Summary

In which the author indulges herself in some shameless Irondad/Spiderson with fluff, angst and everything in between because she needs more of that in her life.

OR

Just another one of those, oh so overdone, fanfics where Tony and Peter's relationship grows into more of a father/son relationship after an accident involving Aunt May (who lives)

Notes

It's purely and solely self-indulgent. I may also be writing it as something of a coping mechanism as I deal with my own crap. Clearly, I need therapy. xD
Chapter 1

Peter had been out as Spider-man when it happened. When he saw it happen. He was perched on top of a building near their apartment eating a hotdog when he saw her car. She must have gotten off early because it was only four in the afternoon and she wasn't supposed to get home until five. In his excitement, he had popped the last of the hotdog in his mouth before preparing himself to swing towards home. Yet, just as he shot out a web towards the next building, the hairs on his neck and arms stood on end. It was a split second later when he heard a deafening screech followed by the sound of heavy metal on metal. Turning towards the commotion he immediately felt sick to his stomach. That was Aunt May's car. May's car had been hit by another driver.

"Karen! Call 911. Tell them to get here now. It's, It's important. They have to get here now!!", the vigilante shouted to his AI as he went swinging towards the wreckage. He had to get to her, to see her, to help her, but he knew he had to be careful. No one could make that connection. If they did, they would know who he was. He was frantic trying to figure out how he was supposed to do that but Spider-man wasn't allowed to be frantic. He can only help. He had to get it together. Closing the distance he kept reminding himself that no one could know that he knows her name... "and favorite color...and what kind of music she likes... and how she loves to mix Reeses Pieces in with her popcorn at the movies...", he thought to himself as he was swinging through the air.

Once his feet were on the ground he immediately ran to her, yanking the driver's side door right off of the car. She's alive. He let out a small breath but he knew this wasn't enough to abate his nerves. Anything could still happen. Where the Hell was that ambulance? People were starting to gather around. It had to be a curious sight to see Spider-man simply holding the hand of a woman who was unconscious from a car wreck but that was how he stayed until EMS arrived and moved him out of the way so they could work. Once he heard the words "She's stable enough to move" he swung himself home to change into his clothes before going full speed towards the hospital he knew she was being taken to, hoping no one would question his pace as he ran through the streets.

He got to the hospital just in time to see his aunt for a brief moment before she was taken back for surgery to correct the breaks in her left leg and hip. Tears were streaming down his face as he kissed her cheek and told her that he loved her.

It was nearing midnight when the doctor came to him. He had questioned Peter's age and the fact that he was there alone, wanting to speak to an adult. It took some time for Peter angrily explain to the man that they were all each other had before he would pass on any information. He finally let him know that surgery had been successful but that they wanted to keep her under for while longer. Her body was under a lot of stress, she would be in pain for a while. They wanted to ease her out of the sedation and onto pain medication slowly.

The conversation with the doctor must have been what started it. As he was sitting in his aunt's room watching her every breath, listening to her every heartbeat, he was interrupted by a nurse handing
him a sandwich and a bottle of water. He informed the woman that he wasn't hungry but she insisted on leaving it with him and made a point of telling him that he needed to get some rest too. That wasn't so bad. It was the next person who entered the room who set his anxiety into overdrive.

A woman had entered the room and introduced herself as Ms. Olivett, a hospital social worker. It had been brought to her attention that he was an unattended minor and that she had come to make sure that he had someone to come and get him.

"I'm fine here", he told her trying to be polite but it came out stiff and slightly defensive.

"No, dear, you don't understand. You can't be here unattended. You need an adult with you. Besides, you have been here for hours on end, you need to go home and rest. You aren't doing your aunt any favors by sitting here like this. She would want you taken care of. Do you have someone to call?"

"She's, she's the only family I have", he all but whispered.

The woman offered him a kind smile. "What about a family friend, dear? I'm afraid that if there is no one, then I will have to call child services. I can't allow you to remain without care and supervision. They can offer that until your aunt is in a position to set something up or care for you herself."

_Foster care?_ They could do that? They could send him to a foster home with a living guardian right there? These were just a few of the questions currently swirling through Peter's tired and anxiety-riddled brain. Who _could_ he call? Ned was in Peru with his family. Michelle was already at some camp in Iowa where she was going to be a Junior counselor all summer, besides, he didn't even know her parents. That only left one other person. _Mr. Stark._

The thought made his chest go tight. He wasn't sure the man would even answer. He had never actually called him. May had called him a few times to arrange 'Spider-man training' and a couple of times to update the man on any new rules she wanted to see put in place... or just to yell at him in general... Karen had called him exactly twice on his behalf. Once to inform the man that he was two hours past curfew and once to report that he had been stabbed and required medical attention. He had never called the man _himself_.

His finger hovered over the call button for no less than two minutes while the social worker watched him, keeping her face neutral. Finally, Peter just handed the phone over to her. "You, you can call him. He might be able to come. I, I don't know."
The woman looked at the contact name, 'Mr. Stark', with mild amusement before brushing it off. After all, just because the person's name was 'Stark' didn't make him Tony Stark. She hit the call button and waited as it rang one, two, three times before the person who sounded an awful lot like the Tony Stark answered.

Tony was actually in bed when the phone rang and FRIDAY was insisting that he should answer it. He picked up the phone with annoyance and glanced at the name. Peter Parker. Why in the Hell was the kid calling him at one-o-fucking-clock in the morning? He almost didn't answer but then all of a sudden he got an image in his head of Spider-man bleeding out in some alleyway. The fact that the AI and not Peter himself would be calling him if that where the case, didn't even cross his mind. He just rolled over and growled under his breath as he answered the phone.

"Kid, it's one am and I was actually asleep for once. It's past your curfew and I swear to God, you better not be in some --"

The shocked social worker cut him off mid-rant. "-- Is this Mr. Stark?"

"Sure is now who the Hell are you and why do you have the kid's phone?"

The social worker was somewhat at a loss for words at this point. "Well, um, I'm Sandy Olivett from Queens Memorial Hospital and I have Peter Parker here wi--"

Tony's heart jumped up into his throat. The kid was in the hospital and May was going to kill him. "--What's wrong with him?", the man nearly shouted.

"N-nothing...sir. He's just, well, his aunt is here, receiving care leaving Peter as an unattended minor. He needs an adult here with him, preferably one who can take him home and care for him until his aunt can make some sort of arrangements. Peter asked me to call you but--"

"--Why would he have you call me?", the man asked completely dumbfounded. He had, had the kid come to the compound a handful of times to train and work in the lab with him, he had also sat with his aunt a few times to discuss guidelines but he wouldn't expect that to put him into any kind of 'caregiver' status. Sure, he liked the kid, a lot actually but 'caregiver' was not a word you ever associated with the name Stark. He was certain of that.

The woman had no idea where to go from here. Sighing she tried again, "Sir if you aren't available to
do this then I can have him try to call someone else or call child Services for assistance. Would you like to talk to him first?"

Tony relented. If the kid was calling him he must be out of options already and child services sounded like a shit idea. "No, no, it's fine. I'll be there in thirty."

At this point, Peter was ushered back into the waiting room against his will, tossing the sandwich in the trash as he walked past it. The woman sat a few seats down from him typing on her computer and ignoring the periodic glares that Peter sent in her direction.

When Tony arrived he first laid eyes on the kid who looked surprised to see him despite the fact that he was sure Peter knew he was coming. Then he turned his attention to the woman who was now approaching him. "Do I need to do anything or do I just take him home and tuck him in or whatever it is you do with kids at...", he glanced at his watch, "one-forty-five AM"

The woman smiled, "I just need you to sign a few papers saying that you are taking temporary custody until which time his aunt is in a position to make a formal decision about his care."

As he quickly filled in his information and scrolled his signature onto the two sheets of paper set before him, the woman went on to explain May's condition which made him cringe a little. It didn't sound great. In fact, it sounded like this was going to become a little more than a simple sleepover. He hoped he was up for this. Thank God Rhodey was in town. If anyone could talk him through this is was Rhodey. Then the woman interrupted him from his thoughts to inform him that Peter hadn't slept and had refused to eat anything since he had been there. This also made the man cringe because Peter needed to be eating more with his crazy metabolism, not skipping meals.

"Alright kid, let's get going. It's a two-hour drive back to the compound as it is."

Peter quirked an eyebrow at this. "How did you get here in forty minutes?" Tony smirked before offering a quick "Classified", and that was the only answer he got before the man threw an arm over his shoulders and purposefully guided him towards the bright orange Audi sitting right outside, stopping only for a second at the vending machine to grab the kid a juice and a granola bar, figuring that something was better than nothing.

