic.

I am so glad we get a three day weekend I don't think I can take another day of my history teacher's voice. I swear to god she reminds me of Umbridge from Harry Potter. It's awful. I hope school is treating the rest of you better.

As always, thank you all for reading and until the next chapter.

-xoxo Denise.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Peter gets into serious trouble.

Chapter Notes

Warning: This chapter contains depictions of blood, gore, pain, death, and murder. Proceed with caution.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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"Well I didn't think I'd be seeing you here either. I guess this place is fulla surprises." Fury responded, looking from T'Challa, to Bucky, to Peter.

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And once more, they explained their plan and story.

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---------------------------------------------

Two full days passed and on the second night Bucky finally relinquished control over Peter taking night watch, allowing the teenager to take a shift while he caught the four hours of sleep he needed. Peter felt validated, and gladly took the last watch of the night, having gotten seven hours of sleep. So he sat against a tree beside Loki who was making small things shimmer with green magic at his fingertips, scanning the forest as the sky slowly faded from black, to purple, to blue, and finally a light orange.

Peter quietly asked Loki if he could watch the group for a few minutes as he went to go find a drink of water. The god agreed, watching as Peter walked off in search of a water source, his eyes flitting back to the magic at his fingers.

Peter found a small stream, leaning down to wash his hands before scooping some water into his mouth, then over his face when he felt a sharp pain in his back. He barely had time to yelp before his head was shoved forward into the water. He gasped in a mouthful of the liquid, his screams muffled by the water before he managed to brace his hands on the bank and push up with all his might against whatever was holding him down. He coughed briefly, hopping to his feet and turning to face
his attacker. He saw the skeletal face of an alien being that he recognized from the Avengers' first battle in New York, a Chitauri.

He kicked the thing hard in the chest, throwing it backward as he wrapped the creature in his webs. Once the Chitauri's arms were bound to its body Peter pushed it forward into the stream, pressing his knee between its shoulder blades and his hand against the back of its head. With his heart beating quickly and his chest heavily rising and falling, he held his hand there as the alien's body thrashed until it stopped moving, its body stopping its struggle against Peter, instead going limp against the riverbank.

He stepped back, seeing the monster there in the river, realizing he had killed it. Vaguely he recognized it as the first thing larger than a spider he had ever killed. He didn't have much time to think about it before he saw more Chitauri crawling in the forest.

Peter sprinted back to the camp, praying to every holy deity he could think of, including Thor, that they hadn't heard him. He saw Loki, still dutifully leaned against his tree, playing with his magic.

"Did you find any water?" He asked.

Peter pressed his finger to his lips hastily and Loki looked up at him in confusion. Peter mouthed out the word, "Chitauri" and Loki's face paled. He drew his knives and Peter looked to Bucky's sleeping frame and placed his hand an inch above the man's shoulder before he realized he didn't have to wake him.

The teen crawled over to Strange and cupped his hand over the man's mouth, shaking his shoulder quickly. He watched the man's eyes snap open in alarm before relaxing at Peter's face over him. He looked at him in concern and Peter leaned down to whisper as quietly as he could so the doctor could still hear him, "Open a portal and get us anywhere but here."

Strange shot up without asking any questions and stood at the far edge of the clearing so everyone was in front of him and circled his hands rapidly, opening an orange portal just as the Chitauri began to creep along the edges of their clearing. Seeing the beings, the man pushed the portal forward until it reached all the way to Loki, who was across from him staring at the aliens in anticipation, before he hastily closed the passageway. The hand of a Chitauri reaching out to enter the portal was cut from its body as it shut, landing on the ground with a lifeless thud. Peter looked around to find them in a completely different clearing of the forest.

The rest of the group remained asleep and Peter panted, the pain in his back flaring, having been forgotten in the time he was running back to camp. He strained to look over his shoulder in search of the wound, finding he couldn't see anything.

"Peter," Loki said quietly, concern and fear in his voice. "You're bleeding."

"Where?" Peter grunted lowly.

"Above your hip. Were you stabbed?" Loki stood, approaching the boy.

"I dunno." Peter said. "The Chitauri caught me by the river, I didn't see it I just felt a sharp pain in my back and it pushed me under."

"We need to find water." Loki said. "Can you walk okay?"

"I think so." Peter responded.

Strange watched as the two walked off, nodding at Peter who looked back at him, silently asking if
he would take watch while he left.

As they came upon a river, deeper than the stream from before, Loki kneeled on the bank, washing his hands clean in the clear water. "Come." He instructed, beckoning Peter toward him.

"I need to see how bad the damage is." Loki said after Peter had sat in front of him.

Peter nodded, closing his eyes to picture the suit becoming half present, the tech clicking softly as it manipulated itself to his wants. He pressed the spider on the chest of the older suit he wore beneath it, which loosened. His face contorted at the pain that flared in his wound as the muscle around it pulled, making his stomach lurch.

"Oh no." Loki said from behind him.

Peter looked over his shoulder, growing anxious. "What, what is it?"

"This," Loki began. "This is magic I've never seen from the Chitauri before."

Peter managed to see the smallest patch of skin around his wound, veins of black webbing out from the deep puncture.

"Do you know what it is?" Peter asked nervously.

"It's dark magic from the old ages. It's been so long I thought it was a myth. I haven't thought of it since I was young. I'm assuming Thanos must have taught the Chitauri how to wield it. I think I can help you, though." Loki said.

"Please Mr. Loki." Peter said. "Please help me." the boy was beginning to panic.

"It's just Loki." Loki said. "Calm down, Peter, it shouldn't be too difficult for me to fix but it may sting a bit. Lay flat on your stomach and put the sleeve of your suit between your teeth."

Peter flattened his body against the soft grass by the river, balling his sleeve up and placing it in his mouth. He heard Loki's magic whoosh between his fingers. Peter looked over his shoulder, seeing the man manipulating the green power until it spread over his palms. He closed his eyes and moved his hands to hover over Peter's back.

The teenager watched in awe until Loki's hands came in contact with his skin, his whole body tensing with pain. He screamed, though it was muffled by the fabric in his mouth, his teeth clenching down on his sleeve, the veins and tendons in his neck and forehead popping out from the exertion. His fingers clawed at the damp soil of the bank, his nails digging into the dirt.

Loki worked quickly, his hands moving in slow circles over Peter's blackening skin, drawing his hands back towards the original wound, the darkness coursing in Peter's veins retreating with his fingers until it centered just around the wound. Loki held there for a moment, Peter's body trembling beneath his palms, watching as the last of the dark magic came toward his hands. The trickster's face was paling then, his eyes clenched shut and his jaw set solidly. Peter realized vaguely through the pain that Loki was taking in the darkness in order to remove it from his body.

"N-no. Loki..." Peter ground out.

Loki didn't respond as he lifted his hands away from Peter's body, drawing the darkness out. The black tendrils mingled with the green of his own as he pulled away. He struggled against the magic for a moment before the thrust his hands forward, pushing it out of his body and into the air. It diminished, absorbed into the atmosphere.
Loki was breathing heavily, leaning over Peter's heaving chest. He caught his breath much quicker than Peter, however, and he scooped water up from the river, pouring it on the teenager's wound. He kept pouring handfuls of water over the boy's shaking back until the liquid ran down his sides clear and not rust colored. Loki waited for the skin to dry and for Peter to recover.

"'May sting a bit.'" Peter quoted Loki through panting breaths.

The dark haired man chuckled dryly. "Well I assumed you'd be much more reluctant to let me help you if I'd told the truth." He said.

When the boy had caught his breath, he slowly moved his hands to the water, cleaning them off before he pulled a handful to his mouth to drink and splashed some over his face. He moved a trembling hand to his back, tentatively feeling for the wound. When he found it, he applied a small amount of webbing to seal it shut and relaxed back against the ground for a minute. Once he'd managed to get a grip, he sat back up, groaning.

"I hope that's not a problem later." Peter said flatly, pulling the sleeves of his suit back up over his body and pressing the spider on his chest once more to tighten it. He finished his redressing by imagining the iron spider suit covering his body and once again the suit responded.

"I hope so too." Loki replied, standing and helping Peter to his feet.

"Thanks." Peter said when he was up.

"I'd like to think I'm doing one thing right by this." Loki responded.

"You're doing a lot of things right. You and Strange might not be on the best of terms, but it's like fighting fire with fire. Strange's ego won't allow him to forgive you the way Heimdall did, and you don't need enough from Strange to apologize." Peter shrugged.

For a moment, Loki didn't know whether to feel offended or complimented but he decided that despite the indelicacy of his statement, Peter probably meant the best. "Thank you." He said finally.

"It's just the truth." Peter said, turning to head back toward camp. "You coming?" He asked when Loki didn't move.

Loki walked behind Peter toward the camp as the sun grew higher above them. When they returned, Bucky was awake. He looked at Peter and then to Loki. "What happened while I was out?" He asked.

"I got caught by some Chitauri by the stream and I had to have Strange move us somewhere else. They stabbed me and tried to drown me but I'm alright." Peter said dismissively. Too dismissively he guessed by the look of horror on Bucky's face.

Bucky's eyes widened in alarm. "Why didn't you wake me?" He said. "This is what I get for letting you take watch without me." He added under his breath.

"It would've happened either way, if I hadn't gone it would've been someone else. Or worse, they would've gotten all of us. Besides, you hadn't slept for like, twenty four hours and I didn't wanna ruin that for you." Peter explained. "I'm fine. Really. Loki helped me." He turned back to the god behind him, sending a soft look. The man's tired eyes looked at him gently back.

Bucky sighed, leaning back against a tree. "You're gonna get yourself killed out here kid."

"Hey, I managed to kill that Chitauri all by myself." Peter said defensively, crossing his arms over his
chest. His heart twinged in disgust directly after, realizing he had taken pride in murder and immediately wished he could pull the words back into his mouth.

Peter realized the man in front of him must've caught his look because, though face didn't seem to falter, his eyes grew concerned. "Was that your first kill?" he asked lowly.

"Yeah..." Peter answered quietly.

"Oh." Bucky replied softly. "Don't feel too bad, kid, those things're hardly alive anyways." he said, hoping to console the boy.

Peter didn't feel too much better but he shrugged anyway.

The teen sat down beside Bucky and stretched his legs out in front of him, watching as the rest of the group began to slowly wake.

Chapter End Notes

And here's what I think is the longest chapter by far???? I'm so exhausted but this helps keep my mind of the stress for a bit.

Anyways thank you all for reading and I'll see you in the next chapter.

-xoxo Denise
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Peter gets himself into a sticky situation.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bucky sighed, leaning back against a tree. "You're gonna get yourself killed out here kid."

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---------------------------------------------

Each of the team, upon waking, had questions about where they were. A few of them even went into fight mode, assuming the worst, and Peter wondered what had ever happened to them that was so bad that they freaked out like that. When he realized who he was riding with though, he realized it was probably something pretty awful and he felt a pang of pity for them in his chest.

The teen, Loki, and Strange then explained how they had seen the Chitauri, though they never told anyone about the black magic. Peter feared they'd grow concerned if not for his well being then for their own. He and Loki had decided it best not to scare anyone.

"So does this new place feel any closer to a thin part of the veil, or?" Quill asked when they'd finished explaining the situation.

"It does. Not extremely close, nowhere near that, but much closer than before. I'm beginning to think that there's a singular spot in this realm where the veil is thin, and we've just been trying to reach it. Because everywhere we go it seems to be pulling me toward the center of something." Strange responded.

"Okay, well we should get going then." Bucky said.

---------------------------------------------
They set off on foot, following Strange through the woods. They walked hours a day for nearly a month before they took a break for a week. They discovered that the soul realm's geography and flora were even more diverse than Earth's was.

There were biomes, like the tundra and rainforest, like rolling treeless hills with soft green grass, perilous coal black mountains capped with snow, rivers and oceans and beaches. There was a lot he had seen, but also types of biomes Peter he couldn't have even fathomed of existing, lush with wildlife that was equally foreign to him full of plants he had never seen before, animals he had never seen before, people he had never seen before.

They crossed through a multitude of camps full of diverse beings. They'd evaded danger from other malevolent beings, though only by a hair. They tried their best to avoid going through portals so as not to lose where they were in terms of closeness to the thin veil point, so they fought their way out of scrimmages instead.

Currently, they were set at a place in one of the camps full of people. They had communal dinners, joked and laughed and sang together. It brought the group closer together than walking, fearing for their lives daily, ever had. However, everyone vowed to tell no one about their escape plan lest people wanting to join them be a nuisance. They were going to save everyone anyways, and they wanted to make sure they were able to do that efficiently.

"That means you, Peter." Peter recalled Sam saying.

"Yeah, yeah, Sam I got it. No telling anyone about how we're gonna get out of here." Peter rolled his eyes.

"We mean that, kid." Quill had added. "We don't need anyone trying to tag along. It's the only way we'll be able to save them."

"I said I got it." Peter said, beginning to grow annoyed. "I swear you guys treat me like a child. Look at this!" He rubbed his unshaven face. "Scruff!"

"And it's exactly that. Just scruff." Bucky laughed, his face full bearded though he regularly trimmed it best he could with his knives. "But I side with you, Pete," He had adopted that nickname over their time together. "I think you're holding up pretty well to being mature here. And you're doing pretty well at not only keeping it together but being an efficient member of the team."

"Thanks Bucky." Peter smiled at the man. Bucky smiled back. "But seriously guys," he turned back to the rest of the group. "I'm not gonna tell anyone."

'Oh god I just told someone.' Peter thought frantically to himself as he raced back to the collection of huts that the group had built. He ducked into the one he shared with Loki and Bucky, finding it empty with the three piles of blankets loaned to them by the leaders of the encampment they used as makeshift beds cold and messy. He plopped down onto his pile and pulled his knees up to his chest, bracing his elbows on his kneecaps and burying his hands in his hair.

He thought back to where he'd been before, talking to a child he'd met in the camp. He had explained he was a superhero on earth, showing the kid his scars and his web shooters after the boy had found him binding sticks together with his webbing for a hut. He had asked if Peter was going to save them and the teen had admitted that his team had a plan to get out of there, but luckily had left out the details. The young boy had gasped and jumped around in excitement before running off to go play with his friends. Peter put exactly negative 15% trust in the child not to tell anyone. He just hoped nobody would believe him if he did.
"Oh my god what am I gonna do." He mumbled to himself.

"What're you gonna do about what?" He heard Bucky's cheery voice from behind him. The man had seriously lightened up when he realized there were goats at the camp and that half of them were the ones he'd tended to in Wakanda.

"Uh, n-nothing!" Peter laughed nervously. "Nope. Nothing at all, Bucky." He smiled awkwardly at the man.

"You're a terrible liar." Loki piped in, shaking his head with a small smile as he ducked through the door behind Bucky. He had lightened up too after he and Strange's relationship had improved, the group began to trust him more, and especially after Bucky had introduced him to his goats.

"There's just a girl. She's here in the camp and I like her a lot and I dunno how to deal with it. I mean once we get out of here I'll probably never see her again. She lives on a whole nother planet." Peter lied through his teeth, throwing in a fake sigh of dejection.

Bucky sat down beside him, throwing an arm around his shoulders and patting his back comfortingly. "Look kid, it's part of the job. Going to new places, meeting new people, some of whom you'll like. And then you gotta leave. You just gotta accept it and move on. That's the easiest way. You want me to talk to Strange and see if maybe we can stay a while longer?"

"No!" Peter yelled a little too quickly. "No, I mean," He tried to play it off smooth. "I think the best way for me to get over it is for us to leave as soon as planned."

Both Bucky and Loki, who had sat down across from them while Bucky consoled Peter, looked at him funny.

"Okay, kid. Whatever you think is best." Bucky said, patting his back twice more for good measure. "Now go see if Quill and Drax need you, they said they might."

Peter took his chance to leave, waving hesitantly at the two men who he knew for a fact would be discussing him after he left. He sighed with relief when he was out of earshot of the hut and went off to go find Drax and Quill.

He found the two men by the river, looking into the rushing water for fish.

"Hello Peter." Drax said, nodding at the boy.

"Hey kid." Quill said afterwards, not looking away from the river. He was standing on the bank, fists panted on his hips as he stared into the water with furrowed brows.

"Quill is looking for fish." Drax said.

"I can see that." Peter replied. "Bucky said you guys needed me, what's the problem?"

"Well we need to fish, but we don't have any string for the poles." Quill pointed at the sticks and hooks he had laying on the bank. "And we were hoping if we could get some web from you to use for the lines."

"Oh okay." Peter said. He was no longer wearing his suit, none of them had worn any of their gear besides their weapons daily since being here. They had started wearing casual clothes, at least the equivalent from the various peoples in the soul realm.

Peter was now wearing a pair of blue jeans and a traditional shirt from one of the many cultures
living in the camp that he had pulled from their donation pile. Luckily, he still wore his web shooters. The teen scrolled through the settings on the shooters and flicked his wrist at Quill who caught the other end. This particular formula was super strong but non-stick. It was meant for any time Peter would need to tie things together but not bind them. He silently thanked Tony for including it. He flicked his wrist again at Drax and then drew some webs for himself.

Each of the three men picked up one of the makeshift fishing rods from the bank, tying one end of the web around the stick and the other to the hook. They baited their hooks with worms Gamora and Mantis had dug up earlier and threw them into the water.

While they waited for their fish to bite, Peter thought about how much time they had before something went wrong from his mistake. He promised he wouldn't say anything to anyone and it just slipped out in a moment of trust he shouldn't have placed on someone so young. He knew that not only would the group's respect for him shatter, but he'd make Bucky look like a fool for admitting he thought Peter was mature. He mentally cursed himself but was snapped out of his thoughts by tugging on his line. He gripped the fishing pole between his knees and pulled the line in from the water. On the end of it, he found a significantly sized fish.

"Good catch kid." Quill cracked a smile at Peter.

"Thanks." Peter smiled back. He pulled the hook out of its lip and threw the fish into a carved wooden tub sitting behind them before re-baiting his line and throwing it back into the river.

They sat and fished all afternoon so that they could have a hearty dinner that night. When the sun had set all three of the men picked up the heavy tub and hauled it back to the center of camp, where the other residents had already begun to build a fire and boil potatoes and beans. Peter backed off but Bucky, Quill, Gamora and Drax sat down by some of the other people in camp who had knives and skinned and gutted the fish. They then skewered them and leaned them into the large fire to cook. Everyone settled down to eat with their handmade clay and wooden bowls and spoons, conversing and laughing and messing around with each other as they had their dinner.

Peter however, sat alone, again lost in thought. They were scheduled to leave tomorrow morning and the crossed his fingers nothing would go wrong until after they were already long gone. He didn't trust his luck.

Sure enough, he saw the camp children tugging on their parents' and older siblings' clothing to point at the group of 'superheroes' as they walked across the camp after breakfast, redressed in their freshly cleaned gear with full bellies. No one talked to them about what the children had said, a fact Peter was extremely grateful for, most likely assuming they were making stories up about the 'magic people' and their escape plan. The teen just dutifully followed the rest of the group behind Dr. Strange with a new sense of relief.

When they were long out of earshot of the camp Bucky came up beside Peter. "I know you told the kid about the plan." He said lowly so the others who were absorbed in conversations of their own wouldn't hear. "I'm not mad." he added quickly as Peter tensed up.

The young man looked at Bucky who looked back with soft blue eyes.

"I slipped up like that so many times in situations much more pressing than this." Bucky said. "I've given my position away by a sneeze or a cough or the slightest movement in war, kid. And I've had my position revealed by Steve, who when we first started battle would salute at me from the ground. I was never angry at him. Not seriously at least."

"Really?" Peter asked.
"Really." Bucky replied, laughing. "Don't worry, Pete. Nothing's gonna happen. People make mistakes and you were smart enough to not reveal the explicits of the plan. You just gotta keep in mind not to do it the next time." Bucky smiled.

"Not to mention I don't believe there will be a next time. Yesterday, Stephen said something about us being only a few days out." Loki added, revealing he'd been listening the entire time.

He fell back to walk on Peter's other side.

"No one will be mad at you, Peter." Loki said offering a small smile to the boy. Someone as cold at times as Loki had shown he could be, genuinely telling Peter he didn't hold anything against him was what truly made him feel better. The boy grinned brightly in return.

Chapter End Notes

Woohoo! Some long chapters! Also some domestic family!avengers for you guys too. Don't worry, there's a bit after here too. It gets worse, and I'm sorry for that but working towards fighting Thanos isn't happy.

Anyways, I hope you all liked it and I'll see you next chapter.

-xoxo Denise
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

The great escape.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

"I slipped up like that so many times in situations much more pressing than this." Bucky said. "I've given my position away by a sneeze or a cough or the slightest movement in war, kid. And I've had my position revealed by Steve, who when we first started battle would salute at me from the ground. I was never angry at him. Not seriously at least."

"Really?" Peter asked.

"Really." Bucky replied, laughing. "Don't worry, Pete. Nothing's gonna happen. People make mistakes and you were smart enough to not reveal the explicits of the plan. You just gotta keep in mind not to do it the next time." Bucky smiled.

"Not to mention I don't believe there will be a next time. Yesterday, Stephen said something about us being only a few days out." Loki added, revealing he'd been listening the entire time.

He fell back to walk on Peter's other side.

"No one will be mad at you, Peter." Loki said offering a small smile to the boy. Someone as cold at times as Loki had shown he could be, genuinely telling Peter he didn't hold anything against him was what truly made him feel better. The boy grinned brightly in return.

They fell back into their rhythm, walking day in and day out. Peter had come to see Bucky and Loki as older brother figures in the time they had been in the soul realm. He found himself being particularly close with them, though he’d become close with the others as well.

He recalled bonding with Quill over pop culture, teasing each other’s taste in movies and music though Peter narrowed what he talked about to the times Quill had last been on Earth. He explained Quill’s references in turn to Gamora, who had come to him asking to be as she put it, ‘educated’ on the Earth customs her boyfriend was interested in. Mantis joined in too after a few exchanges between Peter and Gamora.

He and Drax laughed at Quill slipping in the mud….four times, though Quill didn’t find it nearly as funny as the rib cramping amounts of laughter Drax and Peter elicited would make one think. Peter also talked to Groot about his video games, though what Groot said was translated by Loki, who fiddled with whatever it was he was doing at the time and spoke without looking up from it.

T’Challa and Peter talked about the inventions and technology in Wakanda, and the older man said that he missed his sister, Shuri, deeply and believed the two of them would get along. They also exchanged fighting techniques and things that the King believed Peter could find useful later in fights. The teen thanked the man after every conversation.
Peter also talked with Wanda about how she missed Earth but didn’t miss how people saw the Avengers after the Battle of Sokovia. Peter explained to her that after they defeated Thanos and revived everyone else in the Soul Realm they would probably see her and the rest of them differently, which she thanked him for. She also talked to him about how she missed her brother, Pietro, and the love of her life, Vision. Peter thought her mentioned relationship with Vision was weird at first, considering he wasn’t exactly human, but by the way Wanda described him changed his mind. He comforted her and offered her someone she could vent to, for which she was very grateful.

Heimdall told Peter tales of Asgard, of Loki and his misguidance which helped Peter to fully understand why Loki loathed himself so deeply, and that added to how long he rejected Thor, pushing his ever loving brother away in disbelief and malice pieced together Peter’s view of the man and his life. He still thought highly of Loki, and saw the god as having made massive improvement from how Heimdall described him to previously be, to which the former gatekeeper agreed. Peter wished to meet Thor, to talk to him more than just directing him toward Dr. Strange’s sanctum, and also wished that Loki and Thor make up once they return to earth.

Sam and Peter picked on each other the entire time they searched for the thin veil point. Sam called Peter shrimpy and squirt, Peter joked about how he ‘was picked by genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist Tony Stark’ and Sam wasn’t. They never cut too deep with each other to show they’d become friends and always ended up laughing or complimenting each other on witty comebacks. Peter found Sam really fun to hang out with. Bucky agreed with him, though he threatened to never feed Peter again if he told Sam what he’d said.

Finally, Peter talked to Director Fury and Agent Hill a few times. They were kind of solitary though Hill was a bit more social and they both talked to Sam often about the situation. However, the few times Peter talked to them they both expressed him to be a valuable member of the team and an impressive character for his age. He was flattered by their praise, and was taken aback when Fury said he’d like to see him at S.H.I.E.L.D when they returned to earth and got the whole situation sorted out. Peter thanked the man, and went off to find Bucky immediately afterwards to rave about it.

Within a little over a week of having left the camp, Strange announced that they’d be reaching the thin veil point the next day and to bathe, clean their gear, and eat and rest up for whatever might hit them when they made it back into the living realm. They all took turns bathing in the river near their camp and washing their suits, lounging around in clothes they’d taken with them from the last encampment. While they waited for their turns at the river and the air was still cool, Peter asked Bucky if he wanted to do a light workout to prep their bodies for what might happen the next day. The super soldier agreed and they started off with a jog about a mile down the riverbank and back up. Peter had rolled his sleeves up at first, cuffing them above his shoulders but eventually resorted to taking it off, sweat clinging to his skin in the sticky heat of the rapidly rising sun. Not too long after, Bucky did the same.

After the run, Bucky and Peter did a set of 30 push ups and 30 curl ups, then another set of 20 pull ups and 20 squats, followed up by a final set of 25 lunges on each leg, repeating the entire thing once more. Peter hadn’t found it too hard and Bucky was only sweating from the heat as the sun rose to sit directly overhead but they both knew it would have them in the best shape for tomorrow. Peter recollected on a time when this kind of workout would have him sore for a week, and Bucky joked about how Steve would probably be in a coma if he did something like this before the serum as they walked back to camp.

Bucky let Peter have first rights to the river and the teen checked on his wounds to find them all healing and scarring nicely as he cleaned himself. He noticed that his stubble was a bit rougher and
more prominent as he scrubbed over his face in the water, humming to himself as his palms explored the unfamiliar feeling. He also noticed his once smooth fingers were now calloused from work as they splashed water over his face. The final detail he picked out was that the muscles on his body were more pronounced and toned, especially in his arms and legs. He didn’t think much of it as he moved to clean the dirt off of his suit afterwards and stepped out of the water, hanging his gear by the others’ on a branch of a fallen tree before drying off and dressing in his more comfortable clothes.

He walked back to the camp and settled down for lunch. He ate, ravenous after the workout, before laying down to nap as the others talked amongst themselves.

He woke feeling rejuvenated and refreshed, just in time for dinner, more fish but this time but with the added bonus of potatoes gifted to them from the people of the camp and berries Bucky had picked while he was asleep for dessert. He ate, his belly full and content as the sun lowered in the sky. The group laughed and joked for a few hours as the light faded above them; and as darkness fell over them, they all laid down to sleep. No one took watch that night, Heimdall ensuring they would be safe and saying they all deserved some much needed rest. Everyone, including Bucky and most surprisingly, Loki, laid down and got some sleep that night.

When Peter woke up, the sun was high, telling him it was nearly noon. Bucky, who was back in his gear and had gotten a full ten hours of sleep, a new record for him, notified Peter that the teen had gotten about fourteen. Peter rubbed his eyes sleepily before going to the river to get a drink and wash the sleep off his face to collect and change into his gear before walking refreshed and renewed into the camp. They ate a hearty breakfast of leftovers from the previous night before setting off on the final part of their journey to the thin veil point.

Strange stopped in a large valley surrounded by looming, snowy mountains about three hours after they left. The sky was overcast above them and Strange closed his eyes one last time, making sure they were in the right place. He looked to Heimdall, who nodded, feeling Earth just a stones throw through an astral barrier away. The closest they could possibly be to their realm, and specifically Earth, as they could get.

Loki stepped up to stand beside Strange and they nodded in understanding at each other. Peter then connected the dots, concluding that Stephen had taught Loki of the mystic arts while they’d spent time in the large camps. Loki looked at the teenager, and Peter looked back, nodding at him in sheer respect. Loki quirked a cocky smile and looked back to Strange.

“Loki and I are going to open the portal together because I decided that this would probably be more effective and we’d be able to hold it for longer if we did it with the two of us, but you should still try and cross as quickly as you can.” Strange said.

“Everyone should ready their weapons now if they must.” Loki added.

Peter listened to the sounds of Bucky loading bullets into the magazine of each of his guns before cocking them and holding them at the ready. Peter suddenly felt a question spring to his mind.

“Are we sure we’ll all end up on Earth?” He asked worriedly.

Strange thought about that a moment. “I think we should. This is going to be a direct portal from the soul realm to Earth, so it should override the factor of us having died elsewhere.” The doctor looked to Heimdall for confirmation.

“I don’t see anything tricky happening, though I’m not completely sure my sight is as clear as it could be. This isn’t technically part of our universe, though I don’t think there should be any issues.” The man answered.
Peter was still nervous, but he nodded anyways before he formed his mask over his head.

Loki and Strange checked to make sure everyone was ready to hurry through the portal once it opened. The two men focused and moved in complete unison, the careful movements of their fingers and hands ensuring that they each open two connecting halves of the portal and that those two halves fit together perfectly. Strange and Loki visibly strained under the effort and the group ran through. Gamora first, then Mantis, Drax, Groot, Quill, T’Challa, Sam, Wanda, Heimdall, Fury, Hill, Bucky and finally-

Peter whipped around when he heard the thudding sound of feet landing on the ground behind him. He turned to find a red man in a grey suit and yellow cape standing there. Peter immediately recognized him as the Vision, Tony Stark’s former artificial intelligence J.A.R.V.I.S turned android.

“He’s with us!” Peter called loudly to Loki and Strange and shoved Vision through the portal before diving through himself. Loki and Strange hastily jumped in after him as the portal rapidly closed.

When Peter looked up from his where he landed on his knees on the pavement of the ever familiar New York City, in front of Strange’s sanctum, all his worries about being attacked faded away. There were cars driving down the street, people walking down the sidewalks, the normal hustle and bustle of the city Peter had come to know and love. He was home.

“This place looks awful calm for someplace that had half its people disintegrated just a few months ago…” Bucky said. Pedestrians were beginning to stare.

“Yeah...there’s something off. Look guys, I gotta-” Peter began but was interrupted by Wanda yelling “Vision!” and running into his arms.

The woman started crying as the man held her close to his chest, trying his best to comfort her with the bit of emotion he could emulate.

Everyone looked in confusion to see the woman lean up and kiss her lover, teary eyed and muttering barely coherent sentences about how much she missed him. Peter explained to the rest about how he’d arrived just before he went through the portal. As he spoke the teen's brain was flooded by confused thoughts of his own. Vision was only partly organic and technically had no soul. He couldn't have truly died because he never really existed in the first place. So how was he here?

“I missed you too.” Vision said over Peter’s explanation, stroking Wanda’s hair as she calmed down.

“I gotta go see my aunt, guys.” Peter said, shaking his head to clear his thoughts when everyone had settled. “You guys should head to Avengers HQ and see if someone can contact Tony.”

“I’ll go with you.” Bucky offered. They said their goodbyes, and Bucky and Peter hopped in a cab to Queens. The driver said that he recognized them as members of the Avengers and the conversation stopped at that. It wasn’t until they had pulled up to the bank a block down form Peter’s apartment building that he realized he didn’t have any money.

“Aw, man I don’t have any cash with me we just got back to Ear-” Peter stopped himself. He didn’t know how someone would react to this. “I mean New York and y’know-”

“It’s cool, kid. You saved my niece from a mugger a while back. Call it repayment.” The driver smiled out the window.

“Thank you so much.” Peter said, genuinely grateful. “Have a nice day!” He called after the cab as it drove away.
“Always one for politeness.” Bucky chuckled as they headed down the street. Peter was extremely careful not to be seen by any pedestrians as he weaved through back alleys with Bucky in tow and then climbed the back steps of his building so no one would see him.

He arrived at his door, knocking. “Aunt May?” No answer. “May it’s me!” Peter called, knocking harder.

Peter wished he’d had his keys and turned to Bucky. The man patted himself down before finding a paperclip he always kept in his pocket in case he needed it and bent down to pick the lock.

Peter heard the lock click after Bucky wiggled the paperclip one last time. The older man stepped back and Peter turned the knob, pushing the door open. He found the apartment full of someone else’s stuff. He didn’t see a single thing in that place that looked like his or May’s. Confusion and apprehension flooded his gut.

Chapter End Notes

Woohoo, Chapter 10 finished! The plot starts for real from this point on, but you'll have to wait to see what happens muahahaha.
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"What?" He asked out loud. He turned to Bucky who seemed just as confused.

"Did you guys plan on moving?" Bucky offered.

"No." Peter answered, walking back through the unfamiliar apartment.

"What the hell?" Peter said under his breath as he paced around the living room.

"Maybe Tony knows something about it." Bucky said.

"Yeah, maybe...:" Peter answered, walking back out the door and into the hallway. He shut the door after Bucky exited and they headed toward the back stairs again. Once they were dumped in the alleyway behind the building Peter said, "Karen, call Happy."

"Calling Happy." The suit responded.

"Who's Karen?" Bucky asked.

"My suit- Hello?" Peter cut himself off as he heard an answer on the phone.

"Hello?" The person on the line said.

"Hey! Happy!" Peter said.

"Peter? Kid where the hell have you been?" Happy asked.

"Long story, yeah we're gonna need a ride. Can you pick me up at my apartment building? My old apartment building." He was going to have to get used to calling it his old house.

A car soon pulled up to the end of the alley and Peter and Bucky walked towards it. They got into the back and Happy rolled down the divider between the driver and the back seat. For the first time, Peter saw his own reflection clearly. He looked at himself in the rear view mirror past Happy's eyes,
more tired and with deeper crow's feet than before. Peter saw his own cheekbones and jaw were more defined, his skin tanner, splashed with freckles and his hair lighter from the sun. He also saw his full face of scruff. Happy seemed to notice the difference too and looked from Peter to Bucky then back to Peter.

"You've really got some explaining to do." Happy said.

"I think I could say the same to anyone else I used to know." Peter mumbled as Happy rolled the divider back up.

Peter turned to Bucky, who shrugged as they were driven to the new Avengers headquarters in upstate New York.

As they pulled into the driveway and headed inside, Peter retracted his mask and was greeted by an excited Pepper Potts, though the ring on her finger told him she was now Pepper Stark. He took her hand after she had let him out of probably the tightest hug he had ever received and looked at the big diamond set into the sterling silver band.

"Congratulations!" He said to her.

She smiled back at him.

"Where's Tony?" Peter asked. Pepper looked thoughtful for a minute before he saw Tony hurrying down the stairs over Pepper's shoulder.

"And when did you start calling me Tony?" Stark said as he smiled wide, his eyes full of emotion as he took Peter into a hug. It was the most affection he'd ever seen from the man.

When Tony pulled back to look at the teenager, holding him at arm's length, Peter saw that his hair and beard were streaked with more grey and the smile lines and creases at the corners of his eyes were more pronounced. Peter became even more confused.

"Look at you, kid. You've got a beard going on and everything." Tony said, smiling wide, though his eyes were teary and his hand came up to wipe one away. "You've missed so much!" His smile faltered slightly as he looked at Bucky who was standing behind Peter.

"Mr. Stark," Peter said. "How much could I have really missed, it's only been like two months since I left." Peter laughed nervously.

Tony's face fell. "Kid..." He began. "It's been five years..."

-----------------------------------------------------------------

Tony had promised to tell Peter, Bucky, and the rest of the group that had arrived through the portal what had happened while they were gone after they'd all showered and changed. Everyone was assigned a room that Tony had had hastily stocked with clothing while they ate lunch. Peter had found, to his surprise, his own stuff, though covered in dust, in his room. Stark explained that May, assuming he was dead after a year of Peter being missing, had asked if she could put his stuff in the headquarters, just in case he ever came back. No one really believed he would.

Peter hopped in the shower and cleaned himself for real with soap and water, washed his hair with shampoo, and brushed his teeth, keeping his stubble to prove a point. The teen walked out out of the bathroom into the connecting bedroom and rummaged through the closet and drawers of his old dresser for a pair of black skinny jeans and a white tee shirt with which he layered a red and black flannel.
He found the rest of the group all washed and dressed in the lounge room of the headquarters. To his surprise, he saw a very tired and lined faced May standing up from the couch. He stopped in his tracks as his aunt stood to run towards him, teary eyed and yelling, "Peter!". She hugged him tight and the teenager's arms came up to squeeze her securely back.

"May." He responded, his voice breaking as tears of his own welled in his eyes.

"I missed you so much, Peter, where have you been?" The tears were falling freely down her face as she held him back at arm's length. "You look different. You have freckles," She brushed her thumb over his wet cheeks. "And a beard." She then rubbed her palm over his chin. "You should shave that you look like a lumberjack." She commented.

Peter laughed through his tears as he smiled down at the woman. They stood hugging each other for a few more seconds before they turned back to the group.

"Well, Pete, come sit down because we're gonna need an explanation." Tony said from where he was sitting in the lounge with not only the rest of Peter's group, but Happy and Pepper beside him, Bruce Banner and Black Widow sitting on another couch, Hawkeye on her other side. The archer warily eyed Loki with an indiscernible emotion who was sat in a lounge chair that Thor leaned against, and the Star Spangled Man with a Plan himself, Steve Rogers seated on a couch across from Tony's beside Bucky. Peter went and took a spot between Bucky and Sam, who was on the former Winter Soldier's other side. He noticed Groot sharing another chair with a raccoon looking creature.

"So where have you guys been?" Pepper asked when he had gotten situated.

Peter spoke first. He explained where he had started out in the meadow, when he had found the cat, been attacked by the dog, and then when he met Bucky.

Bucky explained how he had been wandering the woods when he picked up Peter's tracks, and noticed his webs still on trees before they dissolved as he got closer to him. He found Peter resting by the river and waited for the boy to wake up. They then teamed up and that was when they found Loki.

Loki told of how he had stayed in basically the same area, calling for Thor. That segwayed into how Strange and Groot had found them. Strange said he had sensed them, and searched until he found them. Groot then talked about how he'd seen Strange and trailed him to Peter, Bucky, and Loki though it was translated by the racoon who introduced himself as Rocket. Peter picked the tale back up and talked about how Quill had ran past them being chased by Fenris, and described Loki's terror to Thor when the God of Thunder had asked, "Did he cower like a baby?" Loki bristled at the question and glared at Peter for telling the man when Thor burst out laughing heartily.

Quill said he'd been wandering through the forest when he ran into the giant wolf and by chance, into the group of men in his attempt to escape the animal. He relayed the information about how they'd battled the overgrown canine and how Loki had killed it.

"Oh, most valiant brother." Thor said, seeming genuinely impressed as he put his hand on Loki's shoulder. The younger sibling didn't turn to look at Thor and tried to mask his face but Peter saw as his cold and steely exterior melted into one of fondness. At least, until Thor turned to the group and said, "If I was there, we would've done Get Help."

"That wouldn't have even made sense in the situation, Thor you idiot." Loki prickled at his brother.

"What's Get Help?" Peter asked.
"Oh not to worry, it needs no explanation, completely irrelevant!" Loki smiled nervously at the now interested rest of the Avengers and Guardians, leaning forward in preparation to carry on with the story and avoid the subject.

"No no." Tony sat forward from where he was leaning back against the couch. "I wanna hear it."

Loki glared at the man who winked back as Thor jumped into the explanation of their plan. "Get Help is a tactic Loki and I use-"

"You use." Loki corrected, cutting his brother off.

"I use," Thor restarted, rolling his eyes. "To distract our foes, in which I yell 'Get help my brother is dying!' and proceed to throw him across the room into the enemy." He smiled as he finished.

"Yeah, Loki's right. Doesn't sound like it would've made much sense in the situation but I would love to see that at some point." Sam said, snickering. Loki switched his angry gaze to him instead.

"It's humiliating." Loki crossed his arms over his chest.

"Not for me, it's not." Thor said smiling brightly.

They then got back on track, explaining the next arrival of Heimdall and Wanda's. Heimdall explained he had found Wanda sitting by a river after seeing her lifting and moving things with her magic from above the trees. She told them about how she had sat there for a while trying to work through her thoughts and anxiety. Heimdall then added that Loki had called him shortly after that.

Drax and Mantis were the next added to the story, who had been dropped in the soul realm only feet from each other and had stuck together in search of the rest of their friends before Heimdall had seen them, and Drax said that was when the, as he put it, "bird and cat men had come".

T'Challa said he had seen Sam flying and had ran after him to get his attention, and Sam said on one of his patrols he had seen the growing group from above and had gone to get T'Challa before they both came back to join the rest of them. And then shortly after they had found Director Fury and Agent Hill.

Hill and Fury relayed their time gathering information on where they were, who they were there with, and how to get out. They were tracking the group for a good while when they picked up their prints and decided to take a shortcut between two mountains while the group went around so they could beat them to the other side and cut them off. It worked.

"So what's been going on while we were gone?" Peter asked the earth-present half of the room when Fury had finished talking.

"Honestly not much." Tony began. "Half the people on earth disintegrated when Thanos snapped his fingers, but no one came to Earth like we expected. I guess it was selfish to think that of the whole universe this was where Thanos would want to be once he'd collected all of the stones."

The group that was in the soul realm listened intently.

"People grieved, the rest of the Avengers and I had to explain what had happened, what Thanos had done. There were people who were angry at us, mad that we hadn't been able to kill Thanos, and there were others who got ready to join us and fight but of course we didn't do anything. We couldn't have. No one knows where Thanos is, and we're outmatched if he has the stones anyways." Tony continued.
"Do you think now that we're back we'll be able to do it?" Bucky asked.

"I don't know." Tony said, though he looked apprehensive at Bucky's speaking. "I don't wanna get my hopes up here. I'm not saying you guys aren't good enough, it's just that Thanos has an army on top of the Infinity Stones. He may have possibly disbanded them now that he'd reached his goal of achieving 'balance' or whatever but we don't know if he has people watching us, or if he'd know we were coming."

Everyone was silent for a bit. Feeling helpless wasn't something they were used to. They never had to fight someone this powerful before. They'd faced difficult situations, but never like this.

"Do we have any fighters in places besides here?" Peter asked.

Tony was quiet.

Loki suddenly sat up and turned to his brother. "Thor what about the people on Sakaar? The ones from Korg's revolution?" He asked.

Thor thought for a moment. "Maybe. I don't know if they're particularly good fighters or how many of them are left, I've never seen them at war like that but it's possible. Good thinking Loki."

"That won't be enough." Sam said. "It's only one planet of people, and it's not even guaranteed."

"Well maybe we can lead something." Peter said. "We can gather a rebellion. We can go from planet to planet and maybe, in time, we can gather enough people to fight back."

"Kid..." Tony started. "Did I ever tell you you were a genius?" He smiled at Peter. The teenager smiled brightly back.

"How would we even go about that?" Steve piped in.

"Well we could like, start advertising I guess. Doing conferences or something first on Earth, and then in other places." Peter said.

"Do you think we're significant enough for people to even listen?" Quill asked then.

"Maybe. I mean we did almost beat Thanos. Maybe word has carried." Peter said. "Even then when we tell our stories for small audiences who buy into us, they'll spread the word."

"This could actually work." Banner said, turning to Tony.

"Well we should start planning this thing." Tony responded and stood. He turned to Director Fury. "Fury you should call S.H.I.E.L.D about this one, we'll probably need them in on it."

Fury nodded at the man and he and Hill were off, assumingly to S.H.I.E.L.D headquarters.

After watching the man and woman go, Peter spoke his confusion.

"No offense," The teen began. "But why is Vision here? Like, how? I mean he's an Android, right? He didn't technically have a soul...so why was he in the soul realm? And wasn't the mind stone keeping him alive? Thanos has that, so how is it possible he's even here?"

He looked around the group, who were silent. No one seemed to have an answer. Not even Tony or Bruce and they'd come up with the plans to make Ultron.

"I'm not entirely sure why I'm here either." Vision spoke up from beside Wanda. "When Thanos
took the mind stone from me, I woke up in the Soul Realm. I suppose I didn't truly think about it as I was searching for you guys."

Peter looked at the man.

Vision looked at Tony, who looked back with confusion.

"I don't feel the same as I used to." Vision muttered. "When I was first born, I had no semblance of human feelings or anything besides strict reason and reality. Things like worry or sarcasm were merely programs in my mainframe but now I feel as though I truly experience a full range of emotion. What used to seem frivolous now feels entirely real. I'm not sure if I'm imagining things, but it, at least, seems true."

The team remained silent but the man didn't say anything else.

"Vision, I'm going to need to run some tests on you tomorrow." Tony had said. "Is that okay?" He added.

The other man simply nodded and that was the end of it. The team all stood and Tony hustled off to his office with Pepper in tow to go make plans, leaving the rest of the group to get acquainted with each other.

"Who is this child?" Thor asked Loki, pointing to Peter. 

Peter opened his mouth to protest but Loki talked before he could get a word out. "He is not a child, brother, he is a valiant member of our team. His name is Peter Parker. Or Spiderman, as New York would know him." The dark haired man smiled knowingly at the teen. Peter smiled back. 

Thor stepped toward Peter, offering his football sized hand to shake. He was giant, over six feet tall with broad shoulders and hair cropped close to his head. He was wearing a black tee shirt and blue jeans with a pair of sneakers. 

Peter shook his hand. "I remember your hair being longer." He thought out loud. 

"Oh it was, before a creepy old man on Sakaar cut it off." Thor smiled brightly as he gave Peter's hand a firm shake. 

"Oh..." Peter said with slight concern as he shook Thor's hand in return. 

Steve was next to greet him, extending his hand for a shake as well. "Nice to see you again son, Bucky said you held up pretty well in the soul realm." He smiled with perfect white teeth, his baby blues carrying the emotion. 

Peter took his hand and smiled back. "I could say the same to you. I'm sorry if we got off on the wrong foot back in that fight at the airport."

"I'd say we got off on exactly the right foot." Steve responded. "I can tell you'll be a very valuable member of the team. Queens, you said?" He asked. 

"Yeah, Queens." Peter replied. "Brooklyn?"

"Born and raised." Steve grinned. 

They broke apart so Steve could introduce himself to the rest of the newcomers. Hawkeye and Black Widow took his place.
"I don't think we've ever properly met." The woman said, approaching Peter with a smile.

"No, I don't think so either." Peter replied. "I'm Peter Parker, Spiderman, Ms. Black Widow."

She laughed in response. "I'm Natasha, but everybody calls me Nat." She smiled kindly.

"Clint." Hawkeye said from beside her, putting his hand out for a shake.

Peter shook the man's hand.

"Looks like you have another insect friend here." Clint laughed at Natasha.

"Spiders aren't technically insects, they're arachnids." Peter said.

"Oh a smart one! You'll get along great with Banner." Natasha chuckled.

Peter laughed back before she and Clint went their own ways.

Last to introduce themselves to Peter was the formerly mentioned Bruce Banner himself.

"Hey kid, nice to meet you." He said to Peter.

"It's nice to meet you too, Mr. Banner." Peter responded, smiling giddily with admiration, starstruck by the scientist. "I'm a huge fan of your work, Nuclear Physics and Gamma Radiation. Wicked cool."

"Please, it's just Bruce." The man said, chuckling. "If you're gonna be one of the team, there's no need for formality. Anyways, it's nice to see someone who recognizes me for more than just the Hulk." he smiled.

"Well you've made massive scientific breakthroughs sir, it'd be a shame if I just completely forgot about that to only ever recognize the Hulk." Peter responded. "Although his creation is still an extremely impressive movement in biochemistry."

"I like you." Bruce said to the boy. "We should talk more sometime." He smiled.

"Anytime you'd like, sir." Peter broadly smiled back, though butterflies were blooming in his stomach, making him want to jump around with glee.

It was then that F.R.I.D.A.Y announced that dinner was ready and they all moved down to the dining hall for the meal.

Everyone conversed and caught up, the chatter filling the room as they sat at the long table, chowing down hungrily on the first full meal that didn't include fish they'd had in a long time. Tony had had roast chicken with mashed potatoes and green beans prepared for dinner. When the dirty plates had been carted away, a new smaller dish was placed in front of each of the group and they were all served a slice of pie from their choice of a selection of cherry, apple, or pumpkin, and a scoop of vanilla ice cream on top if they chose. Peter got a slice of apple pie with ice cream and thanked the server before greedily spooning the polarly hot and cold treat into his mouth.

The evening drew on and the purple sky crept into black as the group grew tired. One by one, they excused themselves from the table and went off to their rooms. Peter was last, having been talking with Tony into the night before the older man had yawned sleepily, explaining he had a meeting the next morning and they went off to their rooms. Peter's room was beside Bucky's, who was beside Steve and across the hall from Loki and Strange. He saw their doors shut in the now dimmed lights
of the hallway before stepping into his own room.

Peter peeled off his day clothes and pulled on a white undershirt and a pair of worn thin plaid pajama pants and slid into bed. His sheets smelled clean, but the familiar scent of the detergent May used to use. He nuzzled his face into the pillowcase and drifted off to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

I am so so sorry for missing yesterday's chapter. My google password wasn't working so I couldn't reach my writing. I hope the uber long chapter makes up for it if not being more of a nuisance.

Anyways, the team is all in one place but you know what that means. Rivalries and old grudges will reappear but you'll have to wait to see what happens mauahaha.

As always thank you guys for reading and until the next chapter

-xoxo Denise
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Steve convinces Tony to look into Bucky's files.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: This chapter contains graphic depictions of blood, gore, prisoner of war and torture/hostage situations. Do not read if you are sensitive to such topics.

This part of the story actually takes place after the group's arrival on Earth, so it does not take place immediately after Peter sleeping, I just wanted to clarify that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Peter peeled off his day clothes and pulled on a white undershirt and a pair of worn thin plaid pajama pants and slid into bed. His sheets smelled clean, but the familiar scent of the detergent May used to use. He nuzzled his face into the pillowcase and drifted off to sleep.

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"I cannot believe you think I'm going to be okay with Barnes staying here." Tony had spat at Steve, face crinkled in disgust.

"I can't believe you're being such an ass about this, Tony." Steve shot back, his arms crossed over his broad chest, brows furrowed over stormy blue eyes.

"This is my damn facility, Rogers. I built it, I call the shots, you hear me? And the shot I'm calling says he's not staying. End of story." The billionaire had said firmly.

Steve looked at the man with a mix of utter disbelief and anger. "Fine. You can make that decision but take a look at his files. The recordings of the experiments on him. Look at what they did to him and tell me to my face tomorrow that you made the right call."

"Fine." Tony had said, storming out of the room to leave Steve standing alone in the empty kitchen as the team washed up mere rooms away.

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Tony had brooded for a long while before he'd decided to look into what Steve had said. His stubbornness nearly kept him from plugging the hard drive in but he'd done it. He pushed the USB previously stowed away in a cardboard shoe box, collecting dust in the storage closet of his lab, into his computer. He propped his elbow on the edge of the desk and rested his chin in his palm as the video labeled "программа зимней солдатской фазы 1" began.

The image of a bruised, bloodied, and beaten young man strapped to a chair in a dark room appeared on screen. He had brown hair, short on the sides and long on top though it was damp with sweat and
matted with blood. His face was purple beneath his red eyes, his upper lip streaked with blood from his broken nose, his bottom lip split and swollen. The most notable thing was the bloodied stump concealed by the equally bloodied torn sleeve of a blue cotton coat, part of a uniform. A masked man in black garb stood beside his chair. The time stamp in the top corner of the screen marked it as February of 1945.

"как вас зовут" a voice behind the camera said.

"I don't know. What that means." Young Barnes had sighed tiredly, his eyes drooping and his head swinging as he struggled to keep conscious.

"ударил его снова" The voice spoke again and Bucky barely had time to look up in confusion before the man beside his chair struck him hard across the face.

Bucky grunted as blood began to flow from his nose again.

"выключить фотокамеру" The voice said and the film stopped there.

Tony scrubbed his hands over his face before looking at the list of videos on the hard drive. They were labeled 2-й этап программы зимнего солдата to 13-й этап программы зимнего солдата followed by over a dozen videos, each labeled with a mission the Winter Soldier had been sent on. He skipped to the 6th one.

The video loaded up, the same set up, a man strapped to a chair with a masked guard standing beside it, but over his head was a metal helmet like contraption. Only this time, the Bucky in the video was long haired with almost dead looking eyes, glazed over, and a metal arm in place of the one missing in the first video. The same metal arm Tony had shot off all those years ago. The timestamp placed it in July of 1958.

"как вас зовут" The man behind the camera said, just as before.

"Bucky. Barnes." Bucky spat maliciously.

"сделайте это снова" The voice had said and the guard standing beside Bucky's chair shoved a tooth guard into the man's mouth and a moment later his body tensed up as an electric current flowed through him. His screams were muffled by the rubber in his mouth and Tony felt pity form in his gut accompanied by an acute disgust at H.Y.D.R.A.s readiness to shamelessly treat human beings so terribly.

They didn't let up until minutes later, Bucky's screaming ceasing, replaced by heavy panted breaths. Two guards hauled his limp body out of the chair and pulled him off screen, assumingly to the cryochambers.

Tony had a hard time bringing himself to watch any more but he clicked on the last video, waiting as it loaded. The time stamp told him is was now November of 1964. It started off with the same angle in the same place but the chair was empty this time. Tony watched as two masked guards dragged a struggling Bucky into the frame, shoving him into the chair and holding him down until the metal restraints clamped around his limbs. The same metal helmet from before closed around his face as well.

"Let me go!" Bucky yelled, his eyes wild and dark circled.

"желание" a voice behind the camera said.

"No-" Bucky began.
"ржавый" the man continued.

"Stop-" Bucky said, his eyes full of fear.

"семнадцать"

"No-" Bucky repeated, the words strained and ground through gritted teeth.

"рассвет"

"Please!" Bucky begged, his body thrashing against his restraints.

"печь"

Bucky's shoulders lifted off the back of the chair only to be thrown back down. He didn't speak, just struggled against the metal clamps, feral grunts coming from his mouth.

"девять"

That's when the screaming started. A raw, ragged sound tearing itself from Bucky's throat.

"доброкачественный"

Bucky's screaming persisted.

"возвращение домой"

Bucky continued to scream, though his voice became raw, eyes wide and terrified.

"один"

And just like that, the screaming ceased at once.

"грузовой автомобиль"

Bucky's breath heaved as his jaw set, the fear and pain gone from his eyes, instead replaced by a glassy look.

"добрый утренний солдат" The voice finished.

"готовы соблюдать" Bucky responded, his face unwavering, and the film ended there.

Tony sighed out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding and groaned as the scrubbed his hands over his face, pushing them up into his greying hair. He was sure watching that took ten years off of his life span.

"F.R.I.D.A.Y., translate the dialogue of the last video."

"The dialogue of the video, consecutively says, ‘do it again’ and they proceed to electrocute Sergeant Barnes. Following that is a string of ten words, assumingly trigger words, that are, in order: longing, rusted, furnace, daybreak, seventeen, nine, benign, homecoming, one, freight car. Finally the man behind the camera says, ‘good morning soldier’ to which Sergeant Barnes responds, ‘ready to comply’.

"Do the mission videos show the trigger words?" Tony asked the room.

"Some of them, some appear to show him already under the influence of the programming."
F.R.I.D.A.Y. answered.

Tony sighed again, scrubbing his hands through his hair. A newfound pity and respect for Barnes washed over him. Twenty years. It took them twenty years to break Bucky and today, he's free from the brainwashing. He managed to shake it. He still has nightmares but he's strong enough to deal with them.

This didn't mean Tony forgave him. He killed his mother. He kept it a secret, he didn't mention anything to him and this didn't mean he forgave Steve for not telling him either. He still found it a raw wound and wasn't ready to forgive Bucky for it, nor was he at all justifying the Winter Soldier's actions. Tony turned off the computer before he walked to the elevator and took it back up to his room.

Chapter End Notes

So now Tony knows, but will his ego allow him to say Steve was right? We shall see. This won't be the only grudge conflict and possible resolution we'll be seeing. There will be more.

The Russian was literally taken from google translate.

программа зимней солдатской фазы 1 - Project Winter Soldier Phase 1

как вас зовут - what is your name

ударил его снова - hit him again

выключить фотокамеру - turn off the camera

2-й этап программы зимнего солдата to 13-й этап программы зимнего солдата - Winter Soldier Project phase 2 to Winter Soldier Project Phase 13

сделайте это снова - do it again

The rest is translated in the chapter.

Thanks for reading and until the next chapter

-xoxo Denise
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Peter begins to break

Chapter Notes

Warnings: This chapter contains mentions of post traumatic stress disorder and vivid memories of anxiety inducing events. Do not read if you are sensitive to such topics.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tony sighed again, scrubbing his hands through his hair. A newfound pity and respect for Barnes washed over him. Twenty years. It took them twenty years to break Bucky and today, he's free from the brainwashing. He managed to shake it. He still has nightmares but he's strong enough to deal with them. Tony turned off the computer before he walked to the elevator and took it back up to his room.

Images of Thanos flashed before his eyes. Peter felt the burning in his chest as he struggled to find out what was happening. His hands began to turn to dust and his advanced healing tried its best to pull himself back together but he was deteriorating quicker than he could fix himself. He felt the feeling in his body start to fade and his breath heaved as his chest began to disintegrate beneath Tony's.

He didn't register Tony speaking to him as tears welled in his eyes and he began to cry, both from the panic and from the sorrow of leaving Mr. Stark behind. He could see Tony's eyes flooding with tears of his own as he shook the younger man's shoulders to get his attention.

Peter's neurons were firing quicker than they ever had before as he tried to find some way to stay together. He was dying, he felt his life fading. It hurt, it stung, he was falling to pieces and there was nothing anyone could do about it. Tony was crying for real now, and he was saying things to Peter but he didn't hear a word as he faded away completely.

Peter shot up in bed, shouting, "I'm sorry!"

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry..." His words were reduced to mumbles through tears, and then eventually just sobs as the door swung open. Bucky was running to his side, wearing a navy blue tank top and plaid pajama pants, gathering the boy in his arms as he sobbed heavily against the man's flesh shoulder.

Peter was trying to ball himself up as his breath came in shallow heaves. Bucky pulled Peter close to his chest, shushing him and stroking his head. His heart broke at the boy's trembling form, his normally bubbly personality completely gone, replaced by complete terror and sorrow.
"It's okay. You're okay Peter, I'm right here. Nothing's gonna hurt you." Bucky whispered into the boy's hair.

As Peter calmed down, he was curled in the fetal position with his head in Bucky's lap, still crying softly, his shoulders shaking and his body quivering as the man above him petted his soft locks. Tony came rushing in not long after, Bucky having called him when he heard Peter scream. The man looked disheveled, wearing a matching pajama set.

The mentor sat on the bed beside Peter and put his hand on the boy's back, rubbing small comforting circles. The boy began to whimper, and then to mumble barely coherent sentences.

"I-I'm" he started through shaky breaths. "I'm...ss. Mr. Stark...I....Sorry. So sorry."

"Shh kid, it's okay. It's okay. You're back now. You're right here, I'm here with you don't you worry." Tony had taken Bucky's spot beneath Peter's head. Peter had sat up a bit and was clinging on to the older man's chest. The former Winter Soldier could see the pain in the older man's dark circled eyes, how much he hated to see the closest thing he had to a son so broken.

Bucky was now sitting at Peter's feet, rubbing his ankle.

"No one's angry at you." Tony said, pushing Peter's sweat dampened hair back from his forehead. "I'm not angry at you. I'll never be angry at you. It wasn't your fault."

The boy's crying became soft sniffles, and then he quieted completely, falling back to sleep. Bucky and Tony replaced Peter correctly on the bed since his head had been at the foot of the mattress, and pulled the duvet back over him.

The two men made sure he was soundly sleeping before they slipped out of the room for a second to talk.

"Was he like this when you guys were together in the soul realm?" Tony asked in concern.

"No." Bucky replied. "Never."

Tony looked troubled. "I don't know if this is even the worst it'll get. What if this's just the tip of the iceberg?"

Bucky didn't respond, just thought back to how he would remember things from being the Winter Soldier, how he'd never had anyone to comfort him. How he'd never told anyone about it. Not Steve, no one. He also remembered how Steve had mentioned being haunted by Bucky falling off the train and how he hadn't been able to save him. They'd both gotten better, Steve more so than Bucky, but they'd improved. Sometimes Bucky still dreamt about it, and he would wake up in a cold sweat, but he'd learned to cope. He worried how this would affect Peter though, he was just so young.

Bucky didn't notice the look of dubiousness towards him soften slightly on Tony's face as he knew exactly what the ex assassin was thinking about. After all, he's experienced those kinds of emotions first hand. He felt a pang of guilt as his eyes fell on the exposed scar tissue surrounding where the prosthetic met skin on Bucky's exposed shoulder.

"Well I'll always be right by him. So will Loki. I know you don't trust either of us, but we both care about Peter a lot. We got really close and I swear we'd never do anything to hurt him." Bucky felt slightly nervous speaking for Loki, but he knew he'd want to help him as well.

Tony looked skeptical. "You sure?" He asked.
"100%." Bucky answered.

Tony still didn't look convinced. "You promise you'll call me every time something happens? And you'll tell Loki to do the same?" Tony asked.

"I'll be sure to." Bucky said.

Tony relented. "Okay." He still didn't seem completely sure, but he looked a bit more comfortable. "You go ahead back to sleep, I'll watch him for a bit."

Bucky nodded and headed back off to his room, but slipped back out when he heard Tony close Peter's door behind him. He padded across the hall to Loki's door and knocked softly.

The dark haired man opened the door wearing a pair of black silk pajama pants and a white silk button up, the sleeves rolled up over his pale forearms, which he defensively kept pressed to his body, and let Bucky in, shutting it behind him. Bucky noticed the sheets were still neatly made, telling him Loki hadn't slept.

"Peter's having nightmares about his death." Bucky told the man who looked at him, listening. "I think it'll probably become PTSD."

Loki's face became one of concern. "How did that affect you?"

Bucky was taken aback. "How'd you know?"

"It didn't take me long to realize you were a troubled man. How you were so protective of Peter, how you stayed up at night, he reminded you of Captain Rogers, and of purity you'd never been able to protect in yourself." Loki said. "I know it because I see him the same. He reminds me very much of Thor when he was still a boy. So trusting, so soft and gentle."

Bucky sighed. "It was debilitating." he answered Loki's previous question. "I couldn't sleep for weeks, and I still can't sleep well. It's awful."

"How long was it bad for you?" Loki asked.

"Years." Bucky answered and he began to worry for Peter. He could tell Loki was too.

"Well I hope it doesn't get that bad for Peter. I really do." Loki ran a thin hand through his hair. Bucky noticed the man had unrolled his sleeves. He found it odd and he think he knew why but he decided not to press it.

Bucky nodded. "I told Tony we'd look after Peter for him since our rooms are right here."

"Normally I'd be angry that someone spoke for me, but I'll let you slide just this once." Loki answered.

They talked about their worries for the boy until the sun rose, and Bucky ducked out of Loki's room into his own. He got dressed in a pair of blue jeans, a white tee shirt and a red hoodie before heading down the corridor to the main floor's kitchen where he found Steve, already back and showered from his morning run, making pancakes for the team and enlisting Bucky's help to make scrambled eggs and bacon to go along with it.

Chapter End Notes
Tony begins to soften towards Bucky, Loki has a secret, and Peter is crumbling. Where will this go? You'll have to wait and see...

We'll be seeing a lot more rivalry later, but Tony is beginning to accept that what the Winter Soldier did wasn't Bucky, nor was it his fault or conscious decision. The alternate rivalry we'll see later on will be a bit more troubling.

Anyways, as always, thank you all for reading I'll see you guys in the next chapter.

-xoxo Denise
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

The team bonds

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

_They talked about their worries for the boy until the sun rose, and Bucky ducked out of Loki's room into his own. He got dressed in a pair of blue jeans, a white tee shirt and a red hoodie before heading down the corridor to the main floor's kitchen where he found Steve, already back and showered from his morning run, making pancakes for the team and enlisting Bucky's help to make scrambled eggs and bacon to go along with it._

Peter woke a few hours later, finding Tony sleeping with his head drooping and arms crossed over his chest at the desk by his bed. Tony stirred awake when he heard Peter sit up.

"Morning, kid." He said, voice thick with sleep.

"Good morning, Mr. Stark." Peter answered.

"Tony." The Stark corrected.

"I don't know when that became something I was allowed to call you." Peter chuckled.

"It happened when you came back." Tony answered.

"Oh." Peter responded. "Thanks. Anyways, what're you doing in my room?"

"Just checking in on you. Bucky called me saying you woke up last night." The older man said.

The memories of the previous night came flooding back. "Oh." Peter said, his face going red at the memory of sobbing onto Tony's no doubt expensive pajamas. "I'm okay." he smiled smally at the man, though Tony still looked sad.

"I believe you." Tony sighed. "I'm gonna go check in on Pepper." He excused himself from Peter's room.

Peter got up off his bed when Tony left. He got dressed and went into the bathroom to brush his teeth before relenting the facial hair and shaving it off, heading out to the kitchen where he found Bucky and Steve making breakfast.

"Your plate's on the counter." Bucky said from beside Steve who was flipping pancakes, his back to Peter as he scrambled eggs in a skillet, though he tilted his head in the general direction of the kitchen island. Peter slid onto a bar stool and Steve turned away from the stove and slid a pancake onto Peter's plate.
"Don't eat that yet." He said as he turned back to the stove, making a second, and then a third, sliding each onto the boy's plate before passing a bottle of syrup and some butter to him, flashing a smile.

"Fanks." Peter mumbled around a massive bite of pancake, already shoveling them into his mouth.

Bucky heaped some eggs and four strips of bacon onto his plate not long after, knowing the boy would need something to hold him out while Steve made some more pancakes.

Peter practically inhaled the food on his plate, eating four more pancakes and another helping of eggs as the rest of the team ambled into the kitchen. When the teen felt full, he put his plate in the sink before grabbing a glass out of the cupboard and pouring himself some orange juice. He pulled the cartons of juice, milk, and the water pitcher out and set them down on the island as he returned to his spot, smiling in return at Steve when he grinned at the boy in thanks. He also passed everyone a cup.

Peter sat back down in his original seat, now between Loki and Clint, who seemed to visibly untense when Peter took the seat between him and the god. The dark haired man was slowly chewing bacon as he eyed the boy with slight curiosity. "You've had seven pancakes and two helpings of eggs and you don't even feel stuffed?" He asked.

"That's your second piece of bacon and you don't feel hungry?" Peter shot back.

"I don't eat much." The man shrugged.

Meanwhile, on Peter's other side, Clint was scarfing down four pancakes and a mountain of eggs. He paused mid-shovel to blink at Peter. "Wuht?" He garbled around his stuffed mouth.

Natasha slapped the back of Clint's head, who winced.

"Wuht wah 'at for?" He asked, mouth still full of pancake.

"Don't talk with your mouth full." Natasha said, smacking him across the head again.

Clint flinched once more before turning to the woman behind him, holding a finger up to tell her to wait as he closed his eyes and chewed. He opened his eyes again, swallowed, and put his finger down, pausing for emphasis before finally saying, "Bitch."

Peter choked on his gulp of orange juice, feeling the citrus drink rise in his sinuses. Loki snickered under his breath beside him, Thor and Sam were laughing loudly, and Bruce looked like he didn't want to be there. "He's got you there." Tony commented. Rocket, Groot, and Quill looked like they were trying to explain why it was funny to Gamora, and Mantis who looked vaguely amused. T'challa smiled broadly and Hill chuckled under her breath beside a Fury who offered only a small smile. Steve's mouth split in a grin beside Bucky whose shoulders shook gently with silent laughter as he tended to his eggs and bacon.

Breakfast went well, and Peter pitched a trip to central park to the rest of the team. Quill, whose face lit up like a kid in a candy store, admitting he'd never been, convinced Gamora, and Groot said something probably along the lines of the importance of fresh air to Rocket. Thor attempted to compel an unwilling Loki, who only relented when Peter gave him his puppy eyes. The rest of the group agreed easily, including Pepper who had come in halfway through breakfast after making a few business calls and Wanda and Vision who had slept in.

"Hey Cap you could throw the shield around with the Snow Queen over here and teach him some frisbee." Tony pitched to Steve. Peter found it vaguely confusing they were getting along, though he assumed five years of grieving for their lost ones might have brought them closer.
Steve looked mildly concerned before saying, "Maybe a regular frisbee would be a bit of a better idea."

Tony laughed and Peter cracked a smile, grateful the two men had made up.

"Do you guys have anything we can bring to the park?" Peter asked Pepper.

"Tony's a child, of course he does." She laughed fondly, shaking her head.

"I am not a child!" The man defended. "I'm a man child. I've got baseballs, soccer balls, frisbees, you name it." He turned to Peter.

"I think that'll all be fun." Peter smiled, and Tony grinned in return.

Everyone made sure they were ready to go to the park and Tony returned with a mesh laundry bag full of fun things to toss around. They then set out to the elevator that took them to the ground floor where they all piled into two big SUVs that dropped them off a little ways from the park.

The pack walked the few remaining blocks up the street. Bucky and Loki had protectively flanked Peter as the usually did. Bucky and Peter talked, Loki just listened, paying attention to his 'oafish', as he called him, brother who was gazing excitedly around himself. Peter ran forward as the park came into view, racing Bucky who had challenged him to see who could get there fastest. "Be careful you two!" Steve had called out as they sprinted past him. Bucky was ridiculously fast, but Peter was just as. They were neck and neck before Peter jumped, using his enhanced agility to launch his body forward, somersaulting onto the plush green grass to beat Bucky.

"Hey that's cheating!" Bucky laughed, his eyes crinkling as he threw his arms in the air, not even breaking a sweat.

"It's not cheating if we both used our super speed to get here. It automatically means we could've used any powers." Peter said.

"I'm not sure that's how fairness works but okay." Bucky chuckled, shaking his head.

Tony tossed the bag across the grass to Peter when he reached the park and Peter caught it. "Whaddya wanna play?" He asked Bucky.

Bucky contemplated for a moment before Sam called out, "Dibs on the football!" From behind them.

"Frisbee maybe?" Bucky answered. Peter opened the bag and pulled out the football, throwing a perfect spiral to Sam who readied his hands to catch it but Steve jumped up and intercepted, turning to smile snarkily at the other man who looked just a little bit betrayed.

Bucky laughed at them, shaking his head before turning back to Peter. The boy had taken Bucky's distraction as an advantage to throw the frisbee, though Bucky quickly caught it in his right hand, snatching it out of the air with his quick reflexes. He gave Peter a smirkish smile and tossed the plastic disk back. Peter went to catch the frisbee when he heard a shout followed by a thud and pained groaning. He plucked the frisbee out of the air as he whipped around, finding Tony curled in the fetal position on the ground behind him, clutching his groin, having been hit by a soccer ball that was now laying by his feet. Bruce was at his side checking to make sure there weren't any serious injuries, Pepper had her hands over her mouth in shock, and Clint was kneeling on the ground laughing so hard it seemed like it hurt, having fallen over. Behind him stood Natasha who had her arms crossed over her chest, chuckling while T'Challa, Sam, Steve, Quill, Drax, Thor and Rocket who was perched on Groot's head played football past them.
He turned back to Bucky, who was laughing in a way similar to Natasha, arms crossed over his chest and chuckling lowly. Peter shook his head and was just about to pick the game of frisbee back up with Bucky when he saw a man in black sprint across the field, being chased by something. Peter realized that that man was Loki, and that the thing chasing him was a small Yorkshire Terrier.

"Brother! Help me!" He heard Loki yell distantly, and Thor paused before throwing the football to turn at the sound of Loki's voice, falling the the ground as Drax barreled into him, chasing the ball. Peter mentally connected what Loki had said to a line in the Lion King.

When Thor didn't come to his rescue, Loki turned his head as he ran to look over his shoulder at the yipping dog, its small jaws snapping, inches from his pant legs. "Back!" He called. "Back foul beast!"

Peter started laughing in earnest, realizing Bucky had lost it behind him too. Loki ran towards them, a look of sheer terror on his face.

"Loki!" Peter called as he approached. The man's scared blue eyes met his. "Loki, stop!" Peter called.

Loki looked hesitant, but listened and stopped, instead zipping to hide behind Peter. The dog halted in front of the teen, looking past him to lock eyes with the God, spreading its front legs and pressing its chest low to the ground, snarling. Peter looked down at the pint sized terror and knelt in front of it. The dog growled softly, but he put his had out for it to sniff. He felt a small wet nose press to his fingertips and then a tiny pink tongue poked out of the dog's mouth and lapped at his fingers. Peter laughed and pet the dog, scratching behind its ears before picking up its small body which shook with how hard its stubby tail had begun to wag.

The boy turned in circles with the little dog in his arms, searching for its owners. Soon, a panting man and a very apologetic looking woman came up and explained it was their dog that had gotten out of its harness and that they were so sorry it had chased Loki all the way across the big field. Peter just laughed and said it was alright and handed their dog back to them, who was strapped again into his little black harness that was tightened a pretty good deal before being walked away.

"Bye little buddy!" Peter waved at the dog who yipped happily in response before running off alongside his owners. Peter turned back to Loki and Bucky.

"Terrifying." Bucky commented with a smirk on his face, arms crossed as he watched the dog go. Loki glared daggers at the man in response.

"What did you even do to that dog?" Peter laughed.

"I don't know, I just looked at it for a second and the little demon decided it didn't like me." Loki said, emphasizing 'demon' as he straightened his suit.

Peter shook his head, chuckling. "You run from a lot of canines it seems." Peter said, referring to their time in the Soul Realm.

"We shall never speak again of Fenris." Loki said seriously, pointing a finger at Peter.

"Okay, okay!" Peter said through his laughter.

"How was the battle with the beast?" Thor's voice called from across the field. "Did you fight valiantly?"

"Pipe down oaf!" Loki sneered back at Thor who howled with laughter Peter could hear from his
spot a good twenty five yards away.

"Are you afraid of dogs?" Peter asked Loki.

"What? No, of course not." Loki scoffed nervously, shaking his head as though the idea was preposterous.

"You're totally afraid of dogs." Peter said. "Well I'm gonna change that." He said, crossing his arms and sticking his chin up.

"But there's nothing to change." Loki said with forced laughter.

"Sure." Bucky said.

Loki glared at the man again.

Peter left Loki and Bucky to bond a bit in favor of going over to a bench in the shade of a big oak, finding Hill, Natasha who had gone there after Tony's accident, Wanda, Mantis, and surprisingly, Vision sitting there. Mantis was wearing a beanie to cover her antennae, though she looked very uncomfortable, constantly adjusting the hat, and Gamora had the hood of a sweater Hill had leant her up to cover her face. Peter couldn't see much of it however, because she was focused on messily weaving bright yellow dandelions and the purple flowers of perennials together in what looked like a small wreath. Peter's eyes flickered to Hill, Wanda, Natasha, Vision, and Mantis' laps where neat and ornate looking wreaths lay.

"What're you guys making?" Peter asked.

"Flower crowns." Natasha answered, not looking up from what she had in her lap.

"Wanna make one?" Hill asked, looking up at Peter.

"Sure." Peter smiled and accepted a fistfull of wildflowers. Hill leant down to start his, making a base out of the stronger stalks of some wheat grass and demonstrated how to weave the flowers into it with a dandelion. Peter watched intently and nodded confidently when she asked if he understood.

The boy picked up a perennial and wove it into the crown as Hill had shown him. He then began an alternating pattern of dandelions and perennials and added some buttercups he had picked himself for decoration when he had finished. He finished a second and finally a third crown in a little under an hour and thanked the women and Vision when he was done before rushing off to find Bucky and Loki, who now had hot dogs. Bucky munched on his, already half through it but Loki had only taken a bite, chewing cautiously, his face looking unsure about how he felt.

Peter tucked the crowns behind his back.

"If you want one, the cart's over there." Bucky said, beginning to root in his pocket for some money.

"No, no!" Peter said before he could pull some cash from his jeans. "No I'm cool Bucky don't worry."

"Alright suit yourself." Bucky said and removed his hand from his pocket.

"You like it?" Peter asked Loki.

Loki nodded, but his eyebrows were still furrowed together. "It's not like anything I'd ever had on Asgard." He said finally.
"Yeah earth food is weird." Peter said, laughing. "Anyways, I have something for you guys."

Bucky and Loki looked up and him and he pulled his hands out from behind his back, two crowns in one palm and one in the other. "Tada!"

Bucky and Loki both looked at him in confusion.

"They're flower crowns!" Peter said, excited with his work. "You wear 'em." He placed one on his head.

Bucky and Loki still looked slightly confused and Peter placed one lopsidedly on top of Bucky's head and the other on Loki's.

Loki's hands went up to put the crown more securely on his head and looked at Peter. "Thank you." He said.

Bucky straightened his out before calling out across the field, "Hey Stevie!" The blonde man turned around to look at him. "Am I pretty yet?"

Steve looked like he was laughing, though Peter couldn't hear it. "Yeah, Buck! You look beautiful!" He called back.

Bucky laughed, his eyes crinkling and all his teeth showing in his smile. "Thanks!" He finally hollered. "Thank you too, Pete." He said to Peter.

"No problem, Bucky. You too Loki." Peter beamed at the two men.

"I think it's time we go home." Tony said, through panted breaths, looking thoroughly worn out though followed by Clint who looked like he'd been having the time of his life. "Back away demon." Tony snapped at Clint. Hawkeye bust out laughing. "Nice crowns, boys." Though he only looked at Bucky and Peter.

Peter smiled with concern at the man before gathering the frisbee from the bench between Bucky and Loki, running over to tuck it into the play bag, and going to stand at the edge of the grass to collect the rest of the things they'd brought out with them as they left. Steve dropped the football in the bag, giving Peter a bright smile and Thor clapped his big hand heavily on Peter's shoulder as he followed the rest of their football team off the grass. Pepper put the soccer ball in the bag, tailed by Clint, Bruce, and Tony. Natasha, Gamora, Hill, Wanda, Vision, and Mantis walked onto the sidewalk next. Peter tailed the group with Loki and Bucky once again at his sides.

They walked back to the place where they'd been dropped off, getting into the waiting cars and heading home to headquarters, arriving in time for a late lunch.

Chapter End Notes

Wowie some soft superfamily filler content! Don't worry, things are going to be getting darker over the next few chapters >:

I'm not sorry.

As always, thank you all for reading and until the next chapter
Peter smiled with concern at the man before gathering the frisbee from the bench between Bucky and Loki, running over to tuck it into the play bag, and going to stand at the edge of the grass to collect the rest of the things they'd brought out with them as they left. Steve dropped the football in the bag, giving Peter a bright smile and Thor clapped his big hand heavily on Peter's shoulder as he followed the rest of their football team off the grass. Pepper put the soccer ball in the bag, tailed by Clint, Bruce, and Tony. Natasha, Gamora, Hill, Wanda, Vision, and Mantis walked onto the sidewalk next. Peter tailed the group with Loki and Bucky once again at his sides.

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---------------------------------------------

Clint was in the kitchen chopping lettuce for his sandwich, Natasha sitting on the counter behind him when Loki walked in.

"Sorry, just need to get past you." The man said with a polite smile as he squeezed past the two assassins to reach the fridge. He took a can of soda before making his leave. Clint's fist clenched around the knife in his hands as he sucked in a breath, Loki ducking into his room.

"I can't fucking believe Stark even let him into the building, let alone stay here." The archer mumbled.

"Clint, calm down." Natasha said to the man who held on tightly to his knife.

"He knows what he did to me." Clint said quietly, more so to himself than to Natasha. His knuckles were white around the handle of the kitchen knife now.

"Clint, really, it's not that big of a-"

"Not that big a deal?" The man hissed, whipping around to point the knife at her.
Natasha seized Clint's forearm and had the knife in her own hand in a heartbeat, pressing Clint back against the stove and holding the blunt side to the archer's throat.

"Point a knife to me again and next time it'll be the sharp side." She said lowly before letting the man go and putting the knife in the sink.

They were quiet for a moment, Clint seething before he spoke. "Did you see that?" He asked. "He smiled. He smiled at me like nothing ever happened."

"Clint. It has been eleven years. Let it go." Natasha said calmly.

"He put me under mind control and tried to make me kill you guys!" Clint exclaimed. "You should be just as mad about it as I am!"

"You're acting like a child. Loki has had over a decade to grow as a person. Seven years to better himself." Natasha scoffed.

The other looked at her incredulously. "A monster is always a monster." He growled.

Natasha slapped him hard across the face. "Don't you dare ever say that to me again. Eat your fucking sandwich." And with that she strode out of the kitchen and down the hall to her room, slamming the door.

Clint let out a growl that grew into a shout as he slammed his fist down on the counter. The blow resonating up his arm and making him groan in pain, anger flooding through him. He stormed back to his own room, his unconstructed sandwich and half chopped lettuce forgotten. He gathered his bow, arrows, and finger and arm guards before going down to the archery range in the gym to blow off some steam.

He was firing shot after shot after shot, each clustering around the bulls eye, imagining they were driving themselves into Loki's heart. His movements were nearly automatic as he settled into a rhythm of reach, knock, shoot. So much so that it wasn't until he was grabbing at the empty air over his shoulder that he registered he'd run out of arrows.

"Dammit." He said angrily to himself before striding forward to collect his arrows and do it all again. When he turned around he found Steve leaning against the door frame, arms crossed over his chest.

"What, here to give me a speech on forgiveness and righteousness?" Clint said as he stood back at his spot and began to shoot at the target again.

"No, actually I'm here to tell you I think you're right." Steve said as he came to stand closer. He watched Clint's consistent aim, not even amazed by it anymore. He'd known him too long.

Clint froze mid draw of his bow and slowly untightened the string to turn back to Cap.

"You what?" He asked incredulously.

"I think you're right to be angry at Loki. He did one of the most invasive things you can do to someone, and he used you against people that you love and care about. It was something only a horrible person would stoop to." Steve said.

Clint huffed out a little breath before saying, "See I knew I was ri-"

"But." Steve cut him off. "I'm a firm believer in allowing and accepting others' will to change."
"Oh not this again." Clint scoffed, moving to take the shot again.

"Clint I think that your view is clouded in this belief that Loki can't change." Steve said. "Look at Natasha. She was trained to be an assassin for decades and it wasn't until you decided to spare her life that that changed."

Clint stopped shooting and slung his bow over his shoulder then. "That's different, Steve. You know it is."

"No, Clint." Steve responded, eyes soft. "I don't think it is."

Clint crossed his arms over his chest. "And why's that?"

"Because Loki was the same way. Thor never talked to you about him because he was kind enough not to bring it up with you but with the rest of us, especially right after the Battle of Wakanda, it was nonstop stories of his misguided brother." Steve said.

"Oh really?" Clint huffed.

"Yes, really." Steve continued. "He told us of Loki's beginnings, how he never felt worthy or equal to Thor. How their father had never been a good parent. How Loki had gotten the short end of the stick in terms of love and respect. He was conditioned into a monster, trained to be one. Not necessarily directly by people like Natasha was, but by his own uncontrolled rage that no one ever tried to help him with."

Clint yielded just a little bit.

"But he also told us about how the Battle of New York wasn't entirely Loki's doing. He was jaded by the power of the tesseract and he was working with Thanos." Steve said.

Clint felt rage in his stomach flare. "He was working with Thanos?"

"Thanos used him. He manipulated Loki's tunneled vision of ruling earth, of being king." Steve added. "Thanos tortured him, he ruined him."

Clint said nothing.

"But after that, after Thor had taken him back to Asgard, they worked together to help protect Earth, and frankly a lot of the universe from dark beings that threatened it. Past then Loki had a few ups and downs but nothing major, no murdering or tyranny. I think the worst of it was pretending to be Odin and taking the throne in lieu of him while Thor was helping us against Ultron." Steve said.

"What'd he do as king on Asgard?" Clint asked.

"Built a statue of himself and turned his death into a theater tragedy." Steve answered.

"So he didn't make the Asgardians kiss his feet or anything?" Clint asked incredulously.

"Nope. Just drank wine and wore silk robes for the most part." Steve shrugged. "My point is, it seems like Loki's seriously improved from where he was, and he continued to improve all the way up to his death when he sacrificed the tesseract and himself for Thor."

Clint sighed and shook his head. "I dunno what to say."

"You don't have to say anything, Clint. You just have to be more thoughtful of how far you let your emotions go. You really upset Natasha, and from the looks of it you're upsetting yourself pretty bad
too." Steve said.

"I'm sorry." Clint said.

"Tell that to Natasha and not me." Steve responded before he walked out of the range, leaving Clint with himself.

Chapter End Notes

Will Clint forgive Loki? Can Loki be forgiven? We'll see more of this later. I like posting the filler chapters, so I'll probably continue with that.

Also I'm sorry I skipped a few again, I've been swamped with schoolwork and storms by my house knocked out a bunch of our electrical appliances and I was running around trying to get them fixed. I hope the double chapters help you guys forgive me.

As always, thanks for reading and until the next chapter,

-xoxo Denise
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Something's wrong with Peter.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: This chapter contains mentions of self harm and self hatred. Do not read if you're sensitive to such topics.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Clint sighed and shook his head. "I dunno what to say."

"You don't have to say anything, Clint. You just have to be more thoughtful of how far you let your emotions go. You really upset Natasha, and from the looks of it you're upsetting yourself pretty bad too." Steve said.

"I'm sorry." Clint said.

"Tell that to Natasha and not me." Steve responded before he walked out of the range, leaving Clint with himself.

F.R.I.D.A.Y. had ordered pizza, and it was waiting on the island of the kitchen on the common floor. Peter snagged a plate from the stack on the counter left by whoever had put the pizzas there, and grabbed almost the entirety of the meat supreme, leaving the last two pieces in the box. He then opened the fridge to pull out a root beer before walking across the open floor plan of the common room and threw himself onto the center of the couch across from the TV. He snatched up the remote from the coffee table and pressed the power button, watching the massive flat screen light up.

"Star Wars!" He called out.

"I second that." Tony responded from the kitchen.

"What's Star Wars?" Bucky asked, sitting down on the couch beside Peter.

"Oh god," Peter responded. "We're gonna start with A New Hope."

"Alright then." Bucky said. Loki sat down on Peter's other side with a single slice of pepperoni pizza, looking slightly confused.

Steve slid into the seat on Bucky's left and Peter scrolled through Tony's downloaded movies. He selected Star Wars: A New Hope. He waited for the rest of the group to get settled before pressing play. The theme song filled the room and Peter settled in to watch.
The movie finished and all of the Guardians but Quill seemed thoroughly amazed, as did Thor, Loki, Steve and Bucky.

"Are there more of these?" Steve asked Peter.

"Yeah there're nine more. This is the first movie, but the fourth movie in the series." Peter said.

"Wait, wait, what?" Bucky asked, eyebrows knitted in confusion. "How is that even possible?"

"Oh, so there're nine movies. The first three released take place in the present time of the storyline, and they're called the original trilogy, but there's a prequel trilogy that was released after the original trilogy but takes place before it." Peter clarified. "And over the past few years they made a sequel trilogy with a whole new set of characters." Peter explained, though it was followed by a yawn. "Sorry."

"You're all good." Steve smiled. "Tony has these all downloaded?" The blonde asked.

"I think so. Mr. Stark?" Peter turned to Tony.

The man nodded.

"Great. F.R.I.D.A.Y. leave those on my computer." Steve called up to the ceiling.

"Will do, Captain Rogers." The building responded.

"Thank you." Steve replied.

"You know you don't need to look up to talk to F.R.I.D.A.Y. and you don't need to thank her, right?" Tony asked.

"Force of habit." Steve shrugged.

And at that, the group broke off to do their own things for the evening. Peter snatched up the final two slices of meat pizza, to which Tony said with betrayal, "Hey, I was gonna eat that!"

"Sorry Mr. Stark, I already touched it." Peter smirked, shrugging.

"Hey I can always cut you from the 'internship'." Tony threatened.

"I'm sure you can fight both Loki and Bucky on that." Peter laughed as he walked down the hall to his room with the pizza in hand.

"You're gonna be the death of me kid!" Tony called after him.

"I'll make sure they play the Space Jam theme at your funeral then!" Peter called back and with that he ducked into his room and shut the door.

Peter scarfed down the rest of his pizza slices before he sat at his desk and opened his computer. He realized the computer that was top of the line when he'd left was now five years old, and when it didn't load up he realized it was also probably broken from not being used. He sighed and walked back out of his room, finding Tony stirring a cup of coffee in the kitchen.

"If Pepper asks, this is hot cocoa and you saw me make it. She doesn't like me having caffeine past noon." The man said, not looking up from the coffee as Peter walked in.

"Definitely." Peter responded.
Tony turned around then, still stirring his drink. "Whatcha need, Pete?"

"My computer's broken. And assumingly, so's my phone." Peter said.

"So you want a new one?" Tony asked and the boy nodded. "Not after taking my pizza." The billionaire responded.

"Wait are you- are you kidding or?" Peter asked.

"Of course I'm kidding. I'll have Happy go get you what you need tomorrow morning." Tony responded. "You don't need something right now, do you?" He added after.

"Nah, but I don't really have anything to do at the moment." Peter shrugged.

"We have a pretty nice library, if you'd wanna go check it out. I think Loki's down there right now." Tony said.

"Oh okay, thanks." Peter said.

"Sure thing kid, take the elevator down a floor," Tony gestured toward the silver doors. "Go straight and take a right at the end of the hallway. Walk down a bit more till you hit the double doors."

Peter followed Tony's directions, stepping into the seemingly waiting elevator and walked to the end of the hall it dropped him on, hooking a right and stopping down the new corridor at a set of double mahogany doors. Peter pulled one of them open and headed inside. The massive room had a color scheme of muddy red, deep brown, and caramel colors in various shades and the thirty foot ceilings allowed for two tiers of indoor balconies lined with bookshelves. Peter stared in front of him at two sets of rowed shelves on his right and left with an open space between them, featuring plush leather chairs and sturdy wooden tables in a dark stain as well as floor to ceiling windows along the back wall beneath the first balcony, letting in the light from the afternoon sun to bathe the room in light. The place was perfect for not only curling up with a good book, but also relaxation and research.

Peter's eyes flicked to Loki who was sitting in one of the leather chairs, his long legs crossed and propped on a coffee table in front of him, a stack of books by his foot. He was looking down at a thick book in his lap and seemed to not notice Peter. The boy walked towards the shelves on his right.

Peter browsed the shelves for a title that would peak his interest, and his eyes fell on the spine of a worn paperback copy of Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone. He could tell it was probably either Tony or Pepper's old copy, and he pulled the book from the shelf. The boy had never read the series, always having intended to but never coming around to it. He walked out from behind the shelf and seemed to not notice Peter. The boy walked towards the shelves on his right.

He settled into his chair and pulled the paperback open, gazing down at the faded pages as he settled in for the next few hours. He read about halfway through in the time it took for F.R.I.D.A.Y. to announce to them that dinner was ready. Loki tucked a sticky note in his book and offered one to Peter who did the same, the both of them setting their books down on the coffee table. The taller man stood, straightening his clothes, and headed towards the door, waiting briefly for Peter to follow. The boy hurried after him and they walked down to the elevator that took them to the dining hall.
Peter and Loki found the team sitting at the long table, all with plates in front of them, waiting for the two to sit down before they began eating. Peter took his usual spot between Bucky and Loki, who sat down before him. As soon as the teen slid into his seat, Clint groaned, "I'm starving." Before proceeding to heap meatloaf onto his plate. Peter and Steve took as least twice that much, the White Wolf picking on Steve for how much he ate.

They all talked about what they'd done at the park, Peter talking about how he'd made flower crowns and played frisbee, Bucky about how he'd shown Loki the 'wonders' of New York cart food, Tony about how he'd gotten his butt kicked in soccer by Clint, who recalled how funny the look on Stark's face was, and Steve proudly announced he'd led his football team to victory though Sam insisted it was a tie. No one believed him.

"So you said you brought Loki to a food cart?" Steve asked Bucky after Sam had finished his tangent.

"Yep. I took him for some good ol' fashioned hot dogs." Bucky answered.

"How were they?" Steve turned to Loki then. Loki looked slightly surprised the Star Spangled Man was talking to him, considering how few of the group actually seemed to trust him. Even after the soul realm experience.

"I'd say Midgard has a...distinct taste." Loki began. "It's nothing like Asgardian food, though just as tasty and welcoming. From my experiences, your planet just may be onto something with that...what was it we had today? The cheese and tomato on the bread?" He asked.

"Pizza?" Peter supplied.

"Yes, that. That was positively divine." Loki said. "I've thoroughly enjoyed all of the multitude of things you've shown me thus far, however. I would definitely recommend all of it to a friend from...out of town, if presented with the opportunity."

"Well I'm happy you're settling in nicely here. Of course, none of us would pressure you to stay if you wanted to leave, but I wouldn't mind having you for as long as you'd like to stick around." Steve said, flashing that straight toothed smile at him.

Peter could tell Steve was trying to make Loki feel welcome. Loki turned to Peter briefly, and he smiled at the man and nodded. It seemed to calm Loki's anxiety about whether or not it was a trap. Steve was always honest, it was incredibly easy to tell when he wasn't, so Peter was sure Steve genuinely saw the best in Loki even after all the times they'd had any form of dispute.

Peter was glad Steve of all people was making the effort. Loki had never known anything but betrayal and hatred, whether that be from outside people or from himself. Even though the majority of the time, Loki was reading too much into things and his view of the world was flawed, he genuinely felt as though he wasn't worth enough. He always tried his best to be enough at least for himself, and that the unwritten leader of the Avengers was now promising his trust? Well, that must have spoken volumes. Peter zoned out for a moment, his eyelids growing heavy.

"-understand that you may not trust me, or any of the rest of us, but you always have Peter." Peter's ears perked up at Steve's mention of his name. "Isn't that right Peter?"

"Huh? Oh yeah. Yeah I'm always here. Sorry, I was just thinking." He lied. He didn't usually feel this tired so early.

"What about?" Loki asked, looking warily at the boy.
"I'll explain later. Nothing bad." Peter assured him.

Loki nodded and turned back to Steve.

"Thank you, Captain Rogers. I didn't expect you to trust me, especially not after all the things I've done in the past. And I don't expect the rest of you to start trusting me like he has," Loki addressed the rest of the group then. "But you have my word when I tell you I'm trying to make an effort to get better. I'd like to be able to not only prove the stigma against me wrong, but to become living proof that sometimes even the worst people can change."

Peter looked at Loki and stood from his seat, his empty plate in front of him abandoned, and he made a gesture for Loki to stand as well. The man stood cautiously, unsure of why Peter wanted him on his feet, but Peter just leaned in and wrapped his arms around the god's chest. Loki seemed shocked at first, holding his hands in the air a bit above Peter's body like he was afraid he'd hurt the teenager if he touched him, but he gently laid his hands down on the boy's back and softly squeezed his body in return. Peter finally pulled away and turned back to the group, his eyes flitting to meet every person at the table's as he spoke. His gaze fell on Tony's and Clint's for the longest.

"I know Loki has done some...without better way of putting it, awful things, but I think we all have. Whether that be physically harming others or yourselves..." Peter trailed off for a second, rubbing his arm. He briefly caught Bucky's eyes growing concerned and flicking to Steve's but he continued, hoping he could pick his speech back up. "Or emotionally hurting people, we've all done something we regret. I've spent a lot of time with Loki and he's never done anything but good to protect me or others since I've met him. He may have a short fuse and a bad rap, but he's trying his best, and I appreciate him and his actions very much."

Peter turned to smile at Loki who looked like he was almost on the verge of tears.

"Peter..." Loki began but he cut himself off as his voice began to break, instead pulling Peter back into a tight hug, cradling the boy to his body.

The team began clapping, "awwing" and cheering for Loki. Peter tuned it out in favor of concentrating on Loki's uneven breaths.

Peter returned the hug, rubbing his hands over Loki's back, feeling his breath hitch slightly as he struggled to contain his tears. The younger man locked eyes briefly with Thor, who smiled sadly at him. Thor knew that it meant a lot to Loki to hear something so loving from someone outside of himself, and that the younger sibling had always felt as though Thor was required to love him, and for Peter to openly show affection to the man was like offering a starving child a buffet.

Peter loved Loki. He'd come to see him as family, and he valued him very much. He knew he would be crushed if anything happened to him and vice versa. He just hoped it never came to that.

When Loki finally let him go, Peter grinned up at him, and smiled sadly down at the boy in return.

"I trust Peter's judgement." Bucky began. "And I've spent enough time with Loki that I can validate Peter's claims. And if you guys can come to trust me, you can come to trust Loki too."

Loki smiled softly at Bucky then, who gave a small quirk of his lips in return before Loki and Peter sat back down.

"Now who wants dessert?" Tony said, giving a proud grin at Peter.

Banana splits were served for dessert and Loki was hesitant to take one at first but, due to Peter's insistence, finally caved.
"So how is it?" Bucky asked Loki when he took his first bite of chocolate drizzled vanilla ice cream plus banana and peanuts.

Loki's brows furrowed for a second. "This is possibly the sweetest thing I've ever tasted..." He started. "But I like it. Is there more?"

"However much you want, bud." Tony responded, shooting a soft look at Loki.

Peter hadn't paid any attention to the conversation before that last comment, having zoned out again, almost dropping his spoonful of melting ice cream into his lap. He was just getting drowsier and drowsier.

Bucky was staring, and Peter shook his head, flashing a smile in hopes to calm Bucky's worries. The man looked away when Loki spoke again.

"Thank you, Mr. Stark." Loki said, knowing that was probably the closest to an approval he'd get from the Billionaire.

"Tony." The man corrected.

"Thank you, Tony." Loki restated before smiling smally and returning to his ice cream. Peter was immensely happy that this had gone well and he hoped that Loki could find a good quality of life here at the Avengers headquarters. Good enough to stay with them a while.

Dinner had finished and Loki had plowed through three banana splits, the most food Peter had ever watched him consume at once. The god brushed it off as 'being a bit hungry' and Peter decided not to push, even though he knew that wasn't all it was.

Peter and Loki retired to the library once the group had said goodnight to return to their books. Loki seemed as though he genuinely wanted to read, but Peter was beginning to worry a bit about the man.

"Hey Loki?" Peter spoke up just as the man leaned toward the table for his book once he sat down in his chair.

"Yes, Peter?" He responded, halting mid reach for his book.

"What's up?" The teen asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Well I mean. You ate a bunch of ice cream tonight, and I don't think I've ever seen you eat that much at once so I figured maybe something's up."

"Oh..." Loki seemed a bit stunned. "I don't know what to say. I mean, my own feelings, they make sense in my mind but I fear if I try to put them into words it won't come out sensibly."

"You can try." Peter smiled gently.

Loki sighed before seeming thoughtful for a moment. "I've been trying not to draw attention to myself. I don't want to be a nuisance. There're things about me that...that you don't know. That nobody but Heimdall and Thor know, and I'm not sure I'm ready to change that. But I feel this- this need to try and speak up." The god's eyebrows were furrowed and he looked troubled.

"Do you wanna tell me?" Peter asked carefully.
"I don't know," Loki began. "I think so."

"I'll listen to whatever you need to tell me." Peter responded.

"I trust you, Peter, very much. And I hope that this does not change how you see me." Loki said.

"Nothing you say could change that, Loki." Peter responded. "You're like the big brother I never had."

"Thank you." Loki smiled softly. "I um- I'm not as I seem. I'm not a true god, really. I'm part Jotun. I'm a frost giant of the planet Jotunheim. You mentioned you didn't know where that was, not many people do, but the Jotuns were once the natural enemies of Asgard. They sought to perish the people of the kingdom and were greatly feared by the inhabitants. I wasn't told this until long after Odin, my father, had adopted me. He adopted me as a peace offering, to mend the relationship with the Jotuns and keep them from invading Asgard. I'd been lied to my entire life."

Peter listened closely to what Loki said.

"I realized I was the very monster I'd been conditioned to hate. I was the fuel of nightmares. I always felt unworthy in comparison to Thor, but never did I loathe myself more than I did once I knew the truth. I wanted to make my father proud. I'd tried for years. But I finally knew why I never seemed to quite reach that point. I went into a rampage. I tried to kill my father, my brother. I just want to redeem myself from that, and I never seem to be able to." The man finished.

"Loki," Peter said. "You've more than redeemed yourself. You're a strong, brilliant man. You're an amazing fighter, and I look up to you so much. You're exactly what you keep saying you want to be. You've made me proud, even if you couldn't with Odin. And the same goes for Bucky and Steve and Thor. We all care about you, Loki and you belong here. With the team. You deserve nothing less."

Loki's eyes, that had begun to water when Peter had started talking, were now swimming with tears that were falling freely. His pale face grew red at his cheeks and the tip of his nose, his blue eyes puffy. Peter didn't know what else to say, so instead he stood from his seat and crossed to Loki, bending down to wrap his arms around the Jotun's shoulders.

"I love you, Loki." Peter said softly.

"I love you too, Peter." Loki replied, hugging Peter back.

"You're the first person here I've ever told I loved." Peter spoke out loud.

"Well I know for a fact you love a lot more of the people here but me. I suggest you tell them soon, though now I have something to hold over Sergeant Barnes' head." Loki smirked.

Peter laughed then, grateful he had people like Loki, like Bucky and Tony. And he was beginning to feel like he had a family here.

"Hey Loki?" Peter asked for the second time that night.

"Yes, Peter?" Loki answered once again.

"Are you going to stay here, on Earth?"

"I'd like to. You're here, Thor's here. Asgard is gone, long since destroyed, and I have no desire to go elsewhere, so I assume here would be the best place for me." Loki smiled.
Peter smiled back.

"Now it's my turn to ask you a question. I know Barnes was wondering the same thing." Loki said.

Peter looked at the man, waiting to see what he said as he sat down on the chair beside Loki.

"When you gave your speech, about me becoming someone better, you looked nervous when you mentioned physically hurting yourself." Loki said.

"Oh." Peter's face fell.

"You don't have to tell me," Loki retreated quickly. "But I worry for you, Peter, and I highly suggest you tell either me, Barnes, or Tony about it."

"I don't. It's not in the way you'd think, y'know? I considered cutting. I wanted to, but I didn't have the means and so I started throwing myself into other things. I fight and train a lot, especially back in the soul realm. It clears my head but I've fractured knuckles and ribs and things and told myself I deserved it. And part of me really believes I do. I want to think I don't, but I always have that little voice in the back of my head." Peter sighed out. "That if I had just tried a little harder, no one would've had to die. No one would've gotten hurt, it would've all been okay."