Once in the car, Peter immediately turned himself towards the window, ignoring the juice and snack and the man who had offered it.
"Kid, you need to eat that. At least drink the juice."

Peter thought he caught a hint of concern in the man's voice but he didn't care. "I don't want it.", he answered flatly. It had been a stressful day. He was hurt, confused, worried... he was just a big ball of anxiety and wanted nothing more than to be left alone in his thoughts.

Of course Tony couldn't just let it go. "Kid. Just drink the damn juice." This time there was irritation lacing his voice. He was tired and out of his element.

Peter glared at the man before snapping at him. "I said I don't want it. Just leave me alone!"

Tony glared back but didn't say anything. The car fell into silence.

Peter continued to look out the window. Watching the lights and trees pass by was causing him to realize just how tired he really was. How hungry and thirsty he really was but he wasn't about to tell his mentor that. He had already made it very clear that he wasn't going to take the offered items and he wasn't about to go back on that now. Then, he realized all at once that he had been neglecting himself in general for a large portion of the day. Despite the fact that the last thing he wanted to do was ask the man any more favors, he had already woken him up and made him feel like he had to come and get him, but this was something he couldn't just ignore, not for over an hour anyway. So, he broke the silence. "I need to go to the bathroom", he grumbled quietly towards the window.

Tony not quite hearing what the kid had said sighed before glancing in his direction. "Come again?", he asked in obvious annoyance.

Peter let out a quiet growl before repeating himself, more loudly and irritated this time. "God, he was in a bad mood. "I said, I need to go to the bathroom."

Tony wanted to chide the kid but quickly relented. They had just left not even half an hour ago for what the kid knew was going to be a long ride. "For the love of Christ Pete! Are you serious right now?", he yelled loudly. "We just fucking left--you know what, never mind. Fine.", the man scowled. "Gimme a minute, I'll stop at the next gas station." It's not like he had given the child the opportunity. He had basically dragged him out of the building and to the car, no questions asked. He really just wanted to get back to the compound. Not that he was going to be going back to sleep or anything. He was just aggravated in general and being in the car with a cranky teenager had not been on his to-do list for the night, morning, whatever.
After the quick pit stop, the arguing fell to a minimum and Peter found his eyes starting to drift closed, his head resting against the window. He managed to sleep the rest of the way to the compound, Mr. Stark shaking him awake once they got there. "Up and at 'em Kiddo. We're here.", Tony said with no actual enthusiasm, getting out and walking around the car to open Peter's door for him before leading him inside.

Peter was still half asleep as they entered the building. Having been there on a few occasions he wasn't at all surprised when they were greeted by FRIDAY. What did surprise him was that he was lead into the common room kitchen instead of to a bedroom. "Mr., Mr Stark... What? I just want to go to sleep.", he almost whined.

"Yeah, well, I want you to not pass out from low blood sugar in your sleep so, eat something. At least drink some juice or something and then I'll take you to your room."

Tony sounded serious and Peter was hungry so he just grabbed an apple off of the counter, rolling his eyes in the process. Then he ate it as fast as he could before tossing the core in the nearby trashcan. "There. Happy? Can I just go to bed now?", he asked still glaring in the man's direction. He really wasn't sure what had come over him. He would usually never speak to any adult in such a tone, let alone his mentor but he couldn't seem to find it in himself to care too much at the moment.

Peter watched Tony with slight trepidation as he waited for a reaction but the man didn't say anything, he just took him by the arm and led him down the hall. They paused in front of a door for a moment before Tony was turning on his heels and heading to the elevator instead.

Tony had originally thought he would just put the kid in the room that he had originally set up for him when he'd invited him to become an Avenger. However, as the social worker and Peter's current attitude had so helpfully pointed out, this kid was an actual kid. One who needed someone to actually look after him and make sure he did things like eat and sleep. Not that Tony was much of a role model there but he could damn well try. Sort of a 'do as I say not as I do' kind of thing. No, having him a guest room in the penthouse would be a much better idea so that is where he headed.

Before he knew it Peter found himself inside of Tony's private living space. It was less extravagant that he would have imagined it to be. There was a moderately sized living room that opened up into a Kitchen, only separated by a breakfast bar. There were large floor to ceiling windows lining one entire wall and a wide hallway with multiple closed doors. All of it was adorned with hardwood flooring accented by a few expensive looking rugs. It seemed so intimate and personal to be inside his mentor's home. It felt strange, like he wasn't meant to be there.

A few long strides down the hallway and Peter found himself deposited into a very generic, albeit, lavish-looking guest room. "You can stay here, Kid. I'll go get you something to sleep in, there's a bathroom over there if you need it. It's fully stocked with towels and whatnot if you want a shower
or anything." , The man told him pointing to a door in the corner before walking out of the room. He returned moments later with a pair of draw-string sweat pants and a worn-out t-shirt for a band that Peter had never heard of. "If you need anything else just ask FRIDAY." , he said before walking out again, this time closing the door behind him.

Peter stood in the middle of the room for several seconds just holding the clothing he had been handed, trying to process what exactly was going on. One minute his mentor seemed to be concerned about him like, maybe he cared. The next the man was snapping at him and sighing in annoyance. As Peter thought about the night's events he realized that he had not exactly been polite. He was snapping just as much if not more than Tony. Peter sighed to himself and made a mental note to apologize when he saw the man next before walking into the bathroom, more out of habit than necessity, to change clothes.

Ready for bed, Peter crawled up into the queen-sized bed. It was the most comfortable bed he had ever laid upon. Despite that, he fell into an uneasy sleep.
Chapter 2

After dropping Peter off in the guest room, Tony went down to the lab. He needed to think and that was the best place to do that. Though he had just pulled up the blueprints for his latest project when FRIDAY announced that Rhodey was on his way in.

"What's up platypus? Kinda late for you isn't it?", Tony asked not even bothering to look up from his work when he heard the doors slide open.

"Late? You mean early right? It's five AM, man. You did go to bed at some point right?"

"Sure. I slept for about forty-five minutes before a certain Spider-boy called me up and asked me to come to get him."

"Well, shit. He's alright?"

"Yeah, yeah, he's fine. It's his Aunt. Was in a car accident. Apparently, they needed someone to take some kind of temporary guardianship of the kid until she's well enough to take care of him herself. Somehow that ended up being me." Tony continued to focus only on his project, not wanting to see the judgment in his friend's eyes.

A broad smile crossed Rhodey's face. "Aww...really, that's cute. You're gonna play house for a few days. You ready for that?"

"Nope.", Tony answered humorlessly.

"Eh, you'll do fine. You like the kid right? I mean you talk about him all the damn time and he must like you enough if he called you."

Tony never answered, instead he let himself get lost in his thoughts. What his friend had said sounded logical enough. Peter had called him. Of course, it may have been a choice between him or strangers. Plus, the kid had been pretty snappy with him, he'd never seen that before. Usually, Peter was the definition of polite. Almost too polite.
"Where's he at now?", Rhodes asked but Tony wasn't listening. He was so far into his own head at this point that he didn't even remember that his friend was there. "Earth to Tony.", the man said snapping his fingers in front of Tony's face. "Where is the kid now? What's he doing?"

Tony sighed running his hands through his hair, "He's in my guest room. Sleeping I presume. On the way here, if he wasn't asleep he was acting like a complete asshole then snapped at me again when made him eat something. After that, I just showed him to a bed."

Rhodes looked at Tony with a questioning look. "Acting like an asshole. Really? You sure he wasn't just acting like a teenage boy riding a fucked up emotional roller coaster? I mean come on Tony. You've told me enough about this kid that I know he lost both of his parents before he even hit the double digits and then the uncle who raised him, what, a year or two ago? This can't be easy. He's a kid who's already lost that much and now his last living relative is in a hospital bed and God knows, if that kid is anything like you, he must have a hundred negative thoughts rolling through his head right now. You..." the man said pointing a finger directly at Tony's chest, "...are going to need to step up your game."

Tony's hands went back to his hair, "Okay, Fine, so maybe asshole wasn't the best word to use. I'm just not cut out for this shit. You know that. I have no idea what I'm supposed to be doing here.", Tony nearly shouted.

"I get it, man, your scared--"

"--I am not scared.", Tony scoffed.

"Okay, unsure then, but you're gonna have to get over it if you plan on being any kind of help to this kid. Get over your whole 'I'm not cut out for this' crap and maybe take care of yourself for once. Jesus, Tony, go to bed. I'll look out for the kid while you sleep."

"Not tired. Too much to do.", Tony reasoned but Rhodey wasn't going to hear it.

"Go. To. Bed. Tony. Just a couple hours. I'll make sure the kid eats or whatever if he gets up before you."

Tony sighed, as he had FRIDAY save his progress, not that he had made much. "Fine. I guess a few hours wouldn't hurt.", and with that, they both made their way towards the penthouse.
After a fairly uneasy and interrupted sleep, Peter opted to just pull himself out of bed as soon as the clock hit eight-thirty. He knew he hadn't gotten near enough sleep but he was restless and kept waking up, each time having to reorient himself to where he was and why. The 'why' being the hardest part.

The thing was, once he was out of bed he had no idea what to do. He didn't know if Tony was going to come and get him, or if he was just allowed to go out into the man's living room. His stomach was empty and growling to the point that he almost felt nauseous but he didn't know if he was supposed to go get his own breakfast or wait until it was offered to him. So, he cautiously cracked open the door to peer down the hallway. He could just make out the back of a head on the couch and he was sure it wasn't Tony's. Not wanting things to get any more awkward he quietly closed the door back and sat on the edge of the bed.

After a few moments, it occurred to Peter that he could just talk to FRIDAY. "Hey FRIDAY? Where, where's Mr. Stark?"

"The Boss is currently asleep in his bedroom. Would you like for me to get him for you?"

"No! Don't wake him up. I just... wait, can you tell me who that is in the living room?"

"Colonel Rhodes is currently in the suite. I believe he is watching the news. Would you like for me to get him for you?"

"No. You don't need to get anyone for me! Do you, maybe, know what I'm supposed to be doing though?", he asked before sheepishly adding, "I mean, can I eat or do I need to wait for Mr. Stark?"

"Boss has given you full access to the Avenger's Compound including his personal living spaces."

Peter raised his eyebrows at that. He had full access? When had that happened? "Oh, okay, um, thanks."

With that information, Peter hesitantly exited the room and started down the hall. Rhodes must have heard his footsteps because he turned around on the couch and greeted him with a warm smile offering to make him some breakfast. Peter was grateful that the man had offered him some food.
because he wasn't sure if he was comfortable with rummaging through Tony's cabinets and refrigerator even if he was practically starving.

He had just finished up the waffles Rhodey had toasted for him when dressed and freshly showered Tony rounded the corner meeting eyes with Peter. There was no greeting. He just got straight to the point. "What did you eat?"

Peter wasn't sure where this line of questioning was going, making him a little nervous. "Oh, um, Mr. Rhodes made me some waffles."

"How many?", the man asked.

"Oh, um... two? And uh, some orange juice." The man hadn't taken his eyes off of Peter and he was starting to think they might be burning a hole into him.

"Hmm. How about you have two more and I'll make you some eggs."

Peter just looked at the man for a moment. He guessed maybe he hadn't imagined it last night. The man was concerned. This is what concerned Tony Stark looked like. That was interesting.

Not wanting to argue, even if he did find it weird that Iron Man wanted to cook eggs for him, Peter just nodded and offered a quick 'thank you' before getting up to go to the freezer himself to grab the waffles. As he did so he heard the man laughing quietly behind him. "W-what?", he asked not sure if he had missed something or not.

"Nothing", Tony answered, still smiling. "It's just that I never realized how skinny you are. My clothes are huge on you." For the second time in less than twenty-four hours, he was reminded that the kid really was just a kid. He looked so small with the neck of the oversized t-shirt falling slightly towards his shoulder and the hem of the sweat pants getting caught under his feet as he walked.

Peter, looked at the man wide-eyed. He wasn't sure how he was supposed to respond to that but luckily Rhodey cut in and saved him from having to do so.

"Tony, leave the kid alone and let him eat his waffles. I thought you were making eggs or something.", Rhodey said without looking up from his paper.
Peter gave a small smile to both men and continued on his quest to obtain more waffles then the three of them sat together at the breakfast bar, Peter listening eagerly to every story Rhodey had to offer. He decided he definitely liked the man.

After breakfast, Tony looked at his watch. It was nearly ten. He knew the kid would want to get back to the hospital as soon as possible and he figured they would also probably need to stop by the kid's apartment to grab him some clothes that fit. Lunch would have to happen somewhere in there too. He figured he should probably get Happy to drive them. After shooting a quick text he turned to address Peter.

"Alright, Kid, I'm sure you want to go see how your Aunt is doing but I think we should head to your apartment first and get you some clothes that actually fit you. Happy's gonna be waiting for us in the garage in twenty."

Peter looked up at the man. "You're coming with me?"

"Um, yeah, you're a minor who can't be unattended remember? That's why you called me. Yeah?"

Peter was slightly blushing now. Especially when he remembered how he had treated the man on the ride home. Tony had willingly taken up a temporary role as his guardian and he had been rude. "Oh --"

"--Yeah, Oh", the man cut him off before he could get to the apology he wanted to offer. "Now go make sure you're ready. Shoes, phone, bathroom...all that."

Peter blushed a little further before heading back to the guest room to get his shoes and phone. Once he had returned the man looked him over and then headed towards the elevator gesturing for Peter to follow.

The ride into Queens was quiet. Tony mostly worked on his StarkPad while Peter busied himself on his phone. When they arrived at his apartment, Tony had Happy walk up with him, instructing him to grab at least a few days worth of things.

He quickly made his way up to his room and grabbed a duffle bag from the closet before grabbing whatever clean clothes he could find and stuffing them in and going to find his backpack. Sure it was summer break, but that didn't mean he couldn't be studying something. He crammed it with a
few textbooks he had laying around, his only slightly broken laptop, a few science journals he hadn't gotten around to reading yet and with only slight hesitation... his Spider-Man suit. Once he was sure he had what he needed for a few days, he ran into the bathroom and changed into some of his own clothes, tossing Tony's into the duffle bag. He hoped the man, wouldn't mind when he kept the shirt. It was soft and comfortable and he fully planned on wearing it to bed again that night.

Peter hadn't been surprised that Happy didn't really have anything to say as he packed. The man just patiently waited for him until he was ready to go then gave him a quick reminder to 'be sure to lock up' before they headed back out to the car.

Walking into the hospital with Tony Stark was an experience. People couldn't take their eyes off of them. Happy had to keep telling people to back off and put down their phones. A hospital was no place for stalking, he had told them. Peter was grateful and also slightly worried that his picture was going to end up trending somewhere. Tony must have noticed that he had gotten tense because he leaned over and told him that he would have it covered and not to worry about it.

Having found his way back to the hospital room with his aunt, Peter found a lot of the same feelings he had the night before were returning with a vengeance. She was still sedated and looking at her still form terrified him. The only comfort he had was the steady beeping of the monitors going off in time with the heartbeat he could hear if he listened closely. The fear was quickly turning into anger again, or guilt. He wasn't sure which. Maybe it was both.

As the tears started to burn his eyes, he wrapped his arms around his middle before asking Tony to leave him alone. He hadn't meant for it to come out as strained as it did but the man left without a word all the same. He had wanted to go speak to one of the doctors anyway.

Peter sat by May's side for at least half an hour before Tony quietly returned, pulling up a chair beside him. Peter wanted to yell at him to get out but the man started talking before he could get the words out. "Hey, Pete... I just talked to the doctor. He said that they are going to try and wake May up tomorrow afternoon. They, uh, don't think it's a good idea for you to be here whe--"

Peter cut him off shouting, "What!? They're going to wake her up and they don't think I should be here!? I have to be here. She would be here if it was me..."

Tony sighed. He knew the boy wasn't going to take that well but he knew the doctor had a point. If May woke up disoriented or in pain it would more than likely freak Peter out and he didn't want that any more than the doctor did. "I know Buddy, I know. The thing is they don't know how she going to feel when she wakes up. It might take some time for them to get her pain under control and explain what's going on. The plan is for you to come to see her as soon as she's comfortable. Hopefully tomorrow evening."
Peter didn't say anything else. He was afraid that if he opened his mouth he would either shout or cry and he didn't particularly want to do either of those things with his mentor in the room. He just stared straight ahead. Tony must have sensed his stress because he reached over and placed a tentative hand on his knee. Peter's first instinct was to jerk away and when he did the man sighed for the second time since re-entering the room and placed his hands back in his own lap instead. Peter immediately regretted his actions because the tears were creeping back into his eyes now and he really wanted someone, anyone to comfort him yet he had just basically pushed away his only current option. Taking a deep and slightly shaky breath he managed to get a grip on himself before apologizing.

"I, I'm sorry." He nearly whispered the words, managing to keep his tears under control. Crying in front of Tony was something he really wanted to avoid. The man already thought of him as a kid. He was sure that crying would only solidify that notion.