"Peter," Loki began. "You don't deserve any sort of punishment you try to give yourself. You've done nothing wrong, and you can't change things that're out of your reach. You are one of the purest souls I have ever met, but your self hatred deters me. It reminds me of, well, me."

Peter sighed, burying his face in his hands. "I don't know how to feel anymore. I've been having these nightmares and I just. I don't feel right after coming back." His voice was muffled by his palms.

Loki rubbed his hand down the boy's back. "None of us do. It's like that, dying and returning. It's hard." The boy wanted to lean into the touch and let it lull him to sleep but he shook himself out of it when he realized he should say something back to the man. Jeez, what was up with him today?

Peter took a shaky breath. "I don't know what to do Loki. I don't want to tell Tony because I know he'll only worry and I don't want to tell Bucky because he'll worry too, but he'll try to hide it and somehow that's even worse." Peter groaned.

"You'll get through this, Peter. I'm right here with you, and Bucky and Tony are as well. Never doubt that. You can talk to any one of us and we'll help you, but we can't help you if you don't speak up." Loki responded.

They sat like that for a while, in silence, Peter with his face in his hands nearly falling asleep, though he wouldn't admit it, and Loki rubbing his back. Finally they decided it would be best for the both of them to try and get some sleep, and Peter was incredibly grateful for the proposition. The older man suggested a hot bath to Peter, saying it always helped to soothe him, and even offered to let Peter stay the night in his room, saying he would sleep on the floor and the younger could have the bed. Peter gratefully declined, settling for a bath and a good night's rest.

He should've known better than to hope for that.

After making it back to his room, Peter undressed and slipped into the bath. The heat enveloped his body, easing his muscles and creaking joints. He hadn't felt truly relaxed since before he died. He sat in the bath, unwinding, and drifted off to sleep without even realizing he had.
Poor Peter isn't feeling well in more ways than one, and I'm sorry so say it only gets worse from here but you'll have to wait to see what I mean.

As always, thank you all for reading and until the next chapter

-xoxo Denise
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Peter falls very ill.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: This chapter contains mentions of self harm, self hatred, PTSD, and drug overdosage as well as mildly crude language. Do not read if you are sensitive to such topics.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They sat like that for a while, in silence, Peter with his face in his hands nearly falling asleep, though he wouldn’t admit it, and Loki rubbing his back. Finally they decided it would be best for the both of them to try and get some sleep, and Peter was incredibly grateful for the proposition. The older man suggested a hot bath to Peter, saying it always helped to soothe him, and even offered to let Peter stay the night in his room, saying he would sleep on the floor and the younger could have the bed. Peter gratefully declined, settling for a bath and a good night’s rest.

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Silence, but not the good kind.

There was no noise, no trees or grass. No ceiling.

Just white.

Pure white. Like staring into a bright light without the swimming colors from the burn to your retinas.

Peter blinked, trying to clear his vision, but when he opened his eyes everything was still the same.

He couldn’t feel anything beneath his body. There was no bed or ground it just seemed as though he was suspended mid air.

There was a burning in his chest and Peter breathed in.

“I can’t breathe.” Peter thought. “Oh my god I can’t breathe.”

His throat was expanding and contracting like he was breathing, he was heaving and panting and
gasping for air but oxygen never seemed to reach his lungs. The edges of his vision were going black and all he could see in the pinpricks left was the blinding white of the void he was in. He didn’t see anything or anyone around him. He had no idea where he was, he was completely alone.

And he could not breathe.

Peter gulped for air, feeling his lungs fill but not with the gas he so desperately needed. His chest felt heavy and his throat felt tight and thick. His shaking hands came up to his gaping mouth, pulling away to find sticky red blood on his fingertips. He pulled his hands back further, his mind panicking as he struggled to breathe. He felt his consciousness fading, he could feel the life draining from him.

His mouth moved to call out for Bucky, for Loki and Tony but no sound ever came out. It was completely and utterly silent save for the deafening sound of his blood rushing in his ears. Not even a rasp fell from his lips.

Peter’s blinded eyes began to water as the tightness in his throat increased and he felt the blood begin to dribble down his chin then, running to his neck, moving as though he was standing but his body felt like he was laying down. The pain was unbearable, like fire in his chest and throat. It felt like he was dying. Only, he couldn’t tell if it was from the fire or the lack of oxygen.

And on a split second decision, he decided to just let go.

He counted.

One.

Two.

Three-

“Peter!” Someone was yelling. “Peter! Peter wake up!” There were tears in the person’s voice.

Peter could feel rough hands on his skin and he lurched forward, coughing and hacking up water.

“Bucky...” He said brokenly, tears falling down his cheeks.

“I’m right here kid. I’m here. I swear to god I’m right here. Don’t you dare let go on me Peter.” Bucky was sobbing, cradling Peter’s body to his.

Peter was shuddering and he realized half of his naked body was still under the now frigid water.

“The blood…” Peter murmured.

Bucky seemed to panic even more then. “What blood? What blood, Peter?”

“Am I still bleeding?” Peter asked, his words slurring.

Bucky checked his body for wounds. “There’s nothing here Peter what are you talking about? You’re so bruised, what did you even do to yourself?” Bucky was in a state of hysteria now.

“From my mouth.” Peter murmured. “The blood from my mouth.”

“There’s nothing fucking here!” Bucky was sobbing. “What’s going on, Pete, you gotta tell me!” Bucky was hastily dragging Peter out of the tub and out into the bedroom where he laid his body on his bed and checked him again for wounds. “There’s noth- there’s nothing here!” Bucky was choking on his words now as he swaddled Peter in his bed sheets.
Peter mumbled something incoherent then and Bucky shook his shoulders. “Don’t you go to sleep kid. You gotta stay awake for me.”

Just then the door came busting open, bearing Tony and Bruce who was carrying a bag of medical supplies followed by a very scared looking Loki.

“I told him to take a bath before he slept.” Loki was rambling. “I told him to do it and that it would calm him down oh my god I didn’t think-” His hands went to his hair. “I didn’t think he was sick. I-” His eyes were teary now.

“No one blames you, Loki, calm down please. I can’t afford to panic here.” Tony was rushing the words out as fast as he could as he pressed his fingers to Peter’s throat. “His pulse is barely there, Jesus Bruce what’s going on?”

Bruce was busying himself pressing his ear to Peter’s chest, listening to the rattle of his labored breathing. “You said he seemed healthy in the library?” Bruce asked, not turning to Loki.

“He was. He w-was perfe-ectly fine, I-” Loki was stumbling over his words, something no one had ever seen the silvertongue do.

“I think he took something, Tony. We need to get him downstairs to the lab now before he goes into cardiac arrest.” Bruce said urgently. “Come on, help me lift him.”

Bucky swatted everyone else’s hands out of the way. “No!” He barked. “Let me do it!”

Everyone backed away, allowing the man to scoop the blanketed boy into his arms and rush towards the elevator. By then, the rest of the team were beginning to poke their heads out of their rooms, in varying stages of shock. Steve rushed out of his room as Bucky passed, the White Wolf’s puffy red and tear stained face catching his attention. He joined the rushing group, following them as they headed up to Bruce’s lab in the elevator.

When the doors opened, Bucky burst into the room, hastily following Bruce’s directions to lay him down on a table and expose one of his arms so he could take a blood sample. Tony was checking the dilation of Peter’s pupils and asking Bucky to describe how the boy was acting when he found him.

Based on the questions, Bruce was able to narrow down the drug search and determined Peter had taken an extremely high dosage of a Benzodiazepine, specifically a manipulated type of Alprazolam meant to be tasteless before entering the bath, where he fell asleep and nearly drowned. His breathing continued as shallow due to respiratory distress the drug had caused on its own, even after he had coughed up the water.

Bucky was screaming, asking where he had gotten it. No one in the headquarters took it, but Peter was still suffering from what looked like an overdose. The only way they could save him was to pump his stomach of whatever drugs his body hadn’t metabolized yet, fix him with a breathing tube and an IV for fluid and hope for the best.

Loki was wringing his hands, pacing the hallway as Bucky had curled against the wall and began to sob into his knees, Steve stroking his shoulders after Tony and Bruce had ushered them out while they treated Peter.

Bruce finally opened the door to the room, saying they could see Peter now.

The teen's normally rosy, tanned skin was now a sickly beige color. His hair was plastered to his forehead with sweat and residual water from the bath and a tube ran into his mouth and down his windpipe to assist his breathing. His body was severely bruised around his knuckles, his wrists and
forearms, and his ribs, and Loki made the connection.

“He told me he was pushing himself too hard when he trained to punish himself.” Loki murmured.

Steve, Tony, Bruce, and Bucky all looked up in shock.

“He said he deserved to get hurt.” Loki said flatly. His energy was completely drained. He wasn’t used to caring this much when he saw someone get hurt. “He never deserved this. He said he wasn’t feeling right but I don’t think he was taking things. He didn’t seem like the type.”

“Check his memories.” Bucky said insistently. “I know you can do it, you gotta see what happened to him.” His eyes showed a mixture of concern and hysteria that scared Loki.

Loki seemed slightly reluctant. If he was being completely honest with himself, he was scared of what he would see. He didn’t want to watch Peter down a handful of medication to cope with his pain. But if someone had done this to him, they needed to know.

Loki took in a shaky breath before asking, “What’s the time window when he could’ve ingested the drugs in order to have this be the beginning of his reaction?”

“The last one to twenty four hours.” Bruce answered. And with that, Loki pressed his palm to Peter’s forehead.

Loki flicked through Peter’s memories, watching the boy’s past day flash through his mind. He watched once, then twice, then three times and he saw nothing. He went further back. A day, then two days and he still found nothing. Loki pulled his hand away.

“There’s nothing there. I checked everything three times and there’s absolutely nothing there.” Loki said.

Bruce looked troubled.

“Because he wasn’t the one who took them, and he never came into contact with the person who gave them to him.” Bucky supplied. “He was roofied.”

A look of realization struck all the rest of the men’s faces, including Steve who had been doing nothing but listening carefully, worried for the health of the youngest Avenger.

“Does this place have security cameras? Peter has only eaten things that were served here for the past two days, and everything he ate we ate too. So that means someone probably targeted his food specifically.” Bucky said.

Tony nodded and turned to what looked like a normal metal workbench, but when he flicked his hands a hologram screen was projected in front of him, and he entered a bunch of codes and passwords before accessing the security data. They watched the footage from the main kitchen from the past twenty four hours and came up with absolutely nothing, just cooks and servers coming and going and milling about.

“Check the common floor kitchen.” Bucky demanded, leaning over the screen.

Tony flicked through the various cameras until they found the one from the kitchen. He nudged Tony out of the way and fast forwarded the footage to when the pizza was dropped off. He watched from the time the boxes got set down to the time they were empty and didn’t see anything at first but a blip that was barely there long enough to catch his eye. He went back to a bit before that spot. There it was, the blip again. He rewinded the clip again, this time watching the timestamp running in
the top corner. And there it was, the evidence he needed. He rewound the clip again and said, “Watch the time stamp.”

He pressed play, and they watched the video again.


He rewound the clip a final time and pressed play, this time pointing to the blip that had originally caught his eye. Just as the clip picked back up after it had been cut out, there was a foot. A single foot in the frame that disappeared just as quickly as it had come, but it was there. “But evidently not very well.”

The person the foot belonged to had been heading towards the right elevator so Bucky checked the footage for that one. The tape had been doctored there too, but just their luck, it was edited just as poorly. This time, they got a whole leg. Bucky memorized the sneaker and jeans the person was wearing.

He then flipped to the camera footage for the floor the person had got off on. It was the first floor, which was always teeming with workers. The culprit had suspected they’d be lost in the crowd, and they would have been if they hadn’t so poorly cropped the security footage.

Bucky played the footage of the next five minutes on repeat four times before he found the person. They were a tall, tanned, young man wearing a hoodie and jeans with Nike sneakers.

Meanwhile, Tony was blaming himself. “He ate that whole pizza by himself. He saved me by eating that whole damn pizza by himself.”

Bucky cleared his throat and everyone turned their attention back to him. “Him.” he pointed to the person on the screen, and Tony took his place at the computer again to get the guy’s face and run it against facial recognition.

As the scan searched the federal databases for a match in facebook posts, driver’s license pictures, IDs, Bruce said, “So if this guy came in here and only put the drug on one of the pizzas, it means this probably wasn’t a targeted crime. Chances are if he’d had the time, he would’ve drugged all of them. Regardless, he probably never expected any of us to eat a whole pie by ourselves and he most likely didn’t intend on the reactions being this severe. This was a warning.”

“I’m gonna kill that bastard, I swear it.” Bucky seethed.

“Woah, Buck, calm down a second. What if this runs deeper than just that one guy?” Steve said, and it was obvious he was just as concerned, though he felt he had to be strong for Bucky and him both.

“Well then I elect we figure out what this man was doing, and then we kill him.” Loki said, mindlessly staring at his fingernails. His prickly facade resuming as he tried to hide his emotion.

As Bruce continued to try and talk Bucky and Loki out of murder, Tony zoned out for a moment, turning to look at Peter laying in the hospital bed behind them. The man sighed but turned around when he felt a hand lay heavy on his shoulder, finding Steve.

“We’re gonna find the guy that did this to him, Tony. I promise.” The blonde said. Tony just nodded in response.

“What?” They heard Bruce call from where the scan was running.

“What’s what?” Tony responded.
“We didn’t find a match. This scanner checks every database in the country but S.H.I.E.L.D’s, any picture ever posted or taken and we didn’t get a single match.” Bruce said in disbelief. “This guy is completely off the grid.” He was rapidly typing again.

“You mean to tell me this, this guy doesn’t have a driver’s license, no ID, no passport, criminal record, never shown up in the back of anyone’s selfie?” Tony asked.

“It’s like he doesn’t even exist.” Bruce shook his head, not turning away from the screen.

“How is that even possible?” Bucky groaned, scrubbing his hands over his face and pushing them into his hair.

“I have to reevaluate the algorithm. There must be something wrong with it, I mean it’s literally not possible this guy hasn’t shown up anywhere, and based on how poorly he cropped himself out it means he probably didn’t think to wipe himself from at least one place on frickin earth.” The man mumbled in frustration before hurrying to find something.

While they waited, Bucky stalked over to Peter’s bed and pulled a chair up to the side of it. He leaned forward, resting his arms on the bed and burying his face in his elbows. He listened to the sounds of Tony and Bruce working and tried his best to calm down. He heard another chair pull up beside him, and then a third on the other side of the bed. He didn’t look up.

A warm hand rested between his shoulders, rubbing circles. He immediately recognized the touch as Steve’s. Before the war, Steve’s hands were always cold. He was so small and he was sick all the time and his hands were like ice. After he’d been injected with the serum, however, his hands were warm and welcoming. He’d become familiar with it after the many times Steve had comforted him when he had nightmares.

“He’s gonna be fine. The kid’s tough. I know he’ll get through this.” Steve said.

Bucky didn’t respond, he just kept his face in his elbows and tried his best to mask his sobs.

Chapter End Notes

I don’t really have notes for this chapter, I’m exhausted and I kind of just want to get this chapter up for my lovelies. So as always, thank you all for reading and until the next chapter.

-xoxo Denise
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Clint picks a fight with Loki but it doesn't end as he expected.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: This chapter contains graphic depictions of violence. Do not read if you are sensitive to such topics.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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---------------------------------------------

Clint was watching TV when he found out what had happened.

The archer was sitting on the couch, legs propped up on the coffee table as his thumb scrolled through the channels for the third time, searching for something to watch even though he was lost in his own thoughts. Natasha hadn't talked to him for four days now, having ignored him completely even through the soccer scrimmage at Central Park.

He was snapped out of his reverie when the elevator doors slid open behind him. He whipped around to see a thin, lined faced Loki, his eyes sunken with deep circles beneath them and his hair messy from nervously running his hands, both of which he was fretfully wringing, through it. Clint noted through the anger that it was odd seeing Loki so...seemingly vulnerable.

He was about to turn back around when Steve followed the god out of the elevator, his hair also dirty from not showering, his eyes tired and drooping, circled by purple bags. His face was creased with worry and exhaustion as he trudged towards the hallway of the team's rooms after Loki. Clint then realized he hadn't seen either man, as well as Peter, Bucky, Tony, and Bruce for a few days now.

"Hey, Steve, wait!" He called and the man stopped in his tracks to turn and look at Clint.

"Yeah?" He asked tiredly.

"Where've you guys been?" The archer asked.
"Tony didn't tell you? You didn't see?" Steve glanced at him with knitted brows.

"No, see what?" Clint looked at Steve in confusion.

"Peter. He's sick." Steve said sadly.

"What?" Clint asked incredulously. "How is it that I got left out of the loop?"

"The day we went to Central Park, someone, we don't know who, broke into the tower and drugged one of the pizzas. Coincidentally, it was the one Peter ate the entirety of. He's- he's in a coma." Steve replied with a very tired voice.

"Oh my god..." Clint felt worry and grief wash over him. He thought of his own children then, thought of how it would feel for them to be the ones in Peter's place. "Do the other's know?" he asked.

"A handful, I think. A few must've seen us rush past with Peter that night. I don't know if they know how bad it is." Steve answered.

Clint sighed. "I just- I don't know what to say. What're we gonna do?"

"I don't know." Steve said defeatedly.

Clint watched as the blonde scrubbed his hands over his face and up into his hair before turning and heading to his room.

The archer sat on the couch, hands in his lap, frozen in shock as the TV played forgotten in the background. It was a freak chance that Peter picked that pizza, that he ate it all. Things wouldn't be like this if he'd even chosen to eat half of a different pizza instead. A freak chance that someone else hadn't gotten to it first.

He came to see Peter almost like a nephew, seeing as Tony was pretty close to his dad. He thought everyone had come to see him as the baby for the most part. The thing about being an Avenger was that the entire team was like one giant, dysfunctional family. If someone messed with one, they messed with them all. They've all grown together, and to mutually love Peter as part of it.

He ran his hand through his hair before picking up the remote and turning off the TV. The archer stood from the couch in favor of walking down the hallway that Steve had previously gone down. He passed each of the team's rooms, stopping in front of Natasha's door.

He thought for a moment. If he didn't know, that meant Natasha probably wasn't told either unless she'd seen it. Even if she had she might not know Peter never came back out. His hand hovered over the wood before he threw caution to the wind and knocked.

"Go away, Clint." Natasha said. Of course she recognized his footsteps.

"Nat, please, it's important." Clint begged.

"Important like your petty grudges?" Natasha responded.

"No." Clint sighed. "Important like life or death important."

The door opened, revealing the blonde woman in a hoodie and sweats. "What is it?" She asked, annoyed.

"Peter's in a coma." Clint said.
The woman's annoyance drained from her face, instead replaced by a look of shock and sadness. "What happened." She said hardly once her mind had worked through the emotions.

"Someone broke into the tower, he was drugged." Clint answered.

"Jesus." The woman said and she stepped aside to let Clint in.

The archer settled in the chair by Natasha's desk, watching as she sat criss cross on her bed facing him.

"Who told you?" She asked.

"Steve." Clint said. "He only told me when I asked. He apparently hasn't left Bruce's lab in the past four days."

"I knew something was off." The woman cursed herself.

"Hey, it's not your fault. There's no way you could've even stopped it." Clint said hurriedly.

"If I had just been more aware of my surroundings." Natasha didn't stop her berations.

Clint sat forward and touched a hand to her knee. "Nat, Peter wouldn't want you to blame yourself."

The woman was quiet but she didn't look like she felt any better.

"I'm sorry." Clint said. "For everything. For snapping at you, for overreacting. For all of it."

"You should be telling that to Loki." Natasha said softly, averting her eyes.

Clint said nothing.

"You can't keep this up forever." Natasha said.

"I'm still angry, Nat." Clint said quietly. "You don't get what it was like, having him in my head. I don't even remember most of it, but the parts I do remember are bad enough I still have nightmares."

"Clint, you'll never get past this if you don't find peace with Loki." Natasha said. "Anger isn't going to get you anywhere."

Clint shook his head and with that the two fell into silence. He found himself drifting out of Natasha's room around an hour and a half later, the woman having leaned back on her bed and fallen asleep and Clint getting lost in thought in the chair beside her desk. He shut the door carefully behind him and turning to head to his room. He took a step into the hallway, glancing down at his wringing hands when he smacked right into something tall.

"Hey what the he-" Clint looked up to find Loki looking back down at him, his eyes still dark circled but his hair damp and curled.

"Oh, I'm so terribly sorry." The god said, his face apologetic as his hands laid on Clint's shoulders from trying to catch him.

Clint didn't say anything back, just felt anger surging in his stomach as he looked up at the face of the man who had stolen control of his body all those years ago.

"Are you okay?" Loki asked, genuine concern in his voice.
"Do you remember me?" Clint said through gritted teeth.

"Well I know you're Clint Barton, why, have we met before?" Loki asked, confusion written on his face.

Clint took a step back, his fists clenching and unclenching at his sides as he watched Loki's worry grow on his face. "You don't remember me." Clint growled.

"No, I'm so sorry, I don't know you from anywhere but here Clint." Loki said.

And with that last comment Clint threw a hard punch to the god's face.

Loki grunted as his head snapped back and his brows set on his face. "Clint I'm not going to fight you. I don't want to hurt you but I will if you don't stop."

Clint threw another punch which Loki dodged easily.

The archer made a hit that landed on Loki's jaw, hard enough to knock the man over. Clint put a knee to Loki's chest and pressed down to keep the trickster on the ground while he whaled on his face.

"That's for manipulating me." Clint punctuated each word with a punch. He barely processed the look of recognition on Loki's face before he hit the man again.

He began another round of punches, this time to the words, "And that's for New York."

He recognized the god's face bloodying beneath him, his eye beginning to swell with his cut cheek beneath it and his nose bleeding above his split lip. Clint took a fraction of a second to breathe, huffing heavy pants, but Loki used that moment to his advantage. Grabbing the knee Clint had on his chest, Loki pushed outward, using the momentum of Clint moving with his thigh to flip them over and press his own knee to Clint's chest instead.

The god leaned down to press his forearm against Clint's struggling shoulders to keep them from bucking off the ground and shifted his leg so his entire shin was putting weight against the archer's torso and keeping him down.

"Clint, I don't remember much about the New York attack. I assure you, it wasn't my conscious decision. I was nearly just as under the influence of the tesseract as you were, and I regret all that I remember every day that passes. I know you don't trust me but you need to understand." Loki panted.

Clint snarled beneath him, his arms gripping at Loki's unbudging limbs.

"Clint, please." Loki begged.

The archer just sneered at him in anger.

In a moment of desperation, Loki pressed his palm to Clint's forehead. "Feel my pain." He said as he pushed his memories into the Avenger's mind.

Immediately the archer stilled, his previously thrashing body going completely limp and the anger on his face melting into a wide eyed expression.

Chapter End Notes
AHHH I SKIPPED SO MANY DAYS I'M SO SORRY I'VE HAD SO MUCH HOMEWORK BUT HERE COMES A TRIPLE CHAPTER SPECIAL I'M SORRY I LOVE YOU GUYS

THANK YOU ALL FOR READING AND UNTIL THE NEXT CHAPTER

-xoxo Denise
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The bifrost, the very bridge Loki had planned to use to destroy Jotunheim, to pettily prove his worth to Odin, to prove his equality to Thor, destroyed by the thunder god.

Loki's arm was hurting, a single hand wrapped around the staff of the allfather, the only thing keeping him from plummeting into the endless abyss.

"I could've done it, Father! I could've done it! For you! For all of us." Loki said, looking up at his father with teary eyes.

"No Loki." Odin replied.

That's it, isn't it?, Loki thought. All this to prove his power and Odin would still never believe he was truly worth the throne. With pain and anger swimming through his mind, the trickster let go.

"No Loki!" Thor's voice faded as he watched his brother's form grow smaller and smaller while he fell.

"Who is this?" A deep voice said distantly as Loki began to wake.

"We have reason to believe he is Loki, son of Odin." Another, higher voice replied.

"Odin. I haven't heard that name in a very long time." The first voice said.

"He seems to be waking, father." The higher voice said.
Loki sat groggily, though he was fully woken by the panic that settled in his stomach at the unfamiliar surroundings around him.

The place was deep blue, black, and purple. He looked around but he couldn't see the owners of the voices in the darkness. His hands pressed against the fine rock beneath him and he let silt sift through his fingers while he studied it.

"I'm alive." Loki whispered.

"Quite." The first voice said. Loki whipped around to see a goliath of a man stepping out of the shadows. He was bulky and broad, his footsteps falling heavy. He wore gold and purple armor, his skin a shade of indigo violet, his face striped with scars and wrinkles.

"Why am I here? Why am I alive?" Loki asked, distressed but trying his best to stop the shaking in his voice.

"You fell here. The eternal abyss dropped you here." The unknown man said.

"Who are you?" Loki asked.

"My name is Thanos. The great titan." He said.

"What do you want with me?" Loki's voice began to tremble more and more as his anxiety grew.

"I hear you want to be a king." Thanos said.

Loki forced his anxiety down and stuck his chin up. "And what of it?"

"I can give you a kingdom, Loki, and an army." Thanos smiled, the action seeming nearly painful.

"And what's in it for you?" Loki shot back.

"You'll be helping me carry out my own agenda." Thanos replied.

"What agenda is that?" Loki asked.

"One that has nothing to do with you past you acquiring Earth as yours." Thanos said.

And stupidly, Loki had agreed.

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The trickster screamed, his body contorting with pain as he was manipulated by magic. Day after day he was left alone to rot in his holding cell, a masked crony of Thanos coming to torture him with something new and equally horrible.

"Stop! Please!" Loki begged, crying out, his nails ragged from scraping at the stone walls, cutting crescents into his palms as his hands curled into white knuckled fists.

"I cannot stop until you surrender to us." The masked person had said. "The sooner you will yourself to us, the sooner it will be over with."

Loki screamed again as tendrils of blue wrapped themselves around him, burning and tearing at his flesh. He felt both like he was on fire and like he was drowning at the same time. His hair was damp with sweat and his face tear stained.
For weeks this continued and the trickster began losing sleep, hour by hour until eventually he didn't anymore, terrified of what was to come when he woke, unable to defend himself if he were to fall under. Daily he began to wish for death, waited for its sweet release but it never came. The worst times were when it felt like he might die only to be disappointed when his eyes would open again.

One day, however, as Loki sat watching the entrance to his cell, no one came. He was sure it was past the time that someone should have, it seemed to be routine, but no one did. Not until hours later did the door swing open.

The trickster pressed back into the corner of his cell, trembling in fear. He had long since given up the veil of strength.

"Come forward, my child." The voice came from the large figure standing against the light of the doorway.

Loki shook still, wishing he could sink into the wall and disappear.

"Please, Loki, come."

Reluctantly, the god shakily crawled forward.

"Thanos." He whispered.

"Yes." Thanos replied.

"Please don't hurt me." Loki said quietly, on the verge of fearful tears.

"I'm not here to hurt you, I'm here to take you from here." Thanos said.

Loki felt hope bloom in his chest and he followed as Thanos guided him from his cell. They walked down filthy, barren stone corridors until they eventually ended up in a place only slightly nicer. Thanos gestured for Loki to sit down in a slightly reclined chair, the only piece of furniture in the room.

"So I hear you've been hard to break." Thanos said. "That's good, very good."

Loki said nothing.

"You're resilient. You'll be good for my plan."

The god felt fear begin to build again in his stomach.

"But we'll have to do something about that stubbornness of yours." Thanos said.

"No." Loki said quietly. "No!"

Thanos pressed a massive palm to Loki's forehead.

The titan sifted through his memories and no matter how hard Loki tried to hold on to them, hoping to be able to remember not to listen to Thanos in the future, they slipped through his fingers and he lost them. By the end of it, his mind had been twisted around Thanos's finger, bending the god to his will.

"I will give you an army, soldiers of a race called the Chitauri." Thanos said.
"Marvelous." Loki had said, excitement bubbling in his stomach, itching to have his own lackeys.

"And take this. Your weapon." The titan handed Loki a spear. The god admired the metalwork, sturdy yet frighteningly gorgeous.

"You'll take the tesseract to earth and use it to open a portal into New York. Your army will subdue the humans and they'll be yours to rule until the end of your days." Thanos said.

Deep in himself Loki knew something didn't feel right, but his sudden seething hatred for his brother drove him forward regardless of the ill feelings.

The next day Loki went to earth. The happenings past that were spotty, clouded by the influence of the tesseract but what he could remember was being unable to control his own seething rage and cruel mercilessness.

Thorb pulled a bound Loki across a New York street, muzzled and cuffed, surrounded by six heroes who bested him at his own game.

The return to Asgard was probably the worst part. The looks of disappointment he received from his father, from Thor. The silent treatments he received from his mother.

The only people he'd ever cared about, ever wished to impress, showing such disgust towards him. He sat in his cell, watching as guards walked up and down the aisles of the prison, ignoring him each time.

Nothing he did helped. He tried reading, tried sleeping. Sleeping was the hardest. Every time he managed to doze off for at least the smallest bit he always found himself waking screaming or in a cold sweat, terrified he'd wake back in Thanos's lair.

That was when he'd received news that Frigga had died. And things only ever worsened from there. Guilt flooded him. Thoughts of how maybe if he hadn't fought with Thor to begin with he could've been there to protect her, to keep her safe. Or maybe none of it would've happened at all. The nightmares became worse and his depression and anger only plagued him further.

Memories were coming back to him now, snippets of his time with Thanos, of his time before then even. With each returning memory he felt his disgust with himself grow. How he came to a planet he had no right being on and killed so many innocents.

During his time imprisoned on Asgard the trickster had begun to harm himself, finding it to be the only way to help him cope. He didn't start it all at once, but it began with picking at the inside of his hand to scraping his skin red with his fingernails to eventually cutting himself with daggers or burning himself with candles. It was shameful, he knew, and he wished every day he could erase the scars on his skin. Even with the veil of magic he knew what lurked beneath the false exterior of smooth, milky white skin.

Nightmares and sleepless nights filled his time, rarely sleeping, usually plagued by memories of being tortured or seeing the blood of humans on his own hands. Of hurting Thor, Frigga. Some days he would wake crying but some days he wouldn't at all, periods of up to a week filled only by his body's incessant need to rest dragging him under.

All the while his memories were laced with shame and sorrow, not a single day passing without him knit picking his plethora of wrongdoings.
But parts of what Thanos twisted him to be remained, parts of his own malevolent agenda he never managed to quite shake stuck as well, heightened by the pain of his mother's death. Through the happenings of the fights against the dark elves. In the end, he faked his death. He allowed Thor to believe he'd died and banished Odin to earth, a grave mistake on his own part, and took the throne under the guise of being the allfather.

Plays based around him, statues built in his essence, and several thousand bottles of wine later he was brought to the arrival of Odin's first born, Hela, and her brief reign of terror. Finally, his memories ended at the present day, still plagued with nightmares and years of self hatred along with a multitude of other problems.

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When Loki pulled his hand from Clint's forehead he was panting, heaving breaths, his tears having made tracks in the now dry blood on his face, the archer still laying on the floor. However, Clint's face held no anger anymore, only sympathy and sadness.

"I'm so sorry." He whispered to Loki.

Loki said nothing, still busy catching his breath.

"Loki-" Clint laid his hand on Loki's shoulder.

Loki flinched away from the touch and breathlessly got to his feet. He walked out of the room and away from Clint, instead ducking into his own quarters to clean himself up.

Clint sat on the ground in the hallway, his head swimming with shame and pity for Loki. He knew the god wouldn't want his sympathy, even if he needed it, but he couldn't help feeling awful for Loki and his life. The man had never truly experienced anything but pain and Clint had only ever made things worse by being so cruel towards him.

Loki's memories were beginning to slip away from him, only basic gists remaining once they were gone. Clint realized that the trickster probably didn't want him remembering the entirety of his past, that he was probably ashamed of it. It only made the archer feel worse.

Clint ended up standing from the ground and going to his room to shower and work through the information he'd just been given.
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Things begin to look up

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*Loki's memories were beginning to slip away from him, only basic gists remaining once they were gone. Clint realized that the trickster probably didn't want him remembering the entirety of his past, that he was probably ashamed of it. It only made the archer feel worse.*

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Bucky slipped in and out of sleep for six and a half days, though he never felt rested when he woke back up. By then, there were dark bruises forming underneath his eyes. Steve had gone back to his room at some point every night, and had returned each morning showered and with coffee. Loki seemed to have stayed, his pale face thin and lined when Bucky looked up at him. Steve offered them both coffee. Loki took it with thanks, but Bucky never drank his. He ignored the look of concern on Steve’s face and instead stared at Peter’s sickly visage.

The boy didn’t look better. He was still pale and his eyes were bruised. His chest rattled with the air being pumped into his lungs from the breathing tube and the steady beeping of the heart rate monitor assured he was still alive, but it didn’t make Bucky feel any better. It was too quiet without the kid rambling on and on about whatever had come to his mind. Bucky regretted ever being annoyed with him about it.

Occasionally, members of the team would visit. Natasha came a couple times, talking to Peter about what had happened on her latest mission that had kept her from visiting more often. Clint brought in toys and drawings and cards his wife and kids had made or wanted to gift to him, wishing him well. Thor came once on the first day Peter had been asleep with flowers that now sat wilting in a vase beside the bed and a balloon that was beginning to go limp after asking Tony what was customary to give to someone in the hospital.

The Guardians all came together once, Rocket with a set of letters that spelled ‘Peter’, whittled from a piece of Groot, upon the tree’s insistence. Quill offered one of his cassettes, which Gamora later explained meant a lot considering how Quill’s mom had given them to him. Bucky would pop it in an old boombox Tony had dug up and play it to fill the silence. Gamora brought a flower crown that looked much better than her first, Quill saying she had been practicing to make it nice for Peter. Drax talked to Tony about how he had felt really angry and lost after losing his daughter and said he applauded him for not being as resentful.

Hill came and sat by Peter’s bed, reading him stories and poetry she had written. It was surprisingly beautiful. Fury came the next day with a stack of binder clipped papers with the words “S.H.I.E.L.D. Enlistment Forms” at the top, a yellow sticky note reading ‘we could use someone like you, kid’
stuck to the front. Bucky remembered how excited Peter had been when the man had said he wanted him at S.H.I.E.L.D. when they were still in the soul realm.

T’Challa came once at the beginning as well, looking sadly down at the boy before turning to talk to Bruce about how he’d spoken with his sister about ways they could help him get better. Wanda and Vision came, though Vision didn’t say much. Wanda talked to Peter about how she missed having him around and how it’d be great to see him up and about again, her eyes were a bit teary. Finally, Sam came a few times to check in, every time telling Peter he didn’t hate him and that he missed having his “big mouth yammering about whatever random bullshit he thought of that day”, a solemn look on his face when he stopped talking and all that was left was the sound of the heart monitor and the boy’s rattling breaths.

Steve and Loki quietly sipped their morning coffee, and when Loki had finished he excused himself to take a shower. Bucky then spotted Bruce and Tony across the room as he watched Loki leave, seeing the two men hunched over the screen muttering something Bucky couldn’t hear. He assumed it probably had to do with the search algorithm.

“Do you really think he’s gonna be okay?” Bucky asked in a quiet voice.

Steve seemed surprised he had spoken, but said, “I do, yeah.”

“I hope you’re right.” Bucky replied. He hated to admit it, but he was starting to lose hope.

Steve produced a sketchbook from a backpack by his feet when they had settled back into silence, resting it on one leg crossed over the other, flipping through the pages to a blank one. Bucky caught sketches of his own face out of the corner of his eye.

“What should I draw?” Steve asked.

“Peter.” Bucky replied softly. “When he was healthy.”

Steve’s eyes were sad when he looked at the man beside him, but he nodded his head anyways and began sketching.

Bucky became lost in his thoughts again as Steve was immersed in his drawing.

He thought about how he could’ve prevented this. If he had been a little less trusting, less relaxed. If he had been watching Peter closer. If he had been less lax on security. Maybe if he had been more careful this boy wouldn’t be dying in a bed in front of him. Silent tears slid down his face, thankfully unnoticed by Steve. The former assassin hunched over the bed, clasping one of Peter’s frigid hands in both of his and leaned forward to doze off again.

When he woke up about an hour later, Loki was reseated in his chair across the bed from him, his dark hair still damp and curled from his shower but his face now bruised. The look on the god’s face told him not to ask questions. His tired eyes locked with Bucky’s, unrevealing of any emotion though Bucky could tell he was drained. He sat up, turning to Steve who hastily flipped the page of his sketchbook back to the finished sketch of Peter, his smiling face looking up from the page. Bucky pulled the book from Steve’s hands, who didn’t put up too much of a fight to keep it.

The older man held the book in his hands, looking down at the beaming smile of the youngest Avenger. He wished he could see that smile again so badly. He wished it was him in that bed and not the boy. He wished for nothing more. Bucky then flipped the page of the book to what Steve had tried to hide from him.
“No wai—” Steve began but Bucky tuned him out as he looked at the drawing on the page. The sketch was of Peter, lying in his bed, tube protruding from his mouth, his heartbeat on the monitor beside him. His eyes were shut, his face sunken, and laying on the side of the bed was a sleeping Bucky, guarding his hands clasped with Peter’s beneath his head.

Bucky didn’t say anything as he handed the book back to Steve and let go of Peter’s hand just long enough to turn and hug the man, wrapping his arms around his broad shoulders. Steve’s strong arms came up to encase Bucky’s back. The latter vaguely remembered a time when Cap was small, barely over half his size. He was scrawny and couldn’t fend for himself, but determined to prove his worth without ever really considering the worth Bucky had seen in him long before he was ever made a super soldier. He was feisty and had talk bigger than he could back up. Peter reminded Bucky of that Steve. Steve Rogers from Brooklyn, who lied on his enlistment form, who tried five times to get into the army and make his father proud. Steve Rogers long before Captain America was even a fleeting thought in the mind of any man.

Bucky pulled away, turning back to Peter. He stared at the teenager’s face, looking for any sign of life beneath his pale skin. He saw nothing, not even a twitch. He resorted to laying back down and trying to sleep to pass the time. Bucky didn’t wake again until it was dark out, to the sound of the elevator doors sliding open, revealing Steve wearing a leather jacket, his hair slicked back from the wind, showing that he had rode his bike. He carried a bag of what looked like Chinese takeout in one hand, a twelve pack of beer under the other arm. Loki was still seated diligently in his chair, though now he had a book in his lap and looked up at Bucky when he saw he was awake.

Steve walked over to a table in the lab, setting down the food.

“Come on over.” He said. “You two need to eat, it’s been too long since you last had anything.”

Loki stood, setting his book down on the bed by Peter’s calf before pulling his chair over to the table. Steve walked back to the bed, picking up his own chair and nudging Bucky. “C’mon, Buck. You can sit on the side of the table where you can see him. Please, just eat.”

As if on cue, Bucky’s stomach grumbled and he reluctantly caved, standing up and following Steve, his chair in tow, back to the table. He sat on the side of the table where he could watch Peter past Loki’s head, who took the other side across from him and Cap.

Steve pulled all of the takeout carriers from the paper bag, setting them on the table with chopsticks and various packets of sauce. Loki reached for one of the cartons of rice and opened it up, eating several bites to make room for the lo mein and orange chicken he piled on top of it, pulling an egg roll and a wanton from their respective packets. Bucky could tell he was stress eating, not even hesitant at all about the food, foreign to him.

Steve picked up his own carton of rice, opening the boxes of sesame chicken and salt and pepper shrimp, eating straight from the box after making sure the other two men were okay with it.

That left Bucky the last rice carton, which he opened and immediately began picking up with his chopsticks and greedily stuffing into his mouth. He finished it probably quicker than he had ever finished anything in his life before using the empty carton to grab servings of everything else Steve had bought, even going for seconds afterwards. He was hungry and he was stressed and that didn’t make for a great combination. When everyone had finished, Steve cracked open the case of beer, opening three bottles with a bottle opener on his keychain before handing one to Loki and Bucky.

Bucky sipped the drink, feeling it slide down his throat. He used to have a beer every weekend with Steve when they were younger, lying about their ages in the bar and how he’d have to buy Steve a drink because no one believed he was of age. He also remembered how the younger of the two
would get sloshed off of a single bottle.

Bucky chugged his beer and took another, downing that one just as quick though he knew he wouldn’t even feel buzzed. As he moved onto his third, he heard a faint noise from the other side of the room. His gaze snapped up to Peter, whose eyes were now open, thin hands feebly trying to remove the breathing tube from his mouth.

Bucky’s beer fell from his hand before he could even realize he let go of it, the glass shattering against the floor and the liquid spilling across the linoleum. He barely registered the shout of surprise from Steve as he sprinted across the room back to Peter’s bedside. The boy’s tired eyes flicked up to meet Bucky’s and he tried to say something but it didn’t come out as anything more than an incoherent mumble around the breathing tube in his throat.

“Shh, kid, you can’t talk just yet. Hang on just one second.” Bucky smiled down at the boy with watery eyes.

Peter’s hand weakly came up to try and wipe away Bucky’s tears and the older man held his wrist up so the boy could slowly drag his stiff thumb across his cheek.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y. tell Tony and Bruce to come down here!” Steve called at the building as he hurried over to Peter’s bedside, Loki close behind.

“Calling Mr. Stark and Doctor Banner.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. replied and the three men crowded around Peter’s bed. The boy continued his attempts at speech, but Loki explained the breathing tube in his throat and urged him to keep quiet until Tony and Bruce arrived.

The two men burst through the doors of the elevator not long after and dashed to Peter’s bedside. Bruce hurried to drain Peter’s mouth and the breathing tube before telling the boy to relax and pulling the tube from his throat. Peter gagged as the tube was removed, but as soon as it was out he relaxed back against the pillows. He tried to speak but Tony hushed him and went to go get a cup of water, bringing it back for Peter to drink when he was sure the teen could swallow.

Peter greedily sucked down the water to ease his dry throat and once he had finished four cups of it, leaned his head back into the bed and slipped into sleep again. Bucky watched as the boy’s face relaxed and his features softened. He sighed, running a hand through his hair, cringing at the feeling of the grease that transferred onto his fingers. He hadn’t showered for the past week and he decided to go upstairs for one. Steve, Bruce, and Loki followed, Tony opting to stay down in the lab in case Peter woke up again.

The four men stepped into the elevator and returned to the barren common floor, everyone asleep by this time of the night. They ducked into their rooms after saying quiet goodnights, and Bucky made a beeline for his bathroom. He stripped off his old clothes, tossing them on the floor as he ran the water of the shower, stepping beneath the spray before it even had a chance to warm up. He stood in the water for a bit, letting it wash over his body while it heated before finally beginning to work shampoo into his hair and lathering his body with the excess suds.

When he was satisfied with his cleanliness, he shut off the shower and stepped out, wrapping a towel around his hips as walked up to the mirror. He wiped his hand over the fogged glass to clear it and picked up the electric razor Steve had bought him to trim his beard to his signature stubble. Finally, he brushed his teeth before leaving the bathroom, dressing in a pair of pajamas and sliding into bed. He fell asleep quickly, exhausted by the days without it.
So our baby boy's gonna be okay! Yay happy times! We're nearly out of the woods in this sense but we'll wait and see >:)))))))

Once again, I am sososososososososo sorry that I didn't post for so long I'll try to be more consistent with my upload times.

Anyways, as always, thank you all for reading and until the next chapter

-xoxo Denise
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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The next morning, Bucky was stirred awake by the sun peeking through the blinds of his window and he groaned, rubbing his eyes. He sat up, yawning and stretching his arms above his head before he slid off the bed and got dressed in a pair of blue jeans and a black t-shirt, slipping on his boots as he headed out the door. He found Steve fussing in the kitchen.

“Morning.” Bucky said.

“Hey! Good Morning.” Steve smiled.

“What’s it look like?” Steve chuckled as he flipped the french toast.

Well I can see that, but is there a particular reason for it being so nice?” The brunette eyed the sliced strawberries and fresh blueberries on the counter.

“I was hoping Peter would be able to join us for breakfast this morning.” Steve said. “Tony said he woke up in the middle of the night last night saying he was hungry and he was able to keep more than saltines down. Kid’s a trooper.”

Bucky nodded. “Need help?”

“Yeah, keep cutting those strawberries.”

The two men put in work to prepare the food, deciding to wait to make the eggs and bacon until Peter was upstairs so they were hot. Steve placed the french toast in the oven to keep warm while they headed downstairs to see if Peter was doing okay.

“Hey, guys.” Peter immediately waved from the bed where he and Tony had been talking. They found Loki had beaten them down this morning, seeing him sitting in his chair beside Peter's bed.

“Hey kid.” Bucky replied, smiling fondly at the boy, relief hitting him like a train.
“How’re you doing?” Steve asked.

“I feel okay. Disoriented, weak, hungry, but okay.” Peter responded.

“What happened?” The teen asked, picking up his conversation with Tony.

“You were drugged.” Tony said. “Someone broke into the tower and roofied the pizza.”

“You’re welcome for me eating those last slices.” Peter joked.

Tony chuckled dryly, shaking his head. “You’re lucky to be alive, kid. It’s good to see you.”

“Do you think you can walk? I’m sure the rest of the group would be happy to see you’re okay, but I’m sure we can get them down here if that’s what you need.” Steve said.

“I think I can walk. Just, help me up.” Peter pushed the sheet off his body before stopping when he realized he was only in a hospital gown.

“Have I not been wearing real clothes for the past week?” Peter asked.

“Approximately.” Tony said, rubbing the back of his neck. “Bucky can you go get Peter some clothes?”

The man nodded and headed to the elevator, taking it up to the common floor, making for Peter’s room and grabbing a pair of boxers, some sweats, a t-shirt and a pair of socks along with the teen’s sneakers before heading back down to the lab. Everyone had stepped outside and Bucky gave the boy the clothes before leaving the room as Peter dressed.

“Okay, you can come back in now!” Peter called and the men stepped back through the door to see Peter sitting up on the bed, fully clothed. “Now you can help me up.” He smiled and held out his arms for Bucky to help him onto his feet. His knees were weak at first, but he eventually gained his balance and after a few shaky steps he was up and walking.

Tony looked like he had just watched his toddler take its first steps.

Everyone piled into the elevator and they headed back up to the common floor, just in time to see Clint trying to steal a slice of french toast.

“Clint!” Bucky barked and there was a loud thud and a shout of an obscenity as the man slammed his head into the top of the oven.

“Language!” Steve called.

The archer stalked away from the oven like a scolded puppy. “You guys made me wait so long.” He pouted.

Bucky rolled his eyes.

Clint’s gaze fell on Peter. “Oh hey, kid! It’s good to see you up again.” He smiled sincerely at Peter as he rubbed the back of his bruised head. His eyes flickered to Loki, who shifted slightly uncomfortably, over Peter’s shoulder.

“It’s good to see you too, Mr. Barton.” Peter smiled.

“It’s Clint, dude. I dunno why you keep trying to be formal, you’re part of the team now.” Clint said.
Peter didn’t say anything back, just smiled and let the feeling of belonging settle over him.

The rest of the team began to file in, the next being Thor.

“Brother, I haven’t seen your face for days.” He said, rushing forward to grab Loki’s shoulders. “You look sick, are you alright?”

“Just tired, Thor. Don’t worry, I was watching over Peter.” The trickster nodded towards the teen.

Thor turned his body to beam at him. “Peter! You’re back! I’m glad you’re well.” He said but then his large hands cupped Peter’s face and the boy looked up at the god in shock. “But so skinny! You’ve lost to much weight, it couldn’t have been that long, surely it hasn’t.”

“Mr. Stark said my metabolism runs about twice as fast as it used to and I haven’t eaten any solid food for the past week.” Peter shrugged.

“Well we must change that.” Thor said determinedly and he began to usher the teen towards the island in the kitchen, guiding him to sit on a stool and placing a plate in front of him.

“Morning, Peter. How’re you feeling?” Hill smiled softly at the boy just as Bucky and Steve went to work preparing eggs and bacon to go with the french toast.

“I feel a lot better.” Peter smiled back.

Sam came in next, ruffling Peter's hair and giving the kid a massive bear hug. "Damn, kid, don't ever scare me- I mean us - like that again." He said.

Wanda came in with teary eyes, hugging Peter tightly and telling him how worried she was. The boy just smiled sadly and hugged her back.

The group was quickly there in full, each of them having expressed their happiness about Peter being awake again as they’d come in. Steve asked everyone how they liked their eggs as they’d come in, placing the platter of french toast in the middle of the island with the syrup, butter, and powdered sugar, sliding the eggs out of the skillet and onto their plates made to order. Bucky pushed the batches of bacon he was making onto a big plate covered in a paper towel as he finished and everyone took their helpings.

Peter, who insisted he could do it, handed everyone a cup and placed the orange juice, milk, and water pitcher on the counter just like he had the first day they’d had breakfast here.

He sat back down in his seat, Loki on one side and Bucky’s reserved seat on the other. Past Loki, Clint was stuffing french toast into his mouth, Natasha shaking her head at him on his other side. Peter loaded his plate up with french toast, pouring syrup over it and covering that with powdered sugar, topping it with the fruit Steve had placed on the counter. He alternated between his eggs and his french toast, periodically munching on a strip of bacon. It couldn’t have been more than three minutes when he had finished his first plate and he had three more after that, repeating his careful ratio of syrup to powdered sugar to please his starving stomach.

When he had finished, drank three cups of orange juice, his belly full and sated. He smiled at Bucky, who had taken his seat beside him, and Steve on the man’s other side. “Thank you.” He didn’t just mean for breakfast.

Bucky knew that. “It’s no problem, kid.” He smiled fondly at Peter.

“And thank all you guys for all the gifts and well wishes.” Peter addressed the rest of the team who
all smiled brightly at him. “It means a lot, really.”

Peter melted just a little bit under the “it was no problem’s and the expressions of integration of him into the team. He was genuinely flattered by their acceptance of him.

When everyone had gone back to their own conversations, the boy turned to Loki, who had cleared his plate, and blinked in surprise. “Hungry?” He asked.

“A bit.” Loki shrugged.

Peter smiled and filled Loki’s still empty glass with orange juice.

“What is this?” The man leaned over to whisper to Peter.

“You don’t know what orange juice is?” Peter replied quietly.

“I thought I’d look foolish if I asked, so I didn’t.” Loki responded.

“Try it, it’s good.” Peter gestured to the glass.

Hesitantly, Loki raised the cup to his lips and took a tentative sip. His eyes widened in surprise. “It’s sweet, but not too sweet. Acidic. It’s delicious. Where can I get more?”

“There’s always a carton in the fridge.” Peter responded.

“Perfect.” Loki replied, pouring himself another glass.

Breakfast went very well, and by the end of it everyone was joking and laughing and catching Peter up on what had happened while he was gone. No one mentioned the roofying, much to the teen’s thanks. He realized he didn’t really wanna talk about being near death for several days. He was trying hard to uphold this facade of strength, and falling to something like that made him feel nothing short of weak.

“Wait wait, Clint did what?” Peter said through wracking laughter.