Tony turned in his direction. The kid looked like a wreck and he had no idea what he was supposed to do. Especially when the kid had just pulled away from him. "You don't have to apologize Kid. You didn't do anything wrong."

Peter felt the tears start to well up again. "But I did. Last night you came to get me and I was horrible and then I just--"

Tony gave Peter a half smile. "--Kid, I don't think either one of us was in the greatest of moods last night. How 'bout we call it even and go get some lunch."

Peter gave a small laugh. "Yeah, lunch sounds good. Thank you... I mean, for everything,"

"Don't mention it, Kiddo." The man said before leading them out the door.
Chapter 3

Lunch had been a relatively quiet affair. Tony had picked a little diner he had eaten at before and since it was after two before they got there, the place wasn't crowded. Hardly anyone even noticed them. It was a nice change of pace after all of the attention walking through the hospital. They were able to eat in peace. Neither of them had much to say but it wasn't an entirely uncomfortable silence. After all, they had spent time together before, just not this intimately.

At this point, they had been together under the same roof for over twelve hours. Usually, Happy picked Peter up from school then they just worked together for three or four hours before Happy drove him home again. More so, they had rarely spent any time together outside the compound, save for the handful of trips Tony had made to the kid's apartment. This was effectively a new experience for both of them.

Having a precise understanding of the Spiderling's metabolism, Tony took care to make sure that Peter had enough to eat. Ordering him the largest meal on the menu subsequently slipping a few bites of his own lunch over to the kid's plate, offering that he didn't need that many fries. Peter was grateful. It was rare that he got to eat his fill. While he never went hungry per se, he would generally only eat just enough to satisfy his hunger. He didn't want to add any more strain to the grocery bill. He knew Tony, on the other hand, had more than enough money to feed him four times over for the rest of his life, taking away the guilt that would normally come with a completely full stomach.

Satiated from lunch and soothed but the lull of the road, Peter ended up quickly falling asleep in the car on the way back to the compound. He had always been one to sleep on long car rides anyway. He wasn't actually sure how he had managed to stay awake on the ride out. He was exhausted.

The second Happy saw that the teenager was sound asleep against the window, he looked into the rearview mirror, looking at Tony with a combination of concern and amusement. "So, what exactly is up with you and the kid. I know his aunt's in the hospital but, why do you have him."

Honestly Tony wasn't sure. He hadn't exactly gotten around to asking the kid how he'd ended up having to call him of all people. The man was sure he couldn't have been the first choice. He also knew Peter had at least one good friend. Surely he had called him first. He looked over to where Peter was sleeping before answering. "You, know I'm not even sure. He just needed someone to come to get him. If it hadn't been me then it was going to be child services, apparently, so... here we are."

Tony could hear the smile in his friend's voice when he opened his mouth next. "Yep, there you are. How're you liking it? Playing house and all?"
"God, you're as bad as Rhodey", the man groaned. "I'm not playing house. I'm simply making sure the kid doesn't die while his aunt is recovering. I'm pretty sure that's all that was required of me based on the paperwork I signed. Feed him, make him sleep, don't let him do stupid things."

"There was paperwork involved?", the driver asked eyebrows raised. All joking was aside now, this all of the sudden sounded a lot more serious.

"Well, yeah", the man said as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. "They weren't exactly going to let me leave with him without some sort of binding agreement that I wasn't going to kidnap him or something."

"Hmm", Happy hummed in a neutral response, "Does Pepper know?"

Tony visibly paled. He had taken temporary custody of a kid and completely failed to share that information with his future wife. *Shit.* "No, I, uh, suppose I should call her.", he answered hesitantly as Happy rolled his eyes.

"You've got plenty of time. Kid's asleep and we still have an hour to go."

"Yeah, yeah. I'll get right on that. She's still in California for another week or so, so, yeah. I should... yeah.", he said picking up his phone. He wasn't even sure how to start this conversation.

Turns out he didn't have to because his call went straight to voicemail. So he texts, asking her to call him as soon as she could. It was important. Then he got to spend the remainder of the car ride trying to figure out the best way to explain all of this to her. She has met Peter once or twice and God knows Tony had told her all about him but that didn't mean that she was going to be okay with him taking care of the kid. After all, she often accused him of not being able to take care of a house plant... *or himself.*

Once back at the compound, Tony woke Peter up and walked with him back to the guest room, sitting with him while he put his things away. The teenager had once or twice tried to bring up the conversation from the hospital but Tony managed to deflect each time. He wasn't ready to start that up again quite yet. The most recent avoidance tactic being him picking up the kid's backpack, peeking inside. He was surprised to see that there were books inside of it and not more clothes. "Kid, I thought it was summer vacation. What's all of this?", the man asked digging through the backpack Peter had set on the floor beside the provided desk. "and what is this...", the man asked pulling out the laptop, looking at it with overt disgust.
"Hey! Be careful with that!", Peter gasped. "I literally just fixed the casing on it. Well, mostly fixed it. I ran out of polymer resin and I need to find one more screw that size. When I found it, it wasn't working at all but was able to replace the burnt out circuit board and I got the fans working fairly easily, just had to do a little work on the wiring but once I got it running the hard drive was easy enough to clean up and--"

"--Okay, okay, I get it. You're a nerd. You could really use an upgrade though Kiddo."

"Probably, but this one still works. I can do everything I need to do with this one. Which reminds me. Is it okay for me to have the wifi password?"

"Why would I care if you have the wifi password? ...and no changing the subject. You need an upgrade. I'm going to get it for you. There is no way any intern of mine is going to be carrying that around."

"You don't have to do that Mr. Stark. Really this one is fine... Wait, did you say I was your intern?, he asked with surprise.

"Yep. Well, that's what I listed you as in the computer system when I gave you access to the compound. I couldn't exactly list your position as Spider-Man. Besides you help me in the labs."

"Yeah, but I only help you with my suit."

Tony smirked. "That might be changing soon. If you are going to be hanging around here for a little while, then I'm going to be putting that big brain of yours to work. Maybe you can help me with my suit, or some SI projects."

Peter's eyes lit up. "Mr. Stark! That, that would be awesome. I mean, I'd love to do that!"

"Great! Then let's get started by tossing that hunk of junk out and going down to the lab to build you a real laptop. You can show me what you're capable of"

"Yes, sir!", the boy offered with a mock salute.
A distraction seemed to have been a great idea, Tony noted. The boy was busying himself around the lab looking for parts, occasionally asking for an opinion or a second set of hands when he was unsure of himself but he hadn't mentioned anything else about the next day's plans so that was a win.

As the kid was putting the finishing touches on the laptop FRIDAY announced that Ms. Potts was calling. "Put it through to my phone, dear." He said before excusing himself from the lab to take the call.

Pepper greeted him with wariness. She had known the man long enough to know that a text from him asking for a phone call that emphasized that it was important could be just about anything and rarely anything good. "So, I got your message. I must admit I'm a little apprehensive. What exactly did you do Tony?"

"Well, hello to you too.", the man scoffed but really he was really just delaying the inevitable.

Pepper laughed lightly. "Sorry Tony, but your track record indicates that I should just skip all pleasantries and just get straight to the point."

The man sighed. "Well, I didn't do anything detrimental to the company or my health if that's what you think."

"That's exactly what I think", she laughed for real this time. "So, what is it then?"

Tony closed his eyes and bit the bullet. "I may have temporarily taken over guardianship of a teenaged boy..."

The line was silent for a moment too long so he decided to continue. "You know that Parker kid right? The one I'm always telling you about? I think you met him a couple of times. Basically, his aunt got hurt in a car accident and is in the hospital so the kid called me and asked me to come and get him so I did... it was that or temporary foster care. Anyway, I went to go pick him up and they, the social worker I mean, had me sign some papers... and I'm... responsible for him... For a little while! I didn't adopt him or anything. That would be weird. --"

Pepper finally interrupted his rambling. "That's... not what I expected to hear you say. How long have you had him with you? How long is he staying?"
Scrunching up his face and using his free hand to pinch the bridge of his nose as he answered, "I picked him up this morning around two and I have no idea how long he will be here. I thought it was only going to be a couple of days when they called but now I think it could be longer. I honestly have no idea as of yet."

"That's okay." The woman said using the exceedingly patient tone she reserved only for Tony and small children. "How's it been going?"

"Fine... I guess... I mean the kid was pretty pissy when I first picked him up but it's been mostly better since breakfast. Rhodey and Happy have been helping some. Mostly Rhodey.", Tony laughed humorlessly, thinking about the last conversation he'd had with his friend.

"Do you need me to come home early?"

"Nah, we've got it here. I'll keep in touch though."

"Be sure that you do."

"I will." Then a slight pause. "You're not mad?"

"Mad? Why would I be mad? Tony, what you're doing is amazing. Sure, a heads up might have been nice but I assume you did this with all the right intentions. I know you really like this kid and it's clear he really likes you too. I'm sure you'll both be fine."

"We'll see about that...", the man replied with glaring reservation.

"You know you can call me if you need anything. Right?"

"Yeah.", he said letting out a deep breath. "I'm sure I'll talk to you again soon... Love you."

"Love you too"

The conversation had gone much better than he thought it would. Turns out his fiance had more
faith in him than he did. He supposed he should be grateful for that. He had really landed himself quite a woman.

When Tony walked back into the lab he noticed a distinct lack of teenager and his heart immediately dropped down into his stomach. He didn't know why, but it did. Maybe it was because he had just told his fiance that he was being responsible. "FRIDAY! Where's the kid?", he asked slightly panicked as if it was that easy to lose a teenage boy. Then again this was hardly any teenage boy. This boy had superpowers that would allow him to get from there to just about anywhere before Tony could even register that he was missing. Without a doubt, if the kid was going to be staying for any amount of time, there was going to need to be a protocol in place to keep that from happening.

"Peter is currently in the restroom sir", the AI answered and Tony breathed a sigh of relief knowing the kid hadn't just taken off somewhere while he was out of the room.

Seconds later, Peter walked out of the bathroom and when saw that Tony had reentered the lab, he smiled proudly. "I think I finished the laptop! Do you wanna check it out?"

"Of course I do. Bring it over."

Having looked it over for several minutes the man declared it to be nearly perfect only adding a few small suggestions that they could work on another time. He then invited the kid to come to take a look at the blueprints for the latest Iron Man mark. The kid looked it over excitedly for a few minutes before he started to get antsy. Tony rolled his eyes. "What is it, kid? I can feel you thinking something all the way over here."

"Wha- I, I mean, it's nothing. It's not important. Can you tell me more about the cooling system?"

"Sure Kiddo, right after you tell me what you were really thinking about.", the man said looking Peter up and down.

Peter lowered his head. Feeling childish, he mumbled, "I'm just... hungry"

Tony looked down at his watch. Of course, the kid was hungry it was nearly ten o'clock. He hadn't had the kid in his care for twenty-four hours yet and he had already forgotten to feed him. Excellent job Stark. "Shit Kid. You should have said something earlier. I'm not really the best at keeping up with regular meal hours, or sleeping hours, or any kind of hours really. I just sort of get by." The man then took Peter by the shoulder and led him out of the lab. "Anyway, let's get some food in
As Peter found out, Tony was actually a pretty good cook. The had man claimed it wasn't that big of a deal but Peter was pretty sure it was one of the best things he had ever eaten, even if it was just a steak and cheese sandwich with a side salad.

As they were finishing up dinner, Tony decided it was time to broach the subject of tomorrow again. "So... you do understand that we aren't going to be going to the hospital until after they give me a call right?"

Peter's happy mood immediately took a turn, a frown crossing his face. "I know. I still think it's completely unreasonable though. If she's in pain I should be there to help. Not hide from her."

"It's not hiding, Kid. It's letting the doctors do their jobs." The fact that the kid was now glaring at him did not go unnoticed. "I get it, you think that you can help.--"

"--I know I can help. That's what I do. I help people all the time and she's my family I should be helping her before anyone else but no one wants to let me!", Peter all but snapped.

Tony was feeling exceedingly ill-prepared for this conversation yet felt a strong urge to keep going. "I know it feels that way--"

"--No, it is that way!", Peter shouted.

"I'm gonna need you to calm down Kiddo. We can't talk about this if you're yelling."

"I'm not yelling. I'm annoyed because You... they-they're being utterly stupid. It, It's bullshit!"

"Hey! Watch your mouth, Kid"

"What like you?", the kid bit back, causing Tony inwardly groan. So they were back to this. The kid acting out and him trying his best to not lose his shit because he was pretty sure the kid had just danced around telling him he was being stupid not to mention the backtalk. That was not gonna fly.
He tried to take a few deep, calming breaths before he said anything else. His jaw was clenched and he was sure he must look just as pissed off as he felt because the kid was nervously avoided eye contact with him. "Look here, Pete. Eyes up." He waited for the kid to look timidly in his direction. "I'm trying really hard to not to yell at you right now but I've had it about up to here already with the attitude tonight. In fact, maybe you should just go to bed. Then, if you can calm your shit down, we can try this conversation again in the morning." He had somehow managed to not raise his voice yet but he knew his tone must have been hot with his flaring temper. Then before he could stop himself he did raise his voice. "Not that it's going to change any-fucking-thing! The adults have already made the decision!"

Not saying anything else, Peter stomped off towards the guest room, eyes glistening with the threat of tears. It took every ounce of restraint he had to not slam the door. Once inside, he threw himself down on the bed and cried in earnest for the first time since the accident while Tony stormed off to the lab throwing himself into his work. Neither of them even chanceing a look back toward the other.
Tony hadn't meant for the conversation to take a turn like that but the kid was just being so damn aggravating. It was like he was trying to piss him off. So, after shouting at Peter he had disappeared down into the lab on instinct. Avoidance. Getting out of the penthouse meant that he no longer had to focus on Peter or the fight they had just had. Except it didn't work out that way. No matter how hard he tried to bury himself in his work, his mind kept wandering back and forth between Peter and the conversation he'd had with Rhodes early that morning.

Logically he knew his friend was right. Peter was a kid. A kid who had already been through a lot of shit and his aunt being seriously injured and hospitalized was just something else to add to the laundry list trauma the kid had already experienced. The problem was that he had zero practice in giving legitimate emotional support to another human being. Especially one who wasn't even old enough to order a drink from a bar, which would normally be his go-to tactic. What the Hell did the kid need from him? That was the question of the hour.

He thought back to the hospital where Peter had been quick to send him out of the room, later yanking himself away from his touch. Pushing him away. Then just a few hours later while in the lab together, the same boy seemed to be, almost intentionally making sure their hands or shoulders brushed together as they worked. He kept asking Tony for assistance with tasks he was fairly sure the kid was competent in on his own. Looking back, it was almost like the kid had made a complete one-eighty, trying him within close proximity only to fight with him again later. That was a puzzle to be figured out.

After realizing that no actual work was going to be getting done, the man gave up and decided he would do some homework. He was a genius, after all, surely he could become an expert on teenage behavior overnight. Couldn't be any harder than thermonuclear astrophysics right?

While waiting for FRIDAY to download some psychology and, at AI's insistent recommendation, parenting books to his StarkPad he decided he should probably check on the kid. A glance at his watch revealed that he had only been in the lab for about an hour. He hoped Peter had gone to bed during that time.

"FRIDAY. The kid asleep?"
"No boss"

"Well, what on Earth is he doing then?", the man asked ever so slightly annoyed. It was after midnight.

"Crying sir", the AI answered, somehow sounding judgmental.

Tony winced a little. "Well, shit"

"Indeed sir." Tony glared in the general direction of the ceiling. He hadn't been expecting an answer, though he shouldn't have been surprised by the AI's mocking criticism. Himself, having been the one who had programmed her and all.

He groaned leaning back in the chair he had been sitting in before rolling back away from the table, standing up and heading towards the elevator. He didn't need a book or research to tell him that he needed to go talk to Peter. Obviously, he had upset him, or, upset him further anyway. Not something he had ever wanted to do. Breaking the cycle of shame and all that.

Back in the Penthouse, he hesitantly made his way towards the guest room door. He lightly placed his hand on the knob before deciding he should knock, give the child the chance to tell him to get lost. He almost hoped that's what would happen. He was sorely unprepared for the task of dealing with a crying teenager. Luck, however, was not on his side because after quietly tapping on the door to announce his presence, Peter immediately answered, declaring that whoever was on the other side, could come in.

With a deep breath, Tony placed his hand back on the knob and cracked the door open. What he found inside was the most pathetic sight he had ever laid eyes on. The boy, who had been lying face down on the bed had momentarily turned towards the door to see who had entered. He made an ever so brief glance in that direction, just long enough for Tony to take in the kid's red, tear-streaked cheeks and furrowed brow before turning away again.

Upon laying eyes on his mentor Peter Promptly sat himself up, placing his back between himself and the man so he could attempt to pull himself together. He quickly scrubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands and attempted to get his ruffled hair to lay flat. After taking a few deep breaths and making an attempt to clear his throat he finally addressed the man, back still turned. "I'm sorry Mr. Stark. Did you, uh, need something?"
Tony found himself feeling deflated for some reason. "Nope.", he sighed, "Just came to check on you. FRIDAY said you were... still awake."