“He pissed off a raccoon after I told him not to touch it.” Natasha said. Come to think of it, Peter had noticed the thin, scabbed slashes on Clint’s neck and face but he’d decided not to ask, chalkling it up to some mission he had gone on while he was recovering. He, Natasha, Sam, and Rhodes went on them all the time, not to mention that Fury and Hill were gone more often than not for business.

“Just to be clear, that raccoon was not me. Though I’d love to kick Barton’s ass and scratch his face up, I guess he knows better than to mess with me. Can’t say he knows the same about other rodents.” Rocket chimed in from where he was perched on the kitchen counter, carving up an apple with a short knife.

“Pipe it, trash panda.” Clint grunted.

“You want more scratches or are you good with the ones you got.” Rocket sneered, leaning forward and pointing his knife at the scarred assassin.

Clint mumbled something under his breath and Rocket went back to cutting pieces off his apple and eating them off the blade.

“Anyways,” Natasha said. “We were walking to the store because Steve said we needed more flour and Clint saw a raccoon go down an alley and he followed it. I told him to leave it alone or else he’d
get rabies and luckily he avoided that much but didn’t escape unscathed.”

“It’s not my fault it had babies in that dumpster! I thought it was just trying to get food.” he said, subconsciously rubbing his scratched face.

The group bust out laughing, poking fun at the blatantly bad decision.

When everyone had finished up their food and put their plates in the sink, they disbanded in favor of their own activities.

Peter decided to go down the hall to his room and take a shower. Bucky insisted on sitting at the teen’s desk to make sure he didn’t slip and Peter found it oddly comforting that he was there anyways, not completely sure of how much he trusted himself.

He chose the clothes he wanted to wear once he was clean before entering, taking them with him so he didn’t have to come out half naked to Bucky. The boy walked into the bathroom, shucking his current clothes and stepping into the shower to wash off the week of dirt he accumulated from the time spent in the lab along with the strong scent of disinfectant he’d carried with him as well, finally shaving off his slight stubble when he had finished. Peter slipped into his clean underwear and blue skinny jeans, pulling his grey t-shirt over his head and drying his hair a bit more. He grabbed a hoodie from his closet once he walked out of the bathroom and turned to Bucky.

“Whaddya wanna do today, Pete?” the man asked.

“I’m not sure.” Peter looked at his desk, eyeing his broken laptop, realizing that after he had gotten sick the promise for Happy to go get Peter’s new tech had probably gone out the window. “Maybe we can go get my new computer?”

“Sure. Anything you want, kid.” Bucky smiled earnestly at Peter.

“You wanna invite Thor and Loki and Steve?” Peter asked.

“Sounds good. It’d probably be nice for Loki to get out anyway and Thor seemed pretty worried about him so it could be a good idea for him to tag along. I’m sure Steve would wanna come too.” The former Winter Soldier said.

“Great. You can go get Steve, I’ll get Thor and Loki.” Peter smiled.

Bucky agreed and they branched off to gather their party, Peter snagging his backpack on the way out.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y. tell Happy to get a ride ready.” Peter said to the building as he walked down the hall to Thor’s room.

“On it, Mr. Parker.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. responded.

The teen reached the door and he knocked gently.

“Oh hello, spiderling!” He said when Peter pushed the door open. “What brings you here?”

“I wanted to see if you’d wanna to come to the Apple store with me, Steve, Bucky, and Loki.” Peter answered.

“Oh that sounds fun. An outing could do Loki good.” The man smiled.
“So you’re in?” Peter asked.

“Indeed.” Thor said. “Let me get my things and we can go get Loki.”

He proceeded to pick up his wallet and keys before grabbing his light washed denim jacket off of a chair at a desk that seemed hardly used. He pulled the coat on and followed Peter out the door, locking it behind them.

The two men went back up the hall to Loki’s room. Thor knocked on his door, and Loki opened it, eyeing his brother with what Peter was sure was meant to be annoyance but he knew Loki was only feigning a lack of fondness for his sibling.

“What do you want, brother?” Loki drawled.

“Peter here says he, Steve, and Bucky have planned an outing to go get apples.” Thor said brightly.

“We’re not getting apples. We’re getting a phone and a computer.” Peter corrected and Loki looked at him, arching a brow.

“But you said we were going to the apple store.” Thor said in confusion, turning away from Loki to look down at Peter.

“There’s a brand called Apple that makes electronics.” Peter clarified quickly. “I figured you’d know this, did Mr. Stark not give you a phone?”

“I’m sure Tony offered it once, but I doubt he was paying much attention.” Loki rolled his eyes.

“I pay plenty of attention!” Thor exclaimed, waving his arms for emphasis.

“Like what? Picking up snakes or falling into traps?” Loki scoffed.

“You know I love snakes!” Thor exclaimed, waving his arms for emphasis.

“I thought you’d have been smart enough to learn from that time when we were eight.” Loki replied flatly.

“You make me out as some buffoon, but I think you’re just mean.” Thor pouted, his arms crossed again.

“I think you may need to reevaluate your intelligence.” Loki said. Thor just pouted harder.

“Anyways brother.” Thor said, still seemingly hurt. “Will you be joining us?”

Loki turned to Peter. “Please?” The teen added.

“Very well.” Loki relented.

Peter beamed at him and they waited for Loki to collect the black sport coat he wore over his white button up and black trousers and walked down the hall to reconvene with Steve and Bucky who were waiting for them by the elevator.

“You ready to go?” Bucky asked and he pushed the button when Peter nodded.

“Oh, wait!” Peter said once they’d entered the lift. “I need to ask Mr. Stark for some money. F.R.I.D.A.Y., take us to Mr. Stark’s lab.”
“Of course, Mr. Parker.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. replied politely and the elevator descended to Tony’s workshop.

When the doors opened, Peter’s ears were assaulted by the blaring rock music the Tony worked to and the teen spotted the man hunched over a work table, tinkering with something he couldn’t see. The rest of the group waited in the elevator while Peter talked to him.

“Hey, Mr. Stark?” Peter said gently, trying not to scare the man.

It wasn’t very effective as Tony jumped and whipped to face Peter.

“Jesus, kid!” He exclaimed. “Give a man a little warning will ya?”

“Sorry. I just. I still need a new computer but I don’t have any money so…” He trailed off, feeling slightly awkward asking for money.

Tony eyed the elevator. “So you wanna go shopping for some tech and you didn’t even invite me?”
He scoffed. “You wound me so, Pete.”

“I’m sorry Mr. Stark, I just figured you had better things to do and I-”

Tony cut him off. ‘I was kidding, kiddo. Don’t worry about it, I was working on something anyways. Here.’ he fished in his pocket for his wallet, pulling out a credit card and handing it to Peter. “Buy whatever’s shiniest. Don’t worry about the price, it’s not like I’ll care.”

“Thank you, so much, Mr. Stark.” Peter said.

“When’d you stop calling me Tony? I liked the casualty Pete.” Tony said.

“Sorry. Thank you Tony.” Peter corrected himself.

“Now go off.” Tony shooed Peter back towards the elevator. “Hey, Point Break!!” He called to the men waiting in the lift and Thor looked up. “Make sure Rock of Ages is wearing wearing his sunscreen! Wouldn’t want him to burn!”

Loki rolled his eyes, both at Tony and Thor’srumbling laughter and Peter stepped through the doors.

“Bye, Tony!!” He waved.

“Bye, Pete!” Tony called back.

And the doors slid shut.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y. where is Happy waiting?” He asked the elevator.

“Mr. Hogan is waiting in the garage, Mr. Parker. Would you like me to take you there?” The building responded.

“Yes, please.” Peter replied and they descended to the garage.

When they stepped out, Happy’s car was already waiting at the curb in front of the lift for them.

Peter opened the doors to the back seat and they all filed in. Peter sat all the by the back windshield sandwiched between Bucky and Steve, and Loki and Thor sat in the two separate seats in the middle row of the SUV as Happy drove them into the city.
He dropped them off about a block from the store and they hopped out onto the sidewalk. Happy said he’d pick them up from the same spot in two and a half hours and Peter assured him they’d be there before waving goodbye as he drove off.

The group righted themselves and they began their walk.

Thor and Loki led the pack, Peter walking between Bucky and Steve, who was telling Thor when and where to turn.

Thor was staring at everything around him like an excited puppy, enthusiastically tapping Loki’s arm to point out things he was seeing. The corners of the trickster’s mouth curled upward, though he quickly dropped his slight smile when the God of Thunder turned back to beam at his brother.

Peter bonded with Steve and Bucky then, talking about how it was nice to finally be back in New York and what they thought their game plan for restoring the universe would be. Somehow that conversation drifted into picking fights and Steve said he’d throw himself in front of a car for Bucky to which Bucky replied, “Steve, you’d probably throw yourself in front of a car for fun.”. Finally though, they had reached the Apple store.

Steve pulled open the heavy glass door and held it for the group as they walked in. Thor looked completely amazed and immediately started zipping around the store, excitedly poking at the electronics on display. Peter could tell Loki was equally as enthused though he played it off as a slight curiosity. Steve and Bucky broke into a conversation about how “advanced technology was getting these days.” and Bucky mentioned something about how the most exciting thing they’d had back in the 40’s was a hover car Howard Stark had blown up on stage.

Peter walked off to do his own searching, first going to the computer display. There was a range of macbooks that he’d never seen before and he realized they’d come out over the time he was in the soul realm. He poked at touch screens that could flip and detach from paper thin, sleek keyboards for easy typing and found a computer that had come out about two years ago and was now one of the cheapest models there. He chose it not only because it was cheaper, by the standards of Apple of course, and he wanted to spare Tony the expense, but also because he really liked the design and he didn’t want to overwhelm himself with five years or technological advancement all at once.

He remembered the model name and went over to the phone display. He poked at the new gadgets, realizing that not only had the iPhone eleven, twelve, thirteen, and fourteen dropped while he was gone, but the newest, priced at about twenty one hundred dollars, was barely more than a small pane of glass that lit up at a brush of the screen, though it seemed incredibly impractical.

Peter settled on buying the twelve, which wasn’t too different than the iPhone 10 but it was a little bit bigger and slightly thinner. A reversion from the eleven, which seemed to be a bit more ambitious in the fact that it was paper thin and nearly larger than Peter was sure he could fit in his pockets.

Peter approached one of the geniuses and told them about what he was in to buy. They looked at him slightly incredulously but rung it up on a tablet in their hand, asking for a credit card and a signature. Peter handed the card to the person to swipe and signed before they went off into the back to go get Peter’s purchase. They returned with a white bag containing the new gadgets and Peter thanked them before sliding the bag into his backpack.

Both Thor and Loki actually ended up buying phones that day, starting with the twelfth model as well, seeing as it was the easiest to wrap their heads around. Bucky, Steve, and Peter waited as Thor bought both his and Loki’s new devices before they headed out of the store to go get lunch. Peter offering to carry their stuff as well to which Thor thanked him and packed the phones into his backpack, stepping out the door about an hour after they had entered.
They walked down the street to an outdoor cafe Peter knew about and they ordered their food before sitting down in the comfortable light of the sun. Thor pulled the box of his phone out of Peter’s bag but the teen pulled the box gently back from the man who looked at him in confusion.

“You need to charge it overnight and then set up an account on it before you can even use it.” Peter said. “It won’t work if you try to use it now.”

“Oh.” Thor nodded in understanding and instead opted to eat his grilled cheese and french fries.

Peter chowed down on the cheeseburger he had ordered, scarfing down his fries after. He sipped his soda as he indulged in conversation with the men once he had finished.

“It’s exciting, having a phone now. No one can use the excuse that they didn’t know how to reach me anymore.” Thor said.

“Well, to be fair, your phone won’t work if you’re off the planet.” Peter said. “Or if it’s out of battery.”

“Well then what’s the point?” Thor asked, brows knitted together.

“So long as you’re on Earth, we can contact you anywhere you are. They’re meant for standard people. But I’m sure Tony can modify anything you hand him to have longer battery life and reception anywhere it goes.” Peter shrugged.

“Well I’m going to talk to Tony once we get back.” Thor said determinedly.

Peter laughed and the conversation diverted to Peter catching up on school or whether or not he even wanted to.

Once everyone had finished their food, they headed back to where Happy had dropped them off and stood on the curb as he pulled up, right on time. They all piled into the back again and settled in for the drive home.

Once they’d made it back inside the headquarters, Thor had asked if Peter could show him how to set up his phone.

“I can charge it in my room tonight if you want, and I’ll help you make an account tomorrow.” The teen suggested the idea not only to help the God, but also because he knew if the man had it in his room he would probably get impatient and try to poke at it early.

Thankfully, Thor obliged. Peter took Thor and Loki to his room and unboxed his own and Thor’s phones, pointing out where the power button, ringer switch, volume buttons, and charger/headphone port were, explaining what they did before he plugged in the two phones and set them on his desk to charge up overnight. Loki, who had been listening intently, opted to charge his phone in his own room and Peter trusted him not to mess with it too soon.

Thor branched off to go work out with Sam because he had promised him, and Loki asked Peter if he wanted to tag along in the library with him. The teen agreed, saying he’d catch up after he returned Tony’s credit card. Loki nodded and got into the elevator to go down to the library and Peter found the billionaire in the kitchen, leaned against the counter as he sipped a drink, talking with Bruce.

“Hey, kid.” The man smiled at Peter as he walked into the room.

“Hey, I um just wanted to return this.” The teen said, holding out the credit card.
Tony put a hand up, shaking his head. “Keep it. I’ve got a dozen more. You’re gonna need some
course of funds, so there you go. Only rule is don’t do anything illegal with my money. If you’re
gonna, wire it into a separate account first.”

Peter’s mouth closed and opened like a fish.

“Really, Pete. Keep it.” The man smiled.

Peter nodded. “Thank you. Thank you so much.”

“No problem, kid. Have fun, buy whatever you need.”

Peter nodded again, tucking the card into his pocket and saying goodbye before going to meet Loki
in the library.

They spent the evening reading before they reconvened with the team for a dinner of Indian.
Afterwards, Loki and Peter returned to the library and sat back down to read for a few more hours.
As the night drew on the two went back to their rooms for the night.

Peter stared at the ceiling in the dark, unable to sleep with his mind racing through everything about
his current situation. His new home with the Avengers, May’s recently noticed absence for the past
week, his drugging. Eventually, the teenager drifted into a dreamless sleep and he let it wash over
him.

Chapter End Notes

Wow look I actually published chapters for two consecutive days, this is new! So May
is missing, where is that going to go...we'll have to wait and see...

Thank you, my lovelies, for reading, and until the next chapter

-xoxo Denise
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Peter stared at the ceiling in the dark, unable to sleep with his mind racing through everything about his current situation. His new home with the Avengers, May's recently noticed absence for the past week, his drugging. Eventually, the teenager drifted into a dreamless sleep and he let it wash over him.

The next morning, over breakfast, Peter mindlessly shoveled waffles and sausage into his mouth, not paying any attention to what the others were saying. By the end of the meal, the rest of the team was looking at him funny but of course he didn't notice.

When they had finished, he decided to go for a run, returning to his room to slip on a tank top and a pair of gym shorts, noticing he had regained a considerable amount of weight overnight, before taking the elevator down and cutting across the gym to push through a door on the far side that led to the outdoor track. He stretched and did some leg warm ups before he started his run. He did alternating jogs down the long side of the track and sprints down the short sides, walking a lap after doing two that way. He did this for about thirty minutes, barely registering the burn in his muscles as the music pumped through the headphones in his ears and he was lost again in thought.

He returned back inside, going through the rest of his workout regimen of push ups, sit ups, burpees, and box jumps. Afterwards, he found himself overly aggressively throwing hits at a punching bag, not really remembering when he had made the decision to incorporate it. When he had finished, he draped the towel he had brought with him around his neck and made his way back up to his room, not paying any attention to Thor, Sam, Steve, and Bucky's (who had come in not too long after he did) worried looks as he headed up in the elevator.

When he made it back upstairs, Peter showered and put on a fresh set of clothes before going into the kitchen to make himself a shake with Bucky and Steve's tub of protein powder. He hopped up on the counter to drink it, putting the used cup in the sink, giving it a rinse before he decided to head down to the library for some relaxation. A small voice in the back of his mind was telling him his silence and off behavior was probably worrying the caring team members he passed, especially after the drugging, but the thoughts that had gripped onto the forefront of his brain drowned it out.

Peter sat down in one of the leather armchairs, Loki already there, his book still lying where he had left it on the coffee table last night, and settled in to read. The god sat across from him, his feet propped up on the table and a book in his lap.

"You seemed thoughtful this morning." Loki said, not looking up from his book.

"Yeah, I uh. I was just thinking about...stuff." Peter said, mentally cursing himself for how awkward that sentence had been.

"Stuff?" Loki's head remained leaned toward his book but his eyes looked up to gaze at Peter. "Peter please tell me if you're feeling ill again, I'm distrusting of your honesty in how you feel after how little you mentioned to me the last time..."
"No! Yes? No." Peter said hurriedly. "I mean, no I'm not feeling sick, yes I've just been thinking," Peter sighed, bringing a hand up to run through his hair. "I was just glad no one asked about me being drugged."

Loki looked up at him for real then. "Why?"

"Because I'm trying to seem strong. Everyone in the Avengers is super cool and badass and I'm just a kid from Queens. I dunno. Getting drugged and then passing out for seven days because of it makes me feel super lame, y'know?"

"Peter," Loki began. "You heard what Bruce said. Any normal human being would have died from the amount of drugs that you consumed, and we expected you to be asleep a lot longer than you were. In fact, we predicted a full blown coma, but you woke up in a week. I think I would consider that strong."

Peter thought for a minute, weighing Loki's words. "You think so?"

"I know so. You're incredible, Peter. You nearly defeated Thanos and you're not even eighteen yet. You're the youngest, but you're one of the strongest of us here. I'm sure Sergeant Barnes and Captain Rogers would say the same." Loki said.

Peter's heart melted a bit. "Why're you so nice to me?" The teenager asked.

"Because you're good. You're a kind soul, and you're strong and resilient. You're never rude or cruel, and you never get unreasonably angry with people. I see in you who I always wished I could be. I don't want to see you turn down the wrong path. Frankly, you've made me realize how Thor must have felt about me. With less disappointment, of course." Loki smiled softly.

"I think Thor thinks very highly of you." Peter replied. "Especially now that you're making an effort to be better. You've earned a place on the team."

Loki smiled genuinely then and Peter smiled back. Eventually, they resettled into their reading and by the time the noon sun rose high past the windows Peter had finished the first Harry Potter book. His thoughts were beginning to wander and his eyes were roving over the page but he found himself rereading paragraphs because he hadn't retained any of the information the first time.

Finally, he pulled his eyes from the page and let himself think. This went unnoticed by Loki, who was still engrossed in a book of his own. Peter's racing thoughts fell on the topic of his drugging. He thought back to what Bucky had told him about how they found the man who put the drugs on the pizza, and how he was vacant from the federal databases. The boy doubted the man really was off the grid. He had to have gone out at some point and bought a beer, driven a car, renewed a license, gone out of the country. Even if he hadn't, he should've at least shown up in the background of someone's picture. So why didn't they find him?

It didn't make any sense. He managed to effectively wipe himself from every existing database, but he didn't cut himself out of security footage completely? This guy obviously had the smarts and the skills to get rid of himself from everything that could've told them who he was, so why give them his face? Peter's brain worked through the situation, thinking about everything he did, what he used, what he probably knew about the Avengers, and how he managed to break into one of the highest security buildings in the history of the world. He wondered how much the man knew. There's no way he knew who everyone's identity was if it had never been publicized. He couldn't know who Peter was, or who Bucky, or Natasha were. There's just no way.

So what was his deal? What did he want from them? What bone did he have to pick? Did he lose
someone to Thanos? Is he angry about how the Avengers seemingly haven't made any move to kill the person who laid waste upon the universe? Peter had more questions than answers. However, he managed to come to one conclusion.

The boy's face lit up with realization and he drew a big red circle in his mind around the solution. "He wanted us to catch him." He said out loud.

Finally, Loki's head snapped up from his book. "Who wanted us to catch them?"

"They guy who drugged me." Peter said. "The guy who drugged me! He wanted us to catch him!" Peter exclaimed in excitement.

"You seem a bit enthusiastic about the situation." Loki said cautiously. "Why do you say that?"

"This dude is obviously an extremely skilled hacker, and a very good stealth op. He broke into one of the most heavily guarded facilities in America, wiped himself from every single database F.R.I.D.A.Y. knows about, and more, but he did a crappy cut job on the security cams? It doesn't add up. Which means, he wanted us to see him." Peter explained.

Loki's eyes gleamed with understanding. "I can't believe none of us figured this out sooner."

"You were all preoccupied with me being in a coma." Peter shrugged. "We need to tell Tony and Bruce."

Peter hastily stood from his seat, rushing out of the library, Loki hurrying to follow him.

"Peter." Loki said as he strode quickly after the teen, who was lost again in his thoughts.

"Peter." The man repeated, a little bit louder this time. Still the teen didn't answer. "Peter!" He said a final time.

The boy turned around. "Huh?" He asked.

"How is this going to help us? Do you have any clue who this could be?" Loki asked as they reached the elevator.

"I don't know. We can check a database we didn't think about before?" Peter said and as soon as the words fell from his mouth realization dawned on him for the second time that afternoon. "The database of an ally."

"S.H.I.E.L.D." Loki made the connection.

"Exactly." Peter said.

They stepped into the elevator doors. "F.R.I.D.A.Y, where are Mr. Stark and Doctor Banner?" Peter asked the elevator.

"Mr. Stark and Doctor Banner are both currently in Doctor Banner's lab." F.R.I.D.A.Y. responded.

"Will you take us there please?" Peter asked.

"Of course, Mr. Parker." And with that the elevator rose to the very top floor of the building, being met with glass walls and doors, seeing the two men hunched over a desk.

Peter pulled the door open and strode confidently into the room.
"He wanted to get caught." Bruce and Tony's heads snapped up from where they were hunched over Bruce's desk. "The guy who tried to drug us. He wanted to get caught. The man is clear from every single database in the country. At least every one you guys checked. Bucky said that the algorithm searches everything but S.H.I.E.L.D's. He's in there. I know it."

"Peter, we don't have access to that database. We can't get into the archives, neither of us have clearance." Bruce said.

"But we just so happen to be pretty close to someone who does." Peter responded. "Where's Fury right now?"

"Director Fury is currently in the gym supervising training with Agent Hill, Ms. Romanova, Sergeant Barnes and Captain Rogers." F.R.I.D.A.Y answered before Tony or Bruce could get a word out.

Peter turned to get back in the elevator, Loki, Bruce, and Tony struggling to catch up with him. "Take us there." He said to the building.

"Will do, Mr. Parker." Peter found the lift descending to the third floor, the one level with the ground. He strode through the doors when they slid open and into the gym. Everyone but Hill and Natasha, who were sparring, turned around.

Bucky, dressed in workout clothes and with his hair tied up in a ponytail, looked at Peter in concern. "What's up, kid?"

"I need to talk to Director Fury." He turned the man, who was standing with his arms crossed and looked shocked to hear the teenager wanted to speak with him.

"What do you need, Peter?" The man asked.

"I need to check the S.H.I.E.L.D database for someone, I think the guy who tried to drug me," Fury's eyes widened and Peter realized he'd just gotten back from work in D.C. "Long story." He clarified. "The facial recognition we ran checked all but one database and I think you can guess which."

"Is this man a potential threat?" Fury asked.

"Well he managed to break into the compound and drug some pizza that put me in a coma so yeah, I think I'd classify him as a threat." Peter replied.

"Why is this the first I'm hearing of this?" Fury sternly addressed the rest of the group.

"With all due respect sir," Steve piped up, who had listened in on the conversation. "Peter just woke up yesterday morning. I guess no one thought to mention it to you considering we were all too busy celebrating it."

Fury shook his head but said, "I can access everything from my phone." He pulled the device out of his pocket. "F.R.I.D.A.Y send the photo of the intruder to me."

"Already done, Director Fury." The building responded.

The man began typing at his phone before raising it to his face and allowing the camera to scan his eye. Peter watched as hundreds of pictures of people rapidly flashed across the screen before finally, it fell on one man. Peter recognized the face as the guy from the security cameras. They had a clear look at his features now. He smirked at the camera, his heavy lidded blue eyes flecked with green, his tan face handsome with high cheekbones and a chiseled jaw, mess of black bangs pushed back
from his forehead, his hair cropped shorter on the sides, revealing his pierced ears.

With a press of a button, Fury's phone projected the information onto a holo-screen in front of them and everyone gathered around it, including Hill and Natasha who had paused mid-fight to listen in on the conversation.

"Twenty two year old Alexander DeManassi. Ex S.H.I.E.L.D agent," Fury read aloud. "He was fired two years ago for suspicious conduct and was supposed to go in for questioning but went off the grid before we could take him in. He's exceptional at hacking and stealth missions, along with tracking and engineering, which was part of the reason we took him in as an agent when he was eighteen. The other part was his large amount of powers in addition to his skill set. He has enhanced healing, super strength, super speed, increased agility, and heightened senses that would rival Captain Rogers and Sergeant Barnes, along with telekinesis and shapeshifting. He was our most powerful asset before he went rogue."

Peter wondered what they'd gotten themselves into.

"It was later discovered that he stole Howard Stark's original plans for Captain America's suit and shield, though we don't know what he plans on using them for." Steve and Tony perked up at that. "We can only assume it's for his own bidding but he's been radio silent since he disappeared." Fury finished.

"Why would he suddenly turn up now?" Natasha spoke for the first time.

"That's the thing we don't know yet. We assume it has something to do with getting the Avengers' attention." Fury responded.

"And we have no information on where he is?" Natasha asked.

"Not even speculation, before now. One can guess he's probably somewhere near here." Fury responded.

"Got it." And with that, the woman took her turn at dramatically rushing to get things done. The group hurried after her, all crowding into the elevator.

She took it up to the common floor, striding down the hall to her room's door, pushing it open. Everyone followed her in and she didn't object. The inside of her room was neat but barren. She had no personal items or decor, just a set of wine colored sheets. She sat down at her desk, opening her computer and getting straight to work. She was typing away at the keys, first at a page of code and then her screen opened the city security cameras. She typed access codes into another page that popped up and started sifting through the footage.

She started at the time right after the pizza had been drugged and she went from there. Her hands were unmoving for a few seconds as Peter assumed she waited for the computer to track Alexander after he walked out of the building. It locked onto the man getting into a black 2017 Dodge Challenger. Natasha watched the car pull out of its parking space in the center lot of the compound and tear off down the road. She tracked it on the traffic cams as it found its home in front of a motel not far from the building.

"Well what're we waiting for?" The woman asked the group who all scrambled to grab their things and get going.

Branching off to their own rooms, each of the team got their weapons and whatever gear they thought they might need. Peter slipped his web shooters onto his wrists and the mini team headed to
the garage. Bucky, Steve, and Natasha all straddled their bikes and started them up. Bruce, Hill, Loki, and Peter climbed into a car with Tony and they followed Steve and Bucky who led the pack, Fury in his own car behind them and finally Natasha who brought up the rear.

They tore down the road to the motel and when Tony drove into the lot Peter spotted the car from the security footage sitting there. They all surrounded the room the car was parked in front of and everyone walked up to the door, Bucky pounding on it. There was no answer. Peter turned back to look at the car, which had something taped to the hood.

"Um, guys?" Peter cut off Bucky's shouting at the door.

They whipped around and Peter pulled the note off of the car.

"'You're getting close, but did you really think I'd let it be that simple? Two more stops, and you'll find me there. If you get it right, that is. The car's yours now, Spidey. Love, Alex.' And he put a smiley face after it." Peter read out loud. The teen looked back to the hood and sitting on top of the windshield wipers were the keys.

Bucky nudged Peter out of the way and snatched up the keys. He pressed them into the lock on the door and opened it. He spent no less than half an hour searching the car for any explosives and he motioned for everyone to back up before he put the keys in the ignition and turned them. The car started up with a roar and purred after the engine had turned over. Nothing exploded, and Bucky looked genuinely surprised. The man got into the driver's seat and changed the gears to back out, driving a slow lap around the lot and checking to make sure the brakes worked. Everything seemed in order.

"F.R.I.D.A.Y, scan the car for threats." Tony said.

"Scanning." The computer said from the man's phone. "It seems the car is completely safe."

"What about listening equipment?" Tony asked.

"I don't detect anything." F.R.I.D.A.Y. said.

"He left a charger cord in the car." Bucky supplied. "Will that take Peter's data?"

"There don't seem to be any external connections. I can't find any frequencies that are abnormal either." The computer responded.

"Can I keep the car?" Peter asked Tony, trying his best to mask the excitement in his voice.

"Do you have a license?" Tony asked.

Peter pulled his wallet out of his jeans and showed the man his driver's license.

"I guess so, kid." Tony sighed. "You don't go doing anything dumb with, or in, that car." He added sternly.

"No of course not!" Peter exclaimed, wrinkling his face in disgust. "Ew. Why would you even-gross." He shook his head.

"I don't know what goes through that pretty teenage head of yours, kid." Tony said.

"So where're we headed?" Steve broke up the conversation.

"I don't know." Peter flipped the page he hadn't realized was still in his hands. "There's a clue." He
read the writing on the back. "Go back to the place where you all began."

"That could be literally anywhere." Bucky said. "We all started out somewhere different."

"I don't think that's what he meant." Peter said. "The way he worded it was deliberate, I think he meant 'you all' as a unit. As in where the Avengers began." Peter said. "So that would be Stark Tower."

"Well let's go." Bucky said and climbed onto his bike. He looked at the rest of the group, seemingly annoyed at how they hesitated. Peter shrugged and slid into the driver's side of his car and Loki got into the passenger's side. The teenager turned the keys in the ignition. He listened to the engine purr for just a second and managed not to get too distracted before he focused his thoughts back on driving. He pulled out of the parking space and drove behind Tony but in front of Fury as they pulled down the road.

Once they were on the highway, Peter turned the radio on. He handed his phone to Loki saying, "Can you plug the charger into the phone and open my music app? Just shuffle the top playlist so we have something to listen to."

Loki followed Peter's instructions and hooked the phone up to the radio. The display had a little popup signifying that the device was connected and the teen's selection of rock music started playing as soon as the trickster shuffled the playlist.

The two settled into the drive to Manhattan. About an hour and a half later because they encountered some traffic on the way into the city, they finally pulled up in front of the ex Avenger's tower.

They parked along the curb and hopped out of their cars, Peter being careful not to get the door whisked off by the reckless drivers on the street. The teen shut his door and walked around the hood of the car, wading through the throng of walking people, striding up to the front of the building. He immediately found the note taped to the door. He pulled it off and turned to the rest of the group, quietly wondering how no one saw it before they did.

"'Good, you're smarter than I anticipated!'" Peter read. "'At the next stop you'll find the final clue.'"

The teen flipped the page and read their new hint. "'Where did things go south for the youngest Avenger?'"

"Is that the lake?" Tony asked Peter. "Or the shore?"

"It might be Liz's house." Peter said.

"Is there anything before that?" Bucky asked.

"Well it could be when I first found the weapons dealers that were working for Vulture." Peter said.

"Well let's head there then. If that's not right, we'll keep checking." Steve said.

Everyone piled into their cars and they set out to Queens to find the bridge where Peter discovered the arms race. This time, he led the pack, everyone following him as he directed them to his hometown.

Another forty five minute drive dropped the group out in a small section of mulch beneath a bridge. Peter pulled up to the support of the bridge and got out of the car. He walked up to find a piece of paper taped to the metal and mentally congratulated himself.

As everyone gathered around him he read, "There were four places you could have gone and you
were able to deduce it was here? Did you guess?" He flipped the page one last time for the final clue. "You'll find me where the lost saved the broken."

Peter turned to Steve and Bucky who looked like they were trying to put two and two together. "I think that means you two."

"I think you're the lost." Steve said.

"Where did I save you?" Bucky asked.

"Uh...the Potomac? In D.C.?" Steve responded.

"It's either that or Sokovia and I doubt that's it so D.C. it is." Bucky said.

"You guys ready for a five hour drive or do you need anything else?" Peter asked.

"We can pick up some food on the way there and gas may be a good idea." Tony pitched.

"Sounds like a plan." Steve said. "Let's head out then."

Fury led the pack and they fueled up at the first gas station they passed, grabbing lunch in the drive thru of a McDonalds about fifteen minutes into the trip when Peter started a group call and insisted that they eat first so they 'don't get sick'. He was proud of himself when everyone caved. After that, they settled into the trip along the New Jersey turnpike.

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Peter and Loki tore through all the good music the boy had in the first two and a half hours and the teen introduced the god to the wonders of Netflix instead. Loki had watched one episode of the Walking Dead when he spoke.

"I can't believe we're actually doing this." Loki said.

"What do you mean?" Peter asked.

"This man, Alexander, we know basically nothing about him but his powers and that he somehow managed to break into Avengers HQ and drugged you. We don't know what kinds of gear he has and we're showing up to Washington DC with nothing but our sassy demeanor and pocketknives."

"Well I mean..." Peter began. "Yeah I got nothing."

"Exactly. What are we doing?" Loki shook his head.

"I'm not sure. I guess we're kind of just hoping for the best. I'm pretty sure Tony has the Iron Suit either with him or on call so hopefully that works out in our favor." Peter shrugged.

"I feel like we're all being a little lax on security at this point." Loki said.

Peter just shrugged again and settled into the last stretch of the trip.

They made their second gas stop and took a stretch break about fifteen minutes out of D.C. They made it to the Roosevelt bridge and found themselves passing the Triskelion and crossing the Potomac onto Theodore Roosevelt island. They took the exit ramp down and merged onto a side street that would get them closest to the water before pulling over. Bucky and Steve got ready to lead them to the spot where the then Winter Soldier had saved Captain America.

"How're we even gonna get over there?" Peter asked.
"We walk." Bucky responded and hopped off his bike to begin the trek through the woods. Finally, they stood on the bank of the river. Peter wrinkled his nose at the smell and turned to Steve and Bucky.

"You guys were in the Potomac?" The teen asked in disgust.

"It's not like we chose to be." Steve defended himself. "The helicarrier collapsed and we fell into the river."

"The worst part was how the smell clung to me for like three days." Bucky said flatly.

"Gross." Peter responded.

"Well it took you long enough! I was beginning to get bored!" A voice came from behind them and everyone whipped around. Bucky, Natasha, Hill, and Fury all aimed their guns at the newcomer, the first mentioned moving to stand in front of Peter.

Over the man's shoulder, Peter could see the tall frame of Alexander DeManassi, a smirk on his face.

---------------------------------------------
So who's this newcomer?? Alexander is an original character of mine and above is my original concept art for him. I always feel kind of suckish for setting him up to be this crazy powerful character (and handsome and young) but I didn't wanna throw in some rinky dink antagonist because for him to be a recurring character who wasn't particularly powerful felt to me like I was underestimating the team's strength.
Anyways, as always, thank you all for reading and until the next chapter

-xoxo Denise
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*Over the man's shoulder, Peter could see the tall frame of Alexander DeManassi, a smirk on his face.*

The teen took in the young man. He was wearing a pair of black jeans with some old skool vans, a red and black flannel layered over a black t-shirt. Confusion washed over Peter. He expected Alexander to roll up in a suit made from the plans he stole and a shield but here he is, completely unprotected and, from what it seems, unarmed.

"It’s really great to see you all." The man smiled.

"Captain Steve Rogers, what an honor. Nick Fury. Maria, was it, Hill? Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes." His eyes flicked from person to person.


"And last but certainly not least, young Peter Parker." He held Peter's gaze the longest.

Bucky instinctively pressed farther back to protect the teen, who stumbled backwards to have his shoe soaked through with water. He’d have time to be grossed out later.

“How do you know us?” Bucky asked, his voice gruff and sharp as he pointed his gun for emphasis.

“I’m an expert hacker, James. I know everything about you guys. I know you still have nightmares sometimes, I know Tony drinks coffee past noon even though Pepper tells him not to, I know Loki doesn’t sleep at night and I know Agent Hill trains until three in the morning sometimes when she can’t sleep.” Alexander said.

Bucky was seething and he stepped forward, away from Peter to advance on Alexander. He pressed his gun to the man’s forehead. “Don’t you say another word asshole or I swear to god I’ll blow your fucking brains out.”

“Kinky.” Alexander smirked at Bucky, not even flinching. “You’re bluffing. You’re all bluffing. Because you see, you need me. I could very well be your most important asset. You wouldn’t kill
“Yeah, you’re right, I won’t kill you.” Bucky said, uncocking his gun and shoving it back into his belt. Alexander smirked. “I’ll just punch you really, really hard in your punk face.” And with that, Bucky threw a hard left hook to the man’s temple. Alexander fell at the ex Winter Soldier’s feet. “How’s that for a bluff.” He grunted.

Peter stepped forward to nudge the body on the ground with his dry foot. “He’s out cold.” He said when the man didn’t move.

Bucky unbuckled his belt and pulled it from the loops, binding Alexander’s wrists behind his back before throwing the limp body over his metal shoulder and beginning to walk back to the road. The rest of the group followed behind.

Fury popped the trunk of his car and Bucky spared no gentleness as he all but chucked the body into the compartment. When Fury looked at him funny he grunted, “He has super healing. He’ll be fine.” Before trudging back to his bike.

And so they began the drive back to New York. Peter insisted he was hungry again and this time they stopped by a Wendy’s. Bucky bought him a cookie and they were off again. Once they made it back to the Avengers compound, the sun was setting around them and they all parked in the garage.

Bucky went to Fury’s car to yank Alexander out of the trunk, who was now awake. The younger man squirmed at first but when he realized he wouldn’t win against Bucky, who he matched in strength but not in anger, settled for winking at Steve and wiggling his hips, causing Cap’s pale face to go tomato red.

They all crammed into the elevator and took it to the gym, where Bucky sat Alexander on the heaviest piece of equipment he could find, holding him still while Natasha tied his ankles down.

When they had finished, the two stepped back and joined the rest of the group to begin the interrogation.


“Polygraph Mode activated. Test subject, Alexander DeManassi. Results will be saved to my archives. Testing beginning now.” The building responded.

The group let Bucky start.

“Who are you.” He ground out, obviously still extremely angry about the drug incident.

“You know who I am. I’m Alexander DeManassi. I’m 22 years old, I’m from Virginia, I used to work for S.H.I.E.L.D and I’m the newest addition to the list of possible threats to the Avengers.”

“What do you want from us?” Bucky asked.

“Attention.” Alexander responded. “Though I guess recognition is a better word.”

“Who do you work for?” Bucky followed up.

“Myself.” Alexander shrugged, face straight.

“Result?” Tony asked the building, obviously dubious.

Tony didn’t look convinced but he nodded for Bucky to continue.

“And why’d you drug the pizza?” The man fired another question.

“To peak your interests, obviously. Gotta make a good first impression.” Alexander smirked, his hooded blue green eyes glinting.

“And to do that you had to put Peter in a coma?” Bucky barked. His voice had risen with every question he asked.

Alexander’s eyes widened. “Woah, woah, woah, what? I didn’t put Peter in a coma, I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Peter ate your goddamn pizza and he went into a fucking coma.” Bucky’s voice dropped to a harsh whisper that was somehow more terrifying than his yelling. He advanced on Alexander.

“Look, I only drugged the one pizza because that’s all the time I had and I figured it’d be a good way to only get a bunch of you noticeably woozy. It shouldn’t have put anyone in a coma.” Alexander explained.

“Peter ate the entire pizza and nearly drowned falling asleep in the bath, and after that, it took his system seven days to clear the medication.” Bucky said through gritted teeth.

“I didn’t expect anyone to eat a whole pizza on their own. I should’ve taken into account his metabolism, and if not his, Steve’s. I didn’t think any one person would eat that much of it.” Alexander rushed out. “I swear I never meant for anyone to get that sick. I promise you.”

“F.R.I.D.A.Y., results on the testee’s previous three statements?” Tony asked.

“All three statements are true, sir.” The building responded.

Tony looked at Bucky who seemed close to crushing Alexander’s skull with his bare hands.

“Barnes…” Tony said warningly.

Bucky continued to glare daggers at the bound man, but backed off regardless. “I really hope you’re being honest. Not for my sake, but for yours.” Bucky threatened. “Because I swear to God if I ever find out you were anything but completely explicit about that, I will skin you alive and hang you out to dry.”

“Point taken.” Alexander responded. “Now you wanna let me go, or?”

“You armed?” Bucky retorted.

“No sir.” The young man slurred.

“Result?” Bucky asked the building this time.


Bucky rolled his eyes and went to untie Alexander’s ankles.

“The hell’re you doin’ kid?” Fury asked when the man stood, rubbing his red wrists.
“Showing my potential.” Alexander responded.

“Why couldn’t you have just contacted us?” Steve jumped in.

“It’s not how I roll.” Alexander shrugged. “Plus, it’s not like you guys would trust me anyways. Not after everything Fury probably would’ve told you about me if I’d reached out.”

“We know you were an asset before you went off-grid, why’d you go bad?” Natasha asked.

“I wouldn’t say I went bad, per se. I left because I didn’t like what was going on in S.H.I.E.L.D. They weren’t doing a great job of taking care of some threats. A lot of what was going on when I first joined was still disjointed after the H.Y.D.R.A. uprising.” Alexander said.

“So you had to make a bad name for yourself?” Bucky asked, his arms crossed over his chest.

“I wanted to make a statement. I assumed I was one of the most important members of the agency while I was there, so I figured giving them a taste of what I could do to them would get their attention.”

“So you’re not a bad guy?” Steve asked.

“Not really. I wouldn’t say I’m a good guy either. I don’t play by the rules, I do what I think feels right.” Alexander said.

“So a vigilante?” Natasha looked at the man with an emotion Peter couldn’t decipher.

“I guess you could say that.” Alexander responded.

“Are you on our side?” Peter piped up and everyone turned to him.

“I support your cause and I don’t support Thanos’ so yeah, I guess so.”

“Result?” Bucky demanded the building.


“So you have a house?” Peter asked.

“Nah. I’ve been living out of a cabin not far from here.” Alexander said. “I needed to be close enough for my frequency to intercept the building’s.” He added when everyone looked surprised. “It doesn’t have running water, indoor plumbing, or heating and cooling systems so I wouldn’t call it luxury.”

“Can he stay here?” Peter turned to Tony. He didn’t think Alexander would turn, he usually got a bad feeling about those kinds of people.

Tony narrowed his eyes and sized Alexander up. “It’s not like we can just let him go.” He sighed. “He can only stay if he doesn’t have any weapons or access to weapons and F.R.I.D.A.Y. notifies me every time he leaves his room. For anything. Constant around the clock monitoring, you hear that F.R.I.D.A.Y? If this guy sneezes I want to know about it. Also, constant monitors on his vitals. If his heart rate spikes, I want the reason. If he lies, I want to be notified.” The man locked stern eyes with Alexander.

“I want him locked out of any room I don’t explicitly mark as him being allowed in.” Bucky said, arms crossed strongly over his chest.
“That can be arranged. Good addition, Barnes.” Tony said, nodding at Bucky.

“You offering me a place here so long as I’m responsible and listen to my robot babysitter?” Alexander asked. Peter could tell he was excited about not having to live in a shack, but his face was straight and stony.

“I guess so.” Tony said.

“I’ll take it.” Alexander smirked. “I gotta get my stuff from the cabin though.”

“I’m coming with you.” Bucky said sternly.

“Me too.” Tony said.

“Well then I guess that automatically ropes me in.” Steve sighed.

“I’ll drive.” Peter pitched.

Tony looked a little unsure but finally nodded and they went back down to the garage. Peter slid into the driver’s seat of his new car and Bucky sat in the passenger’s seat, Tony, Steve, and Alexander piling into the back.

“How do you like your new ride, Peter?” Alexander asked after the teenager started the vehicle up and was beginning to pull out of the garage.

“Uh,” Peter said, his eyes flicking to the rearview mirror to look at Alexander’s smirking face before he refocused on the road. “It’s really nice. I don’t get why you gave it to me though.”

“I didn’t think Tony was gonna get you one anytime soon, and I knew you wouldn’t ask for one so I figured why not take matters into my own hands?”

“And this isn’t some kind of trick?” Peter asked.

“God no.” Alexander laughed. “I may make questionable decisions but I wouldn’t do that to you. I didn’t even lay my hands on the steering wheel of any car until I was twenty.”

“Oh. Why not?” Peter asked.

“I didn’t have the most privileged childhood. I grew up in one of the richest counties in the world and even though my parents made a good paycheck, it didn’t get us very far. I was the kid that got their clothes from Walmart and Goodwill because I couldn’t afford anything else, let alone a car.” Alexander shrugged.

“Oh.” Peter said again. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault. Don’t worry about it.” Alexander said but he didn’t speak again until they were inside his cabin.

The rundown wooden house was closer to a shed than a cabin. The logs it was built of were rotting and splintered, the floorboards swollen and creaking as they walked over them. Alexander’s rickety kitchen table was covered in high tech looking equipment but he emerged from his room carrying nothing but a duffel bag that held everything he owned. Peter couldn’t help but feel bad for him.

“I don’t need that anymore. You can take it, leave it here, I don’t care.” Alexander said to Tony who was assessing the gear on his table.
“I can scrap it.” Tony said. “Steve, help me carry this out to the car. Peter, can you open your trunk?” The teenager turned to the broken glass window and pressed a button on the keyfob, watching the trunk of the car pop open.

“Are you being honest with us?” Peter asked Alexander who pulled up a matching chair to the table.

“I don’t lie. I’ve been wronged by a lot of liars and it’d be hypocritical of me to stoop that low.” Alexander said.

“What’re you getting out of this?” Peter fired. “I mean, you don’t seem like the biggest of willing teammates, so why join the Avengers?”

“I guess it’s time for me to find myself a place somewhere other than hacking security cameras and drugging pizzas.” Alexander’s lips quirked.

Peter smiled back softly and when he heard the sound of the trunk shut outside he started toward the door, turning back to make sure Bucky and Alexander were following.

Everyone got back into the car and returned to the compound, taking the elevator back up to the common floor.

Steve and Tony went off to do their own things but Alexander threw himself down onto the couch in front of the TV and Peter made a beeline for the fridge, grabbing himself a diet coke. “You want a soda?” He called to Alexander.

“Yeah. Please?” Alexander responded.

“Sure. How about you Bucky?” He looked to the man who’d taken a seat on a stool at the island.

“Why not?” He smiled fondly at the teenager who handed him a can and brought two back with him to the couches, passing one to Alexander and throwing himself across a loveseat, propping his head up on the arm of it.

He opened his soda and took a sip before asking, “Why’d you give me a car? You don’t even know me, and you don’t have your own. Why buy me a sixty thousand dollar ride?”

“I have a car. I just parked it in the lot of this compound. No one seemed to notice it never leaves.” He snickered. “But I wanted to show you guys I can do nice things.”

“Where’re you even getting the money?” Bucky asked, walking over from the island to instead sit down in one of the chairs by the TV.

“I hacked the accounts of some rich assholes I don’t like and wired it to myself in intervals of a couple hundred dollars every week to make it look like a paycheck.” Alexander shrugged. “The amounts were so small they didn’t even notice.”

“Huh.” Peter said, tipping the soda can back against his lips again.

“So what’s your story?” Bucky asked. “You know all of ours.”

“I guess it’s only fair.” Alexander sighed. “I’m Alexander Samuel DeManassi. I was born in Springfield Virginia and my family moved to the city of Alexandria when I was eleven. I was in the advanced placement program but I didn’t go to school much. I skipped a bunch of days and my parents were too busy fighting to really care.”
“My dad was a drunk, my mom was a chain smoker. They didn’t sleep in the same bed, my dad slept on the basement couch more often than not. He knew my mom was cheating, but so was he so they never talked about it. I ran away from home when I was fifteen and by then my powers had already begun surfacing. My parents were going to sell me to some place in Russia that wanted to exploit me. S.H.I.E.L.D. took interest when I started popping up on their radar, but they’d barely gotten past the H.Y.D.R.A. uprising so I wasn’t sure but they sent in someone to talk to me about it a few years after that and they offered me an apartment and a car, so I took it.”

“And how’d you end up on the run and with stolen plans from Howard Stark?” Bucky looked at Alexander.

“People were fidgety. Anxious. People in S.H.I.E.L.D were going on about this new apparent threat that they learned about from some connection of theirs and then next thing I knew, half the world was disappearing. And they weren’t doing anything about it. So I took some blueprints I thought looked cool and I bolted.” Alexander shrugged.

“I don’t think that’s all you wanted with the plans.” Bucky pressed.

“I was gonna make a suit and a shield, but I never got my hands on the stuff I needed.” Alexander sighed.

“And here we are?” Peter asked.

“Here we are.” Alexander responded.

“I don’t think you’re gonna betray us.” Peter said.

“I don’t think so either.” Alexander replied. “I don’t want to. I think being here could be good for me. And good for the team.”

“It’s good to have you then.” Peter responded.

With that, Alexander turned on the TV and chose one of Tony’s many movies. Peter and Bucky eventually left, Bucky to go finish the workout he’d only gotten halfway through this morning and Peter to go to his room.

The teen opened his laptop, going on to check the Midtown Tech website. He hadn’t thought about school since before he died up until this morning when Steve had brought it up and he just realized not only were all his friends now five years older than him, but they’d all graduated without him. He checked the site’s banner for the class of 2019, seeing the headline “In Loving Memory of Those Who Could Not Graduate With Us” and below it, a list of everyone who had died. Peter found his name under the letter P, the list so long it had to alphabetized.

He frantically checked for the names of all his friends, even checked for Flash. Thankfully, he didn’t find them. He let out an audible sigh of relief, but his heart panged with guilt as he read the names of the peers who he had classes with or had seen around. It wasn’t fair he got to live and they didn’t.

Peter sighed and shut his laptop before throwing himself onto his bed. Suddenly, an idea sprung in his head. He pulled the home phone out of the cradle on his nightstand. Should he call anyone? Could he? Ned knew he was Spiderman, but he couldn’t count on him not telling anyone. MJ didn’t, and neither did Liz. He wanted nothing more than to see them again, to smile and laugh and cry with them saying, “I’m back.”.

But what if they didn’t remember him? What if they’d let him go over the past five years. The thoughts swam in Peter’s mind, making his chest clench. He decided not to tell anyone. For now.
The teenager put the phone back in the cradle and laid down for the night instead, not bothering to change his clothes or even get under the covers.

Chapter End Notes

OoooooOOOOOoooooo what's gonna happen next???? I'm running dry on a/n ideas so this is all I got for right now.

I love you all and thank you so much for reading. Until the next chapter, my lovelies

-xoxo Denise
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When he woke up it was the next afternoon and to an insistent pounding on his door. Peter stirred awake, shooting up in bed at the heavy thuds and he swung his legs over the side of the mattress. He stumbled to the door on sleep-weak legs and pulled it open, finding a disheveled looking Bucky standing there.

"Peter there's something really important going on you-" And the man cut himself off by slamming a water balloon against the teen's chest. "-just got soaked." He smirked at the boy whose shirt was now dripping in cold water.