"Oh, I, I'm fine, Mr. Stark. I'm sorry.", he answered still not looking towards the man. With a small, quiet, sniff, he tried to discreetly wipe his nose on the back of his hand. Tony must have noticed. He immediately strode into the connecting bathroom, collected a small wad of toilet paper and made his way over to sit beside the kid.

Peter felt the tissue being placed in his hands as the bed dipped beside him. He was going to say 'thank you' but found impending tears were clogging his throat. Instead, he tried to give a small nod of appreciation as he used the tissue to wipe his eyes and then his nose again, after which he crumpled it up into a tight ball and held it in his lap.

Tony could see that the kid was trying not to come apart, this bringing on a feeling he couldn't quite determine. Whatever it was, made him want to fix the kid right then and there by any means necessary. Then, before he could even think about what he was doing, he had lifted his hand to place it on Peter's knee but ended up backtracking. He only allowed it to hover there for a moment before quickly retracting it. The kid had been sending him mixed signals all day. He had no idea if he was supposed to touch him or not.

"You're obviously not fine, Kid, and I don't know how to help you. What do you want from me? Tell me what I'm supposed to do." He hadn't meant for it to, but his own feeling of inadequacy slipped into his tone making him sound more frustrated than concerned.

Peter slightly recoiled, pulling in on himself a little further. His mentor sounded annoyed and that was the last thing Peter wanted at the moment. They had already fought enough and he was trying so hard not to be a nuisance, only he couldn't seem to get himself regulated. It was like he was pissed off and trying not to cry one minute and perfectly fine the next without much emotion in between. Like a switch. He began to shiver slightly. He wasn't stupid, he knew the second the man decided he'd had enough of him, he would end up in some sort of group home. "I, I don't need you to do anything, sir. I'm fine. Really. You don't have to bother with me. I, I'm sorry." He wasn't even sure, at this point, what he was apologizing for. The words just fell out of his mouth.

"Oh, Kid", Tony sighed, running his hands down his face. "I just don't want to argue anymore--"

"--I won't", Peter curtly interrupted. He glanced to the side to try and gauge his mentor's posture but the man locked eyes with as soon as his head turned. Feeling exposed, he made an attempt to look back down towards the floor.
"Come on, Kid. Look at me, will ya?", the man pleaded, earning him another brief glance in his direction. "I know I'm not exactly good at...this.", Tony stated, gesturing between the two of them, "but I'm trying alright?" He waited only a few seconds to see if Peter was going to respond. When he didn't he just sighed. "Look, why don't you go ahead and get ready for bed. It's late, or early, depending on how you want to look at it.", he said with a small smile but Peter only nodded his head and started to walk towards the dresser.

Tony took that as his cue to leave, heading into his own room to get comfortable and begin his self-appointed study session.

By the time the sun was about to rise, Tony was feeling, at the very least much more informed even if he still didn't feel prepared. Turns out the boy's angry outburst, mood-swings, and general overreactions were to be expected. Actually, when it came to 'common reactions to trauma in teenagers', Peter seemed to be hitting a good many of the tick boxes. Some of them, he realized, were already there before this latest upheaval. That only deepened his concern for the kid.

As far as how he could help, that was a little more tricky. The top two suggestion across the board seemed to be making sure the child involved felt safe and secure (That sounded easy enough) and encouraging them to openly talk about their emotions (That sounded a little more difficult). Tony fleetingly considered just hiring a therapist but he was pretty sure the kid would quickly rebuff that option. Meaning that as Rhodey had already so readily pointed out, he was absolutely going to need to step up his game and oddly enough, he found himself more than willing to do so.

He was just about to pull back the covers and try to get a couple of hours of sleep when he was pretty sure he heard someone in the hallway. Knowing the only possible option was Peter, he glanced at the clock. Five thirty-two. That was entirely too early for the kid to be up and about, he hadn't even changed into his bedclothes until nearly one. With some protest from his tired body, he reluctantly pulled himself out of bed to go see what the boy was doing awake.

Entering the kitchen, he saw Peter sitting at the breakfast bar with a cup of orange juice in his hands. "Hey, Pete--", he cut himself off when the boy startled having not seen him enter the room.

"I'm sorry! I didn't mean to wake you up!", Peter gasped.

"You didn't wake me up Kiddo, I haven't gone to bed yet. The question is, why are you up?", the man asked with an eyebrow raised.

"Oh, I, um, couldn't sleep. I mean, I did sleep for a little bit but then... I just... woke up. Sorry.", the
truth was he'd had a nightmare but he didn't need his mentor to know that. It was childish and he knew it.

"Kid, you don't have to apologize for everything. You know that, right?" At this point, he had gotten a good look at the boy and causing him to smile to himself. While Peter was wearing some pajama bottoms from his apartment the t-shirt was the one he had handed the kid the night before. It was almost... endearing. "You hungry? I could make us some grilled cheese sandwiches." Not that he was hungry, but the thought the kid might be, he usually was, besides it gave them a reason to be in the same room together.

"Um, sure. That, that would be nice. Thank you.", the boy answered hesitantly.

As he started pulling out what he needed to make the sandwiches he decided this was his opportunity to put his new found knowledge to use. Which if he was being honest with himself was a bit, well, terrifying. "So... why couldn't you sleep?", he asked but he was pretty sure he knew. Everything he had read had indicated that nightmares were almost inevitable and he wasn't convinced that the kid wasn't already having them to begin with. It sort of came with their line of work. They had never discussed it. There had been no real reason to.

Peter blinked at the man a few times before answering. God, he was tired. "I'm, uh, n-not sure? I just, like I said. I just... woke up.", he almost felt bad for lying really. He never lied to May, not about his nightmares anyway. Even if he didn't want to talk about them she would still hold him tight and sit up with him until he fell back asleep. Without that as an option, getting up for the day was all he could do, really.

"So, uh, no bad dreams or anything then?", Tony asked trying to sound casual despite his unease. The books had said that he shouldn't be overbearing and since overbearing was practically his middle name, this was going to take some careful practice.

The question threw Peter off guard causing him to squeeze the cup in his hands a little harder than he had meant to. The intense pressure on the glass made it instantly shatter into a dozen pieces, juice to going everywhere. He panicked, "Shit! I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I-I didn't mean to. It was--"

"--Hey, hey, hey, calm down. It's okay. It was an accident. I don't care about the cup. Are your hands okay? Let me see." Peter, still wide-eyed and shakey, held out his hands for Tony to examine. Finding only a few very small cuts and no embedded glass he urged the boy to come around and wash his hands in the sink, while got to work cleaning up the mess, the conversation pertaining to nightmares having been forgotten or at the very least tabled for the moment.
After getting the mess cleaned up, Tony made a mental note to purchase some plastic cups and got back to their sandwiches. He had three stacked up on a plate for Peter before making one of his own. Once complete, he opted to stand across the bar from the kid, so he could see him, rather than sit beside him to eat. Watching the boy as he started into his second sandwich, Tony wondered if he should really try to pry any more at the moment. He had obviously hit the nail on the head when he had asked about the nightmares, even if the kid didn't actually admit it. He ended up sighing and shifting on his feet, feeling somewhat apprehensive regarding what he was about to say. "You know you can talk to me, right? About more than just science and tech I mean. You can talk to me about...whatever. You know that?"

Peter didn't really know what to say so he just nodded his head in confirmation, even though he was having a hard time with the idea of being forthcoming with the man. He didn't want to say the wrong thing and end up with the man thinking of him as even more of a child or worse not wanting him around anymore. He was already invading the man's personal space, had argued with him on several occasions at this point, lied to him and had managed to break one of his, no doubt, expensive kitchen glasses. All of this in a span of little over a twenty-four-hours. *He needed to get it together.*

Having finished his own sandwich, Tony poured himself a glass of juice before pouring another for Peter and setting it by his plate. He noticed the kid look apprehensively at the cup before picking it up to drink from it. He could practically *taste* the kid's negative thoughts. "Hey, buddy, whatever your thinking over there, stop it. It's fine. Everything is fine... you do look tired though. Any chance of you going back to bed?" The boy laid his head on his arms looking defeated before shrugging his shoulders in response. "Movie it is then."

With that, they both headed towards the living room, Tony tossing Peter a throw blanket as they each settled on opposite ends of the couch. Peter fell asleep first, laying on his side, knees pulled up to his middle, while Tony had his feet propped up on the coffee table lounging back on the cushions.