"Oh you're so on!" Peter said, all sleepiness gone, running out of the room as Bucky sprinted down the hall. He found the rest of the team in the now drenched living room all soaked through with water, hurling balloons and shooting squirt guns at each other with no abandon.

Peter managed to sneak into the kitchen and smuggled a bunch of balloons from Sam and Bucky's stash in the sink while the two were distracted by Steve and Tony, folding his shirt into a pouch. By the time the men noticed it was too late and he had already shoved one down the back of Bucky's shirt and slapped it down so it would pop. The older man's back arched at the feeling of the frigid water.

"It's in my pants!" He screamed and Peter laughed as he smushed one on Sam's face before gathering his marsupial pouch in his arms and running out of range before they could counteract.

Peter slid behind Loki, who was standing, completely dry, in the hallway as he watched the scene before him. The teen chucked a balloon at the man, watching as it popped and the god's shoulders rose as his body tensed. Loki turned to glare at Peter before he smirked and his hand flicked, a balloon materializing from green magic as it flew through the air and hit Peter square in the face. The boy ducked before a second one could hit him and he scrambled out of the way, Thor's balloons raining down on Loki then as Peter dove over the soaked couch to evade more fire, briefly noticing that the TV had been moved someplace presumably safer. Behind the couch he found a very wet and slightly terrified Clint.

"Hey kid, wanna be allies? I don't have any and Nat is kicking my butt." He said.

"Sure." Peter responded, opening his balloon filled pouch to share with Clint. The man grabbed one
and poked his head over the couch to throw it at Natasha.

Just as he was throwing a balloon over the couch fort to hit Wanda, who was ruthless by the way, he felt his entire body soak with water. He looked up to find Bucky and Sam, now allied with Steve, Tony, and Stephen, holding a bucket above his head.

Peter gritted his teeth and grabbed a balloon in each hand, slapping one against both men's abdomens, watching as they cringed at the feeling of their pants and everything underneath being soaked with freezing water. Clint turned and helped the teen attack the entire team who fought back valiantly.

The room was filled with the sounds of laughter, battle cries, and the splashing of water but everyone went dead silent when a loud, "Stop!" Run out.

Everyone turned to find Pepper, standing in the doors of the elevator looking angry. "What the hell are you doing?" She asked before her face turned from mad to a devious smile as she produced what Peter was sure was the largest water gun he had ever seen from behind her back, proceeding to spray everyone down.

They were like that until every person ran out of water balloons. When it ended, everyone was leaning on each other, laughing so hard tears streamed from their eyes. Sam was making fun of how Bucky's hair stuck to his face when it was wet so Bucky put the bucket over Sam's head. Everything was so soaked the couches and rugs would need to be replaced and everything sprayed down with bleach when they cleaned up the water to prevent mold but it was worth it. This was it, the happiest thing they'd done in a very long time.

"Who started it anyways?" Peter asked Bucky, leaning on his floor squeegee after everyone was dry and set to work hauling couches and rugs outside or sweeping the water out the floor to ceiling windows Peter didn't even know opened.

"Alexander did. At first it was just him coming into the common room with a bucket and everyone thought it was weird but all of a sudden he was chucking water balloons at us and it turned into this war." Bucky laughed and Peter turned his head to look at Alexander, who was also sweeping water out the window, whistling nonchalantly.

"Y'know, this is the biggest team activity the Avengers have had in years." Peter said as he moved to swipe the water closer to Alexander.

"I know." The man said, eyes locked on the floor as he pushed the water out. "Why do you think I did it?"

"You're a godsend." Bucky said from his place now farther back in the room as he gathered water on the back wall.

"I know." Alexander repeated, smiling smugly.

When most of the water was out the window, they came in with a ton of towels, sopping up what was left before making a water/scented bleach solution and mopping the floors with it. When they were done, they waited for the tiles to dry and went off to the conference hall where the rest of the team was relaxing.

"Hey, Peter!" Tony said, sitting forward from where he was leaned back in a wheelie chair, his feet propped on the sleek table.

"Hey, Mr. Stark." Peter smiled, waving.
"Whaddya want for dinner, kid? You brought us Alexander, so you can choose tonight." Tony said with a smile.

"Uhh..." Peter said, blanking from being put on the spot. "Italian...?" He said the first thing that came to mind.

"You sure?" Tony asked. "You don't sound sure."

"I'm sure." Peter nodded. "Let's get Italian."

"Okay. Italian good?" He turned to the rest of the team and everyone murmured their agreement. "Great. I know the best Italian place."

---------------------------------------------

"Tony what're we doing at Olive Garden?" Steve asked, unamused with his strong arms crossed over his chest.

"You said you knew a good Italian place." Clint said, his arms crossed.

"I said I knew one I didn't say we were going there." Tony shrugged, smirking.

"Let me guess," Bucky pitched flatly. "It's in Italy?"

"See the Manchurian Candidate got it!" Tony said, turning and pointing at Bucky as he walked toward the building. Everyone stood by their cars in the lot. "What you're not coming?" The team didn't budge. "Fine you got me I was kidding." He sighed.

Bucky smirked and slid back into the car with Peter and Loki as Tony grumbled under his breath but got into his own car, leading the group to what looked like a locally owned Italian restaurant; its parking lot so small nearly every spot was taken up by the group alone. The building was well kept, but the time was evident in the fading of the paint. The whole place had a certain homey feeling to it, warm and welcoming. Tony walked towards the door, the rest of the team following behind him.

"Ah, Tony, Pepper!" A small old woman said in a thick Italian accent, throwing her arms up as she walked towards the billionaire.

"Giovanna!" Tony exclaimed, coming forward to wrap the woman in a tight hug. She was so small she made Tony look tall though he was one of the shortest within the team.

"It's good to see you, Giovanna." Pepper smiled and the woman gasped when she saw the ring on Pepper's hand before turning and smacking Tony upside the head.

"Why didn't you tell me?" She asked angrily and Tony rubbed the side of his skull.

"Ah, Tony, Pepper!" A small old woman said in a thick Italian accent, throwing her arms up as she walked towards the billionaire.

"Giovanna!" Tony exclaimed, coming forward to wrap the woman in a tight hug. She was so small she made Tony look tall though he was one of the shortest within the team.

"It's good to see you, Giovanna." Pepper smiled and the woman gasped when she saw the ring on Pepper's hand before turning and smacking Tony upside the head.

"Why didn't you tell me?" She asked angrily and Tony rubbed the side of his skull.

"We've been busy!" Tony pouted.

"And who are these you've brought with you?" She asked, turning to the group.

"These are the rest of my coworkers, and my good friends." Tony smiled at her and Peter realized she didn't know they were the Avengers, though she didn't seem at all phased by Rocket, Groot, and Gamora.

"Oh!" She said, smiling, going to hug and kiss everyone's cheeks as Tony introduced them all.

Thor and Loki were the first, both of them bending down so the woman could kiss their cheeks.
Thor gave the woman a bear hug and Loki suavely slipped her hand into his palm, raising it to his thin lips to kiss as he locked his eyes on hers, to which she blushed.

The woman tightly hugged Natasha and asked something in Italian and the assassin responded in the same language, smiling and turning to Clint. Peter realized they knew each other.

"Clint." The woman smiled warmly, holding the man's face in her hands, pulling him down to kiss his forehead.

"Hi, Giovanna." The man smiled back.

Tony and Giovanna moved down the line until they finally reached the end.

"And this is Peter." Tony said from behind the teenager, his hands on the boy's shoulders.

"Hello, Peter. Tony has told me so much about you." She smiled warmly at the teen before wrapping him in a tight hug. The teen brought his arms up to wrap around her small frame in return.

"Now, now. No more wait, you must eat!" The small woman said as she ushered them off to a long table in the back of the restaurant. Everyone took a seat and Giovanna passed each of them a menu, asking what they wanted to drink first. Peter looked at the menu in his hands while he waited on his diet coke.

When Giovanna and another waiter, who bore a resemblance to her, telling Peter he was her son, brought their drinks out she asked if everyone was ready, proceeding to take their orders when they answered yes.

The entire team's banter filled the room, their voices and laughter carrying and the waiters and waitresses that came by to check on them sometimes engaged in the conversation as well, laughing heartily. Peter was so happy and he didn't think at all about what was going on or what might happen with Thanos, instead he just shoveled pasta and breadsticks into his mouth and laughed so hard he nearly choked when Thor didn't know what to call tomato sauce so he called it "red juice with meat". However Peter's favorite part was the story telling.

"And so Steve, he threw a punch at this guy twice his size, and the dude just picks him up and chucks him into the pond." Bucky was gasping through laughter.

Peter snorted coke out his nose and groaned in pain as everyone else busted out cackling at him and Bucky looked like he was going to have an asthma attack. Peter rubbed his nose aggressively at the stinging itch in his nostrils, Steve patting his back and glaring at Bucky, his cheeks cherry red. When everyone had finished their dinner, Giovanna came out with Tiramisu and Cannolis.

"We didn't order those." Tony said, looking at her curiously.

"On the house." She smiled.

"Really, I can pay for i-" the man began.

"On the house." Giovanna said sternly and Tony put his hands up in surrender as Peter sat practically vibrating with excitement at the prospect of dessert.

When a slice of Tiramisu and a cannoli was placed on his plate Peter tried not to explode while he waited for everyone else to get theirs before greedily shoving a bite into his mouth, moaning around the cake, sliding down in his seat. He pulled his plate closer to the edge and savored the rest, then downing his cannoli in two bites.
When he opened his eyes he found a new, untouched plate in front of him. He looked up to see his empty plate sitting in front of Bucky, who looked at him and nodded for him to take it.

"But it's-" Peter began.

"Eat." Bucky said sternly and Peter put the cannoli over on the empty plate and ate the tiramisu, pulling his new plate out of Bucky's reach so the man couldn't return the dessert. The White Wolf rolled his eyes at Peter and took a bite of the treat, Peter smiling broadly at him when he caved.

After the team had cleaned their plates, Tony insisted he pay though Giovanni tried her best to keep him from doing it. His solution was pulling three hundreds from his wallet and slamming it down on the table before running out of the restaurant when Giovanni repeatedly tried to stop him from leaving it. The group burst with laughter and said goodbye to the staff, carrying containers of leftovers and hugging their hostess on the way out. Peter returned to his car with Bucky, Steve, and Loki and turned the keys in the ignition, backing out of the parking space and following the rest of the team back to the compound.

The group was so big they had to split into two and take a different elevator but they met back up on the newly restored common floor. Thor sat down on the new, dry couch in front of the TV which had been moved back to its original place, Loki beside him as he fiddled with the remote. Steve was saying something on his other side, pointing to the buttons and then to the monitor that lit up, followed by Thor's sound of surprise.

Everyone else found their ways to the couches and chairs and made themselves comfortable and Peter reached into the cabinet for a fistful of microwave popcorn packets but was pushed aside by Bucky.

"Those cause cancer." The man said and proceeded to put the popcorn back in the cupboard, instead pulling out a pot, olive oil, popcorn kernels, salt, and a stick of butter and got to work.

He set the pot down on the stove, eyeballing measurements of oil and popcorn kernels, adding salt and a chunk of the butter before covering the pot with its lid and shaking it gently. The only thing Peter could hear at first was the hissing of the fire but eventually pops began to come from the covered pot.

A few minutes later, Bucky was satisfied with the quantity of cooked popcorn and took it off the burner, moving to pull out two large bowls and pouring half of the surprisingly large amount of popcorn into each of them, walking out of the kitchen and giving a bowl to each side of the room to share. Peter went to the fridge, pulling out the whole box of sodas and brought them back out, turning the lights off on his way before passing the drinks to anyone who wanted one. He then found his place on the floor in front of the couch between Bucky and Loki's knees.

Bucky ruffled the teenager's hair, handing the bowl of popcorn to him before turning back to watch the movie Thor had picked. Peter didn't know exactly what it was, it seemed like a chick flick, of course Thor would love that, but it seemed interesting enough. Peter sat back against the couch, watching the TV.

The movie was an emotional rollercoaster, and if he was being completely honest, he teared up just a little bit when the girl was diagnosed with cancer, but Thor started bawling. Loki looked mildly uncomfortable as his hand glowed green, a box of tissues materializing that he handed to his sobbing brother.

"Oh Loki, it's so sad, she's got cancer! She's dying! She's never going to be with her love again!" Thor choked out in his version of a whisper, which was really just a quiet yell.
"There, there, Brother." Loki said awkwardly, gently patting Thor's shoulder.

Peter looked back to check on Bucky who had a steely expression, but there was a hint of tears in his eyes, his jaw set solidly as he tried to seem put together. Peter reached over his shoulder to pat his knee comfortingly. The man looked down at him and gave a small smile before passing the boy the last of the popcorn.

The teenager munched quietly on the snack, fully aware of Thor sniffling not so discreetly past Loki. The movie had a happy ending, the girl went into remission and she ended up marrying the love interest. The smile on Thor's face was so big Peter was sure it must have hurt and Loki looked vaguely pleased. The trickster's lips quirking at the corners but just like during their outing he dropped the smile and replaced it with one of annoyance once Thor turned his way. Peter shook his head, chuckling when he made eye contact with the god.

The group all stood, stretching and laughing as they made the last talk of the night. The team began to trickle out of the room, heading off to their bedrooms and saying goodnight to each other. For the first time in a little while, Peter and Tony were alone to talk.

"How're things lately, Pete?" Tony asked, leaning back in his chair.

"Pretty good." Peter responded.

"Good, good." Tony answered. "How're the suits?" The man added.

"They're great. They lasted me through the soul realm." Peter thought back to the older suit hanging in the closet in his room and the disk of the new one on his nightstand. He hadn't touched them since he got back. "The self mending technology is fast, but if I needed full body coverage right away it's not as fast as it could be."

Tony thought for a second. "Well I could upgrade them. The latest suits I've got all have that kind of tech. If you wanted to keep the suits you have though, I could probably weave it into the programming."

Peter nodded. "Yeah, I definitely like both the suits a lot. The new one is wicked cool." Tony looked confused for a moment at the use of the word 'new' before he remembered that for Peter, it was new.

"Sweet. I could probably have it done by tomorrow afternoon. Just drop it by the lab in the morning." Tony said.

"Got it." Peter smiled. "Hey, how's May?"

The man's eyebrows knitted together. "She hasn't called in a little while. She usually does every few days. I thought maybe she'd have contacted you, actually."

Concern washed over Peter, the teen thinking back to the unanswered texts in his messages. "Do you know where she's staying these days, she hasn't answered my texts."

Tony rambled off an address and Peter thanked him before hurrying off to his room, slipping the web shooters onto his wrists and snatching up his car keys before hurrying into the elevator and going down to the garage. He jogged to his car, getting into the driver's seat and turning his keys in the ignition before backing out of his parking space and gunning it out the mouth of the garage onto the open service road.

Chapter End Notes
Here we go, thrown right back into the angst and anger. We'll have to see what happened to May to make her be missing Peter's texts.

Anyways, I love you all and thank you so much for reading. Until the next chapter,

-xoxo Denise
"Got it." Peter smiled. "Hey, how's May?"

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Peter tore down the empty streets to the address Tony had given him, pulling up the curb outside the complex. He turned off the car and climbed out, running up to the security buzzer and looking for the apartment number, pressing its button.

"May!" He called into it. "May, it's Peter! Let me in!"

No response.

Panic flooded his body and he pressed it again frantically. "May! May are you there?"

Again, no answer.

Peter huffed, running around the side of the building to the fire escape. He scaled it quietly, not wanting the rattling of the rickety iron to cause suspicion. He climbed up to where the apartment should be. The teen peered through the darkened window when he reached it, seeing the familiar furniture May owned. Hooking his fingers under the window and pulling up, he found it had been left unlocked. May never left the window unlocked.

The boy crawled through the opening, landing softly on the floor below. He hurried though the apartment to the bedrooms, turning the knobs of each room in the hall. He opened to a barren office and a linen closet before he reached the master bedroom. He took a deep breath and opened the door.

The bed was empty and made.

Peter panicked. He checked every other room in the house, finding them all neatly organized and unused. She had left the apartment as if she'd just headed off to work and never come back. Peter cursed under his breath, going to the kitchen and digging through the drawers for the spare key he
knew May always kept. He swiped his finger over the counter, finding it coated with a thin layer of dust despite May's habit of always wiping it down. She'd been gone a while.

Peter's roving hands found the key and tucked it into his pocket before returning to the still open window, closing and locking it. The boy left through the front door, locking it on his way out before running down the stairs and back out the lobby.

Peter's thoughts were racing a mile a minute, trying to decipher May's absence. Maybe she was just on a business trip. That's feasible right? She's on a business trip.

But she would've responded to Peter's texts, wouldn't she have? She gets angry if Peter doesn't call back three seconds after she does, she would've left a message at least.

But she didn't.

So where was she?

Peter raced back to the facility, parking his car and locking it over his shoulder as he strode back to the elevator, stepping inside.

"F.R.I.D.A.Y, where is Natasha right now?" He asked the building just before the doors closed.

"Ms. Romanova is currently training in the gym with agent Hill." The building responded. "I'm assuming you would like me to take you there?"

"Yes, please." Peter responded.

The elevator slid up to the gym floor and opened to the two sparring women.

Natasha was grunting and making little "hyah!" noises with each rapid fire kick or punch she threw at Hill, who blocked everything easily. When she found an open spot in Natasha's onslaught she grabbed the assassin's other arm and spun her around, kicking a knee up and pressing it to the center of her back, pushing their bodies forward.

Natasha did some kind of weird twist where she pulled her arms out of Hill's grip and flipped out of the way before she could be pinned down. Instead, she took her place behind Hill, taking the woman in a headlock and pressing her knee on her tailbone.

"Breaktime." Natasha said, getting off of a winded Hill, not even breaking a sweat, before turning to Peter.

"What's up kid?" She asked.

"My aunt, May, she's missing." Peter wrung his hands.

Natasha's eyes became concerned. "We're done for the night, Maria." She said over her shoulder and Hill nodded, looking vaguely worried, but toweling the sweat off of her face and neck as Natasha moved into the elevator with Peter. Natasha pressed the buttons, taking it up to the common floor. She led him down the hall to her room again. "Where does she live?"

Peter gave her the address and while she pulled up the traffic and security cameras he explained how the apartment had been left without a struggle and included he had snagged a key to it as well.

Natasha nodded. "When was the last time you talked to her?"

"When we first got back. She hasn't called or texted at all. I assumed she would've at least told Tony
something but he says he hasn't heard from her either." Peter responded.

The woman's hands clicked at the keyboard, accessing the cameras around May's apartment and going back through the footage of the last four days. From the day she had been at the headquarters, they watched her go into the building and she didn't come back out until the next morning, getting into her car and driving off to what Peter only assumed was work. They watched the footage of the next twenty-four hours and found she didn't return. Natasha went back to the time she left and tracked her through the streets until they found her destination. Peter watched her get out of her car but she never even reached the building.

The teen's gut did flips as a white van pulled up in front of her, the doors opened and he watched his aunt struggle and lose against the people in black masks pulling her inside. The doors slid shut and the van drove off. May had been kidnapped in broad daylight.

"Can you get the license plate?" Peter asked.

"Yeah hang on." Natasha said and the monitor flicked to a different camera angle, one that showed a blurry, pixelated image of the van. The woman stopped the footage and focused in on the license plate, pressing a few buttons which enhanced the quality. Peter wrote the number down with a pen and a sticky note Natasha handed him.

"Where does it go after that?" He asked her and she followed the vehicle as it drove across town, making its way to a warehouse a ways away from the start point. "Thanks." The teenager said before Natasha could say anything and rushed out of her room back to his own.

The teen slipped on his suit as quick as he possibly could and ran out of his room to the elevator. He barely registered the hollered, "Peter, what the hell, where are you going?" From a Bucky who was sipping a beer on the couch before the silver doors slid shut and took him down to the garage.

The teenager ran to his car, getting in and firing it up before he floored the gas and tore out of the lot for the second time that night. He saw the reflection of a disheveled Bucky running out of the elevator in his rear view mirror but he set his jaw and kept his foot pressed on the gas.

Peter raced through the dark streets, his breath heavy as he drove towards the warehouse they'd seen May get taken to. He felt awful. She had been there for eight days and he hadn't even thought about there being anything wrong until today. He had left his aunt for dead and what if he showed up and she wasn't okay? His teeth were grinding together and he barely registered the pain in his molars from it as he swung dangerously tight turns that put the car up on two wheels.

When he finally reached the warehouse, he found the van abandoned in the lot. He didn't see any other cars as he sprinted towards the doors. He thought he heard the distant revving of a motorcycle as he ducked into the building. Peter ran across the dust and dirt covered floor of the dilapidated structure. He could smell the mold on the ceilings, wrinkling his nose just a bit as he began searching for May.

The front of the building was clear, all the nooks and closets empty, but when he reached the back of the building he heard a scream of, "Peter, no!"

His head whipped to the source of the voice, seeing a bruised and bloodied May tied to a metal chair. He made to approach her but the woman said, "Don't! They want to kill you! They want to kill you and they're using me as bait!" The sentence was followed by a scream of pain and the sound of a bullet tearing through the flesh of her side.

"Let go of my aunt!" Peter yelled as he ran towards the hidden gunman. He ignored the weak
warnings from May as he passed her, his ears listening closely for the smallest shift in clothing. He couldn't see whoever had the gun in the dark of the spot they were holed up in but he could hear them. He knew exactly where they were as he heard the small creak of a leather glove when their finger tightened to pull the trigger again.

Peter flicked his wrist towards the ceiling, pulling his body up on his web, the bullet whizzing through where his chest had been. The teenager used his momentum to swing himself forwards through the hole of what looked like the remains of a window and his feet connected with the chest of whoever was shooting. The sound of the gun skidding across the ground filled his ears as he threw the person down. Time felt like it was moving in slow motion as they fell, Peter landing with one knee on the gunman's chest and the other on the floor beside his ribcage.

The teenager threw a hard punch to the person's face, feeling it connect with their cheekbone. The mystery man grunted and he threw another, harder punch. Hands came up to grab his fist, stopping it before it even came into contact with their face. They caught Peter off guard and used that to their advantage to throw him off and they rolled over so they were on top, bringing a large fist down on his nose. The teen felt it snap beneath the blow, blood immediately beginning to flow. Another hit landed itself against Peter's cheek and he kicked his legs out to pull his body up, the person on top of him landing on their feet.

Peter stood, running at the person and putting his full strength into pushing them back towards the wall where he shoved them forward, their back connecting with the concrete. He threw punch after punch to the bloodied face of a man he didn't recognize. He pressed his left forearm to the person's neck, pushing down so the man against the wall couldn't breathe and he growled, "Who are you?"

"Someone you'll wish you'd never met." The man sneered breathlessly, spitting blood onto Peter's face.

The teen angrily wiped his face against his shoulder and pushed his forearm harder against the man's throat. "Who are you?" He asked louder.

"Screw you, kid." The man said faintly.

Peter inhaled sharply and removed his forearm, instead gripping his fingers around the man's throat and using his right hand to throw hard punches to his face. Peter felt the force of his punches resonating up his arm as he continued to hit long after the man was unconscious and he was holding the dead weight up by the hand around his throat. Anger was coursing through his body and it wasn't until he felt strong arms wrap around his waist and pull him away that he stopped punching to struggle against the person restraining him.

"Peter! Peter it's Bucky!" He heard the man say and he calmed down just a bit and saw Steve run through the door wearing his full uniform and kneel down to check the pulse of the man on the floor. He pressed his fingers to the man's bruised neck.

"He's alive but he's not breathing well. He needs to get medical attention." The man looked up and past Peter's head to make eye contact with Bucky.

"I think May might be faring a bit worse." Peter felt Bucky's voice rumble in the man's chest beneath his back. Steve nodded but still picked up the man, slinging the abandoned gun over his shoulder and running out of the building to presumably bring him to Bruce and Tony. Meanwhile, Bucky set the teenager down and turned him so he could grab his shoulders instead.

"Listen, Pete, I know you're hurting and you're angry but you just almost beat a man to death. May is dying, and I need you to calm down enough for me to get an ambulance here so she can get the
medical attention she needs." Bucky said seriously.

Peter nodded. His adrenaline was gone and he could feel himself fading. He was now painfully aware of the throbbing in his face, especially his broken nose. His split knuckles stung like they were on fire and the rest of his battered body felt like he'd been hit by a truck.

"I know how you're feeling." Bucky said over his shoulder as he left the room to hurry to May, who had her hands against her side, pressing a cloth to the wound in her stomach to stunt the bleeding. "The post-fight drain. It sucks but you gotta stay awake until we get May helped out."

Peter nodded and locked eyes with his aunt and waved his hand in dismissal when she looked at him with concern. She didn't look convinced but she was doing a lot worse than he was so she let Bucky tend to her until the sound of sirens wailing down the street made Bucky hurry to pick her up and help her walk towards the entrance, instructing for Peter to hide the rope and chair. While he did that, he heard Bucky ramble off a story they'd concocted to avoid a police investigation about a mugging gone wrong while she was walking home from the convenience store.

Peter ran out after, hastily pulling on a pair of jeans and a hoodie Bucky had brought for him to wear to the hospital and be with May. The older man talked to the police officers who pulled up while May was strapped onto a stretcher and loaded into an ambulance, Peter being corralled in after her and brought to the hospital.

Upon their arrival Peter was separated from May by a thin curtain in the Emergency room, behind which they flushed and stitched her wounds. He caught snippets of conversation about how she was lucky for the bullet's clean exit while the nurse reset and bandaged his nose, explaining it should heal completely in a matter of two weeks if he was careful and gave him a prescription for painkillers that would be ready at his local pharmacy when he was discharged. He nodded and waited for May to be finished.

When the nurse finally pulled back the curtain dividing the two sides of the room Peter saw May being helped into a wheelchair by two other nurses. After they had gotten her seated, they let the teenager wheel her out to the main entrance and asked if he had a ride. Peter opened his mouth to say no but before the words could come out Bucky pulled up to the curb in front of them.

"Yeah, this is us." The teen said instead.

The nurses stood with him while Bucky got out of the car, opening the door and helping May into the passenger seat. Peter thanked them before getting in after and settling in for Bucky to take them back to the headquarters.

"What happened to the guy you guys took back?" Peter asked.

"He's still out cold, but Tony put him in this thing I didn't even know the compound had. It's half prison, half dungeon, all terrifyingly weird." Bucky shuddered.

"Oh...okay?" Peter said.

"I can't believe you didn't even listen to me." May said sternly, turning around in her seat to look at Peter, wincing slightly as the stitches in her side pulled.

"I can't believe you got yourself shot trying to tell me what I assume your kidnappers told you specifically not to tell me." Peter shot back.

"I-" May stopped herself and squinted at Peter. "Since when did you have this kind of back sass? You're spending too much time with Tony." She shook her head.
"Well I'd say it's probably more Loki's fault than anything." Bucky pitched in as he turned onto a new street.

"Loki's there too? I figured they would've gone back to Asgard by now." the woman's brows shut up her forehead.

"Asgard got destroyed." Peter said.

"Oh." May said flatly.

"Yeah..." Peter replied before adding, "I really like Loki, and Thor, and Bucky and Steve. I really like everyone who's living at the headquarters."

"Well that's good." May said a bit happier now. "I'm glad you like it but I'm not glad you're running off to save people."

"You seem way less freaked out than I thought you would be considering you were sitting in that warehouse for eight days." Peter said.

"They didn't really do much. They fed me and gave me water. I think they were just waiting for you to show up. And I just don't want to think about it." May responded.

"I still don't think that warrants this level of calm..." The teen was concerned.

"We're here." Bucky said as he turned off the car and when Peter looked out the window he saw they were back in the garage.

Bucky helped the boy lift May out of the car and walk her into the building. Once they were inside they found the worried team gathered on the couches in the living room. Tony stood up and began fussing over Peter, only turning to ask May if she was okay and the teenager brushed him off. Bucky quickly informed them he had to go pick up their prescriptions before ducking back into the elevator.

"Natasha said you were kidnapped and Bucky told us you got shot." The man said. "I think it'd be best if you don't go back to your apartment until all of this is sorted out. There's a room here you can have and I'll send someone to get everything you need from your place, it'll be here by noon tomorrow."

Tony didn't give May time to answer before he was hustling her into her new room at the very end of the hallway, hurrying back out to make her tea. Peter made it to the door just as Tony was coming back out and helped her out of her shoes. He went to his room and found the coziest shirt and pajama pants he could find, giving them to her and leaving the room to let her dress. As he stood outside the door, his heart melted just a little bit when Natasha came to him with a pair of fuzzy socks, Thor with a massive hoodie, and Wanda with a variety of hair ties to help keep her hair back.

When May called that he could come in, he pushed the door open and presented her with the gifts. She smiled and asked Peter to thank everyone for her, saying she wanted to get some rest after Tony returned with tea. Peter nodded and followed the billionaire out of the room, shutting the door behind him.

Alexander shifted awkwardly under everyone's gaze after they reentered the living room.

"I swear it wasn't me." He said finally. "I'm committed to this team, at least for now, and I swear I'm trying to better myself. I wouldn't do this, especially not to Peter."

"No one said anything." Tony said.
"Well you guys were thinking it." Alexander replied.

Tony sighed and said, "Peter went into a coma, someone kidnapped May, what's next?"

"I'm not a hundred percent sure I wanna know the answer." Peter mumbled.

The room went quiet and eventually they all settled for going to bed. Peter hadn't realized how exhausted he was until, upon his return, Bucky gave him his dose of painkillers and insisted that he bandage the teen's hands that he hadn't told the nurses about at the hospital and nearly fell asleep while he sat on the edge of the bathtub. Bucky, who was kneeled in front of him, wrapping his battered knuckles, luckily caught him.

"Rest." Bucky said when he was finished, guiding Peter to the bed and pulling the covers over his body when he finally laid down. The teenager nestled his head into the pillows and was asleep before Bucky even made it out the door.

The man shook his head, chuckling under his breath as he flipped the lights off and shut the door behind him, going to his own room to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

So now what? OoooOOO mystery.

Thank you all for reading and until the next chapter

-xoxo Denise
“Rest.” Bucky said when he was finished, guiding Peter to the bed and pulling the covers over his body when he finally laid down. The teenager nestled his head into the pillows and was asleep before Bucky even made it out the door.

The man shook his head, chuckling under his breath as he flipped the lights off and shut the door behind him, going to his own room to sleep.

The sun shining on Peter's face is what woke the teenager and when he checked the clock it was already noon. He yawned and stretched before sliding out of bed and getting dressed. The boy caught a glance of his reflection in the bathroom mirror, seeing the swelling in his face had gone down but the bruising had gotten worse. Sighing, he walked out of his room and into the living room where the team was already gathered, laughed and joking.

"Afternoon, sleepyhead." Bucky smiled at him when he came in.

"Hey." Peter said and he spotted May sitting on the couch. "How you feelin' May?" He asked.

"Better." She smiled at him.

"There's a donut for you in the kitchen." Steve piped up, pointing to the island.

Peter nodded and walked into the kitchen to grab the powdered jelly donut that had been left for him and hopped up on the counter to eat it.

The boy listened to the conversation of the group, smiling when someone said something funny as he munched on his breakfast. Eventually, the team decided to go do whatever they had planned for the afternoon. Peter lingered in the kitchen as Loki remained on the couch, exploring the magic of eBooks on his new phone.

Peter heard the man sigh heavily from his perch on the counter and his eyes flicked up from his own phone to look at the god. He watched as a single tear slid down his pink and puffy face and Peter debated whether or not to walk over to the couch.

Before the teen could make a decision Mantis strode into the room. Loki looked surprised and a little bit frightened, hurrying to wipe away his tears.

"You are sad." Mantis said, approaching Loki, who was silent.

"I can help you." She offered.
Loki looked slightly confused and Mantis added, "I can make it go away for a little bit." She held her hand over Loki’s arm and asked, "May I?"

The trickster nodded tentatively and the woman gently laid her hand on his arm. Immediately she sucked in a breath and her eyes flooded with tears. "I can feel your pain." She said in a broken voice. "You have so much sorrow... and regret. So much self hatred. You don't like life."

Peter watched in both awe and concern, fear and sadness pitting in his stomach from Mantis' words as Loki's face faded from sad to content and the woman pulled her hand away. She dried her tears with the sleeve of the hoodie she wore, Loki's emotions waning from her as she began to calm.

"Thank you." Loki said quietly and Mantis nodded.

"I am sorry." She said. "You have friends here who love you."

"I know." Loki answered.

Mantis nodded again and stood, looking back at Loki one last time before she left the room.

"I know you're there Peter." Loki said, not turning to look at the boy.

"I'm sorry I- I didn't mean to intrude but you just-"

"It's okay." Loki said, cutting him off.

"I don't want to make you sad again, Matis just helped you." Peter said.

"Well isn't that exactly why you should talk to me now?" Loki asked, finally turning to make eye contact with the boy.

It made sense and the teen sighed, walking over to sit on the couch beside the trickster.

"I'm worried about you." The boy admitted.

"That makes four of you now." Loki said.

"What?" Peter asked.

"You, Thor, Sergeant Barnes, and Captain Rogers have all said you worry about me." Loki explained.

"Loki, Mantis said you're really sad and have a lot of regret and self hatred. She said you don't like life and I-" Peter cut himself off. "That scares me."

Loki sighed and Peter wondered if he'd said something wrong.

"Peter, I've had a lot of things happen to me in my life." Loki said. "My family was never the best, I was lied to for thousands of years. When I learned about who my real parents were, I hated myself for a very long time. I told myself I would never be worthy of Odin's approval. I found myself spiraling into a dark place. Not only did I try to kill hundreds of thousands of people, inclusive of my brother, I tried to kill myself. I hurt myself."

Peter inhaled sharply and looked at Loki in shock. "Loki-" he began.

"I'm doing better now. Not much better. But I'm doing better." Loki added.
"Have you..." Peter started, stopping to gather his thoughts. "When was the last time?"

"A long time ago. A few years." Loki responded.

Peter nodded and looked at Loki. "Can I- can I see?"

Loki looked nervous at first but eventually nodded and pulled up the sleeves of his button down. Peter saw that his skin was littered with thin, faded linear scars, running both across and up and down both forearms. The newest ones were the easiest to spot, darker against his pale skin. The teenager realized that was why he never showed his arms. He had thought maybe that just went against his style but he never showed them. He always wore long sleeves.

Peter turned Loki's wrists gently in his hands and noticed some of the scars were different, burn marks rather than cuts. Peter felt his eyes begin to water.

"When was the last time you thought about it?" The teen asked, voice soft.

Loki was quiet.

"Loki?"

"Yesterday." The man responded, barely above a whisper.

"I'm okay, Peter." Loki added quickly.

"But you're not." Peter began to cry. "You're not okay, Loki. Thor loves you. Bucky and Steve love you. I love you, Loki. You're great. You're funny and protective and powerful. There's so much to love about you and you don't even see it." He was sobbing now.

Loki looked at the watery brown eyes of the teenager sitting beside him. He leaned in and hugged Peter tight, pulling the boy's body protectively against his. "I'm so sorry, Peter." He rubbed the boy's shaking shoulders and pressed his face into the teenager's hair.

Loki looked at the watery brown eyes of the teenager sitting beside him. He leaned in and hugged Peter tight, pulling the boy's body protectively against his. "I'm so sorry, Peter." He rubbed the boy's shaking shoulders and pressed his face into the teenager's hair.

Peter leaned against Loki's chest, letting his emotions out. He wished Loki would just treat himself a little better but he knew how hard it could be. He'd told himself he'd never be good enough and beat himself up in the gym, he was sure Loki found it just as hard to shake intrusive thoughts and for him it'd been so much worse.

Peter's tears lightened just a bit and he just gripped Loki instead, hoping he got his message of care for the man across. Loki hugged him back, his thin fingers petting Peter's hair.

"Please...I'm just across the hall, Loki. If you ever feel like you need to-" Peter cut himself off.

"Come talk to me." He insisted, pulling back to look at Loki's pale face.

"I will." The man nodded.

"Promise me." Peter said firmly.

Loki was silent for a minute, not wanting to lie, but finally he said sincerely, "I promise."

They settled into another bit of silence but Loki broke it by saying, "Why do you care about me so much?"

Peter looked at him like he was stupid. "Why wouldn't I? You're my friend, one of my best friends. You're super cool and you're always good to me. So you came up rough, who didn't? Name one person here who didn't have a hard time as a kid." Peter couldn't think of a time he was ever this
aggressive in his rants. "Steve? Sick. All the time. Tony? His dad was awful. Natasha? She was an assassin by the time she was a teenager. Everyone here's life would suck without everyone else. You're part of that."

Loki looked taken aback by Peter's abrasiveness. "I'm so-"

"No, Loki." Peter said, softer now. "You have nothing to be sorry for. I'm sorry we weren't able to prove to you that you mean a lot to everyone here. That I wasn't able to prove that you mean a lot to me."

"Peter..." Loki said quietly.

"I love you Loki. You're family, you're an Avenger. You're one of us." Peter stopped him.

"I love you too, Peter." Loki said.

"When was the last time you said that to Thor?" Peter joked.

Loki smiled wryly. "A long time ago. Too long."

Peter smirked and grabbed Loki's arm, pulling him up off the couch and hauling him down the hall to Thor's room. "You're family, but just because you're not blood doesn't mean you get to skip me being the annoying little brother."

Loki chuckled and let Peter drag him along. When the teen reached the Thunder God's door, he knocked, to which he got a hollered, "It's open!" In response. He pushed the door open and shoved Loki in, entering behind him to find Thor twisting slightly in the spinning chair by his desk, his feet propped up on the furniture.

Peter put his hands up on Loki's shoulders, getting on his tiptoes to peek over and make eye contact with the older sibling. "Loki has something he'd like to say to you." He said in a sing songy voice.

"What is it brother?" The blonde turned to look at Loki, smiling obliviously.

Loki rolled his eyes but Peter said, "Don't be fooled by the icy exterior, deep, deep down he still has a little shriveled heart."

The trickster elbowed Peter but his lips quirked slightly.

"Tell Thor what you have to say!" Peter urged him on. "Don't waste the good man's time!"

Loki sighed. "Peter and I have just had a heartfelt conversation," He began. "And I've realized it's been a very long time since I told you I loved you."

Thor's eyes widened in bewilderment at first but then he cocked a brow and smirked, crossing his arms over his chest. "I love you too, but you've never said you loved me."

Loki mirrored the action. "Yes I have." He said defensively.

"No, I'm pretty sure you haven't, brother." Thor said.

"Yes I did! That one time I turned you into a roach when we were nine and you cried because you thought I hated you!" Loki said.

"That never happened." Thor laughed. "You turned me into a spider once and you tried to step on me but I assure you you never turned me into a roach."
"Really? Was that a dream then?" Loki looked thoughtful for a second.

"I wouldn't know, you're the witch." The older brother joked.

"Hey!" Loki exclaimed.

"I love you too, Loki. I have all this time, and I told you every day. Though, you having dreamt about telling me you loved me means you must have loved me too." Thor smirked.

Loki stuck his chin up. "It doesn't mean anything, oaf, I could have been lying to make you feel better."

"Ah, ah, I know you better than that. You'd never comfort me even if I was crying. Not unless you meant it." Thor smiled. "I learned after you told me there was a sea serpent in the bathtub and I refused to bathe in that room for days but in reality you just wanted to use the bigger tub without me bothering you."

Loki smiled. "I stand by that scheme, it was crafty for my age. I can't believe you fell for that, you're such an idiot!"

"How was I supposed to know sea serpents were too big to fit in a bathtub, I'd never seen one!" Thor said, gesturing exasperatedly with his hands.

"Well they were big enough to eat a dozen men I figured you'd do the math and know a dozen men wouldn't fit in that tub." Loki said.

Thor mumbled something under his breath, tightening his crossed arms and huffing like an angry child.

Loki snickered. "You're ever so childish, brother."

"You love me." Thor said, smiling knowingly.

"Unfortunately, I do." Loki sighed.

Thor gave a genuine smile then and Loki shook his head, a smile of his own on his face.

Peter grinned before pushing Loki forward, the tall man stumbling a bit. "Now hug!"

Thor's smile broadened as he stood from his place in his desk chair and wrapped his large arms tightly around Loki's body, pinning the man's own arms against his torso. The trickster looked shocked and slightly uncomfortable as Thor seemed to have a goal of squeezing the life out of him but eventually, he wrapped his arms under Thor's to link behind his brother's broad back.

Peter beamed, happy he got the brothers to mend their relationship before stepping quietly out of the room. He was still smiling contently as he stepped into the kitchen, walking past Bucky who was mixing something in a bowl before opening the fridge to get a soda.

"You seem happy." Bucky said, eyes still on his bowl.

"I just got fixed a norse brotherhood." Peter said before opening his soda and taking a sip.

Bucky looked at him in confusion. "How so?"

"I got Loki to tell Thor he loved him." Peter said cockily.
"You got Loki to tell Thor he loved him?" Bucky repeated, surprised. "I honestly didn't think that'd be possible."

"I know right!" Peter exclaimed happily. "I did that!"

"Good job kid." Bucky smiled, pausing his mixing to raise a hand for a high five.

Peter slapped their hands together and Bucky went back to his mixing. The teen hopped up on the counter to watch Bucky finish whatever it was he was making. Finally, he set the bowl down on the counter beside the oven and began lining two baking trays with parchment paper. When he had it cut down to size, he began evenly spacing what Peter finally realized was cookie dough. He placed the trays in the oven and set a timer before turning back to Peter.

"Cookies?" Peter asked.

"Secret recipe." Bucky said.

"What's so secret about it?" Peter looked at Bucky.

"You'll see." The man smiled.

"Oookay." The teen said and finished his soda. "Is that all we have for lunch or should I wait to eat?"

"Stark ordered something or other but it might not be here for a little bit. You could grab a snack." Bucky answered.

"Cool." And with that, Peter grabbed a package of pop tarts, going to sit on the couch and opening Netflix.

Bucky came to sit beside him, not saying anything as he got entranced in in the world of Game Of Thrones. Thor walked in at one point for a drink, and as the screen focused on Tyrion Lannister's face and said, "He looks exactly like a Dwarf I know, he forged my hammer and my axe. Only he looks...much smaller than I remember him to be."

Peter turned to look at him. Thor was squinting at the screen before shrugging and walking back to his room. The teenager decided not to dwell on it and turned back to the TV instead. Bucky was so caught up in the show that he didn't even realize the timer had gone off until Peter tapped him on the shoulder. His head whipped to look at Peter like a deer in the headlights.

"Woah, woah! The timer's done." Peter said, raising his hands.

"Oh." Bucky said. "Right." And he got up off the couch to take the cookies out of the oven.

Bucky set a new timer for the cookies to cool before returning to the couch. They sat for a little bit until Steve crossed the room towards the elevator from the hallway. Both men followed the blonde with their eyes as he entered the lift, only looking away when the doors slid shut. A moment later the man reemerged from the elevator with takeout in hand. At first, Peter wasn't able to identify the food since Steve was hidden behind the counter but suddenly the smell reached his nose and told him it was Five Guys. Peter loved American fast food. It was greasy and hot and fatty and delicious.

The teen's mouth watered as he all but ran towards Steve, who was setting the large bag down in the kitchen with two stacked drink carriers Peter was amazed he managed to make all the way up here without spilling. The boy waited not so patiently for the rest of the team to make it to the kitchen for lunch before greedily taking his carton of fries and two thoughtfully ordered burgers along with a
drink that had his name marked on it and sliding onto a bar stool.

The rest of the team took their regular places throughout the room and the volume got increasingly loud as conversations ensued. Peter was sandwiched between Loki and Bucky as normal, Thor and Steve on the men's other sides. Peter scarfed down his burgers and fries, taking sips of his soda, applauding Steve's ability to recall the fleeting mention of his favorite soda being Dr. Pepper and having gotten it for him. Bonus, he applauded Steve's label for said soda being "little Peter" with a smiley face afterwards, so his wouldn't get confused with Quill's orange and grape soda mixture.

"Heathen." Peter had spat, his face scrunched in disgust.

"At least I'm not boring." Quill said defensively.

"I'm not boring!" Peter countered. "You know who's boring? Steve! He gets ginger ale every time!"

"Hey!" Steve had said, hurt. "It's healthier than whatever that mystery drink is!"

Peter turned to the man. "You say that like ginger ale isn't just as full of chemicals as cola is. Nothing 'healthy' is healthy anymore, Steve."

"Bucky, Loki, Tony, come get your son." Sam had laughed.

"Peter says I'm a brother." Loki quickly ducked out of the conversation.

"Fair." Tony said. "But he was my son before he was Bucky's just saying."

"And he was my son before any of you." May had shut the conversation down.

"Also fair." Tony added.

The rest of the team, who had gone silent to listen in, started laughing after; beginning side conversations entailing their favorite parts or mocking sections of the conversation.

The team ate, everyone laughing and joking loudly. Quill was showing off a very impressive talent of his where he could catch anything you threw at him in his mouth, as long as it was small enough to fit in his jaw. Peter tested this claim by tossing grapes he had found in the fridge at the man who, sure enough, caught each one. He then moved onto fries, which Quill also caught. And in a grand finale, Peter threw the man's whole burger at him which he caught and proceeded to eat. The teen was amazed to say the least.

"One time when we were children he turned himself into a snake because he knows I love snakes and when I went to pick up the snake to admire it, he transformed back into himself and he was like "MEUH IT'S ME!" And then he stabbed me. We were eight, at the time." Thor said, the group listening around him bursting into laughter. Loki chucked from his spot beside Peter, shaking his head.

"So that's the snake story?" Peter turned to the man.

"Indeed." Loki nodded, smiling. "I'm still proud of that."

"But you stabbed him." Peter said, worried.

"Only with a little knife. He was a strong boy." Loki said defensively.

"I don't know whether to laugh or to be scared." Peter said.
"-nd so this blue guy basically kidnapped me from earth with good intentions that I didn't find out about until like, a year ago, but he always said he needed me because I was skinny and I could get through small spaces to steal stuff for him. He threatened to eat me a lot, which was terrifying, but hey, I learned how to fly a ship and pick pocket space aliens what more does a guy need?" Peter tuned into Quill's story.

Another round of boisterous laughter came from those listening to Quill's story and he smiled proudly. Obviously he didn't get that reaction much.

Peter listened to the stories coming from the speakers around the room, laughing at them. He enjoyed being here with everyone and he was constantly reminded just how much by situations like these.

After they had eaten and broken off to do their own things, Peter asked if they needed groceries for the common room kitchen, Tony explaining the main kitchen had its groceries delivered. Everyone put together a list of things they’d need from the store and the teenager made his way down to the garage. He got into his car and turned the key in the ignition, pulling out of his parking space and down the road to the nearest supermarket.

Chapter End Notes

There's much more angst to come soon and I'm only a little bit sorry.

As always, thank you all for reading and until the next chapter.

-xoxo Denise
After they had eaten and broken off to do their own things, Peter asked if they needed groceries for the common room kitchen, Tony explaining the main kitchen had its groceries delivered. Everyone put together a list of things they'd need from the store and the teenager made his way down to the garage. He got into his car and turned the key in the ignition, pulling out of his parking space and down the road to the nearest supermarket.

Peter pulled the list out of his pocket as he walked up to the store. He got a cart, pushing it through the automatic doors and read off the first things on the list, dividing the haul by frozen, refrigerated, and non refrigerated.

He started at the fresh produce that he encountered just inside the door, getting the lettuce, spinach, tomatoes, potatoes, bell peppers, broccoli, carrots, and corn the list requested. He followed that up with the apples, oranges, pears, peaches, grapes, strawberries, blueberries, and bananas the group wanted too.

When he checked twice to make sure he got all the requested fresh food, he searched for the biggest boxes of the three kinds of cereal the group ate, the half a dozen different canned goods, everyone’s favorite potato chip flavors, saltines for Steve to which Peter thought, “The guy sure acts his age for how fit he’s supposed to be.” And the cases of soda the group needed.

Next, he picked up the frozen fruit Natasha insisted she needed for her smoothies, saying she didn’t like “how the blender doesn’t break the ice up smooth enough” when Steve told her to just use fresh fruit. He finished his rounds with the eggs, bacon, sausage, and milk Bucky had tacked onto the list as well.

He checked the list once more to make sure he got everything before making his way up to the front of the store to pay. He snagged himself a candy bar at the register before wheeling the cart back out to his car. He loaded the groceries into the trunk and drove back to the headquarters. He pulled the car up to the curb in front of the garage’s elevator, which opened as though expecting him, and he moved the groceries from his trunk to the lift. The elevator waited for him as he got back in the car and parked before stepping inside.

He went up to the common room floor, dragging the groceries out of the elevator, Steve rushing to help him. They put the food away, casually throwing responses into the group’s conversation along the way. When they had finished, Peter sat down on the couch between Loki and Bucky and engaged fully in the conversation.

Dinner was casual, eaten while strewn across the common room, a flavorful Asian style steak and vegetable stir fry prepared by a mixture of Bucky and Bruce's home recipes. Peter was so distracted
by how the meat soaked up the heavenly concoction of a sauce Bucky had mustered up and how it seemed to melt in his mouth that he didn't even mind the vegetables he'd normally dislike.

After dinner and as the group decided to turn in for the night, it became only May and Peter, plus Thor and Loki who remained chatting quietly. Well, Loki quietly and Thor’s version of quiet, at a table by the kitchen Tony had recently ordered. He wanted the team to be able to have breakfast together without getting the couches dirty or sitting on the floor.

“Hey, Pete.” May said, smiling at him from where she leaned against the arm of the couch, fluffy socked feet propped up on the cushions.

“Hi May.” Peter grinned back, looking at his aunt.

“How’re you feeling?” She asked him.

“I should be asking you.” He laughed. “I’m fine, May. But how’re you? Everything healing okay?”

“Everything’s healing fine. Perfect, actually. Mantis helped me with the pain at first but Loki came to heal me last night.” She smiled. “No need for any help.”

Peter’s eyes widened and he looked over at the dark haired man, who, having heard his name, looked at him to smile as he talked to Thor.

“Thank you.” The boy mouthed, and Loki nodded before turning back to Thor.

“How come you never smile at me, brother?” Peter caught Thor say, hurt before he tuned back into what May was saying.

“They sure are a pair.” May laughed.

“That they are.” Peter replied.

“You really like it here, huh?” May asked.

“I do.” Peter responded. “I feel special here. Like I can put my powers to use.”

“It’s still weird thinking about you having powers, but it explains a lot.” May shook her head, smiling.

“I really wish you’d found out some other way.” Peter said. “Or not at all.” He mumbled afterwards.

“I don’t get why you wanted to hide it from me.” May said, looking at her son with sad eyes. “You got stabbed by one of those Chitauri things, fell off a space donut, climbed the Washington Monument, nearly fell to your death in an elevator, and a plethora of other things I’m sure I don’t know about. I don’t know what I’d do if something worse happened to you.”

“Peter I don’t want you getting hurt trying to deal with this by yourself.” May said, looking at her son with sad eyes. “You got stabbed by one of those Chitauri things, fell off a space donut, climbed the Washington Monument, nearly fell to your death in an elevator, and a plethora of other things I’m sure I don’t know about. I don’t know what I’d do if something worse happened to you.”