That is exactly how Rhodey found them several hours later when Tony didn't show up for a meeting downstairs. He decided domestic life looked good on Tony before snapping a couple of pictures to send to Pepper.
Later that morning, Peter woke up feeling oddly embarrassed about having fallen asleep on the couch with Iron Man. He was thankful that the man himself was still asleep as he folded up the blanket and returned it to its previous location on the back of the furniture, before checking the clock on the wall as he slipped into the hall bathroom. He was surprised to see that it was practically noon. No wonder he was hungry it had been hours since he'd eaten the sandwiches his mentor had made him. So, after exiting the bathroom he headed straight for the kitchen. Opting to make himself some waffles, since he already knew where those were. Once toasted and on a plate, he realized that he had no idea where the syrup was. He hadn't seen where Rhodey had gotten it from, or where his mentor had returned it to the day before. As he was debating whether or not he wanted to actually try to look for it he heard a voice from across the room.

Tony had woken up to the sound of the toaster popping up. Glancing behind him, he saw the kid wandering around the kitchen, carrying a plate of dry waffles, looking a little lost. He smiled to himself, the kid was too polite or shy, he wasn't sure which, to even look through the cupboards. "Syrup's in the pantry over there behind you.", he said causing the kid to whip around to face him.

"Hmm? Oh, um, thanks.", the boy said as he trekked across the kitchen towards the pantry door. "Sorry if I woke you up.", he mumbled with a bit of hesitation.

"Geez, you didn't wake me up. Even if you had, it would have been fine. In fact, I probably should have been up hours ago. What time is it? I'm pretty sure I was supposed to be in a meeting this morning. FRIDAY?", he asked standing up with the intention of joining the kid in the kitchen.

The AI was quick to answer as always, "It is currently twelve-thirteen in the afternoon, you had a meeting with the accords committee scheduled for eight o'clock this morning in conference room C."

"...and you didn't wake me up because..."

"You had not slept more than eight collective hours over the course of two consecutive days. I did not wake you per the 'Go Back To Bed Protocol' created by Ms. Potts three months ago."

"...and who gave her permission to create protocols!??"

"You did sir.", the AI responded sounding exasperated, causing Peter to nearly choke on a bite of waffle as he tried to stifle a small laugh at his mentor's expense.
Tony lowered himself back down onto the couch, grumbling. "Right... I did do that, didn't I." He was going to need to go into the code at some point and see what other protocols his fiance had created. There would be time for that later he supposed. At the moment, that wasn't nearly as important as finding out what he had missed in that meeting.

He along with Rhodey were supposed to be the liaisons when it came to the amendments. Not showing up wasn't exactly a great show of commitment to the project. Sighing to himself he sent a text to his friend before heading into the kitchen to start a pot of coffee. "Alright, Kiddo, I need to go talk to Rhodey. You can entertain yourself and stay out of trouble, right?"

"Yes, sir.", the boy answered. Tony nodded in confirmation giving a quick 'good' before headed into his room to get ready for the day.

A hot shower and a fresh set of clothes later, Tony walked back into the great room to find Peter still sitting at the breakfast bar, empty plate in front of him. The kid was looking up at him like he had been eagerly awaiting his return before turning his gaze downward as he addressed the man. "Mr. Stark? How, uh, how long will you be gone?"

"Not long. I'm only going down to talk to Rhodey for a bit about the meeting I missed. That's all. Shouldn't take longer than an hour really." Then he frowned ever so slightly as he poured himself a cup of coffee. "You're okay with being alone up here for an hour or so right?" He hadn't even considered that the kid might not enjoy the idea of being left on his own. He knew the kid was often alone at his apartment, though that was a far cry from being left alone in an unfamiliar home.

"Oh! No, I'm fine by myself! I, I just wondered what would happen if, if the hospital called. Y-you know?"

'Oh,' Tony thought to himself. That made much more sense. The kid wasn't worried about being left alone, he was worried that Tony was going to take off and leave him with no way to get news on May's condition. "If they call me, you'll be the first to know." As the words escaped his mouth he saw the kid visibly relax, offering a quiet 'thank you' in response. "Alright, I'm fixing to head out. Put your plate in the dishwasher, yeah?"

Peter nodded his head and made his way towards the kitchen as the man walked out the door. Once the plate was taken care of, he unsure of what he should be doing next. He was anxious, waiting to find out what was going to happen with his aunt and nothing seemed to be distracting him. Laying on the guest room bed, he had tried reading, playing games on his phone, studying... he'd even tried going over the Iron Man suit schematics his mentor had put on the new laptop for him. He wished he could text Ned because none of the other things he had tried held his attention for long.
His mind kept wandering. Mostly it seemed intent on replaying the wreck over and over again in his head. Primarily, it replayed it back as it had happened. Other times his brain would concoct a scenario where Peter was in the car with her or where he wasn't sitting on a building, instead, being able to stop the speeding car from hitting her at all. Peter never even realized that the longer he lay there dwelling in his thoughts the more the guilt and hurt began to consume him. As such, he wound up so deep inside his own head that he didn't hear Tony return or the man's footsteps as he strode down the hall towards the open door. He was taken aback when the man appeared right in front of him.

As it were, Tony hadn't really missed much in the meeting. Even with Ross out of the picture, they were no closer to coming to an agreement on the accords than they had been when they met six months ago, let alone two weeks ago. The good news was, Rhodey had been able to cover for him, something about a family emergency. Apparently, no one questioned it. Which Tony thought was odd, seeing as he didn't really have a family to speak of, but didn't think too hard on it.

Once all of that was out of the way, Tony couldn't help but notice the way his friend kept smiling at him. "What? Why do you keep looking at me like that? Do I have something on my face?"

"Nothing.", Rhodey answered smile continuing to grow even more broad as the seconds passed. Like there was some sort of hilarious secret he was trying not to spill.

"I swear to God Rhodey if you don't tell me what has you so ridiculously pleased I might lose my shit." Then all of a sudden he received a text from the man who was standing right across from him. A quick flick of his phone brought up a clear image of his couch with Peter and himself sound asleep on either end of it. Tony made a small indignant noise but before he could say anything about it Rhodey was laughing out loud.

"Pepper thinks it's adorable by the way and I'm sure Happy is going to love it too. I can't wait to show it to him. It's just so, so domestic. It's precious really."

For whatever reason Tony was annoyed by his friend's innocent teasing, snapping back at him with sarcasm. "Yeah, it's so cute how the kid only slept for three or four hours before waking up from a nightmare that he wouldn't even admit to, then freaking the fuck out because he broke a kitchen glass and thought I was going to yell at him for it before basically admitting he wasn't going to be able to go back to sleep. Simply precious.", the man spat, rolling his eyes in the process. "The only reason we were even out there was that I was trying to be responsible, keep him company and whatnot. We were watching a movie for Christ's sake. Remind me to remove your access to my suite."
"Geez, Tony, calm down", Rhodes laughed. "I'm only saying it's nice that you're doing so much for the kid. Family life suits you."

"He's not family.", the man sputtered. "He's just, just Peter. He already has a family, he has his aunt, he doesn't need me. I'm merely looking after him for a bit... it's not like I adopted him. So, you know, maybe you're the one that should calm down."

Rhodes was still smiling despite Tony's annoyance. "Sure. I'll get right on that."

"Yeah, be sure that you do. In the meantime, I need to get back upstairs to the spider-boy. God knows what he's getting into."

"Uh huh, Whatever you say. Later, man. Tell the kid I said Hi." his friend called after him. Tony's only grunted in reply as he directed himself back towards the elevator.

Upon entering the penthouse he had expected to see Peter sitting somewhere in the great room. When there was no teenager in sight he pointed himself towards the hallway where he saw the guest room door was ajar. "Hey, Pete? I'm back." He called out as he made his way towards the door. Once he arrived there he was less than pleased with the sight that awaited him. It looked like the kid had gotten himself all worked up over something or another. He was curled up on the bed surrounded by several abandoned books and journals, his phone tossed to the side. He didn't seem to be angry or panicking so much as he just seemed... sad. "Peter?", the man said with a softness to his voice. "What's wrong?"

The kid looked like he was right on the verge of opening up but then at the very last second, he seemed to think better of it, an emotion crossing his face so quickly that Tony wasn't able to place it. "Nothing, Mr. Stark. I was only... thinking. Um... Did, did you happen to hear from the hospital yet?"

"Not yet... Is that what has you so upset?"

Peter sat up and tried to force a smile onto his face, though he was sure it didn't look genuine. "I'm not upset Mr. Stark. I'm fine. I was just wondering if you had heard anything yet. That's all. You don't have to worry about me."