Peter opened his mouth to respond but nothing came out. He took a deep breath to gather his thoughts and form a response. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner.” He said finally.
May looked at him for a moment before sighing. “It’s okay. I get it. I mean, knowing me, I’d have probably done the same thing. Just, from this point on, no more secrets, okay?”

“No more secrets.” He said with a small smile. “Hey, how did you find out about the Washington Monument?”

“Ned told me” She shrugged.

“Ned told you?!” Peter exclaimed. “He was supposed to keep that a secret!”

“You can’t keep it a secret if channel four is airing a breaking news report titled “Spider-Man Scales Washington Monument”.” May said, chuckling.

“Right.” Peter said. “Speaking of Ned,” He added. “Have you talked to him recently?”

“Yeah. Every couple weeks or so he sends me a text checking in on me and asking for updates on you. Sometimes MJ does too, but not as often. I haven’t heard from Liz in a while.” She said.

“Really?” Peter asked, his eyes wide, though his heart fell just a little bit to hear that Liz wasn’t as worried.

“Yeah.” May said. “They really miss you.”

“Do they know?” Peter asked.

“Ned told MJ.” May nodded. “I tried to stop him but she swore they’d be better at keeping your secret than Ned was.”

Peter sighed in relief. “Did you tell Ned I was back?”

“Not yet. I actually figured you’d want to.” May said.

“Is his number still the same?” Peter asked, beginning to get excited.

“Same number for the past seven years.” May nodded. “MJ changed hers, but I’m sure Ned can give it to you, they still keep in touch.”

Peter nodded. He was eager to talk to his friends again, but he worried how they’d react.

“I’m sure they’d both be really relieved to learn you’re back.” May assured him, putting her hand on his shoulder.

Their conversation then turned to that of Thanos and their worries about him. Eventually, Thor and Loki both went off to their rooms and not too long after May decided to turn in as well. Peter got himself a glass of water once he was alone. He leaned against the counter and sipped it in silence, allowing himself to be lost in his thoughts.

He’d been sleeping like dead the past few nights, nightmare but also dream free. That’s what made him realize he missed having soft and pleasant dreams. Made him realize he missed a lot of things, actually. Missed being able to go to school and see Ned, and though he never thought he would, he missed tests and homework and studying being the only thing he had to worry about.

When he looked at himself in the mirror, he didn't see himself anymore. Bucky joked he must have been catching up on the years he missed, but he didn’t see someone older, he saw someone different. His face was tired and lined, his skin darker and freckled from his time in the soul realm, his hair longer and shaggy. His body was wiry and strong but scarred and sometimes, it scared him. He
wondered when he’d gone from Your Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man to Superhero, Avenger, Peter Parker.

He wasn’t just a masked spider-powered kid who helped old ladies cross the street and saved women getting their purses stolen anymore. He was in deeper now. He was in it for real. There was no going back from here. He had to help save the universe. He knew, he was in on all the deepest secrets even some of the highest level SH.I.E.L.D. agents aren’t in on. He was running with the wolves and he was just trying not to get mauled.

Briefly, he thought about running, getting away from it. Surely, no one would make him stay if he wanted out. But what about Bucky? Loki? Tony? He’d be leaving them in the lion’s den by themselves. Sure, the Avengers are a massive crew now. They’ve more than doubled their ranks, but they needed everybody they could get. They were talking exponentially terrible odds against them. They were considering recruiting whole planets to fight Thanos and even then they had a massive possibility of losing. He could feel his heart rate rising at the anxiety his situation brought.

He ran his hands through his hair.

“You’ve been drinking that water for the past half hour.” Bucky said.

Peter whipped around, nearly dropping his glass. “Jesus, Bucky!” He whisper yelled.


“It’s nothing.” Peter shrugged, dumping his now lukewarm water down the drain and placing his cup in the sink.

“Doesn’t look like nothing.” Bucky raised a brow.

“I’m fine, really.” Peter said.

“Peter…” Bucky began.

“I said I’m fine!” Peter snapped.

“Woah, Peter calm down!” Bucky said, raising his hands in surrender.

Somehow, that made him even angrier. “Don’t tell me to calm down, Barnes.” Peter sneered and Bucky’s face looked taken back by the cold use of his last name. “I am stuck in this shit show of a plan against Thanos, which is probably gonna end in us dying. My aunt got kidnapped and frickin’ shot by some dude who’s knocked out in some prison cell somewhere around here who we don’t know anything about. I got mauled by a dog and stabbed by a goddamn alien and I’m so close to having a mental breakdown—”

His eyes were watering now and Bucky was staring at him with a mix of shock and horror.

“I got drugged and went into a coma for a week that I don’t remember anything about. All my friends are five years older than me and I never got to graduate high school. I’m seventeen with no credentials and no friends my age anymore. The people I live with are all war torn self hating soldiers or aliens with some sort of daddy or issues and here I am, having to deal with it all by myself with nobody to talk to because everyone here will probably think I’m lame since I have no real problems.”

Peter’s rant was cut off by his own sobs and he began to sink to his knees but was caught by Bucky who slid to the ground and pulled Peter close.
He cried against the man’s chest, balling his fists in the fabric of Bucky’s shirt. The older man laid a
hand on Peter’s back, the other to cradle the boy’s head. He felt a pang in his heart at the teen in his
arms who was sobbing so hard his body shook. Even he’d been older than him when he’d been
captured by H.Y.D.R.A. But all of a sudden this teenager who thought he had his whole life ahead
of him gets powers and eventually gets roped into an otherworldly fight? He couldn’t even imagine
how it felt to be in Peter’s shoes.

He let the boy cry until he couldn’t anymore, the tears stopping, leaving only ragged breaths and
quiet sniffles. Bucky carded his hands through Peter’s hair and the teen leaned his face against
Bucky’s flesh shoulder.

“You’re not lame, Pete.” Bucky said quietly once the youngest avenger had calmed down. “I can’t
even imagine what you’re going through. You had your life ripped away from you and now you’re
tied to this battle that isn’t your fight to fight. You died and came back and you’ve been through hell
in between. I’m so sorry.”

Peter was silent. Bucky hoped his message had sunk in as he held the boy.

After a while Peter spoke, his voice muffled by Bucky’s shoulder. “I’m sorry I yelled at you. You
didn’t do anyth-”

“Shh.” Bucky interrupted him. “I get it. You have every right to be angry and stressed. I’m not
gonna hold anything against you. You understand?”

Peter didn’t say anything, just nodded.

“Good.” Bucky said, ruffling Peter’s hair. “You gonna be okay?”

Peter nodded again.

“Okay.” The White Wolf whispered, pulling Peter back to look at his red and puffy face.

“Hey.” Bucky said softly, shaking the teen’s shoulders gently to get him to make eye contact. “Go
get some sleep.” He said when the boy looked up at him with blood shot eyes. “Wake me up if
anything happens. Please.” He begged.

“I will.” Peter whispered softly.

“I mean it, Peter. I promise that I’ll be much more angry if I find out you didn’t wake me up.”

Peter nodded and Bucky pulled him in for a tight hug. “I love you, kid.”

The teen was shocked by the man’s words and tensed in Bucky’s arms. “I love you too.” He
responded quietly once he gathered his thoughts, bringing his arms up to squeeze Bucky in return.

“Now go to bed.” The man said after helping Peter up.

The boy nodded and headed back down the hallway to his room where he quickly changed his
clothes in the dark and immediately climbed into bed.

“I think you’re good for him.” Bucky turned at the sound of a voice by the elevator.

The man turned to see Tony, leaning against the wall.

Bucky opened his mouth to ask but the billionaire responded, “I had F.R.I.D.A.Y. set up an alarm
system that notifies me every time Peter’s in distress. I rushed up to see what the fuss was about, but I
think you handled it.”

“I’m not trying to-” Bucky began.

“I know.” Tony said. “You’re not trying to replace me. I can see that. You care about Peter. He cares about you. I’m just worried about him, Barnes.”

The man stepped toward Bucky, leaning against the counter instead. “I am too.” The ex Winter Soldier responded quietly.

“I don’t want him becoming like us. I hate to say it but we’re broken. When I met Peter, he had this twinkle in his eye and I don’t see that as much anymore.” Tony said. “I’m scared that this whole thing’ll destroy him and he’ll be another empty shell of a human being.”

“He’s trying so hard. He’s trying to hold onto the good. I can tell.” Bucky said softly.

“I know.” Tony replied. “God it’s my fault.”

Bucky’s head whipped to look at Tony, who was scrubbing his hands over his face. “What? Tony, don’t say that.”

“I gave this kid his suits. The suits that failed to protect him against the dog, against the Chitauri, against what else? What else is he gonna come across in those suits that’ll get him hurt or worse? I took him under my wing and now he’s in the middle of this universal war that’s brewing.”

“Tony, he was already trying to be a hero. How much worse do you think things would’ve been if he went through everything he’s been through without you monitoring him? Without the suits at all, without your guidance or help? Just walking into it blind? Tony if that’s what had happened I think he would’ve been dead a lot sooner than when Thanos snapped.” Bucky said strongly.

Tony turned to look at him then. “Y’know, sometimes I wonder why you’re so nice to me even though I blew your arm off. Then I remember it’s because you spend so much time with Steve Righteous Rogers.”

Bucky laughed wryly. “I’m not gonna disagree.”

“Go get some sleep, Barnes. You deserve it.” Tony chuckled, shaking his head.

“Only if you promise not to drink that coffee Pepper tells you not to drink past noon.” Bucky joked.

“Well technically, any time after noon is before the noon of the next day.” Tony countered.

“Technically every time is after noon of the previous day too, then.” Bucky said.

“Damn your logic.” Tony ran his hand through his hair. “Okay, fine. No coffee. Now go to bed.”


“G’night, Bucky.” Tony said then wrinkled his face in disgust. “Gross, that feels weird. I’m gonna keep calling you Barnes, but it’s not a mean ‘Barnes’ anymore.”

“Sure.” Bucky chuckled. “Don’t sleep too late.” He said as he walked toward his room.

“Yeah, yeah. Anything for you, mom.” Tony said.

Bucky ducked inside his room and shut the door, crawling under the covers of his bed, sighing as he
closed his eyes and tried to get to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

And so the angst continues. This story is mostly sad, sorry. I try to make my fluffy filler chapters a little less so but sometimes they don’t really compensate.

Thank you all for reading, as always, and until the next chapter

-xoxo Denise
"Fine. Goodnight, Tony." Bucky said.

"G'night, Bucky." Tony said then wrinkled his face in disgust. "Gross, that feels weird. I'm gonna keep calling you Barnes, but it's not a mean 'Barnes' anymore."

"Sure." Bucky chuckled. "Don't sleep too late." He said as he walked toward his room.

"Yeah, yeah. Anything for you, mom." Tony said.

Bucky ducked inside his room and shut the door, crawling under the covers of his bed, sighing as he closed his eyes and tried to get to sleep.

When Peter woke the next morning he felt considerably better. He slid out of bed and walked into the bathroom, opting to take a shower and shave before getting dressed in a pair of blue skinny jeans and a tee shirt so old he could barely read the faded print of the band on the front. He pulled on his sneakers and slid his phone into his pocket, wandering out of his room and into the hallway.

The common room was relatively barren, the group opting to sleep in on the Saturday morning. The only person the teen found was Clint, who was fussing over a sandwich in the kitchen.

"A sandwich?" Peter asked, cocking a brow when the archer turned to look at him. "For breakfast?"

"Don't question my ways." Clint said. "You want one?" He gestured to the bread.

"Y'know what? Why not." Peter replied.

Clint got to assembling the teen a sandwich as well, piling ham, lettuce, tomatoes, and some crisp bacon onto the toasted bread before adding mustard and slapping the second slice of bread on top. He handed the plate to Peter who took it gratefully.

The two moved to the breakfast table by the windows and sat down across from each other to eat.

"What're your plans for today, kid?" Clint asked around a mouthful of sandwich.

"I actually think I'm gonna try and reconnect with some of my old friends." Peter replied. "What about you?"

"Prank war." Clint smirked.

"Wait, what?" Peter asked.

"I'm gonna start a prank war with Nat. We do 'em all the time, and it's been a while since the last one. I'm trying to set everything up today and I hope I'll be able to get it started by this afternoon." Clint said.

"Well save some for me. I wanna see this." Peter said.
"Oh don't worry, they don't happen quick. They take time." Clint said.

"Sometimes I wonder if you're really an adult." Peter laughed.

"Me too, kid, me too." Clint laughed as he stood to place his plate in the sink.

"I'll keep you posted on the score." The man said before heading off to attend to his devious activities.

After finishing his sandwich, Peter made his way to his room and he picked up his phone. The teen opened it and scrolled through his contacts. He debated who to call first. He knew for a fact MJ would probably take it with a cooler head and Ned was more likely to freak out, but he wondered if he should just get the worst over with.

In the end he decided upon calling Ned to begin with. His thumb hovered over the 'call' button for a solid five minutes before he finally pressed it. Well, he pressed it more because his hands were shaking than as a conscious decision and his heart hammered worryingly quick in his chest as he scrambled to raise the phone to his ear.

Three rings in, Peter dejectedly doubted Ned would be answering but he heard a shaky, "Peter?" On the line just before the phone rang out.

"Hey, Ned." The teen replied.

An hour and a half later and Peter was pulling up to a local park where he, Ned, and MJ had arranged to meet. The phone calls with the both of them had been wildly different but also succinct as they arranged a rendezvous. Ned had been excited and quickly speaking, MJ had been, well, MJ and cool headed as she agreed to meet Peter and Ned.

Peter scrubbed his shaking hands over his face as he parked his car and got out. He found himself nervously picking at his hands as he walked towards the grassed area to find his friends. The teens sneakers fell soft as he walked across the field to find the spot where his friends said they would be. He saw the two figures that he'd recognize anywhere talking to each other, and watched as MJ pointed toward him and Ned turned.

His friend had changed much more than he had expected. He wasn't still the round bellied rosy cheeked boy Peter remembered. Instead his dark hair was trimmed in a trendy undercut he pushed back from his face. He was thinner, still a bit husky but more muscular. He wore a dark blue button up that exposed his built arms and black jeans. It suited him, Peter thought.

"Oh my god, it's really you." Ned said, barely above a whisper as Peter approached.

"Hah, yeah." Peter said awkwardly, scratching the back of his head but grunted as the entirety of Ned squeezed him the the world's tightest bear hug.

The teen felt a warm patch grow on his shoulder and he realized Ned had begun to cry.

"I thought you were dead." his friend hushed.

"I know." Peter replied as his arms wrapped around the man. "I'm so sorry."

Ned pulled back. "Don't be sorry. You didn't choose to go."
Peter didn't say anything as he looked over to MJ. He got a good look at the woman's pretty face. Her hair was down, not tied back in the ponytail she used to always have, her highlighted curls framing her face. She seemed to have the same fashion sense as before, still just as edgy, though it had more of a feminine aspect to it now. She was wearing a black motocross jacket over a wine colored v-neck and a pair of black jeans. Her feet were clad in a pair of equally dark Doc Martens. Peter was surprised to find that her face was streaked with tears.

Ned stepped aside as she ran to hug Peter tight and the teen felt his arms come up to wrap around her body almost immediately. Her torso shook as she sobbed into his neck, the most emotion he'd ever seen her convey. The teen stroked her hair as she cried, feeling a massive wave of shame and sadness wash over him. He never wanted to make anyone feel like this. Ever. But it seemed everyone he'd seen since coming back had.

"I missed you, Peter." MJ said softly, balling her hands in her friend's now damp shirt when her sobbing had reduced to quiet sniffles.

"I missed you too." Peter replied.

When they pulled away from each other, MJ looked at Peter with sad, puffy eyes and her hand came to gently cup the now younger's cheek. The teen smiled at her softly and she smiled solemnly back but the boy watched the look of fondness in her watery eyes turn to anger in a split second. She drew her palm away from his cheek only to bring it back down in a hard slap across the face.

"Don't ever scare us like that again!" She said as Peter rubbed his reddening cheekbone.

"Ow! I'm sorry!" Peter said as his hand cupped his face.

"That's more like the MJ I know." He smirked at her when the stinging calmed.

"Yeah, yeah, shut up loser." She scoffed.

"Yep, definitely MJ." Ned laughed. "It's good to have you back, Pete."

The group ended up going for lunch, catching Peter up on what's been happening the past five years. Ned, of course, being Ned, got into some pretty deep conspiracy theories about how even though in their time stream he's been around the full twenty two years they have, he's only just under eighteen by his personal knowledge of time. His theory was that, even though they've known and have confirmed documents of a full twenty two years of Peter's existence, the being and body that was corporeally present has only existed for just under eighteen years.

It made Peter's head hurt.

"Wait, but what if Peter has existed a full twenty two years but the soul realm somehow managed to warp his body backwards to mirror what he was before he went into it. Would that mean he really did exist a full twenty two years, or would that mean he existed longer due to the time spent bringing him back to seventeen from twenty two." MJ said.

"...what?" Peter asked.

"No it makes sense!" Ned looked at her with wide eyes, his sandwich still in hand. "You mean like he'd have existed twenty seven years because you'd tack on the time difference between seventeen and twenty two?"
"Exactly." MJ said.

"I am so confused right now." Peter jutted in.

"You don't have the mind for the intricacies of space and time." MJ said and continued to ramble with Ned about how Peter was now some warped being who was likely to cause a tear in the space time continuum.

Somehow the conversation ended up with pestering Peter about whether or not he was involved in the top secret society of the lizard people that Mark Zuckerberg and the Queen of England were "known members" of.

"Okay, that's enough." Peter had cut it short.

"See, you're being defensive! He's definitely a lizard person." Ned concluded.

"What? I am not a lizard person!" Peter shouted incredulously.

"That's exactly what a lizard person would say." MJ said.

Peter sighed. "You guys are in a world of your own."

"And you're in a world that's not your own, lizard person." Ned said.

Peter rolled his eyes and groaned.

The friends broke off when Ned got a text from his parents saying they needed him and MJ left not soon after because her dog at home was waiting to be walked. They said their goodbyes and as they all walked to their cars, fawned over Peter's ride before making their ways back home.

Peter watched MJ's Civic pull out of her parking space and down the road after Ned before he even started his car. He didn't turn the engine over, just allowed the air conditioning to run as he thought about how it was so weird his friends he had never expected to be apart from were now a full five years older than him. It felt odd, like talking to adults at a family reunion. They had had time to grow and mature that he'd never had. He felt wildly childish beside them.

Adjusting to the new concept of time had been difficult on it's own, but this wasn't making it any easier. The teen turned the key again and let the car start up before pulling out of his space and down the road.

Upon Peter's arrival back at the compound, the common room was barren and dead silent. He thought it was weird at first but he realized it was just after lunch time and by now the rest of the team was probably off doing their own things. The teen went to the fridge and got a soda before sitting down on the couch to quietly watch TV.

Natasha walked into the room from the hallway and Peter followed her with his eyes as she crossed to the island in the kitchen to pluck an apple from the bowl of fruit resting there. All of a sudden the room erupted in chaos as the cabinet beside the stove swung open, baring Clint with a bag of flour. Things seemed to move in slow motion as he lunged from the cabinet and flew over Natasha, dumping the bag over her as he went. She stood in a pile of flour as her hair, face, and clothes were now covered in white.

Clint knew better than to stick around to witness her wrath so he instead took off running as soon as his feet hit the floor. Natasha seethed for a split second before she bolted after him. Clint left a trail of
flour from the not-quite-empty bag behind him.

Peter sighed and just got a broom to sweep up the mess. He knew Bucky would have a fit when he found out that the newly bought baking ingredient was no longer present in the cabinets for his stress baking.

The rest of the evening drew on in unrequited anarchy as the prank war raged. Clint somehow managed to fall for the old "bucket over the door" trick and got soaked in water. He retaliated by spraying Natasha thoroughly down in silly string. The woman snuck into his room and stole all his clothes and the towels from his closet and dresser just before he went in to take a shower. This resulted in Clint hilariously exiting of the bathroom, sopping wet, in a kilt made of pillowcases in search of a towel in the least conspicuous way possible. With the team present in the living room it was hard to go unnoticed in the straight view down the hallway after slipping in your own puddle.

The fight got dirtier as it went on and no one seemed to put any effort into stopping it, seemingly aware that this was how things went. The only people who seemed confused in the least were the people who'd been in the soul realm who'd never met Clint nor Natasha before. The rest, despite never being present for one of the previous prank wars, seemed to account it as something somewhat normal.

Clint hid all mugs from the cabinet so Natasha wouldn't be able to drink her coffee, which resulted more in Tony's anger than the woman's, who resorted to just making an iced coffee and using a normal glass. One of the lowest points was towards the setting of the sun when Natasha tarred and feathered the man. She managed to get her hands on web fluid Tony had fixed up quickly when she coerced him into helping her, using the mug incident as leverage. The web fluid acted as the glue and she slit open Clint's own pillows to use as the feathers. He walked out into the living room looking very unhappy and very much like he was ready to be a sign spinner for a local chicken restaurant.

The fight only ceased when the group was rattled by the sounds of gunshots followed by Clint's screams carrying through the air vents. As one of the last pranks of the night, Clint had been crawling through the vents to try and swing down and attack Natasha from above and Bucky, having the reflexes he did (or so he claimed), had shot at the ceiling. When the team had run into the White Wolf's bedroom, they found him standing by his bed, gun in hand, with a circular track of bullet holes surrounding a Clint sized spot in the ceiling.

"Oops." The man deadpanned.

Following Bucky's comment there was the sound of rattling in the vents and Clint dropped down, still covered in feathers, just outside Bucky's open door, white faced and shaken.

"Did I hit you?" Bucky cocked a brow at him.

Clint, trembling, shook his head.

"Damn." And with that Bucky went back to pulling the covers taught over the bed he'd been in the middle of making.

When the team had made sure Clint was okay and joked about how that was the shortest prank war he and Natasha had ever had, Peter lingered in Bucky's room.

"Why'd you shoot at Clint?" The teen asked.

"He wasted all my flour." Bucky shrugged and proceeded to throw the duvet over his sheets.

"Huh." Peter huffed before walking out of the room.
When the teen reached the team crowded around Clint in the living room, the man gesturing animatedly with his hands, saying, "Bucky tried to shoot me! I thought he and I were friends!" all the feathers fell from him at once, drifting to pool at his feet.

"Well." Clint said, watching them fall to the ground. "That's one problem solved, I guess."

"How am I even going to fix the bullet holes in my ceiling. The vents are gonna whistle now! I'm tempted to just leave them for Barnes to deal with. No respect for building maintenance, I tell you." Tony said angrily.

The team laughed boisterously.

Clint stepped over the mess of feathers and tried to slip out unnoticed as the team was joking loudly about the pranks but Tony stopped him before he could take two full steps.

"BARTON!" He yelled and with that Clint took off running down the hall, screaming as Tony ran after him. "YOU GET BACK HERE AND SWEEP UP THOSE FEATHERS!"

The ruckus only continued when Peter ducked as the gauntlet of the iron suit flew over his head and down the hall to where Tony and Clint had disappeared. The arrival of the armor was followed by a loud explosion that shook the floor, only drowning out Clint's screeches of terror for a moment.

A second later the archer came bounding around the corner, covered in soot, still screaming. Tony followed, the older model iron suit on his hand and murder in his eyes.

After a lap around the common room, Tony managed to corner Clint in the kitchen and he held his hand out towards the archer, the arc reactor in his palm charging up as Hawkeye looked close to wetting himself.

"I'm sorry Tony!" He begged. "Please don't kill me! Oh god, I'm too young to die. I have a wife! And kids! I'll clean my mess, I'll clean everything up! I'll even fix the vents! I swear!"

Tony's face of anger became an easy smile. "Cool! You start now." He suddenly lunged forward to press a forearm against Clint's throat and his smile turned to a grimace, saying through gritted teeth, "And if this place isn't spotless by tomorrow morning, you're evicted...and dead. You hear me?"

Clint nodded again.

"Okay!" Tony stepped back and he had a smile on his face again. He turned to the rest of the team and clapped his hands, one flesh and the other still in the iron glove. "Who's ready for dinner?"

The meal went pretty decent, though Clint was shunned to sit at a very small, children's table apart from the actual dining table. Peter stole a glance at his pouting and sullen face, comically crammed at the extremely tiny table alone and nearly choked on his water.

After dinner, the team turned in for the night. Well, all of the team except Clint. As a matter of fact, Bucky was given Clint's room for the night by Tony, who smiled at Clint's face of betrayal and incredulity. Bucky smirked at him and walked into the other man's room to redress the mattress in clean sheets and carrying his personal, fully in tact pillows.

Clint grumbled under his breath, crossing his arms and pouting.

"Hey, did I say you could take a break?" Tony shouted at him.

"No, sir!" The archer blurted and his face wrinkled in disgust from the words that'd just escaped his
"Go fix the vents, Barton!"

"But it's dark!" Clint said, shocked.

"Well you better work harder to do a damn good job, then." Tony said and tossed him a headlamp. "Have fun!"

And with that, the giggling team left the defeated archer to sulk as they went off to their own rooms. Well, most of them. Bucky to Clint's and Clint into the vents to fix the bullet holes.

Peter laughed to himself as he toed off his shoes in his room after saying goodnight to his team members. He then went to brush his teeth, wash his face, and changed into some pajamas before getting into bed and falling quickly asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Ooh another fun filler chapter and only a little bit of angst! I love writing these. The topic for Bucky shooting the ceiling was taken from a tumblr post I saw somewhere but unfortunately I don't remember the name of the original blog that posted it.

Anyways, thank you all for reading and until the next chapter.

-xoxo Denise
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

Warnings: This chapter contains graphic depictions of self harm, self hatred, anger, sadness, anxiety, severe depression, moderate language, and hospitalization. Do not read if you are sensitive to such topics.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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---------------------------------------------

Peter smelled the bacon before he saw it and when he looked around the corner at the end of the hall, he saw Steve and Bucky fussing over breakfast in the kitchen as usual. What he didn't expect, however, was them acting as assistants to Sam and the beautiful breakfast sandwiches he was dishing.

The teen hurried the rest of the way to the breakfast bar, sliding into his seat beside Loki and next to Bucky and Steve's.

"Good morning Peter." Loki smiled at the teen but there was something off about it. Something almost artificial. It didn't reach his eyes, the sparkle he usually had upon looking at the teen's beaming face not present.

Peter felt a pang of sadness in his heart, wondering if he'd done something wrong, something to make Loki feel as though he had to fake a smile for him but he chose not to press it. Instead he hastened to keep the conversation going as though he hadn't noticed anything.

"Morning, Loki." Peter quickly smiled back and a plate was slid in front of him with a grin from Sam.

Peter took a bite and moaned at the taste. "This is amazing." He said through the food in his mouth.

"I try." Sam said as he threw buttered bread down in the skillet in front of him.

"Hey, Peter?" Tony called from where he leaned against the counter, his plate in his hand.

"Yeah?" Peter responded after swallowing.

"Can you bring your suits down to my lab after breakfast? And I'm gonna need the keys to your car. I gotta fix 'em with some new tech."

"Sure thing." Peter said.
"And you, Thor, Loki." Tony continued but Loki didn't look up until Peter nudged him, too busy looking lostly down at his food. Tony gave him a weird look. "You said you wanted me to set your phones up so they'll work anywhere for longer? Bring them down too and I'll see what I can do." And with that he excused himself from breakfast to go down to the lab.

When Peter had finished eating, he slid off his seat and went to his room to grab both of his suits and his car keys before walking back out and to the elevator, which he took down to Tony's lab. When the doors slid open he found the man already beginning to dissect Thor's and Loki's phones at one of his workbenches.

"Hey, Pete." Tony said, turning around to look at Peter. "You want both the suits fixed up? It won't be any extra trouble," He added when Peter looked slightly nervous. "I can do them together so you might as well if you like em both."

Peter thought for a second. "Yeah, sure. It could be cool to have em both."

"Nice. Okay you can put them over on that table," Tony gestured to another workbench. "And you can leave your keys over there too. I should have em done by this afternoon, so don't go doing anything that you'll need em for."

"Got it." Peter said and went to put his stuff where Tony wanted it. As he was heading to the elevators he turned back. "On second thought, you think I could help you?"

Tony turned to look at him. "Yeah, sure if you're feeling up to it."

"Cool, yeah anything you'll let me do." Peter smiled. Tony beamed at him in return.

"First thing you can do is you can go down to the garage and drive your car up and around the building and pull it up over there." He pointed to a long, empty stretch of wall lined with metal doors that open up to the black top outside. "When you get there, F.R.I.D.A.Y will let you in and then I'm gonna need you to park inside."

Peter nodded and he took his keys, heading to the elevator and taking it down to the garage. He followed Tony's instructions. Sure enough, when he reached one of the doors, it opened, allowing him to carefully drive inside.

He put the car in park and turned it off before getting out and heading back to Tony, who had already booted up the program needed to fix Peter's suit.

"Here. You can take these cords," Tony held up something that looked similar to black USB cables. "And plug them into these ports," and he pointed to a matching port under a flap in his first suit and an open port on the side of the newest suit model's pod. "And press until they click. Then wait while the program loads them up."

Peter moved to the workbench, sitting on the spinning stool in front of it and following the instructions while Tony moved to continue work on Thor's phone.

While he waited for them to load up, Tony handed him a list of tools to find and put in a rolling cabinet to leave by his car. He spent the next hour and a half digging through various cabinets and drawers and sifting through clutter on desks in search of the tools. Afterwards, Tony handed him a new list of parts he'd need. Finding those took another forty five minutes.

When he'd assembled everything Tony needed, the man was nearly finished improving Thor and Loki's phones, having replaced the batteries with a stronger one that's rechargeable by any light source, along with replacing the signal receptors with a different parts of his own design that produce
their own signal and don't depend on cell towers. Peter never ceased to be amazed by what Tony could make from practically nothing.

They took a break for lunch, consisting of barbecue that was a godsend, bless Sam and his grilling skills, and worked until dinner on Peter's car.

Peter handed Tony the parts and tools he needed while the man pulled apart the inner workings of the teen's car, putting in things to deploy updated clones of the iron spidey suit, things that kept extra web fluid, and a cooler. He fixed it with all kinds of cool new stuff along with F.R.I.D.A.Y.'s programming and Peter wondered if he ever let any details slide.

They talked some too, laughing and joking about whatever came to mind. They finished just as F.R.I.D.A.Y. announced dinner was ready.

"Good job today, kid." Tony turned to grin at the teen as they walked to the dining room.

"Thanks Mr. Stark." Peter smiled back.

"It's Tony." The man chuckled before ruffling the boy's hair. "You'll do a fine job taking on the mantle."

"As if I'm ever gonna let you die. You can't escape me that easy." Peter threw back.

Tony burst out laughing just as he had his hand out to push open the doors to the dining room. Their good mood immediately reflected on the quiet room, which erupted into conversations full of bright smiles while they dug into dinner. All except Loki, who was mindlessly poking at the food on his plate, which he eventually pushed toward Peter to eat. The teen looked at him in concern but the God didn't meet his eyes.

After they ate, Tony decided to go on a walk with Pepper, Peter opting to go to his room instead. The rest of the team was busy with their own things. Bucky, Sam, T'Challa and Steve had gone on a run, Hill and Natasha were training, Fury was in D.C. again, Wanda and Vision were out for date night and Thor and Heimdall went with the Guardians to tour the grounds. Finally, Strange went to check on the Sanctum. That left Peter, Loki, Bruce and Alexander alone in the building.

As far as Peter remembered, Alexander was napping. "F.R.I.D.A.Y., what is Alexander doing right now?"

"Mr. DeMenassi is currently sleeping, Mr. Parker." The building responded.

"What about Bruce?"

"Doctor Banner is in his lab." F.R.I.D.A.Y. Replied.

"And Loki?" Peter asked finally.

"Mr. Laufeyson is in his room, but I can't tell you what he's doing. There is no video or audio footage in any personal quarters except Mr. DeManassi's." F.R.I.D.A.Y. said.

"Okay, thank you." Peter said and slid off his bed to see if Loki wanted to do something. When he crossed the hall to Loki's door, he knocked but didn't get an answer.

Peter knocked again. "Loki?" He called. "Loki are you there?"

Again, no answer. "Loki?"
Peter began to worry, and he tried the doorknob. Locked.

Peter tried again. The door didn't budge.

Something didn't sit right with Peter and the teen threw his shoulder against the door. He felt it rattle in the frame and surely the sound would've woken Loki up had he been asleep, but he still heard no sound from inside the room. He threw his shoulder against the wall a second time, feeling it rattle a bit more, and finally a third time that broke the lock and caused the door to swing open.

The teen rushed into the darkened room. He looked to the bed, seeing it neat and made as it always was. He checked the floor for the trickster, panic beginning to set in when he didn't see anyone. He saw the thin strip of light from beneath the bathroom door. Carefully, Peter approached it, knocking.

"Loki?" He called.

No response.

He knocked harder. "Loki?"

Again, no answer.

He pounded on the door a final time, calling, "Loki!"

When he didn't hear the man's voice he took a deep breath, stepping back and opting to kick the door in. He wasn't prepared for what he saw when it swung open.

Inside the bathroom Loki sat limp, slumped against the side of the bathtub. The fluorescent lights illuminated his sunken face, though his skin was blue and lined with thin, white, tattoo like markings. Peter realized this must have been his Jotun form. He mentioned it would only appear if he allowed it to, or if he became too weak to hide it, causing the teen to panic.

His hair was dark and curled, draped over the edge of the tub where his head rested in an uncomfortable position. It was then that he saw Loki's arms. The right was the same, littered with old scars, but his left bore three thin cuts and one deep one. Blood ran down his thin forearm to pool on the ground. He hadn't gotten very far before he went unconscious. In his slack right hand was a bloodstained dagger and abandoned in the pool of blood by his hip was a lighter. The teen hastily checked for burn marks but didn't find any.

Peter was horrified to say the least. Not particularly by the blood, but by how he was seeing one of his closest friends so vulnerable, near death, having done this to themselves. Having wanted it.

The teen felt his eyes begin to water and he grabbed Loki's shoulders, shaking them.

"Loki!" He said raggedly. "Loki, wake up! Please, Loki." He was beginning to cry as he pressed his fingers to the man's thin neck, letting out a sob of relief when he felt a heartbeat, though faint.

"F.R.I.D.A.Y!" Peter screamed. "F.R.I.D.A.Y. CALL BRUCE! GET HIM IN HERE!"

"Calling Doctor Banner." The building responded.

Peter then began hastily trying to stunt the bleeding by pressing towels to Loki's arm, the red flooding across the white and the room temperature towel growing warm in Peter's hands as Loki's face grew whiter. Not long after, Bruce came running in with a med kit.

"Oh god." The man said as he rushed over, Peter scurrying away while the man quickly bandaged
Loki's wounds. "I left a stretcher in the hall." and Peter ran out, moving to wheel the thing inside and helping Bruce to hoist the Jotun onto it.

Peter rushed after the doctor as he wheeled Loki out of the room and into the elevator to make it back to Bruce's lab.

"Call Thor." Bruce said, looking at Peter.

Peter quickly nodded and tried his best to call the correct contact with his shaking hands, bloody fingerprints littering his device as he went. He finally managed to press the right buttons and he found himself muttering "pick up, pick up, pick up," as he anxiously listened to the phone ring. On the third, Thor's voice filtered through the speaker pressed to Peter's ear.

"Thor, please, get home quick. It's Loki. He's in trouble. Please." Peter's teary voice was quivering and he heard Thor excuse himself from the Guardians before saying, "I'll be right there."

Mere minutes later, Thor was bursting through the doors of the lab.

"Brother..." The word fell soft from his lips as he looked at his sibling's blue form lying unconscious in the bed. An IV for the lost fluids and a heart monitor were already hooked up as Bruce worked on stitching up the deeper cut. He was able to determine it was a single incision that caused Loki to go unconscious and that there were no additional substances in his system, and judging by how few cuts he was able to make, him fainting was most likely an accident rather than a suicide attempt. Peter didn't feel much better after that, but he was relieved.

Thor was nervously pacing the room, muttering to himself about how he should've been more careful, more caring and open about Loki's emotions. Saying things like maybe if he had been a better brother Loki would have talked to him rather than done this. Peter found himself hugging Thor's massive, sobbing frame while Bruce covered Loki's stitches.

The same thoughts were running through his own mind. He had seen Loki, thought to himself that something was off and he'd done nothing to help it.

Peter assured Thor it wasn't his fault, that he was an amazing brother and that Loki loved and cared for him very much. The teen was trying to convince himself as well as Thor that the man's decision was his own and that neither of them had any say in it at all. Still, Peter could feel the guilt rising to form a lump in his throat and he knew for sure that Thor probably felt the exact same.

Peter nearly cried in relief when Bruce announced that Loki was going to be okay and that he'd be waking up in just a few hours. Peter explained to Bruce what was going on in terms of Loki's current form rather than Thor, who had slipped into silence from emotional drain, instead slumped in a seat beside his brother's bed. After he'd finished explaining he also told Bruce that Loki didn't want anyone to know he was Jotun but him and Thor just yet and he begged him not to tell the others about that part at least.

Bruce nodded in understanding and agreed to not tell anyone about how Loki was here at all, deciding to discreetly care for him with the exception of Tony since F.R.I.D.A.Y. was required to tell him about any persons admitted into Bruce's medical care. Peter decided Tony would probably keep it quiet if he talked to him.

And with that, Bruce went about finding a painkiller strong enough to help Loki. However, he firmly told Thor and Peter he would be the only person Loki could receive it from in case the man decided he wanted to take his life in the near future, god forbid. Peter found himself volunteering to clean up the blood in Loki's bathroom.
"Peter..." Bruce began. "Are you sure?"

Peter nodded firmly and he collected the bucket, sponge, and bleach he would need to clean it up as he returned to Loki's room. He kneeled in front of the cold and coagulating blood, plunging the sponge into the water bucket and wiping up the red staining the white linoleum, wringing it out into the bathtub. He cleaned until all that was left was a pink hue on the floor when he washed the sponge and switched the water out for bleach. He scrubbed and scrubbed at the floor, continuing to furiously rub at it even after the stains were long gone, his teeth gritted and tears in his eyes as the sickening scent of bleach filled his nose, the image of Loki when he found him burned into the backs of his eyelids.

Peter dropped the sponge in the bucket and hastily stood on shaky legs, his vision tunneling for a moment from standing too quickly. He washed his hands thoroughly in hot water before changing the tap to cold, splashing it across his puffy, tearstained face. He didn't dry his hands after he shut the water off, pressing his wet palms to his eyelids as he sobbed. He hunched forward on himself, slumped against the cabinets beneath the sink. His body shook with sobs as he wondered where he'd gone wrong, what he could've done to help this.

It took him nearly an hour to calm down, though he'd stopped crying thirty minutes in to catch his breath and he'd zoned out for the rest of the time. He busied himself getting lost in thought before he gathered enough energy to rinse down the tub and go to throw away the bucket and sponge in the garbage chute.

He washed his hands a final time, the full team now back but he ignored their concerned questions in favor of getting Loki a change of clothes and heading back up to Bruce's lab. He found Thor still sitting silent in his seat beside Loki's bed. Peter left to room to let Thor redress his brother and when he had finished, joined him, pulling a seat up beside the bed and watching the Jotun's chest rise and fall with his even breaths.

The teen dozed off for a little while, but was woken up by Loki stirring and groaning lowly.

Peter's eyes snapped open and he slapped his hand against Thor's chest to wake him. He watched as Loki's eyes slowly fluttered open. The man dazedly looked at Peter, and then to Thor.

"Peter? Thor? Where am- oh." He cut himself off when he realized he was in Bruce's lab. He looked down at his hands and any trace of grogginess was erased as he hurried to recloak his Jotun form.

Peter heard the heart monitor beep more rapidly with the raise in Loki's heart rate. He watched as the man's blue skin faded back to his normal pale color, though with darker circles under his eyes and more sunken from the blood loss.

"Loki." Peter said softly and the man looked at him with panicked eyes. "It's okay. You're okay." He choked out the last words before he broke down again, sobbing hard.

The trickster leaned forward, weakly gripping Peter's hand. He looked to Thor, who had watery eyes of his own, and Loki allowed his brother to hug him tightly.

After the older sibling had settled back in his seat, Peter looked up at Loki with puffy eyes.

"You promised you would talk to me." He said weakly. Then the teen's face twisted in anger. "You promised!" He snarled, slamming his hand down on Loki's bed, causing the frame to rattle with the teen's strength.

"Peter I-" Loki said, shocked.
Peter's anger flooded from him as quickly as it came, the emotional drain returning instead in its place. "I was so scared, Loki." Peter said quietly, his voice ragged. "We were so scared."

"I'm so sorry." Loki whispered and he looked away from Peter's face in shame.

"It's." Peter began. "I- Please don't do that again. Please. Never, Loki. I was terrified. You terrified me. You terrified Thor. Thor. He was silent for hours. He couldn't even speak after he came in here. I can't. He was crying and he was blaming himself. I had a mental breakdown in your bathroom. It was awful, Loki. Please, understand, whatever your reasons were, I assure you they were wrong. There is nothing wrong with you as a person, you're amazing and generous and wonderful and you keep- You keep doubting yourself. You're always blaming yourself for things you can't control."

Peter's red, watery eyes met Loki's sunken ones. The man's mouth was open like he was going to say something but nothing came out.

"Peter." He finally muttered.

"Loki, I know, it's hard. I do it. I know, trust me. I stopped myself because I'm trying to let go of that for the sake of people I love. For your sake, Bucky's sake, Tony and May's sake. For the team's sake. It makes sense at the time and it's a hard habit to break but you need to replace it with something more constructive. Anything, no matter how small. Whether it's singing your favorite song or curling up in your favorite blanket, find something. Talk to someone. Please." Peter stressed.

Loki didn't say anything, just gaped at Peter, his eyes full of shock and sadness. "I'm sorry." He whispered finally.

"I know." Peter said. "It's okay. Please, Loki, we love you. Don't scare us like this again."

He looked up at Loki who was silent for a moment before finally nodding, whispering. "Okay."

"Promise?" Peter asked.

"More than a promise." Loki said firmly. He turned from Peter to Thor whose face was wet with silent tears. "Oh, brother. What warrior are you if you'll fall at something so simple?" He cracked a small smile.

Thor chuckled wryly. "One that values family over war."

Loki smiled softly at them and Peter told F.R.I.D.A.Y. to call Bruce.

"You won't tell anyone, will you?" Loki asked Bruce as the doctor removed the IV and administered the first round of painkillers.

"Of course not, Loki. It's not my secret to tell." Bruce said as he placed a cotton ball over the prick in Loki's elbow and stuck it down with medical tape. "Tony knows because F.R.I.D.A.Y. is required to report all of my patients to him but he doesn't know about your Jotun form or anything, just that you were here and why."

Loki nodded.

"Get some rest, eat, get your blood sugar back up. Come back to me in the morning to change your bandages and get your next round of painkillers." Bruce said. "Take care of yourself, Loki."

"I will, Bruce." Loki said.
Bruce nodded as Loki, Peter, and Thor got into the elevator and went back down to the now empty common floor, the sun peeking over the horizon beyond the floor to ceiling windows.

"Do you wanna sleep in my room?" Peter asked. "I can sleep on the floor."

Loki looked like he was going to say no but he thought for a moment before nodding. "Please."

They said goodnight to Thor, and Peter went into Loki’s room to get the man's pillows, placing them on the bed in his own room and throwing his original pillows onto the floor. He padded out to the living room to hastily steal the cushions off of the couch and laid them out on the floor. Loki followed him with his eyes from where he was tucked tightly under Peter’s comforter.

The teen got comfortable on the cushions beneath him and closed his eyes. "Goodnight, Loki." He said.

"Goodnight, Peter." He heard the Trickster respond.

And with that, Peter nestled into the blankets and let sleep overtake him.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the angst, but I'm working towards giving all the characters blatant and recurring flaws or touching on ones that have already been expressed as part of the "show superheroes are humans too" and add a relatable aspect to them all.

Anyways, thank you all for reading and until the next chapter

-xoxo Denise
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Peter woke the next morning with a sore back and a crick in his neck, but he stretched and massaged his own shoulders, knowing Loki would feel guilty if he knew he was hurting.

The teen sat up on the couch cushions, looking over at his bed, the aforementioned god still soundly asleep on it. The man didn't sleep much, so Peter knew he must've really needed it. He decided to leave him alone, and as quietly as he could, slipped into the bathroom and showered, dressed, and brushed his teeth. He tiptoed out of the room, taking the cushions, his phone and his sneakers with him before quietly shutting the door.

Upon walking in on breakfast, the team asked about Loki's whereabouts as Peter replaced the couch cushions, causing Bruce to seize up and stutter. Tony elbowed the man in the side under the table, suavely responding with, "Poor guy had a bit of a rough night. He's resting."

"A rough night or a rough night?" Sam asked, quirking his brow.

"Dude's gonna be real hungover. He didn't even get home until sunrise." Tony lied. "So take it easy on him when he does wake up."

After breakfast, Peter took his car that had been replaced in the garage last night after Tony had finished working on it, and drove to the grocery store. He immediately weaved through the isles, picking up everything he wished he'd had when he was sad, along with the things that he knew Loki liked. He hoped to get the man feeling better as soon as possible. He didn't expect it to happen in a day, even in a week, but he wanted to make him feel loved and comfortable.

The teen picked up two tubs of ice cream, one mint chocolate chip and one double chocolate brownie, hoping they'd be good for Loki. He also bought a ton of various types of candy, and other such junk foods, tossing in an extra box of chocolates for a certain God of Thunder. Finally, he grabbed two jugs of orange juice and placed them in the cart, paying with the card Tony had given him.
He brought his groceries outside, piling them into the trunk of his car and driving back to headquarters. He parked and grabbed his haul before taking the elevator back up to the common room. As he loaded the stuff into the fridge he turned to warn the group, saying, "If any single one of you touches any of the stuff I bought, that means you Clint," He glared at the archer. "I will personally make sure you find a surprise snake in your sheets."

The group mumbled their shocked agreement and Peter pulled out the chocolate he bought for Thor, picking a sharpie up off the counter and neatly writing the man's name on it. When he had finished, he poured a cup of orange juice, snagging a muffin Bucky had left out and heading down the hallway to the team's quarters. He knocked on Thor's door, and upon hearing the hollered, "Come in!" He ducked his head inside.

"Hey, Thor, sorry to bother you, I was wondering if I could borrow a hoodie for Loki to wear. Big hoodies always make me feel better and I'm trying to help him out."

"Oh, that's very kind of you to think. Of course you can borrow one. They're on the left side of the closet." The man smiled at the teen.

Peter flashed a grin back and set the glass of orange juice he got down on the dresser while he used his non-muffin holding hand to pull a sweater out of the god's closet. "Thanks!" He threw the garment over his shoulder and picked the glass of orange juice up, heading to the door.

Just as he was about to leave he turned back and said, "Oh! Also there's a box of chocolates in the kitchen for you. I put your name on it. Don't touch anything else though, they're for Loki."

Thor nodded and the teen stepped back into the hall, shutting the door to Thor's room and heading back to his own.

When Peter opened his door, he found the man sitting up, toying with the hem of his shirt.

"Hey." The teen smiled. "How're you feeling?"

"Better. I heal quickly." Loki said.

"That's not really what I meant." Peter sat on the edge of the bed by Loki's feet, handing the man the muffin and juice he had brought.

Loki sipped the juice before placing the glass on the nightstand, beginning to unwrap the muffin. "I feel...okay. Last night was a mistake. Not just because I fell unconscious but because I decided to do it at all. I shouldn't have. It was a selfish decision. I should have talked to someone first."

Peter nodded but rubbed Loki's blanketed knee. "No one's blaming you for anything, Loki. We just want to see you get better."

Loki looked up at the teen. "I'm truly sorry."

"I know. It's okay, Loki." He smiled.

Loki smiled smally back.

"Oh also, I brought you a hoodie. They always make me feel better." Peter said, pulling the sweater off of his shoulder and passing it to Loki.

The trickster studied the fabric in his hands before handing Peter his muffin so he could pull it over his head.
Peter grinned at him, the jacket hanging loosely off of the man's lean frame.

"Is this Thor's?" Loki asked as he looked at the cuffs of the sleeves that covered his thin hands.

"Yeah, he lent it to you." Peter responded.

Loki smiled softly.

"Now eat, you need it. I got you a ton of stuff at the store, it's all in the kitchen and I promised snakes in the beds of anyone who dared steal any. I hope I don't need to go to the pet store tonight." Peter said.

Loki chuckled. "I'm nearly certain that Clint has already taken something."

"Yeah, me too." Peter ran a hand through his hair, sighing. "I should check the site to see how old I need to be to buy a reptile."

When the God had finished eating, Peter asked Loki what he'd like to do.

"Can we-" He began softly. "Can we just go on a walk? Me and you?"

"Yeah. Yeah, of course. Anything you want, Loki." Peter said and he helped the man off the bed.

Loki didn't change, just let Peter help him into his shoes and Peter slid his own sneakers on before he wandered out of his room.

"Hey, look who it is!" Steve said, beaming.

"Hangover." Peter whispered just loud enough for Loki to hear. He didn't even flinch, just immediately let his face sag and his eyes hood.

The man feigned sickness. "Good morning." He said weakly.

Damn he's good. Peter found himself realizing why Thor always fell for his jokes.

"How's your head?" Sam asked.

"Pounding like a stampede of frost beasts." Loki murmured.

"You want some aspirin?" Tony threw in to help it seem more convincing.

"No, thank you. I've already got some." Loki nodded at the man.

"Where're you two headed anyways?" Bucky asked.

"We're gonna go on a walk, see if the fresh air helps Loki at all." Peter said.

"Oh, well good luck then." Bucky nodded in response.

"If you feel the need to puke please do so off of the walkway." Tony said.

"Of course." Loki chuckled wryly.

And with that the two escaped the team's scrutiny in favor of the silence of the elevator.

Peter insisted they go out the back door of the gym because it put them closest to the trail into the woods.
"The woods in upstate New York are the nicest this time of year." The teen said as he and Loki began to stroll down the pathway. The summer was close to its end and the fall would soon begin but the insects were beginning to prepare for the winter and the air was warm but not humid.

Loki nodded, seemingly taken by the flora himself. He walked slowly beside Peter and gazed around him at the lush green. The forest smelled fresh and Loki's eyes glimmered.

"Do you think the team likes me?" Loki asked, out of the blue.

"What?" Peter looked at him. "Of course they like you, why wouldn't they?"

"Well Agent Barton doesn't." Loki said softly.

"Why do you say that?" Peter replied tentatively.

"Because he and I fought, a few days back. He confronted me and things went awry." The god whispered.

Peter listened to Loki explain what happened.

"So you showed him your memories?" The teen asked.

"Yes." Loki answered.

"And he hasn't spoken to you since?" Peter followed up.

"Yes." The god repeated.

"If Clint hasn't spoken to you then that probably means he's either ashamed for being angry at you or embarrassed to talk to you after what happened. Either way, I doubt he'd be this calm about it if he was still mad." Peter consoled the man.

Loki didn't say anything.

"And just to be clear, just because Clint didn't like you doesn't mean the rest of the team doesn't. I mean, look at Steve and Bucky and how much they love you. They like having you around. Who's to say everyone else doesn't?"


"Jeez, took you long enough to realize." Peter laughed.

The two walked for a few hours, casually conversing until Peter checked his watch and proposed lunch. Loki agreed and they walked into the compound again to see if the team had plans. He found Steve sitting on the couch, leaned against the arm of the couch, sketchbook in his lap and his feet propped up on Bucky's blanketed knees, marathoning Game of Thrones.

"Hey, you two." Steve smiled at them.

"Hey, Steve." Peter smiled back and Loki offered a soft grin.

"How was your walk?" The blonde asked, Bucky's eyes glued to the TV.

Peter opened his mouth to answer but Loki beat him to it.
"It was beautiful, Captain Rogers. The compound's grounds to bear such wonderful flora. I believe I'll find myself taking strolls more often. Maybe even with some of the team, if they care to join me." Loki grinned. "And I must say, I feel much better."

"That's great, Loki. I'm happy to see you're settling in well with the team. Doing something calming with members is a good bonding exercise as well. It stimulates conversation." Steve smiled. "Also, you can call me Steve."

"Thank you, Steve." Loki smiled.

Peter felt pride bubble in his chest at the thought of his words reaching Loki.

"Sorry to break up the moment, but what's the plan for lunch?" Peter asked.

Steve thought for a second. "No one said anything specific about lunch." He looked to the ceiling. "F.R.I.D.A.Y, can you ask Tony what the lunch plans are?"

"Of course, Captain Rogers." The building responded before going silent. A moment later the AI continued with, "Mr. Stark says there are currently no lunch plans."

Peter turned to Loki. "You wanna grab lunch?"

"I don't see why not." Loki nodded.

"Just you and me or do you want to invite the team?" Peter followed up.

"We could invite the team." Loki shrugged. "Bonding." He turned to flash a smile at Steve.

Steve smiled in return. "F.R.I.D.A.Y, can you tell the team to get ready for a lunch outing?"

"Will do." The building responded and Steve stood from the couch, unplastering himself from Bucky.

"C'mon, Buck. Go get ready for lunch." Steve said.

The blonde chuckled at Bucky's disappointed grumbling.

"I'on wanna get up, Stevie." Bucky groaned, throwing his head back against the couch.

Steve held his big hands out to clasp with Bucky's and the White Wolf linked their palms. Steve made an over exaggerated grunting noise as he heaved Bucky to his feet. "Go get ready."

The older man rolled his eyes and made his way down the hall and into his room.

"See you in a bit then." Steve turned back to Loki and Peter before making his way off down the hallway.

"Do you wanna shower before we go? I mean Bruce was supposed to change your bandages but we can ask to see if it's safe for you to shower." Peter turned back to Loki.

"I'd love a warm shower but I fear I'd have trouble functioning in-" He stammered. "In my own quarters."

Realization dawned on Peter. "Oh! Right, of course. You can use my bathroom if you want. I showered this morning, so."
"Thank you." Loki smiled softly at Peter. "That's kind of you. I just need to get my things-" He still seemed hesitant.

"I can get them for you, if you want." Peter offered. "What do you need?"

"I need my shampoo and conditioner, and my clothing." Loki said. "But if you can get me any pair of trousers and a shirt."

"Alright." Peter said and he hurried off to get everything Loki would need.

When the teen walked into the man's room it was colder than usual. It was usually cool enough to make Peter want to slither under the covers or curl into his hoodie but the lack of Loki's presence in the room made it even colder. He quickly opened Loki's closet, getting the man a set of clothing before retrieving the toiletries he needed. He tried not to stand dumbly as the image of Loki leaning limp against the tub flashed before his eyes. He shook his head and brought everything back to his room with a clean towel and passed them to Loki.

"I'll wait for you in the living room, just come meet me whe-" Peter cut himself off at the uneasiness behind Loki's eyes. "What?"

Loki looked like he was trying to gather the words for a moment. "I- um. Could you stay? I'm worried that if I'm alone-"

Peter didn't force the stuttering man to finish. "It's okay. I'll stay."

"Thank you." Loki said. "I really don't mean to be troublesome I just-"

"I understand." The teen stopped him with a soft smile. "Oh! And I have a hairdryer in the cabinet beneath the sink." Peter added.

Loki nodded before making his way into the bathroom, leaving the teen in the quiet room with only the sound of the shower beginning to run. He sat on his bed, scrolling through his phone.

About fifteen minutes later Peter heard the shower shut off, offering a moment of silence quickly followed by Loki's bare feet padding on the linoleum and the sound of the hair dryer turning on. Another forty five minutes and Loki was coming out of the bathroom, his hair curled, but dry, and wearing the black slacks and white button up Peter had supplied him with.

The man buttoned the cuffs of his sleeves while Peter scooted over on the bed for him to pull his socks on, his shoes following.

"You wanna go check in with Bruce?" Peter asked.

Loki nodded and Peter instructed the building to ask Dr. Banner to meet them in his lab, the two taking the elevator upstairs.

When they stepped out, they found Bruce already gathering the things Loki would need.

"Hey guys." He smiled, looking up at the entering pair.

"Hello, Bruce." Loki smiled back, Peter waving beside him.

"Did you take a shower?" The doctor asked, stepping forward and Loki nodded. "Did you take off the bandages already?" he continued, reaching for Loki's arm and the man nodded again. "Before or after you got in the water?"
"Before." Loki answered, Bruce gently turned the man's wrists in his hands.

"By the looks of it you're healed enough for me to remove the stitches. It shouldn't hurt, but I'm going to tape them together after. By tomorrow you should probably be fully healed." Bruce said.

Loki nodded and followed the doctor over to a table where he'd set out the supplies. He used a very small pair of scissors to snip the knots in the stitches he'd given Loki, carefully pulling the thread out with tweezers. The god didn't even flinch. Bruce proceeded to use wound closure strips to keep the skin together as it finished healing and stepped back.

"Just be careful and make sure you're not doing anything strenuous with that hand that could make the skin pull back apart. It'll put you right back at square one and the scar'll be a lot worse than it could be." Bruce said and Loki nodded as he pulled his sleeve back down.

"Thank you." The trickster said.

Bruce nodded and smiled at the man sadly. He waved Loki and Peter goodbye, saying he'd see them at lunch as the two headed back downstairs in the elevator. The two found most of the team clustered in the living room, ready for lunch and waiting for the others.

"So where're we going?" Tony asked from his place on the couch, feet propped on the coffee table.

Peter looked to Loki for help.

"I have a hankering for poultry." Loki said.

"Ooh, I could go for fried chicken." Tony said before turning to the group. "Popeyes or KFC let's take a vote."

Immediately the team began clamoring over which fast food restaurant to go to which eventually escalated to an all out turf war about which was better. Peter was genuinely worried that Bucky would actually punch Sam as he watched the White Wolf's jaw tense as he glared angrily at the Falcon. Loki looked slightly guilty about having started it but Tony on the other hand looked giddy and highly entertained.

"I'm assuming you've already made a decision on where we're going." Steve muttered to Tony, arms crossed as he carefully monitored Bucky's behavior.

"Yep." Tony grinned as he watched the chaos.

"We're going somewhere local, aren't we." Steve said.

"Yep." Tony repeated, smile still in place, and the blonde sighed.

"Woah! Bucky! No!" Steve hollered as the man gripped Sam's shirt collar and drew his arm back to punch, rushing forward to grab the raised fist.

"Sometimes I wonder how we end up in situations like this." Peter said.

"Don't we all." Loki replied.

---------------------------------------------

In the end Tony resolved the conflict with a compromise, saying that he knew a place. The grumpy team piled into their respective rides, Peter driving Bucky, Steve, Loki, and Thor. He had to stop himself from laughing and concentrate on backing out of his parking space when he turned to see
Captain America, the White Wolf, and the God of Thunder uncomfortably pressed shoulder to shoulder in the back seat. It was even harder to prevent his laughter when, in order for him to see out the back windshield, Bucky leaned over which pressed Steve's face up against the window.

The situation had happened when Bucky, Steve, and Loki had wanted to ride with Peter, and Thor had asked if he could come too. Steve's crippling politeness didn't allow him to tell the thunder god no, regardless of him knowing for sure it would be extremely cramped, instead caving to the man's puppy like expression.

The situation was made worse when Loki, the thinnest of all of them, had called shotgun with a mischievous smirk, cramming the three massive men into the back seat. As the teen followed Tony's car, he decided he would let Steve drive and Thor could have the front seat, so he, Loki, and Bucky could sit in the back and maximize space.

When they finally arrived, Peter was surprised to see that the place was a food truck set up on a patch of asphalt. Past it was a field of lush grass. He parked in the small lot that was mainly unoccupied and got out and watched as the three superheroes tumbled out of the back seat, groaning and stretching. The teen explained the seating arrangement for the ride back and Thor nodded, though it didn't seem as though the back seat phased him as much as it did Bucky and Steve, who both looked extremely grateful for the change. Loki, however, looked slightly resentful of his being booted into the back.

The four reconvened with the remainder of the arriving team. Once everyone had arrived, they all turned to Tony.

"This place is great. I've been coming here for years, it's a true godsend. I'm friends with the owners, so don't break anything." He said, and with that everyone followed him up to the truck. He conversed with the young man at the window, who seemed bewildered at the amount of people who had just shown up, superheroes nonetheless, but he took Tony's order and rung it up. The billionaire paided and he went to sit down with Pepper and May at a table.

The majority of the outdoor seating was occupied by the team, even though they tried their best to cram as many people into a table as possible. The noise level of the area grew with their banter while they waited for whatever Tony had gotten them to be ready. Peter found his mouth watering when the food finally arrived.

A bucket of fried chicken, a large container of mashed potatoes, and a box of biscuits along with wrapped utensils were placed in the center of the crowded table occupied by him, Steve, Bucky, Loki, Thor, Alexander, Clint, and Natasha. He tried to not seem too eager as he piled food onto the paper tray he'd been given. When Alexander, Clint, Natasha, and Loki had had their fill, he, Thor, Steve, and Bucky dove back in for seconds. By the end of it, only crumbs remained of the large bucket of chicken and Peter was shoveling the remainder of the potatoes into his mouth, which had been offered to him by the rest of the table.

"So how're you adjusting to the team?" Steve asked Alexander when Peter had finished.

"Huh? Oh." The man said, being pulled away from his thoughts, looking surprised that Steve was speaking to him. "I like the team a lot. You've all been really welcoming."

"That's good. You tried the full experience of the facility yet?" Steve continued.

"I checked out the gym, which is sweet, and the pool. I haven't really been anywhere else, I'm not sure what I'm locked out of." The young man shrugged.
"The library is beautiful. I assume Tony only made private and work areas off limits to you." Loki offered.

"We have a library?" Alexander asked, shocked. "The HQ must be bigger than I thought."

"Yeah, some of it extends underground, but I haven't even been down there. I think it's mostly workplace." Peter shrugged.

"Woah." Alexander said but he turned at the sound of laughing and saw Sam and T'Challa playing soccer with a small pack of teenagers. "The team's really cool." He said absentmindedly.

Peter hoped that Alexander was going to do okay here. The two had only spoken on a few occasions, mainly because the older tended to isolate himself from the others. One thing Peter always found himself wanting was the best for others. He always wanted everyone to be happy and healthy and it distressed him when they weren't. He tried his best to keep everyone in the best shape he could, even if that meant sacrificing his own mental health for it.

In the end, all the members of the team who felt up to it joined in to play soccer against the teenagers. Peter found himself standing on the field beside Thor, the two of them watching as Natasha expertly dribbled the ball between her feet and passed to T'Challa, who was just as good. Peter took off when T'Challa had passed to him with a grin and he hauled up every memory of the soccer unit he'd had in P.E. last year. He kicked the ball over to Bucky, who smoothly bypassed the teens of the other team and with one quick move, scored a goal for team Avengers.

The superheroes cheered and the pack of teenagers groaned, whining over how it was because they had super humans on their team. They all burst out in laughter anyways, high fiving and congratulating each other. Peter watched with a smile as Natasha demonstrated some sort of fancy footwork she applied to her strategy to the kids, who stared in awe.

"You are not so bad, considering you spend so much time with Tony." T'Challa said, sidling up to Peter with a grin.

The teen still found himself getting flustered and excited every time the king talked to him. "Thanks." Peter said, blushing.

"You have no reason to be shy now, we are on the same team." The older man said and Peter nodded. "I am not within my kingdom here, you owe me no respect."

"It's not just that." Peter said. "I mean yeah you're a king of like, probably the coolest place on Earth, but you're also a really great fighter and member of the team."

T'Challa smiled then. "It is times like this when I wonder why I do not talk to you more. You are much nicer than my sister."

Peter laughed. "From the way people describe her I think she might be a lot more intelligent."

"She has more than you do. Tony told me that you managed to make your own web shooters before he even offered you the internship." The king said. "And that they worked effectively."

"I guess. I still think she's super cool though." Peter shrugged.

T'Challa chuckled. "Do not go complimenting my sister now. I may like you but that does not mean I like you enough to let you talk about her as though you have feelings."

Peter's face immediately reddened in a blush. "No I- Of course not! I would never date your sister!
Wait no! Not that she isn't-" Peter stuttered. "I just don't know her!"

T'Challa clapped a hand on the teen's shoulder, laughing. "I was only kidding, Peter."

Peter sighed in relief. "Sorry I just don't want to- y'know." He waved his hands flusteredly.

"I know." T'Challa said, shaking his head with a smile.

"I would like to show you Wakanda sometime." The man said casually after a moment of silence.

Peter's head whipped around to look at the man in surprise. "I would like to take all of the Avengers there." T'Challa continued. "America is nice, but I miss Wakanda very much. It is beautiful, and I miss my family. It is also a very good place to make new weapons and improve our suits. We may need it."

Peter nodded. "I think that would be nice."

"How about this weekend?" The man turned to Peter.

"What?" The teen asked incredulously.

"What, is that a problem?" T'Challa asked. "I'm sure we can find a good time if that doesn't work for you but-"

"No, no, it's fine I just didn't expect it to happen that soon." Peter said. "Why are you telling me this anyways? I mean, not that it's not important but shouldn't Tony be the one you're talking to?"

"Well, like I said, I like you, Peter. I just think you should be the first to know." T'Challa smiled.

"Thanks, T'Challa." Peter grinned back at the man. "But I still think you should tell Tony."

"Yes, of course." T'Challa chuckled before walking over to the billionaire, leaving Peter standing before the soccer players. He glanced at the King standing beside Tony and watched Tony nod at what T'Challa was saying.

"What was that about?" Loki asked, his arms crossed over his chest, having sidled up to Peter unnoticed.

"Oh my god!" Peter shouted with a jump. "Don't scare me like that!"

"Sorry." Loki said flatly.

"You don't sound too apologetic." Peter said.

"I'm not, that was funny." Loki gave a small smirk.

Peter shook his head. "T'Challa wanted us to go to Wakanda this weekend. He's talking to Tony about it right now."

"Oh." Loki said and when Peter looked at him, he was gazing off into the distance, an emotion Peter couldn't quite identify on his face.

"What?" The teen asked.

Loki snapped out of his reverie to look at Peter, his collected facade back in place. "Nothing." The man answered coolly.
"It really doesn't sound like nothing." Peter turned turned his body to face him fully.

"It's nothing." Loki repeated.

Peter was quiet for a moment before speaking again. "Loki if this another one of your 'the team doesn't accept me and I don't know if I should include myself' things I assure you that's not how it is. And if Wakanda is good for one of us, it's you."

Loki turned to look at him with soft eyes but a solid face. "I want to go, Peter. Truly, I do, but I'm not sure if I even should."

"Loki, you're one of the team now. If you weren't, believe me, the rest of them would've made it very clear." Peter replied.

"I just don't know." Loki said softly.

"I want you to sleep on this. Tell me tomorrow if you really want to leave me to go across the world all by myself." Peter said. He knew it probably wasn't fair to guilt trip the god like that but he knew it was most likely the only way to convince him to join them.

The teen couldn't handle looking at Loki's expression of shock and incredulity so he walked away instead. He found himself sitting between Steve and Bucky at their table, watching a young boy talk to Clint about being his favorite superhero.

"What's up, Pete?" Bucky looked at the teen with concern.

"Loki's thinking about not coming to Wakanda." Peter answered.

"Wakanda?" Steve asked.

"T'Challa wants to go this weekend." Peter answered.

"And why doesn't Loki wanna go?" Bucky asked.

"He thinks he'll be a nuisance or something." Peter shook his head. "Which I don't understand because honestly he's got some of the strongest and most useful powers of us all."

Steve nodded. "Did you tell him that?"

"He doesn't wanna listen to me." The teen responded sadly.

Bucky threw his arm around Peter's shoulders and pulled the boy into his side. Steve leaned into his other side, his arm joining Bucky's. "He'll come around. Until then, we have four days to convince him he's a part of the team."

Peter nodded and they sat in silence for the rest of the time, only moving when Tony called time for them to leave.

Steve slid into the driver's seat of Peter's car and Thor into the passenger's side, as arranged earlier. The teen sat between Loki and Bucky in the back, taking the cord Thor handed him and put on some music while they drove back to the compound.
Ahh! We're at 30 chapters now! However, I'm sorry to say that from this point on updates will be coming much less frequently. I think I mentioned before that this story was mostly prewritten, having started out as something I didn't ever plan on publishing. I've come to the end of things I wrote before, so the rest needs to be drafted and edited across the time it takes me to publish it. I'll be posting as much as I possibly can but currently I think every week is a good estimate.

Anyways, thank you all so much for reading and until the next chapter

-xoxo Denise
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The team all branched off to work on whatever it was they needed to do for the day until dinner, Peter standing in the kitchen mixing a glass of chocolate milk while he decided what to do for the afternoon.

“Hey, Peter.” The teen heard from behind him.

Peter turned around to find Wanda leaning on the counter behind him. She was holding two game controllers in her hands. “How you feel about Mario Kart?” She smirked, waving the controllers.

Peter smirked back, hurrying out of the kitchen and over the the couches as quick as he possibly could without spilling his milk, Natasha, Hill, and Sam all sitting there already.

The teen set his cup down on the coffee table and took one of the controllers from Wanda. Hill, who had the master controller asked everyone which course they wanted to do before selecting one and allowing everyone to choose their characters and cars before they begun.

Peter, going with the newly added character of Link, assessed the stats of his car in extreme detail before making his final choice and sitting back to wait for Hill, who was taking even longer to analyze hers.

The first round went well. Well, in the terms of the Avengers, of course. Sam had slammed his fists down on the coffee table so hard after being so close to winning the final course but was so cruelly knocked back down by a red shell al la Natasha that he knocked Peter’s drink over. The boy looked at his spilt milk sadly and Sam was grumbling the entire time he sopped it up, the rest of the team getting ready to play another round.

By the time the group wrapped up their game, which only happened when they’d completed all the cups, the rest of the Avengers were crowded around them, cheering them on.

Rocket was betting money on who would win the first round with Quill, as Tony shouted suggestions to Peter, which distracted the teen and threw the bet in favor of Rocket, who laughed heartily as he pocketed Quill’s money.

“I’m telling you, Quill, just because someone has the same name as you is not a good reason to bet money on them.” The raccoon chuckled.

“Shut up, Rocket, or I’ll cut your tail off.” Quill sneered.

“Pfft, I’d like to see you try, ya wimp!” Rocket waved his knife at star lord.
The elder Peter threw himself into a fight with the raccoon as the remainder of the team continued their hollering.

“Come on Peter!” Loki was yelling, on his feet standing behind the couch, watching the TV screen. “Yes, yes! You can do it Spiderling!” Thor was hooting beside him.

The teen felt a surge in power and confidence and he managed to take first place for the second stretch, placing him at top marks on the leaderboard due to his landslide of a win. Three more roads to go.

Peter tuned out the groups yelling, letting it fade into white noise as he stole the win of the next course from Natasha, expertly dodging her attempts to throw him off. Two more.

“You’re terrible at this.” Steve laughed, his arms crossed as he stood behind Sam’s seat. “Pipe it Steve.” Sam grunted angrily, driving in circles as he tried to get himself out of a tight corner he’d somehow managed to crash himself into.

“Can’t you do any better?” Bucky prodded on the next level, and Sam gritted his teeth. “C’mon, Pidgey, you can do it.” Bucky smirked. Sam, having had enough, threw himself over the edge of the couch and tackled Bucky, the two men rolling on the floor, grunting and Steve screaming as he tried to break it up.

Wanda looked up for a split moment in horror and it gave Peter the perfect opening to steal her first place spot.

The next round, Sam plummeted off of Rainbow Road, cursing intensely as his first place spot fell with him.

“Language!” Steve shouted.

“Shut up Steve!” Sam yelled.

Peter and Hill were neck and neck this time. The woman was extremely good at multitasking, let Peter tell you. The teen had to stop himself from falling for her trick of distracting him with small talk and stealing his place. It was no easy feat. The boy completely tuned everything around him out, submersing himself in his thoughts. Hill was just the smallest bit ahead of him in the last lap of the round when the teen threw his car over the edge of the road and caught himself on the road beneath them, speeding over the finish line.

Natasha tossed her controller down on the table and she slumped back against the couch as Peter’s character took his victory lap.

The team behind them was shouting and hollering in excitement as Peter stood. Loki and Thor scooped the teen up onto their shoulders and the remainder of the team behind them trailed, all chanting Peter! Peter! Peter!

The boy felt accomplishment and pride wash over him and he let himself be carried down the hallway by the gods. They all piled into the elevators, Peter ducking his head so he’d make it in and again as Loki and Thor walked him out into the dining room. He was gently let down off the men’s shoulders at the head of the table, where Tony normally sat, the lush chair cushioned with duck feathers and covered in soft velvet.
Tony arrived not long after the rest of the team, a crown made of what looked to be the same gold alloy used for the Iron Man suits. It was encrusted with little gems of some sort but Peter could see the welding on the edges where the pieces Tony had made it out of were adhered together. The edge was cushioned by the same leopard’s print material you see on a king’s crown in all the story books and the man walked toward Peter with the headpiece in hand.

“Today we witnessed the valiant fight for the rights of Mario Kart King or Queen. Each competitor gave their all to winning, but as we all know there can only be one true ruler.” Tony said in an overly haughty, regal voice. “Due to the bloody battle we just watched, the all knowing God, Fusajiro Yamauchi, has determined that Sir Peter Parker reigns as the new Super Mario Kart King.”

The man bowed as he placed the crown on Peter’s head and the Avengers cheered. Behind Tony came Clint who draped the heavy fabric of a velvet cape over Peter’s shoulders, lined with the same leopard’s print fabric as the crown. The team laughed about their favorite mishaps of the game, and Quill tried to reason with Rocket to get his bet money back, claiming since Peter won in the end he should have it. Rocket declined and the man brooded the rest of dinner.

After the meal the team all went their own ways. Peter opted to slide into his bed and go to sleep early.

The next morning he found the common room empty but all the doors to the team’s rooms open. He walked across down the hall to Bucky’s room, finding the man sitting before an empty suitcase, folding clothes and neatly tucking them inside.

“Where’re you going?” Peter asked and the man’s head shot up to look at the teen.

“Change of plans, the whole team’s going to Wakanda early. Tony said he’d explain on the way there, pack for three weeks, we’re leaving in a few hours.” The White Wolf responded.

“Ooookay?” Peter arched a brow and slipped out of the door.

The boy pulled his old suitcase out of his closet and began moving things out of his closet and dresser and throwing it into the suitcase.

Hours of folding and packing later, he checked the clock. 12:15. He’d received word from Tony that they’d be leaving at 1:30. He hadn’t yet had a chance to eat.

Peter packed a backpack with his computer and phone along with their chargers and his headset before shoving an extra pair of socks and a hoodie in after and going out to the kitchen to find something to eat.

Lucky for the teen, Bucky was one step ahead of him, hastily prepping grilled cheeses for everyone to eat before they left. Peter took the two the man offered him gratefully, shoving them in his mouth and dowing a soda quickly afterward as the rest of the team filtered into the living room, luggage in tow.

Peter was shouldering his backpack and dragging his suitcase along behind him five minutes later when Tony began ushering everyone into the elevators in groups since the luggage was too big to fit at once. Next thing the teen knew he was being ushered onto a large shuttle, his car keys forgotten in his pocket.

In just two hours past that the team was being loaded onto a luxurious jet and they were prepping for takeoff. As Peter’s head nervously swiveled around he found him and Loki being the only two who’d buckled their seatbelts. As the plane took off, the teen’s hands gripped the armrest so hard his
knuckles blanched. Steve put his hand on his shoulder from beside him, looking up at the kid with comforting blue eyes.

Peter sighed out a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding when the ship evened up in the air and he followed Steve out of the aisle as everyone stood to mingle as the flight went on.

The teen quickly realized the aircraft was much larger than he’d previously thought as he got lost on his way to the sitting room. He found his way into the quarters, full with the rest of the Avengers and refreshments.

Peter began shoveling the chocolates from the candy bowl into his face so fast that when Tony put a hand on his shoulder to stop him he whipped around with wide, surprised eyes and a mouth bulging with sweets.

“Slow down, Pete. Leave some for the rest of us.” Tony chuckled before handing the kid a plate bearing a fresh burger and fries.

The teen took the food gratefully before sitting down on the floor in front of Bucky and Steve. He started eating before mumbling around his food, “So why’d we go early?”

Tony’s eyes flitted to Thor and the man said, “I had a vision. I had one during the battle against Ultron, it’s what notified us of the existence of the stones. This time, I was notified of a quickly approaching battle against Thanos.”

“What else?” Peter asked after swallowing his food. What else did you see?”

“I saw…” Thor hesitated. “I saw death. I saw loss. I hope that if we go against what I saw, we can beat the odds.”

Peter’s gut clenched and suddenly he was no longer hungry.

“What exactly are we doing in Wakanda that you didn’t see in the vision?” Bucky asked tentatively.

“I don’t think we knew. Or at least, we didn’t take action. We didn’t seem prepared. I’m just hoping that somehow, we can manage to gather ranks and get ready to fight Thanos while based in Wakanda. We’d have better chances.” Thor sighed.

The teen wondered if he was ready to truly fight. If so, with what? Sure, he had super strength and spider powers but he’d never- never walked into a fight with the intention of murder. But this wasn’t the same as say, the Airport Fight. He couldn’t just web aliens up and hope they wouldn’t kill him when the binds dissolved. He’d have to fight for real. Fight to kill.

What worried him was maybe he was a little too ready.

Peter didn’t feel the same after coming back from the soul realm. He’d told Loki about it fleetingly but he never mentioned it to anyone past that, and never in depth. However, he thought about it a lot. How his anger was reaching levels he’d never experienced, how he was becoming more and more aggressive, more and more violent. He found little things irritating him, found that he was more ready to fight or hurt someone than he’d ever been before. What if he snapped on someone one day? Really snapped?

He was scaring himself.

“Well, I guess now is a good a time as ever to talk about the game plan.” Steve said.
The team immediately erupted into overlapping conversations. Tony waved his arms and shouted, saying that only one person could speak at a time and they’d build a plan off of that. Steve opted to write everything down in the back of his sketchbook.

The plan wasn’t anywhere near simple. It wasn’t easy to settle on one either, but eventually got there.

Tony established that the start point would be getting everyone fitted with new gear and better weapons as well as rigorous daily training, sparring, and building of strength, discipline, and fighting tactics. He made very clear that his belief in their reason for losing to Thanos once was that they were divided. They needed to fit together as a seamless team before they’d ever have a chance at winning.

Thor and Loki added the idea that part of the time would travel to Sakaar and begin the spread of word of a revolution against Thanos. The team easily agreed.

From there the plan consisted of finding generals and sergeants to run regiments that would tour to planets and start rallying troops, arming and training them. They’d set up communication systems, something Tony was working on to go along with the newly completed spaceship models that Rocket and Quill had taken on a day trip to test a few days back.

Everything past that was entirely dependent on when Thanos was going to attack. By now they doubted the element of surprise was possible. Thor’s vision confirmed that Thanos almost certainly knew about their return by now.

Once everything had been mapped out the entirety of the rest of the trip was spent with the team either resting or doing something in their own time. Peter tried to sleep as best he could, curling up in one of the bunks that they had on the jet. He didn’t sleep much however, tossing and turning more than anything until the plane landed and he was forced to crawl out from under the nice fleece blanket of the cot.

The teen was slightly shocked to see that it was past midnight in Wakanda, not really having thought of the time difference. The jetlag set in immediately and as soon as T’Challa had shown them where they’d be staying, he threw himself down on the soft mattress and burrowed under the down comforter and luxurious throw fur, letting the homey smell of safari grass and soft musk lull him to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Oooh Wakanda! I know I promised weekly updates and I'm late on this one but I'm working on it! Also, a secondary story or mini stories may be up soon as well. I plan to write some short little things here and I'm not sure how chronological they'll be in terms of following the story line but I'll try my best.

As always, thank you all for reading and until the next, and hopefully sooner, chapter.

-xoxo Denise
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Peter woke a full fifteen hours later feeling groggy and disoriented. He found his luggage sitting just inside his door, which he'd left unlocked, too tired to bother. He resigned his thoughts to the belief that Steve had probably dragged it in while he was sleeping and stretched before woefully slithering out of bed and throwing his suitcase down on its side, digging through his hasty packing for something to wear.

When the teen walked out of his room, he found himself getting immediately lost in the winding halls of the living quarters. His head swiveled on his shoulders as his eyes roved the deep chocolate browns cast in the warm afternoon light, trying to find his way to wherever the rest of the team was when he smacked into something tall and solid.

Peter looked up to find the face of Strange.

"You look lost." The doctor said, wearing a deep blue cardigan over a white shirt with black jeans.

"Yeah, just a bit." Peter replied, scratching the back of his head, embarrassed.

"The rest of the team's at lunch. I was just heading there myself. Trust me, I was just as lost as you were this morning. Unfortunately you happened to still be sleeping by breakfast, otherwise you'd know how to get there yourself." Strange said.

"Oh." The boy responded dumbly.

"Come on, it's this way." And with that the Sorcerer Supreme was striding off expertly down the halls. Peter found it amazing how he seemed to know the way so well despite only being there once.

"I have a photographic memory." Strange said, not looking over his shoulder.

Peter's brows shot up as he was snapped out of his thoughts. "Oh. How-

"I can hear your thoughts." Strange shrugged. "And your silence told me you were wondering."

"Huh." Peter nodded, more to himself than anything, and committed the idea to memory ad he hurried after the long legged man, struggling to keep up with Strange's confident strides while being
distracted by the intricate decoration of the palace.

"So how're you today?" Strange asked, pulling Peter out of his examination again.

"I'm good. You?" The teen returned.

"I'm okay. I'm amazed by the intricacy of the palace, everything is so beautifully detailed." The man gazed almost longingly at the breathtaking high ceilings above them. "On an unrelated note, I wonder what kind of new suits and gear Tony's gonna come up with. I heard he's working with T'Challa's sister." He deviated from the topic.

"Oh that's a pair to be reckoned with. Shuri's wicked smart. She made Bucky's arm, she's amazing." Peter gushed.

"Don't let T'Challa hear you're talking about her like that." Strange joked.

"He thinks we'll get along." Peter laughed back.

"Well, based on what I know about you and what you just told me, I think you guys'll get along fine." The doctor smiled.

Peter grinned back and saw that they'd arrived at the dining hall. Peter saw T'Challa seated at the head of the table, a powerful looking, dark skinned, bald woman wearing red and gold gear sitting to his right and a younger, stylish chocolate faced girl with long braids sitting to his left. Peter recognized them as, respectively, Okoye, his right hand, and Shuri, his sister, both of which T'Challa had mentioned during the few talks they'd had.

"Welcome!" T'Challa beamed at them. "Okoye, Shuri, this is Peter Parker and Dr. Stephen Strange. They're the last members of our team."

Peter felt pride bubble in his chest at the thought of being considered of the same team as T'Challa, but in the meantime waved at the two smiling women.

"Is this Tony's boy? The one you mentioned?" Peter's heightened senses picked up Shuri's inquiry.

"Yes. He's just as smart, less self absorbed." T'Challa poked fun at Tony, who he locked eyes with, the Stark feigning hurt.

Peter slid into his reserved seat between Loki and Bucky and waited for breakfast to be served.

"Morning, kid." Bucky ruffled his hair. "You need a haircut." He added.

Peter smirked as he let his hair be manhandled. "I know." He waited for the man to pull his hand away before squinting at a strand of his hair. "And I think you need a dye. Is that grey I see?"

"That was uncalled for, spider kid." Bucky pretended to be offended and the teen shrugged with a mischievous smile.

Peter watched as a plate was placed in front of him and he looked at the wonderful omelet on it. He tried his best to keep an aer of manners about himself as he ate, attempting not to inhale his food as quickly as he normally would.

After breakfast, the team was led off by four of the Dora Milaje, including Okoye, two in the front, two in the back. They wove through a series of hallways, reaching the final destination of a lab that Shuri swept into, taking control and smiling at the team.
"This is weapons development. I run this lab, and I have taken the liberty of getting a few things for you." The young woman began.

"Something you will find most all of us wearing around here are these." She held up her wrist, showcasing a black beaded bracelet. "These are called Kimoyo beads. They're your communication and information technology. The vibranium they are made out of can also be used to stabilize certain wounds if removed from the bracelet. They're completely magnetic, no need to worry with breaking a string, and very simple to use."

Peter watched as she tapped the beads on her wrist, projecting holograms of text and images.

She went around, holding out a black box with a suede interior, distributing the bracelets to each team member. Peter jumped just a little bit as the string of beads snapped closed around his wrist with the magnets but it sat comfortably and weighed almost nothing. He probably wouldn't even recognize it was there if he wasn't paying attention to it.

The team began fidgeting with their new tech, oohing and aahing at the simple yet sleek wear. The teen himself was pretty wowed as he recognized that the holograms were no harder to read or see than a modern smartphone.

"You should be wearing these at all times," T'Challa spoke up, drawing the group's attention. "Just in case we need to contact you."

Everyone nodded their agreement and T'Challa smiled. "Now, we have the full works of our spa and recreational services open to our guests. You're welcome to use anything you like, we have a number of indoor and outdoor swimming pools and hot tubs as well as complete salons and barber shops, gyms, and tracks."

"Time to get that haircut, kid." Bucky said, laughing as the team exited the lab, all gushing over how nice their treatment was and making fun of Tony for not having anything like that back at the headquarters.

The White Wolf, Peter, Steve, Loki and Thor all walked together to the aforementioned barber shop. Bucky had said he was due for a trim and a rehighlighting, Steve admitting his hair was getting a little raggy too. Loki had only come when Bucky had convinced him he'd never gotten a better haircut in his life than he had here and Thor, of course, had excitedly tagged along with them.

Peter slid into the cushioned leather chair of the barber shop, allowing the handsome and clean cut man behind him to drape the cape over his shoulders and get to work on his hair solely on the basis of Loki and Bucky's conspiring. The teen found himself slightly nervous as he heard the sound of the scissors out of his sight and felt his hair dropping onto his shoulders and chest. The real nervousness set in when he heard the buzzing of the electric clippers and felt them touch to his head but he trusted that the two men had come up with something good.

Thirty minutes, a shampoo, condition, and a rinse later Peter was being spun back around in the mirror. He realized he'd been needlessly anxious as he looked at his new hairstyle.

His locks were still long on the top, left nearly alone save for the trimming of split ends and a slight layering as it fell in his natural, soft waves. The sides of his head were trimmed just slightly shorter at the part in his hair, and was faded on the way up. He found that he liked it a lot as it made him look older and more cleanly handsome. He thanked the man, resisting the urge to pull money from his pocket despite Bucky's clear instructions on not to pay, it being considered close to insulting.

Speaking of Bucky, he looked at the man's now caramel highlighted hair, pleasantly shiny from the
deep conditioning he'd received and layered in a way that framed his face nicely, though the top half was pulled neatly back in a handsomely messy top knot.

The teen was awed for the second time that day as Bucky spoke smooth Wakandan to the barber who Peter realized he probably knew, judging by the warm smiles and brotherly hug. The ex assassin moved over to Steve, whose hair had been trimmed in a nice undercut, the longer part on top swept back from his face and his beard trimmed with the lines cleaned neatly.

Loki’s hair had remained more or less the same, though it'd been left curly after his wash, voluminous and shiny but not greasy and tied up in a neat half pony, pulling his locks back to expose his now rosy face, something the teen was happy to see. The man who’d cut his hair offered him a bottle of specialized shampoo made specifically for oily hair, meant to hydrate the scalp and keep it from producing an overage of grease all the while keeping a silky and shiny look. The God thanked him, taking the bottle gratefully.

Thor had just gotten a trim, his hair still cropped short to his head though the stripes shaved into the side of his scalp cleaned. His beard had been trimmed and lined cleanly, just as Steve's, and he must’ve thanked the barber a dozen times before the other men had managed to usher him out of the room.

"I feel like a whole new god." Loki had said quietly, awed by the effect of his hair treatment.

"I told you." Bucky laughed. "Not to mention, most everything here is all natural, completely safe and healthy. My skin was never as clear, my hair never as shiny as it was here. Just ask Steve, he said my hair looked so flat it must've been chalked before I came here."

"It's true. And you should've seen the bags under his eyes. Dark circles the size of Texas, I swear." The blonde laughed, running a hand through his newly washed, baby soft locks.

"Told you." Bucky chuckled back, throwing an arm around Steve.

When Peter reached his room again he decided to check out the gym he'd gotten word of earlier. He changed into his workout clothes, slinging a towel over his shoulders and slipping on some tennis shoes before finding his way to the center.

He pushed the doors open with his clothed shoulder, careful not to get fingerprints on the spotless glass. The equipment in the gym was all new and functioning; state of the art. The teen excitedly tested everything that was available to him. Well, everything he could figure out how to work. He ran the back of his wrist across his forehead, attempting to brush away the sweat but was quickly made acutely aware of how much rubbing the Kimoyo beads across his skull hurt. He noted not to use that hand to wipe his face again.

Peter finished up his workout with some boxing drills before leaving to go take a shower.

"Woah, hey, where're you going?" Tony stopped the boy when they crossed paths in the hallway. "We have training to do. Go get suited up!"

Peter looked at the man in shock which turned to dejection as he slouched, sighing as he nodded and trudged off to his room to put on the spidersuit, disappointed no one had told him about training before he'd gone to work out.

Peter sadly dried his sweaty body before sticking the nanosuit disk to his chest and allowing it to encase his body, going off to find the team.

He made his way to the meeting point better than this morning, finding them in a site slightly off
from the gym, mainly consisting of a large warehouse type space with forty foot ceilings, not unlike a school gym but on a larger scale. The floors were mercifully padded as Peter wasn't ready to break any bones learning to fight Thanos.

The goal of the day, after stretches and warmups, was an exercise designed to force the team to work together while simulating fighting monsters modeled after the ones from the attack on Wakanda. The enemy in question were fully tangible holograms, complete with teeth, nails, and sounds eerily like the aliens that fought with Thanos.

When T'Challa had pitched the idea to the group, Peter had thought it was stupid and overly easy but upon actually trying to execute said exercises he realized just how disjointed the team was. It seemed to be more of a cock fight to find who was best between Tony, Steve, Sam, and Bucky, with the rest of the team floundering to bind everyone together if they knew what they were doing at all.

Peter found himself getting frustrated, listening to the bickering over the comms and having to shout to be heard. T'Challa called the game off and instructed everyone to take a short break for water to reconvene in five minutes.

The teen made his way to his water bottle, chugging half of it in one go as he eyed the rest of the flustered group, Tony and Steve bickering heatedly and Sam and Bucky throwing each other angry glances from either side of Cap. When T'Challa shouted that the break was over, the group trudged forward as he beckoned them to gather before him.

"You are all too focused on the individual." The king said. "If we are going to be ready to fight Thanos when the time comes, we need to be able to work together."

The group was silent.

"This is not a competition to see who's strongest, or who's wrong and who's right. Competitions are useless in our ranks. Captain Rogers, Sergeant Barnes, Airman Wilson, I am most disappointed to see you carelessly bickering, among others."

Steve and Bucky's heads shot up, a look of shock on Bucky's face and one of shame on Steve and Sam's. "You were soldiers," T'Challa continued. "I would expect this kind of competitiveness from Tony and the others, but from you." He shook his head. "You should know the importance of a well functioning unit in success. We are going to try this again, and I expect better from all of you." He addressed the group.

Everyone nodded as they jumped back into the throes. The comms were now full of shouted warnings and instructions for group maneuvers. Peter found his ideas being gratefully accepted and pretty soon the team was close to settling into a rhythm. By no means were they working perfectly, but they were beginning to get the hang of it.

When the group had finally managed to beat the program Shuri had undoubtedly designed to combat their team dynamics, the group was panting and sweaty but overall triumphant.

"Good work today, guys. Hopefully, by tomorrow, you will be getting some upgraded gear. We will be training that evening as well, so expect it and be prepared." T'Challa said, his forehead beaded with sweat of his own but he smiled proudly. "Now, go get showered and when you are finished dinner will be waiting."

Everyone broke off to return to their rooms, applauding and clapping each other on the backs for impressive techniques and moves. Peter's face split into a grin and his stomach fluttered when Thor bent to wrap a big arm around his shoulders and congratulate him on learning well and applying his
fighting skills to the exercise. He would never get used to being praised by the kings, gods, and excellent warriors around him.

Peter went off to finally shower, changing into some blue jeans and a comfortable t-shirt before heading out to the dining room to join the team for a dinner of traditional food. The teen had never seen what had been placed before him in his life, but he hesitantly took a bite and was pleasantly surprised. He looked forward to expanding his horizons every time they had a meal.

The night ended quickly, everyone still tired after training and hurrying to get to their own rooms. Peter gratefully took his chance to leave when Tony said he should catch some shut eye, "being a growing boy", brushing his teeth and changing into pajamas before sliding under the heavy covers and falling into a blissful sleep.

Chapter End Notes

It has been forever! I am so sorry for ghosting you all, but I had so many projects due and a bunch of tests, not to mention to the stress of the PSAT thrown in there as well. I'm going to try my best to correct my horrible writing habits but I don't want to make any more promises I can't keep. I hope you can forgive me.

Anyways, thank you all for reading and until the next chapter,

-xoxo Denise
The night ended quickly, everyone still tired after training and hurrying to get to their own rooms. Peter gratefully took his chance to leave when Tony said he should catch some shut eye, "being a growing boy", brushing his teeth and changing into pajamas before sliding under the heavy covers and falling into a blissful sleep.

The next morning Peter felt a throbbing soreness in his muscles and he groaned as he slid out of bed, trudging painfully into the bathroom to go through his morning routine. As the teen was dressing, he caught a glimpse of his body in the mirror. His muscles pressed against his tanned skin, the wonderful soap his room had provided him with causing it to shine dewily and with a healthy glow. Peter could barely remember a time when he was small anymore. He couldn't remember the fourteen year old boy he'd been, small and frail, nose adorned with constantly sliding glasses fixed time and time again with masking tape from his clumsy accidents and incidents with bullies. He could barely remember how thin he'd been, how his ribs were countable through his almost translucently pale skin. He'd been lanky and significantly shorter, constantly sick or achy. Now he was up with Steve on the scale of male perfection. Sometimes he prided himself in it, others he felt disgusted.

He hastily silenced those thoughts by pulling his shirt over his head and instead going to slip on his sneakers and join the team for breakfast.

He was just sliding into his seat as the food was being wheeled out.

"Morning, Pete." Bucky smiled at him from his right.

"Morning." Peter said back, grinning as he shoveled the delicious meal into his mouth.

Loki chuckled quietly beside him. "Hungry?"

"Just a bit." Peter murmured in response and Loki laughed before returning to his conversation with Thor.

The day drew on and Peter felt himself begin to grow tired. His muscles ached and his mind screamed at him intrusively. He slipped into a clouded mental state, going quiet and sleeping earlier at night and later into the morning. Next thing he knew, nearly a week in Wakanda had passed, full of rigorous training and interesting activities but he couldn't seem to thoroughly enjoy anything they'd done. The team was beginning to worry and when asked what was wrong he never seemed to have an answer. Most of them didn't pry.

"Hey, Pete." Bucky had said gently one morning, tapping on the teenager's slightly ajar door and pushing his way inside.
"Hey, Bucky." Peter replied quietly, not looking up from the Kimoyo beads he'd been fiddling with.

"How're you feeling?" The man sat by Peter's blanketed feet.

The teen only shrugged.

"We missed you at breakfast." Bucky said.

"Oh, did I miss it again?" Peter looked up at the ex assassin with apologetic eyes.

"Peter..." Bucky uttered quietly. "We really need to talk about this."

"About what?" Peter asked coyly.

"About your attitude." As soon as the words had left his mouth Bucky looked like he regretted it. "That sounded really harsh, you're not doing anything wrong I just-" He sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. "You know what I mean."

"Yeah." Peter said, putting his hand on Bucky's shoulder. "I get it."

Bucky scrubbed his hands through his hair before looking at the teen with a soft expression. "Now talk to me, kid."

"I don't know how to explain it. There's just this kind of looming sadness." Peter shrugged.

"Is there a reason you're sad?" Bucky asked.

"I don't think so. I just- I keep getting upset at these little things. Things like there being no more milk in the fridge, or running out of ice cream. Really minuscule things just make me so upset and I have no idea why."

"Is this how you felt those times back at headquarters?" Bucky asked. "When you snapped at me?"

Peter was silent a moment, thinking. A minute later he answered, quietly saying, "Yeah, I guess so."

"Did you ever connect them before now?"

"No." The teen looked around in revelation.

"Pete, this sounds like you may have something bigger going on." Bucky said softly.

"Huh..." Peter breathed. "I didn't even think about that."

"We can talk to Bruce and Strange, and see what they say." Bucky offered. "Would you wanna do that?"

"Yeah." Peter replied. "Can we do that now?"

"You sure? We can wait if you want." Bucky wanted to make sure Peter didn't force himself into tackling this before he could handle it.

"No, I'm ready now." The teen insisted.

"Okay. Let's see if we can find them." And with that, the two men went off to find the doctors.

"To me, Peter, it seems you may have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Depression induced by it." Bruce said apologetically a few hours later, after rigorous testing.
"Oh." The teen said dumbly.

"Have you been having nightmares, about anything that's happened to you?" Stephen added.

"Yeah. Sometimes I have nightmares about Tha-" Peter's breath hitched. "About Thanos." He tried again.

Bucky rested his hand gently on the teen's shoulder.

"When was the last time?" Bruce asked.

Peter was silent. He hadn't really addressed it recently, but now that he thought about it he'd been having them almost every night. Not always really bad, but they were definitely nightmares. He found it hard to believe that he could forget about them, but he guessed he'd just gotten used to it.

"Pete?" Bucky snapped the teen out of his thoughts.

"Huh? Oh." Peter shook his head. "Last night, I guess."

Bruce's eyes widened in shock that he quickly tried to mask. "How often do you have them?"

"Almost every night."

Bruce and Stephen looked at each other worriedly.

"Peter, in a normal situation," Stephen began. "We would recommend medication but this isn't a normal situation. Frankly, we're just not sure how your body would react to antidepressants or melatonin supplements."

"However," Bruce interjected. "I do encourage you to talk to one or both of us when you have nightmares, or perhaps keep a dream diary. Sometimes, that can help."

Peter was dumbstruck. In full honesty, he didn't know how to respond. It'd just never occurred to him that he may have a mental disorder. It made a lot more sense, but he didn't really know how to feel about it.

"Pete?" The teen snapped out of his thoughts and turned to see Tony, not knowing when he'd come, but the man's face was creased with thinly veiled worry.

"Hey." Tony came forward and pulled Peter into a hug he hadn't even realized he'd needed. It seemed like there were a lot of things he didn't know about himself.

"Hey, Mr. Stark." Peter whispered weakly.

"Tony." The man corrected.

The boy felt three more sets of arms enclose around him and the billionaire and he completely lost it. Sobs wracked his body as he let himself be cradled by his friends. His family.

The next few days seemed to flash by. Quicker than he could blink he was six days later with dozens of new gifts. Thor had come to his room, holding at least six massive hoodies, having remembered what Peter mentioned about them making him feel better.

Natasha came in and would do his hair, combing, braiding, and twisting it into intricate styles while they talked about whatever came to mind. Sometimes Clint would come too, eating the snacks Natasha bore, laying on the floor in a pool of chip crumbs and mumbling interjections to the
conversation through mouthfuls of junk food.

Wanda would come and she'd sprawl herself over the foot of Peter's bed and they'd just vent to each other. A lot of times, conversations would be drawn back to the topic of their families. How Peter wishes he remembered more about Ben, and how Wanda sometimes dreamed about Pietro.

Hill and Fury still hadn't been able to come to Wakanda, still caught up working on sorting things out in DC, but he received a link to a playlist made of extremely corny upbeat songs, the very first one being "Uptown Girl", followed by "Walking on Sunshine" and "Shut up and Dance". He noticed the link had been accompanied by a short 'love, Hill and Fury' tailed by a selfie of a grinning Hill and the closest thing to a smile Peter had ever seen the Director give. He grinned just a little and saved the photo and the playlist to his phone.

The guardians were always off doing something or other, but Groot and Rocket would come, Groot crawling into bed with Peter or growing him beautiful bouquets of flowers and Rocket perching on his nightstand and telling him stories of his adventures in space. Peter got a few laughs out of it. Quill and Gamora would come together too. Quill, having gotten all his music downloaded onto his Kimoyo beads, would sync them to the speaker system in Peter's room and blast his playlist while Gamora bobbed her head to the beat from the armchair in the corner as she sharpened her knives. Other times Drax and Mantis would come and passionately ramble on about nonsense that made Peter snicker.

Tony and Bruce would come together sometimes, blubbering about some project they were working on, bouncing ideas off of the teen who understood every word they said. Other times, Bruce would come by himself and just sit in a chair and talk with Peter about how he was feeling. He and Strange would take turns with this, and Peter couldn't lie, he always felt better afterwards. Tony would come by himself too, bearing whatever oddity or activity he thought the teen would be interested in. Once he showed up with crayons and printer paper and they scrawled thoroughly terrible portraits of each other. Another, he had created some voice distortion tech and they laughed for hours saying stupid things in funny tones.

Loki and Bucky would come together, Loki sometimes painting his nails or letting Bucky braid his hair or vice versa while Peter either read a book or they listened to 40's big band music. They never really talked much, but they all knew they could benefit solely from the company of each other. Every now and again Steve would tag along with Bucky and his fingers would twitch along with the trumpet line of the music playing in the background, eyes closed as he leaned his head back and let himself revel in the feeling of complete relaxation, something he rarely got.

May seemed to be busy a lot of the time, especially now that they'd gotten to Wakanda, but she popped in when she could. Sometimes she'd lean against the pillows and Peter would just rest his head in her lap like when he was little and she'd card her fingers through his hair. Sometimes they'd talk, sometimes he'd cry, and sometimes they were silent. He was just glad to have her.

One morning, the teen trudged sleepily out to breakfast and sluggishly ate. By the end of the meal, he was feeling a little more awake, but not enough to be as bubbly as everyone seemed to hope. He prepared himself to dip back into his room but was interrupted by someone speaking behind him.

"Peter." The teen heard his name and turned to find T'Challa.

"Oh, hey, your highness." Peter grinned.

"Please, nobody calls me that." T'Challa laughed, dismissing him with a wave.

"Oh." The teen said. "Sorry."
"It's okay." T'Challa responded.

"What's up?"

"Come, I want to show you something." And with that the king was striding off down hallways Peter had never navigated before, the teen hurrying quickly after him.

"Where're we going?" Peter asked, jogging slightly to keep up with T'Challa's strong strides.

The man didn't answer.

Peter diligently trailed T'Challa as he weaved through hallways and eventually they entered a large room. It was simple and barren, art and decorless, but the floor to ceiling windows washing the room in afternoon light seemed to compensate. As they approached, the windows slid back and a balcony formed where there used to be only a steep drop to the vibrant grass beneath. The king walked out onto it and beckoned for a wowed Peter to follow.

"This is Wakanda. In its truest." The man leaned onto the beautiful wrought iron-like railing that prevented him from falling out. "I hear it was scarred for a long time after the battle here, in some places you can still see singed holes in the dirt; but it recovered. It rebuilt itself."

Just as Peter was beginning to wonder what this was all about, T'Challa continued with, "As you will."

Peter felt the words sink in. He found himself thinking back to what everyone had said to him and realized that they'd all used some sort of similar analogy. That he would heal. It felt almost like a weight was being lifted off his shoulders. By no means were T'Challa's words a cure-all, but they were certainly an eye opener.

The lush greenness before him left no evidence the land had ever been destroyed, or anything less than it was now. The gorgeous view spanned miles, the plains flanked by thick forest and dotted with huts and livestock. The distant market was visible from their perch, Peter imagining the colorful trinkets lining shelves and trendy Wakandans milling down the alleys, searching for something perfect to buy.

The grass grew tall and thick in some places, others the fields were lines with plowed rows or flourishing crops. Peter had never seen anything more beautiful in his life, amazed by the realness of it all. He tried to memorize it while he still could.

"Thank you." The teen said softly after a moment.

"No problem, Peter." The king turned to smile at him. "Now take one last good look, Shuri's been saying she'd like to meet you."

Peter gazed out at the beautiful landscape before him, closed his eyes, took a deep breath, opened them again, and turned to nod his readiness at T'Challa, who led him back inside and down another winding set of hallways. Finally, they arrived at the lab in which the team had received their Kimoyo beads the first time.

The teen caught sight of a bobbing bun of braids from over a table, which was followed by Shuri's beaming face. "Peter! I'm so glad you came, I was just working on something and I need some advice."

Peter was slightly overwhelmed but also felt oddly validated by how the princess didn't even hesitate to pull him into what was undoubtedly some amazing, high-tech project.
"Yeah, what's up?" The teen weaved around the tables towards the woman and his eyes flicked back to meet T'Challa's, who winked before making his leave.

"So I'm trying to find a way to re-articulate this joint here." Shuri got straight to the point, gesturing to a huge piece of some sort of armor. "I need the nodes here to connect in a way that allows for smooth movement. I tried a few different patterns but I've already almost scrapped it three times. Here's my original blueprints. Thoughts?"

Peter was watching diligently as she pointed at the pieces she needed help with. He then looked at the blueprints and it only took him a few seconds to realize what was wrong. "Oh! I think you need to add an extension here," He pointed to the problem area. "And make sure it touches this wire and it'll spread the current here, and these two pieces should move a bit smoother."

"Genius! I have no idea why I didn't think about that sooner!" And with that Shuri was already hustling off, digging through piles of wires on her desk looking for a piece that would fit. Peter watched as she returned with a strip of wire and welded it to the piece where it was needed before testing the joint again.

"Perfect!" She exclaimed as the armor moved silently, smoothly working together without even whirring. "Thank you." She smiled at Peter.

"It's no problem. I'm willing to help anytime." The teen smiled back. "What's this for anyways?"

"One of our war rhinos, he fell into one of the holes left by Thanos's army; broke his leg. The wound got infected and we had to amputate. He's one of Okoye's favorites, and she just couldn't bear the idea of decommissioning him so she asked if I could make him a prosthetic." Shuri replied. "He'll be even stronger now than before." She beamed.

Peter nodded in awe and looked at the beautiful piece of machinery.

Several hours later, they were chowing down on the best pizza the teen had ever had, laughing muffledly around massive bites at some top tier memes that developed while Peter was in the soul realm. He'd been educated on years worth of gen z humor in a matter of minutes and he felt like a middle aged mother at first, but he caught on soon enough. Missing the drop of Vine 2 was probably now on his list of top 10 things he regretted missing.

After lunch, Shuri had to run and sit in on some meeting with T'Challa and she apologized profusely somehow at the same time as she thanked Peter for helping her and hanging out. When he finally managed to ensure the girl it was really no trouble, she hurried off and Peter crawled under the covers of his bed to watch Netflix he was projecting onto his wall. He quickly fell asleep halfway through the first episode he attempted to watch, a heavy nap taking him.

Chapter End Notes

AAAAAAHHHH I KNOW I SUCK I'M SORRY MY UPDATES TAKE FOREVER!
Here we have some discoveries and some Wakandan adventures. The story should be reaching its climax soon, within the next ten chapters, and be finished maybe around the next fifteen. It shouldn't be any longer than that, and no matter how hard of a time I have making new chapters, I'm gonna miss this. I hope to make the remainder of this story as best I can for you guys, and I hope the ending won't be too underwhelming.
Anyways, thank you all so much for reading and until the next chapter.

-xoxo Denise
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

Warnings: This chapter contains graphic depiction of blood and gore, depression, PTSD, stress, stressful situations, reaction to stress and stressful situations, self harm, and suicide. Do not read if you are sensitive to such topics.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After lunch, Shuri had to run and sit in on some meeting with T'Challa and she apologized profusely somehow at the same time as she thanked Peter for helping her and hanging out. When he finally managed to ensure the girl it was really no trouble, she hurried off and Peter crawled under the covers of his bed to watch Netflix he was projecting onto his wall. He quickly fell asleep halfway through the first episode he attempted to watch, a heavy nap taking him.

"Hey, Loki?" Peter said as he pushed open the cracked door to the man's room. No answer.

Peter's brows knitted together as he scanned the empty room. He could've sworn he saw him come in here and he didn't remember seeing him leave.

"Loki?" He asked again, looking around. He eyed the sliver of light under the bathroom door and carefully approached it.

"Lokes?" Peter put his hand on the knob and listened. Still no response. He tried turning the brass, finding it unlocked. He slowly pushed it open, giving the man time to tell him to stop if he was in there.

"Loki are you oka-" Peter's words died in the air and were replaced with shock and horror as he took in the scene.

A Jotun sat in the bathtub, his head submerged halfway under crimson water, his black hair swirling in a halo around it. Peter scrambled forward, panic rising in his pounding chest as he hurried to pull the man from the now frigid pool.

As his arms, looking purple beneath the red water, breached the surface, Peter saw the deep slashes along his Cephalic vein. His stomach churned at the sight, half disgusted by the gruesome sight and half terrified as he realized the wound was no longer bleeding.

"Loki." Peter cried as he shook the god's already cooling body. "Loki, wake up!"

Peter was sobbing as he clutched the limp form to his chest. He refused to believe that this man, his brother, who he loved, was dead, even as he pressed a finger to his chilled neck and felt no pulse beneath the slowly stiffening skin.

"Loki, please." Peter croaked. "Loki, wake up!"

"Peter?" The teen heard a distant voice say. Loki... Loki was calling him... but when he looked down the man's thin lips remained pressed shut.
"Loki..." Peter wailed.

"Peter!" Loki was calling again, louder now, but the teen continued to clutch the lifeless body to his chest, his own wracked by sobs.

The door to the bathroom behind him slammed open but everything flashed a bright white before he could turn around and see who it was.

"Peter!" When the teen's eyes finally snapped open it was with a terrible scream, loud and full of fear and pain.

Whoever had opened the door was rushing forward, gathering Peter's crying body to their chest. When two lean arms connected to cool hands wrapped around him, Peter's cloudy brain vaguely recognized the person as Loki.

"Loki..." Peter said brokenly.

"I'm right here." Loki hushed the boy, hesitantly petting the terrified teenager's hair. He had never been very good at comforting others, but he was trying his best.

"You- you're dead." Peter sobbed.

"No, Peter, I'm right here." Loki was trying to calm the boy.

"You-" The teen choked. "You killed yourself. I saw it."

The trickster felt a pang in his gut as he pulled Peter even closer. "No, Peter, I'm alive. I'm right here. Right with you."

Peter's shaking hands fist ed in Loki's shirt, gripping tight onto the fabric as he trembled. The god felt a tear roll down his face. He hadn't cried. Not in a very long time, but he was now. The knowledge that he had scared this boy into thinking that he would leave him, so selfishly abandon him, weighed on his thoughts.

Eventually Peter calmed enough that his sobs became nothing more than heaving breaths, and he slowly but surely drifted back to sleep in Loki's arms. The man didn't really know what to do from there, but he decided on carefully righting the teen on his bed and slid Peter out of his arms and onto the pillows, drawing the comforter over his frame.

Loki ran his hands through his hair, sighing as he slid to sit on the floor against Peter's wall. He knew Peter had nightmares, but he'd never imagined them to be like this. He was plagued by bad dreams too, he knew how it felt to fear sleep or to wake up not knowing where you were or if everyone you cared about was okay, but he was much much older than Peter was. Peter was still a child. He'd never been prepared for something like this. He was just glad he'd come when he did.

The trickster didn't know if he'd just zoned out or if he'd actually dozed off, but when he tuned back into reality, light was beginning to filter through the curtains over Peter's window and the teen was stirring awake.

"Loki?" Came Peter's slurred and groggy voice.

"Yes, Peter." Loki replied quickly as he stood from the ground and moved to sit on the edge of the boy's bed while he stretched the sleep from his joints.
"Wha're you doin' here?" The mumbled words came from his tired lips.

"I was just checking in on you." Loki said, finding himself glad the teen didn't seem to remember the happenings of last night.

"Oh." Peter said softly, and for a moment he said nothing else. Loki was okay with just sitting in silence as the boy dozed off again, and about a half hour later the youngest Avenger finally truly woke.

Sitting up and rubbing his eyes, Peter yawned and looked at Loki. "Morning." He smiled.

"Good morning, Peter." The trickster couldn't keep the chuckle out of his voice at his little brother's beaming smile.

"What's for breakfast?"

--------------------------------------------------

Turns out, breakfast would never happen. Instead, once Loki had left Peter to dress and the teen ambled his way out into the hallway, he was greeted by concerned muttering of Bruce and Tony.

"-was never supposed to happen. The algorithm..." Bruce was whispering.

"I didn't even think this could happen." Tony picked up the man's sentence, as they did.

"So what's gonna happen? What does it mean for him? For the team?" Bruce's brows were knitted together, his arms crossed over his chest.

"What's going on?" Peter asked and the two men whipped around to find him standing in the doorway.

"I-" Bruce hesitated.

"Vision." Tony said. "The day we went to the park, I was supposed to run tests on him, but I got sidetracked when you- well when you went into a coma."

Peter vaguely remembered a conversation from the day they made it out of the soul stone about how Vision hadn't felt the same, how he felt more human now. It didn't make sense to him at the time, and he'd left it to Tony and Bruce to work out. Didn't even think to ask if the results came through.

"So?" Peter edged the two men on.

Tony spoke for them. "So we finally got around to running those tests." He began. "And we found brainwaves."

Peter's eyes widened. "Brainwaves?"

The billionaire nodded.

"He doesn't even have a brain, does he?"

"We gave him something like it. Something artificial, to house the programming, and I guess he always had 'brainwaves' but these're different. These're...human. They show individual, deep, thought." Bruce said.

"How?" Peter was shocked.
"That's what we're trying to find out." Tony said.

"He said he felt more human than before...even before he went into the soul realm. That means something must've prompted this before now." Peter said.

"But he still needed the mind stone. Taking it...it killed him..." Bruce said thoughtfully.

"But he was a soul. He had one, he was in the soul realm." Peter added.

"So that means that something made him...I dunno...grow one?" Tony's brow arched.

"I guess. That's what makes the most sense." Peter shrugged. "Why though? Why would he need to evolve? He was supposedly already the best he could be."

"There must've been something. Something either he or the programming realized he was sub par at, something he needed to improve in." Bruce scratched his chin.

They were quiet for a moment before the teen's eyes widened in revelation. "Wanda. Wanda! It's her. He loved her, he grew to love and care for her. She made him more human, he needed to care for her. She was the reason."

"I'm so stupid, how did I not think about that?" Tony pinched the bridge of his nose.

"So she...she edged his evolution forward?" Bruce asked.

"I guess so." Peter replied. "What does this mean? Think about what this means for androids?"

"We created a human. Tony. We made a self cognizant, emotional being." Bruce said, shocked. "This is the biggest breakthrough in biogenetics since-"

"Since your work on gamma rays." Peter supplied. "My god."

The three men continued to chatter excitedly for only a few more minutes before Steve and Bucky walked in, laughing at something they'd been joking about.

"Woah, what's going on?" Steve's laughter stopped and he looked at the three men with knitted brows.

"It's vision. We detected brainwaves in tests we ran yesterday. Shuri's doing a followup check to make sure we didn't imagine it, but we think he's evolving." Bruce explained.

"Wow..." Bucky said breathlessly. "I- I never even imagined-"

"This kind of technology-" Steve continued his sentence.

"My god." Bucky finished.

Peter had never anticipated anything like this happening in his lifetime, let alone being so close to the development. He knew the subject. He knew Vision, he worked with him. This was insane, he wished he'd gotten his reaction on film.

"Does he know?" Peter turned to Tony, who shook his head.

"Does Wanda?" Bucky added, now standing beside, arms crossed.

Tony shook his head again.
"When will you tell them?" Steve looked at the billionaire with wide blue eyes.

"I don't know." The man said, looking regretful.

"What's going on?" Came Natasha's voice from the doorway.

"Cat's out of the bag." Steve stated.

An hour later, the team, inclusive of Wanda and Vision, were seated in the living room, everyone shocked by the bombshell news Tony and Bruce had dropped on them.

"You mean...I'm human?" Vision questioned. Peter had never seen the man in a state of confusion like this. He was made from the internet, he had all the answers, but this time...this time there was nothing on the internet that could have prepared him for this.

"Humanoid." Tony replied. "But you're basically human."

"You're the best version of us you could possibly be." Bruce added. "You have the indestructability of an advanced cyborg but you have the emotions, the thought, the free will of a human being."

"What does that mean for us?" Natasha asked.

"It means we have-" Tony hesitated.

"You have a weapon against Thanos." Vision completed. "You don't need to hesitate, I take no offense."

Tony avoided Vision's eyes.

"A shot is a shot." Sam pitched.

"Considering how our odds look," Strange spoke up. "We need every weapon we can get."

"Well at the moment we have a couple of depressed super-humans and an emotional cyborg. Where are we going to get the people we need to win this thing?" Clint said, arms crossed and a brow raised.

"Sakaar." Thor said. "We had a plan, if it's still there-"

"We can use Korg's rebellion." Loki finished.

"And the Wakandan's. Who're left. They're happy to help you." T'Challa said.

"So what's the plan to, well, Assemble the Avengers?" Tony asked.

"We don't have much time." Thor said. "We've waited too long already."

"How much longer do you think we have?" Peter asked.

"Days. At most." Thor shook his head.

"I can prepare my people tonight." T'Challa offered.

"We need a ship. One that'll make it deep into space." Loki said.
"Lucky for you, I learned a thing or two on the space donut. Quinjets aren't all we have now." Tony smirked.

"Thor, Loki, and I can get out to Sakaar-" Bruce began.

"You're gonna need more people than that." Quill spoke. "This isn't a milk run anymore, the Guardians're coming with."

"The more the merrier." Loki shrugged.

"Bucky, Shuri, Okoye, and I will get my troops ready." T'Challa said.

"Everyone else, every record, every database, anything we have, we need to dig through it all and see if there are any people, anyone, who we haven't heard from, track them down, see if we can get them in on the plan." Tony said.

"We move out tonight." Steve said. "For now, we get everyone fueled up and ready."

Chapter End Notes

I know I've been super inactive. These past few weeks have been really stressful due to issues with my homelife, one of my very close friends being hospitalized, and my own mental health. I'm working on some new chapters as soon as this goes up so I have insurance in case something happens again, and I hope to have one up next weekend.

Thank you all for the consistency in readers, and I hope you liked this chapter. Until the next one,

-xoxo Denise
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Lunch was quickly and greedily downed by the team members, breakfast having been skipped, as they got packed for the recruitment ahead of them. The guardians, Thor, Loki, and Bruce shoved gear and nonperishable food into their packs, counting and recounting their rations before they fueled up the jet.

Peter assembled a bag containing his older suit, an extra set of clothes and some road snacks, pressing the disk of the nanosuit to his chest, preparing for the drive he'd take after being dropped back off in the states to find one Scott Lang and track down Hank Pym and Hope Van Dyne.

Tony, who was going with Natasha were going to find Hill and Fury, was anxious about the idea of the teen going alone but the others were needed elsewhere.

"Mr. Stark, I promise I can get this done by myself I'm almost 18, I got this." Peter smiled, hoping to ease Tony's worry.

"I just don't want you getting hurt out there alone." Tony said.

"I'm not. You know me, the states are full of nothing but crooks and common criminals. Nothing I haven't tackled before." Peter replied.

"Are you sure you're going to be okay?" Tony asked.

"I'm sure." Peter grinned softly.

"Okay. Call me if-"
"Call you if anything goes wrong, I know." The teen laughed.

"I believe in you, Pete." Tony said, clapping a hand on Peter's shoulder.

"Thanks, Mr. Stark." The boy replied with a bright smile.

Meanwhile, they arranged for Strange to tag along with Steve to try to track down Heimdall, who'd gone M.I.A long before they reached Wakanda. Alexander was set to stay back at the compound in an effort to learn to work with some new gear Tony had fit him with.

Everyone said their goodbyes, Peter gave Bruce a warm hug, Thor gripped the boy tightly after, clapping him hard on the back, and Loki locked his little brother in a vice-like embrace before ruffling his chestnut locks.

"Good luck, Peter." Loki smiled before pushing the boy off to say goodbye to the Guardians.

"You're gonna do good, kid." Quill said to Peter when the two reached each other.

"You're gonna do better." Peter punched Quill in the arm. "Make sure Thor doesn't eat all your food this time."

"I-" Quill stuttered, offended. "That was one time! And he stole it!"

Thor laughed heartily in the background as the Star Lord glared at him. Peter suppressed a chuckle of his own to talk to Mantis.

"Hello, Peter." She smiled softly at him.

"Hi, Mantis." Peter smiled back.

"I know you will do well in finding Scott." She put a hand on Peter's shoulder. "But I feel your unease."

"I'm just worried I won't get them in time. That something might go wrong." Peter replied.

"You have done well before, you can only improve from where you have been." Mantis assured him.

Peter was quiet a moment before finally saying softly, "Thank you."

"Of course." The woman grinned and the boy hugged her goodbye.

Gamora was next and Peter came to smile at her.

"Peter." She said warmly.

"Hi Gamora." Peter grinned.

"Mantis was right, you know." Gamora said. "Steve explained what you did at the fight over the Accords."

"He did?" Peter was taken aback.

"Yes. Your skill set is very broad and, with a little practice, you could make it much broader." Gamora assured him.
"You really think so?" Peter's eyes were wide with admiration.

"I really do." Gamora smiled. "And," She reached into her pocket. "I want you to have this." She pressed a gorgeous pearl handle switchblade into his hand. "Press the button. Careful, it has a bit of a kick."

Peter held the compacted knife in his hands and turned to avoid cutting the woman before pressing the button. How swiftly it flipped surprised him but he was quickly distracted by the beauty of the silver blade.

"I pitched the idea of buying you something small to Tony and he was hesitant at first but when I showed him the design he caved." Gamora smiled at the look on Peter's face as he twisted the knife in his hands. "I already polished it and oiled all the joints, so it should feel smooth when it opens. You can use it for just about anything."

"Thank you so much." Peter closed the knife and tucked it into the inner pocket of the jean jacket he was wearing before the woman gripped him in a tight hug.

"Be safe, Peter." She said into his hair.

"I will."

"That was a beautiful blade Gamora gave you." Drax said when the boy moved on to him.

"Yeah, I love it." Peter grinned.

"Take good care of it, with the right hands a blade like that will last a lifetime." Drax said.

"I will." Peter nodded as Drax patted him on the back and sent him off to Groot and Rocket.

"You're gonna do great, Pete. Rule of thumb, don't eat anything with a weird color." The raccoon said, perched on Groot's shoulder.

"I am Groot." The tree added.

"Or moldy." Rocket translated.

"Thanks guys." Peter laughed.

"Catch you on the flip side, squirt." Rocket teased and with that Peter turned to wish the rest of the team goodbye.

He was smothered in a massive group hug from Steve, Bucky, Sam, Natasha, and Clint.

"You better not do anything stupid. You know I'll come get you if you do." Bucky said sternly.

"C'mon, Buck, he has to learn to do things on his own sometime, don't you think?" Steve reasoned with him.

"No. I did that with you and look where we both ended up." Bucky glared.

Steve laughed and put his hands up in surrender.

"Y'all really gotta get over that." Sam shook his head. "You be good out there, Pete, don't go webbing someone up."
"Yeah yeah, don't go hitting anyone with Redwing." Peter shook his head.

Sam pulled him into another hug. "I'm gonna miss you kid, but you'll be back in no time."

"That I will." Peter said.

"Take care of yourself, Petey." Natasha piped, ruffling the boy's hair.

"And I-" Clint stepped forward, producing a big brown paper bag. "Brought road snacks. I know you have some already, but I figured you wouldn't let yourself pick up this much junk food so I bought you soda, candy, and chips and my wife and kids baked you some cookies."

Peter took the bag from him, taken off guard by it's weight at first. "Thanks, bird brain." Peter chuckled.

"Anytime, bug boy." Clint grinned.

Wanda came next, accompanied by Vision. "Good luck out there, Peter." Wanda smiled. "You have my number, do not hesitate to call me for anything."

"Thanks." Peter smiled at the woman. "You guys keep safe."

"You too." Vision nodded.

"I have updated your Kimoyo beads to reach us with the utmost clarity from the states." Shuri said when Peter came upon her and T'Challa. "You can keep your old ones, you may need the vibranium but here are the new ones."

The princess clasped the new bracelet around Peter's wrist and she tapped the beads to show the functions of the tech.

"It has a broader display with a clearer image, and the communications tech sounds almost as if you are in the same room. And, as you can see, I took the liberty of adding a bit of customization." Shuri grinned slightly deviously.

Peter looked and saw his spider symbol engraved into some of the beads, the rest adorned with web like patterns.

"Woah." The teen said.

"I knew you'd like them." The princess smiled proudly.

"Good luck, Peter. I'm confident you will show us your abilities." T'Challa said.

"I'll make you proud." Peter nodded, holding his head a little higher.

"You have already done that, Peter." And the king ushered him off to see his last teammates. Finally Peter came across Bruce, Strange, Pepper, and May.

"You'll do great, Peter." Strange said. "Be careful out there."

"Thanks." Peter grinned at him. "You do your...boom boom whoosh stuff."

Strange laughed. "That I will."
"Be safe, Pete. Call us if." Bruce began.

"If anything goes wrong." Peter cut him off, smiling and shaking his head fondly. "You sound like Tony."

"Tony's right then." Pepper piped in. "Be careful, Peter."

"I will." Peter smiled softly as Pepper pulled him into a hug and pressed a gentle kiss to his hair.

When he came face to face with May the woman was teary eyed.

"You're growing up so fast." She sniffled, pressing a hand to the side of Peter's face. The boy leaned into it. "Ben would be so proud."

At that Peter's eyes watered with tears of his own.

"I love you, May."

"I love you to, honey." May smiled softly before pressing her lips to her son's forehead.

With that, the groups were splitting. Peter had to catch the jet that would take him back to the states and the others had places of their own to be. He hugged May goodbye one more time before picking up his backpack and duffel before running for the ship.

The part of the team set to go back to the states climbed onto the quinjet. In less than an hour they were landing on the Avengers' compound. Peter gave his group one last goodbye before they got off plane. Tony's face looked sad as the bay door closed, the aircraft taking off again to bring Peter to Los Angeles, California.

His car was waiting for him in the lot of the facility they landed at and he crammed his luggage into the backseat, piling his road snacks in the passenger side before starting her up and pulling out of the lot.

The sound of Peter's engine settled into white noise as he tore down the highway towards San Francisco. His ears were filled with nothing but the sound of his music blasting and the sound of the warm California air rushing past his open window. He didn't mind the moderate traffic he'd encountered periodically along his drive, he was too distracted by the sight of the beautiful houses in the hills backed by nothing but clear blue skies.

As he left the city the hills fell away to instead reveal the ocean in the distance, the sun reflecting off the water and casting beams of light across the inside of Peter's car. The San Francisco skyline rose in the distance as he drew closer, and soon he was driving down narrow residential streets flanked by the colorful victorian homes Peter had only ever seen in movies.

The directions on Peter's phone said he was close to Scott Lang's last known whereabouts, his home by the bay. Peter had read in the files that Scott had been M.I.A for the past few years. The teen felt anxiety pool in his stomach as the notion of Scott not being there when he knocked as he approached the door.

The teen's fist came into contact with the door and he stood as his heightened hearing searched for the sound of footsteps within the house. His suspicions were confirmed when he heard nothing but silence.
Another chapter for you guys, finally. It's not much but I wanted to at least get something out for you all.

Thank you all for reading and as always, until the next chapter.

-xoxo Denise
Chapter 36

The directions on Peter's phone said he was close to Scott Lang's last known whereabouts, his home by the bay. Peter had read in the files that Scott had been M.I.A for the past few years. The teen felt anxiety pool in his stomach as the notion of Scott not being there when he knocked as he approached the door.

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Peter groaned in anger as he walked around the house, searching for the easiest and least visible way to break in. He hated trespassing like this, especially in the house of someone he didn't know, but he had to figure out where Scott had gone.

Once around the back of the house, Peter carefully scaled the shadowed side of the building. He made his way up to, upon further inspection, a bedroom window that he tested to see was locked. He sighed when it was and pulled the switchblade Gamora had gifted him from his hoodie pocket, sliding the blade between the glass and the frame, moving the lock out of place.

Peter made his way into the home, pushing the window open and crawling through, landing softly on the floor beneath it. He sighed as he stood and slowly closed the glass before making his way into the rest of the house. Sliding his hand across an end table in the hallway, it came away coated with a thin layer of dust. As he looked closer, he realized everything was blanketed by the same grey veil. However, the amount of dust didn't match the amount of time Scott's been MIA, meaning someone had been here to keep house between then and now. Peter walked down the hall in search of the master bedroom.

When he found it, the teen stepped inside and made his way to the closet. The room was neat, the bed made carefully and the pillows still fluffed but Peter noticed the closet had been stocked with freshly washed clothes, all hung or folded and put in their places. Peter's brows knitted as he eyed the empty laundry basket.

Funny. The boy thought to himself. The house was kept, but there was no laundry. Scott hadn't been here in a long time, someone was coming to care for the house. Peter vaguely remembered reading about a daughter and an ex wife.

The teen stood in the center of the floor, hands on his head as he inhaled deeply, having really hoped it wouldn't be this complicated. With a big sigh Peter resigned himself to things just being the way they always are in this line of work and he began sifting through loose papers in search of something that would tell him where Scott had gone.

After finding nothing in the master bedroom Peter stepped back out into the main hallway. There was a faint clicking noise and the sound of something moving across the hardwood floors and Peter felt his spidey-sense prickle. His hands prepared themselves to flick a web at whatever he was about be greeted by, but none of his previous training would have prepared him for what he saw.
When he finally whipped around, the teen was met by a giant ant. A loud scream tore itself from his throat as he fell and scrambled backwards across the floor. However, unluckily for the teen, he had somehow managed to miss the fact that he was at the top of the stairs and his hand, expecting to find more floor, instead found the empty air above one of the steps and he was sent tumbling down the staircase. The ant, standing at the top of the steps, looking down at him, just tilted its head and clicked in response.

Peter groaned as he tried to pull his aching body up from the ground but he caught sight of the ant making its way down the stairs. He quickly righted himself, ignoring the throbbing of his head, spine, and ribcage from where they hit the stairs, and pressed himself against the wall farthest from them.

"I don't want any trouble." Peter's voice came out shakier than he wanted it to.

He wasn't sure if he was seeing things, but he thought he saw the ant nod in response.

Peter threw caution to the wind, figuring that if there was a giant ant in Ant Man's house then the ant could probably understand him, at least to some degree.

"So you're Scott's friend, huh?" Peter hoped he wasn't just being stupid.

The ant nodded again.

"Yes!" Peter cheered internally before hurrying to get his next question out. "I think he's in trouble, and I need to find him."

The ant seemed apprehensive, and Peter felt crazy for noticing.

"It's really important. He hasn't been home in a long while, huh?" Peter asked.

The ant nodded again.

"I'm not sure if he ever told you anything about how he fought with Captain America back in the day,"

The ant nodded enthusiastically this time and Peter saw his chance.

"I'm Spiderman. I fought with Iron Man, but they were supposed to have been cool by the time he was lost." Peter crossed his fingers.

The ant nodded once more.

"So do you know anything about where Scott may have gone, or anywhere here that might have something that could help?"

The ant clicked and raised one leg in the direction of a closed door Peter could only assume was an office.

Peter made his way across the floor and into the room, hearing the sound of the ant following behind. In Scott's office he found a slightly outdated monitor placed on a clean desk. Whoever'd been coming to clean house had done a good job organizing, and the teen just hoped they hadn't tossed anything that could make his life a lot easier.

Sifting through the carefully filed papers, Peter's fingers searched for something of use. Nothing really of use came up in the filing cabinet he was rooting through and his hope was beginning to
dwindle when a yellow sticky note stuck to the computer monitor caught his eye. He mentally crossed his fingers as he approached the piece of paper decorated by scribbled handwriting.

'Meet Hope and Hank at 3:15’ was scrawled on the reminder followed by a date and address. The teen's chest bloomed with determination as he snatched the sticky note and made his way to the front door, peeking out the window beside it to make sure no one was watching. When he saw the coast was clear, he turned back to look at the ant again.

"Thank you so much. I'll get Scott back to you in once piece, I promise.”

The ant gave a small wave as the teen slipped out the door and ran across the street to where he'd parked.

Peter let out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding after he slid into the driver's seat of his car. He closed his eyes and inhaled deeply again, gathering his muddled thoughts, before leaning forward to turn the keys in the ignition and make his way to the address that'd been written on the sticky note.

Peter had to double check that he'd gotten the address right when he pulled up in front of what looked to be a dilapidated parking structure. He sighed as his phone assured him he'd gotten the address right and he drove into the lot.

The teen slowly traced each level of the structure, starting to get less and less hopeful as he went up floor by floor and found nothing each time. However, when he finally reached the top, he found an old van, back doors still open, big tubes running from the inside to rusted and weathered equipment stationed behind it.

As he took a peek into the doors, Peter saw what he recognized as a dormant smaller scale of Hank Pym's greatest work, the quantum tunnel, although it was dirty with trash blown by wind, dirt, dust, and a small bird's nest had been abandoned in the mouth.

The pieces started to fit together in Peter's head and he realized why Scott'd been gone so long. He'd read about how Hank Pym's own wife had gone through the same. He pictured the three rusted consoles once shiny and functional, being manned by the Pym/Van Dyne family as San Francisco's very own Ant Man was sent into the quantum realm as he'd done only once before for-

For what exactly? What had Scott been sent into the quantum realm for that had gotten him trapped? Why had he been trapped? Why wasn't he able to be pulled out?

Peter could think of a plethora of reasons, but none of them made sense. It couldn't be that they'd been apprehended by police. Surely if they had been, the authorities would have taken the materials with them, right? There must have been something else-

The dusting.

The only reason that made complete sense was that they'd unfortunately chosen the wrong day to access the quantum realm and ultimately died, leaving Scott stranded. Assuming Scott was alive at least, that was what happened. Peter hoped he was.

This was beginning to get much more complicated than Peter originally hoped for. He was hoping he'd find Scott sitting at home watching TV, or maybe catch him just as he was returning from running some errands. But when did Peter ever get what he wanted.

The teen sat on the hood of his car, head in his hands. He had no idea what to do. All the equipment
here was too complicated for him to try and work himself, and he didn't know who would. He couldn't even think of a person who might have a single clue. No one except-

Banner. Dr. Banner. Peter was sure he'd heard Bruce mention something about Hank at least once. He was crossing his fingers he was right as he fiddled with the Kimoyo beads on his wrist.

A small screen projected from the beads, showcasing a list of contacts that Peter had in them. He scrolled to 'B' and selected Bruce's name. He waited as the video call rang through.

Shortly, the 'connecting' screen cut to an image of Bruce's face, looking down at his own wrist from where he was, on his way to Sakaar.

"Peter?" Bruce's voice filtered through the beads. "Peter, what's going on?"

"Bruce, I found Scott. Well...where he used to be." The teen scratched his head. "I think Hank Pym sent him into the quantum realm. I found their van, there's a quantum tunnel in the back of it but all the gear is too shot to use."

Bruce looked thoughtful. "Dumb question, but did you check to see if there was extra gear in the van?"

Peter blushed. "...no. I'll go do that, hang on." And with that he strode over the the van, bracing his foot on the back bumper and leaned in. He carefully held himself up with one hand on the back of the front seat as he saw a lumpy tarp behind the quantum tunnel. He held his breath as he drew the fabric back.

Peter's heart rate picked up in excitement at the gear he saw in front of him. He immediately started pulling the pieces out and carefully laid the tech on the ground. He stood in front of it all and looked back down at his bracelet with a massive smile on his face. "I found it!"

"Okay, do you know how to assemble it?" Bruce asked from the call.

"It seems simple enough, I was looking at the older consoles earlier and it's just a bunch of things that you have to hook together." Peter said.

"Good, good. Do you know how to use it?" Bruce followed up.

"That, I don't know. I imagine that they needed three people to work it." Peter said.

"Well is there a radio?" Bruce looked at Peter through the projection.

The teen's eyes scanned the gear at his feet and they fell on what looked like a bus radio. "Yes."

"That probably calls Scott." Bruce replied. "So put the consoles together first, and see if you can reach him. I have to go, but call me if you need any more help."

Peter nodded. "I will, thanks Bruce."

"No problem, be careful Peter."

"I will." And with that, the call cut out.

Peter immediately got to work setting up the consoles. He pressed the tech together and connected all the wires. Once he had them standing he disconnected the tubing running from the tunnels to the old panels, which he pushed aside, reconnecting them to the new ones. Finally, he brushed all the trash and dirt from the inside of the van and made his way back over to the base station he'd just
assembled.

The teen's eyes roved over the three stations, searching for anything that looked like a power button. When he found the switch, he pressed his thumb to it, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath as he pushed it forward.

Immediately the panels hummed to life, buzzing with electricity. The tunnel itself booted up as well. He hurried over to the radio, picking up the speaker that was hissing with static. He held down the button on the side and took a deep breath before saying, "Incoming Scott Lang, incoming Scott Lang, this is Peter Parker, Spiderman, do you read me? Over."

Peter lifted his thumb from the button and listened to the static. His heart was pounding as one second passed, then two, and they seemed to drag on forever. He was starting to fear Scott wasn't there when a shaky voice filtered over the radio saying, "This is Scott Lang, I read you, over."

Chapter End Notes

WHEW. I know it's been a long time, and I am so so so sorry for the inactivity but I've been trying to deal with a lot of things in my personal life and I've also been struggling with my own mental health but I was finally able to sit down and finish this chapter for you guys. Hopefully the next one won't take so long.

Anyways, thank you all for reading and as always I'll see you in the next chapter.

-xoxo Denise
Chapter 37

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

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Peter's heart was pounding in his chest, but shock demanded control of his brain. For a minute, he wasn't able to find a way to make his thumb press back down on the radio's button and his lips refused to formulate a response, but he eventually gathered his bearings and opened his dry mouth to speak.

"Incoming Peter Parker, status Scott Lang, over." Peter breathlessly responded.

"Status alive, I'm stuck in the quantum realm, I can't get myself out, over." Scott's reply was nearly immediate.

"I assembled the spare gear, but I don't know how to use it. Banner was my only shot and he's trying to make it to another planet right now. We need you back, I need you to help me figure this tech out." Peter poured out. "Over." He added.

"Who's we? Over." Scott skirted over the main point.

"The Avengers, I can explain more once you're out but we need to get you up here first. Over." Peter responded.

"There's a button on the farthest right panel. It's green, it says 'revert' beneath it. But you need to be really careful, you have to do it at exactly the right time or you'll rip me apart. Over." There was fear in Scott's voice.

"How do I know when the right time is? Over." Peter felt the pressure on him.

"There's a series of switches you have to flip first, each one second apart, but they're all next to each other. After, there's a lever on the same panel as the revert button that you need to pull all the way down, then you count to three and you get me out, over." Scott enunciated every word, ensuring Peter knew exactly how important his role was.

Peter scrubbed his hands over his face before turning to face the other consoles. His eyes scanned for what buttons he needed to press and which switches to flip. He sighed heavily before scrubbing his hands over his face and picking the radio back up.
"Okay, where are the switches? Over." Peter replied.

"They're on the second console, three rows down, and four in from the right They're all directly next to each other, six of them. Over."

"I'm going to get you out, Scott. Over." Peter ran his hands through his hair before making his way over to the switches he needed to flip. The teen carefully counted and recounted all of the rows to make sure he was going to flip exactly the right ones.

Taking one more deep breath, Peter flipped the first switch.

One Mississippi. He ignored how childish it sounded in his head before flipping the second.

Two Mississippi. Flip.

Three Mississippi. Flip. Four Mississippi, flip. Five Mississippi. Flip-

The teen quickly stepped over to the other panel before gripping onto the lever and he pressed the button down on the radio for the last time saying as he worked against the lever's weight, "Revert in five, four, three, two-

And with that, Peter slapped his hand down on the revert button and held his breath.

The quantum tunnel surged and Peter's heart pounded in his aching chest. His stomach did flips as he watched the back of the van, time seeming to drag on for hours longer than it'd really been.

As the teen's eyes were locked on the back of the truck, he watched as in seemingly slow motion the tunnel flashed and (as Peter could best describe) pushed a very small but rapidly growing figure from its mouth. In a single second, Scott Lang himself was standing before Spiderman, dirty, ragged, and aged.

Peter's eyes took in the sight of Scott's now salt-and-pepper hair, something the teen didn't remember him having before, and uneven beard. His dingy visage was accompanied by a scuffed, torn, and slightly tattered suit. His eyes frantically roved the surroundings he hadn't seen in almost six years, and Peter felt pity grip at his heart.

"I-" Scott stuttered. "I'm back."

"You're back." Peter replied.

"I'm back!" The man added. "How did you know where to find me?" He turned to Peter.

"I had a little help from a certain giant ant friend." Peter shrugged.

"I'm going to ignore the fact that that means you broke into my house in favor of the fact that my best buddy's still alive." Scott beamed.

"Do you know how long you've been gone?" The teen opted to just get straight to the point.

"Give or take...six years?" Scott counted on his fingers.

"Thank god I didn't have to drop that bomb." Peter muttered.

"Yeah, time works just about the same in the quantum realm just...smaller. A lot smaller." Aside from all the time spent alone, forgotten and lost in the aforementioned quantum realm, Scott was back to cracking jokes just like Peter remembered him. The teen felt doubt scratching at the back of
his mind and he searched the Antman's eyes for any sign of trauma, but he found none.

"How're you feeling, Scott?" Peter asked.

"A little shaky, not used to things being this big, but you said that the Avenger's needed help so I'm gonna help." Scott said. "Where's Hank and the crew?"

"That's kind of what we need your help with..." Peter said.

---------------------------------------------

Peter gave Scott the rundown on the quinjet back to Wakanda after a quick stop by his house where he'd been affectionately greeted by the giant ant Peter’d met earlier (who Scott managed to somehow convince the boy to take back with them to Wakanda, having been shrunken down and placed comfortably in the breast pocket of a shirt Lang'd changed into) and a bag was packed for the trip. He took it surprisingly well, but the teen still felt sad when he watched the man avoid eye contact with him after telling him that Hope and her parents were in the soul stone, and that they hadn't found them before leaving.

"Do we have time to find them before we need to fight Thanos? You said we needed all the help we can get, right?" Scott had asked, his voice verged on panicked, frantic.

"I-" Peter stuttered, berated by Scott's insistence. "I don't know. I don't think we will, Thor says Thanos is coming soon, as in really soon and it took us months to get out of the quantum realm, no one even knows where they'd be."

Scott didn't say anything after that, in fact he was silent for the next hour as they finished up the trip back to regroup.

When they'd landed back on base, Scott was ushered off by palace officials, being shown his room and offered the amenities of the lavish new living space he'd be in while they trained for the upcoming attack.

Peter watched him go. He felt guilt pit in his stomach and he was gnawing on his bottom lip, staring at the spot Scott had been last before disappearing around the corner with the Dora Milaje that led him away when he felt a hand, heavy on his shoulder.

The teen turned around to find Bucky, his sharp face soft with fondness for the boy. "He's gonna be alright, kid."

"How did you know that's what I was thinking about?" Peter sputtered in response, still half trying to overcome the shock of being surprised by the man.

"Well, generally people don't watch others leave with a look like yours unless they're worried." Bucky chuckled and he wrapped his arm around the teen's shoulders and pulled him close against his side. "Everything's gonna turn out fine."

"He misses Hope." Peter blurted, pinching the bridge of his nose. "And Hank, I think he feels like it's his fault because he wasn't there to help them but he doesn't know that nobody could have helped the snap, it was all encompassing and-" He shook his head. "I don't know."

"We all felt bad, you and I felt bad and we were the ones who turned to dust. You can't help grief, only work through it, and they're gonna get their loved ones back. He'll have a second chance, and he knows that, we just have to make sure he gets far enough to see them." Bucky's flesh hand had fallen and was now rubbing calming circles between the boy's shoulder blades.
Peter rested his head against Bucky's shoulder and the White Wolf leaned his own head on top, giving the boy a tight squeeze as they both looked down the empty hallway in comfortable silence.

Chapter End Notes

I'm a horrible updater, this I know, but I've been sitting on a couple chapters trying to finish them all up and the end of the school year's been rushing at me like a train. Hopefully once finals week passes I'll be able to update more frequently since I'll have less going on but that's what I always say, isn't it?

Anyways, thank you all so much for reading and as always I'll see you in the next chapter, whenever that is.

-xoxo Denise
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The humming of the Milano filled the silence of the Guardians, coasting through space in search of alliance planets.

"How far out are we?" Rocket asked, breaking the sleepy quiet of the ship.

"Just a few clicks." Quill responded through a yawn.

"Are you positive we should be showing up on a planet that is nearly guaranteed to be hostile while all of us can barely stay awake?" Loki said apprehensively, fiddling with his hands from where he was securely strapped into his seat even though they'd been at cruising speed for hours now.

"Loki's right, I think maybe we all need a chance to catch some shut eye before we land." Banner added.

"I could sleep." Quill nodded, looking to Gamora and then to the rest of the crew. "Could you guys sleep?"

The response was a chorus of dreary 'yes'es and Quill veered slightly off course towards a smaller celestial body in orbit of the planet. He set the ship down on the moon and flicked some switches until the hum of the engine cut out.

"Everyone settle in, we've got about four hours we could spare." Quill said and with that he was disappearing off into the bowels of the Milano with Gamora following sleepily behind. The others made their way to their cots and stretched out for some much needed rest.

Sure enough, four hours later Quill was up knocking on cots telling everyone to get ready to land on Sakaar. With tired groans and mumbled curses the team crawled out of bed and tried their hardest to unwind their bodies. Sleep started to drift away from their brains as they strapped gear back onto their bodies and crammed last minute snacks into their mouths before resettling in their seats for Quill to lead them into the atmosphere.

Thor patted Loki's shoulder as he nervously strapped himself into his chair, making sure his belts
were as secure as he could get them.

"This is the worst part." Loki mumbled nervously as shaking hands tightened the straps around his hips.

"You get used to it brother. I assure you Quill is one of the best pilots I've seen, you're perfectly safe in his hands."

"I hope you're right, Thor." The younger shook his head.

With that the god of thunder settled into his seat and Quill started the ship up. The engine purred before roaring as he pulled back on the yoke and the Milano lurched up before taking off back towards Sakaar.

"Hang on guys we're breaking atmosphere in 5...4...3...2..." and the feeling of the ship rattling as it struggled through orbit and into the atmosphere before free falling as the planet's gravity took over made Loki's stomach churn.

Thor caught his brother's nervous eyes and smiled warmly before mouthing, "it's okay." and Loki shakily nodded, his eyes trained on his brother's face as he took in a shuddering breath and let his hands tightly grip the arm rest of his seat.

In a span of seconds that felt like hours, Quill was pulling the ship up and leveling out as he searched for a safe place to land that was close enough to the central tower. Soon enough he found a clear spot in a grass patch behind a throng of buildings. The first thing Banner, Thor, and Loki noticed was how much cleaner the planet was. There were no large plants, but small shrubs and an abundance of grasses were sprouting up around all the empty spaces there were, empty spaces that should be filled with garbage.

"You guys said this was supposed to be a trash planet, I don't see very much trash here." Rocket spoke as he unstrapped himself and hopped down from his seat.

"It's supposed to be..." Loki said. "Quill, you're sure we're in Sakaar?"

"Brother look, the buildings, they're all the same. This is it." Thor pointed to the surrounding architecture.

Loki knew his way around Sakaar better than any of them, having had to slink around for weeks trying to climb and charm his way up the social structure and gain favor of the grandmaster. He stepped off of the ship once Quill had lowered the hatch and gaped at the planet around him. It no longer reeked of rusting metal and rot, it instead smelled...fresh. Something about it threw him off.

"What happened?" Loki's voice was soft, and he said it more to himself than anyone.

"I don't know, but I guess we have to find out." Banner replied, his eyes still trained on the shining building above them as he walked toward the only place they knew they'd get answers, the Grandmaster's tower.

The ground lacked it's usual chaos, common areas full of laughing citizens and children playing happily in small gardens or chasing pets across fresh grass. The whole thing was...strikingly beautiful. Without garbage crowding every place you could lay your eyes on, you could see the gentle rolling hills of Sakaar's landscape. Loki could only imagine how beautiful the sunset must be here.

"Come on, brother." The younger was snapped out of his reverie by Thor's gentle hand on his
shoulder, nudging him towards where the others had already trekked off to.

It took a little over half an hour to finally reach the Grandmaster's tower and Loki felt anxiety begin to bubble in his stomach. The last time he'd been here he'd left as a traitor. He'd aided Thor and Korg in stealing the Grandmaster's ships and been chased by his right hand, causing significant damage in the process. If anyone here remembered what he'd done, which he was sure they had, he'd be incarcerated the second he set foot in the tower.

"Loki!" An excited voice called distantly. "Guys, look, Loki's back!"

The anxious moths turned to a boiling plasma pit in his gut as klaxon alarms sounded in his head. The trickster's fight or flight responses triggered and his feet moved to carry him far far away from the people yelling his name.

When he turned expecting guards ready to take him away, however, he was greeted by the smiling faces of Sakaar's elites. The people he'd spent time charming and partying with, and they beamed at him, welcoming him as though he'd done nothing wrong.

"How are you, Loki?" Aaliyah, a sweet woman he'd talked to back when he'd spent time sipping cocktails and telling stories asked him. "It's been so long."

"I'm well, love, thank you for asking." The god smiled warmly. "And you?"

"I'm splendid. Ever since the Grandmaster was overthrown things have been so much better here." She chuckled. "An awful man he was, truly."

"Overthrown?" Loki's brows knitted together. "I haven't heard anything of him being overthrown."

"Oh! Of course you haven't, you haven't been here, silly me." Aaliyah chastised herself, shaking her head. "Just after you and your brother stole his ships the city rioted. He tried to take an escape pod but he crashed. Those scrappers out there tried to eat him. Funny situation, really."

"Oh my." Loki laughed as though the news didn't immediately remove a mountain of weight from his shoulders.

"We're since under new leadership. A Kronan named Korg. He used to be a gladiator in the Contest of Champions. He talked about Thor before, it seems he knows you guys. You're heroes here."

"Can we talk to Korg?" Thor spoke before Loki could, his voice urgent but only detectable to him, who heard the anxiety being pushed behind a polite exterior.

"I'm sure he'd be up to see you guys. He's upstairs, Kreaton'll lead you." A blue skinned alien man appeared behind her and nodded towards the group, leading them towards the elevator.

Once inside, Kreaton pressed a button scribed with a numeral in a language Loki didn't recognize but he committed its placement on the panel to memory. When the doors slid open Loki recognized Korg's back, turned to them as he said something to one of his associates. He turned at the sound of the elevator doors opening.

"Thor! Loki! You're back!" The kronan was excited, striding forward with open arms. He pulled Thor into a tight hug, the god grunting with poorly masked pain and he pulled away with the imprints of rock on his face.

Loki politely declined a hug in favor of a handshake.
"What brings you two back to Sakaar?" Korg asked and Thor was quick to reply.

"Things with the snap...they're complicated, and we assumed they were permanent until now, considering everyone has been gone going on six years now but there have been people who escaped the soul realm, we've seen it, and we need to save the rest of them."

Korg seemed hesitant and Loki thought he knew why.

"What happened here?" The trickster asked. "This place used to literally be a dump, what changed?"

"When half the universe wiped out," Korg started, "There wasn't much need for this planet to be used as a cosmic dumpster. There weren't that many people."

Banner's face dropped from where Loki could see it over Thor's shoulder.

"Please, Korg, people need their families back." Bruce reasoned.

"There has to be some way to get them back and keep this place clean." Thor added.

"You can talk to Tony and he'll help you work something out, we just need your help." Loki offered. He knew the aforementioned wouldn't be happy but he had to do whatever it takes.

"Tony? As in Tony Stark?" Korg asked, his excitement unbridled.

"Yes, Tony Stark. The one and only genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist. He'll even throw in a selfie." At this point Loki was getting back at the man for his years of incessant snark directed at the younger Odinson, whether well deserved or not.

"Done." Korg barely left space between his response and the end of Loki's offer. The trickster was just waiting for the beating Tony would combat him with once they made it back to earth but that was a bridge he'd cross when he got to it.

"So, when do we start?"

Chapter End Notes

Surprise surprise, it took me two months to update. I'm sorry I'm horrible at this oml. I really hope this chapter was worth it. Also sorry for any errors I wanted to get this up as soon as I finished it so I didn't proofread.

Anyways, thank you all for reading and as always I'll see you in the next chapter (whenever that is)

-xoxo Denise

End Notes
And there goes the first chapter! I'm super excited to finally be publishing this. I'm still trying to figure out how long I want the chapters to be and how I want to leave the ends of them, but I promise I'm working on it.

Thank you for reading, and I really hope you liked it!

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