Tony wasn't sure what it was going to take to get it through to this kid that he was going to worry
about him whether he wanted him to or not. He always had to an extent, except not quite like this. Not this close. He had worried from afar, creating protocols and safety nets for the kid as he went about doing his vigilante thing. Keeping him physically safe. This was different. The kid was right in front of him and needed something more. Something besides technology from him. He sighed a bit. "I guess I don't have to worry about you, but I do anyway." He watched as the boy's strained smile faltered slightly at those words like he was contemplating whether or not they could possibly true.

Tony sat down on the edge of the bed. "I don't have anywhere else to be today, Kiddo, you want to go down to the lab? Or the gym?" HOPING a distraction would work just as well today as it had the day before but Peter just shrugged his shoulders. He knew the kid was anxious. It made sense really. They hadn't heard anything about May since they left the hospital the day before. Tony was at a loss. "How about some food then hmm? All, you've had today is waffles right?" Again, Peter only shrugged his shoulders and the lack of concrete answers from the boy was starting to grate on his nerves.

"Alright, look here, I'm gonna need some kind of verbal confirmation from you. A yes or a No. I can't read your mind and I'm not going to play guessing games with you. Got it?", he said, all the softness having left his voice.

Peter winced a little, pulling his arms around himself and nodded before quickly adding a quiet, "Yes, sir."

"Great. So... food?"

Sure, Peter was hungry. He almost always was but he just didn't feel like eating. He was nervous and even though his mentor was in the same room with him trying to carry on a conversation he couldn't stop seeing the car wreck behind his eyelids every time he blinked. He almost shrugged his shoulders, but not wanting to annoy Tony any further he again nodded his head before hastily tagging on a verbal, "Yes, sir"  

Once out into the kitchen Tony tried to get Peter to look around and find something to eat. He didn't have a lot of variety but there was enough there that the kid could make some kind of decision for himself. When it looked like he wasn't going to make a move to go through the kitchen to find anything, the man stepped in. "Hey, you're gonna be staying here a little while, yeah? It's okay for you to go through the kitchen. It's not off limits. In fact, I want to see you in here, often. I know how much you need to eat, Kid. Just look around and grab whatever you want. If it's not here just tell FRIDAY and she'll order it for you. Now look, there is sandwich stuff in here and there might still be some Hot Pockets in the freezer...", the man continued to walk Peter around the kitchen, pointing out what was there until the kid just settled on making a sandwich, Tony, following suit.
Right as the pair were cleaning up their plates and considering what to do next, FRIDAY announced that there was an incoming phone call from Queens Memorial Hospital. Peter completely stilled, right in the middle of placing his plate in the dishwasher as Tony told the AI to put the call through to his home office.

As the man disappeared down the hall Peter strained to hear the conversation. Any other time it would have been an easy task but it seemed that Tony must have soundproofed the room or something because he couldn't make out one singular word. Even when he had made it all the way to the outside of the door, there was still nothing. Being unable to hear anything and definitely not wanting to get caught trying to listen in, he returned to the living room, sitting on the couch trying his best to remain calm.

His mentor returned moments later, though it felt like an eternity to Peter. He tried to read Tony's expression as he walked towards him but he found the man to be unreadable making him even more anxious. *Was the man actually walking in slow motion?*

Tony decided to take a seat beside the kid before he started talking, "Well, Pete, it sounds like you can go visit her now." The kid's head shot up in subdued elation. "They wanted me to make sure that you understand that she might not be completely coherent. She's on a lot of pain management and she has a slight concussion on top of that. So don't be surprised or worried if you don't get a whole lot of answers. The doctor also wants us to keep the visit kind of short for today, she needs as much rest as she can get. You got all that?"

"Yes, sir", Peter answered trying to keep his voice steady. He was finally going to see her awake. To get to talk to her.

"Alright then, let's get ready to go then." Pausing, he looked the teenager over. "You should probably take a quick shower."; he added noting the boy's greasy hair.

Not really wanting to waste time on a shower but also not wanting to give the man any reason to raise his voice at him at the moment, Peter agreed and ran off towards the guest room to get washed up and into clean clothes. Tony took that time to get ahold of Happy for the ride.

As soon as Peter rejoined him, he looked the kid over once more before heading out the door.
The ride to the hospital was quiet. Tense. So much so that, Tony didn't even try to engage Peter in any kind of conversation. He could see the wheels in the boy's head turning and the rapid anticipatory twitches in his leg. It made the two-hour long ride feel like twenty. Tony had never been so thankful to pull up to a hospital in all his life. He couldn't wait to get out of the stressful and restrictive atmosphere that had become the car.

The second Happy had brought the car to a stop, Peter was already out the door. Tony fumbled, trying to get out quickly enough to stay on his heels. The boy was fast, but thankfully the parking garage elevator was able to slow him down enough for the man to catch up. Once by his side, he placed a hand heavily on his shoulder, a silent command for the boy to pause and allow Happy to join them. Once he had, there was no stopping the kid. He was singularly focused. The fact that people were staring and trying to get pictures of them again didn't phase him. He didn't even flinch when someone, trying to get Tony's attention, jumped out in front of them as they made their way down the main hallway. Nor, did he hear Happy when he told that said someone to 'back off or so help me God...'

Having reached the doors is the ICU, Peter was finally forced to slow down. He hesitantly requested entrance only to be met at the doors by a nurse asking them to remain in the waiting area for a moment. The doctor wanted to speak to them. Peter wanted to scream. His mentor had already told him what to everything, he didn't need to be held up by a repeated list of things he should and shouldn't expect. He just wanted to see her. Why was everyone so insistent on treating him like an ignorant child. He was fifteen. He was Spiderman for God's sake. Those thoughts stayed heavily on his mind as he bitterly took a seat near the corner of the room, arms crossed over his chest glaring off into space.

A short time later, the doctor came in. Having made eye contact with him, Tony stood and shook the man's hand. Peter remained rooted to his chair in indignation. However after his mentor had shot him a commanding glare, he slowly rose to his feet and listlessly held out his hand for the doctor to shake.

As expected, the doctor went over May's condition with them again. He seemed to be focusing on Peter and using small words. This was only proving to fuel the already present animosity the boy was holding towards the man.
After the doctor had finished what felt like a never-ending and ridiculously patronizing explanation, he asked the two of them if they had any questions. Peter didn't even give Tony a chance to open his mouth. He had practically cut the doctor off before he could even finish the inquiry. "When is she coming home?". The question rushed out of his mouth in one breath.

The doctor looked back and forth between Tony and Peter, with a furrowed brow. It appeared as though he hadn't really been expecting that particular question, or didn't particularly want to answer it. "Well, that's the thing, son" Peter wanted to interrupt the man and tell him he was not his son. His want for an answer was the only thing stopping him. "She has a lot of healing to do. There really is no timeline on that as of right now and with the injuries, she sustained to her pelvis and femur, there is a very real possibility that she will need to spend at least some time in a rehabilitation facility once she is released from our care." Peter's frown was deepening causing the doctor to slightly falter. "Now, don't take that as an absolute just yet. Anything can happen... but I can assure you she will be here for at least another week or two. Let's give her some time. No rush. Okay?"

Peter didn't answer at first. It took him some time to process it all before he just nodded his head. Then remembering Tony's earlier demand for verbal confirmation he whispered a quiet 'Yes, sir.'

After that, they were lead into May's room, where Peter quietly approached her sleeping form, touching her hand and whispering her name. He was, relieved when her eyes fluttered open at the sound of his voice. Despite the tired look on her face, she appeared to be attempting a smile for him. He smiled back, standing by her bed, speaking to her quietly. Mostly he reassured her that she was going to be okay and that she didn't need to worry about him. She only needed to get better. He was fully focused on her and only her.

It had only taken a few moments for Peter to completely forget that Tony was even in the room. That is until the man slid a chair towards him so he could sit by her side rather than hover over her. After which, he excused himself from the room to get coffee. Leaving Peter alone with his aunt. He simply looked at her for a bit as her eyes fell shut again. He was content to lay his head on the bed where his hand was in hers, as she slept.

It was about fifteen minutes later when she opened her eyes again, she squeezed Peter's hand. She seemed a little more lucid this time. "Peter..." she whispered.

"You're okay?"

"Of course. I'm fine... and you're going to be fine too.", Peter said trying to sound as reassuring as
"They tell you?", his aunt asked in a slightly breathy voice.

"Tell me what?", he asked her in trepidation.

His aunt looked at him for a few moments. Seemingly gathering her thoughts before speaking again. "Car accident."

Peter let out a breath he had not even realized he was holding. "Yeah, yeah, I know about that. I, uh, I actually saw it happen." His speech was becoming shakier as he spoke. "I was on top of a building and I saw you driving home. I, I was there. I couldn't stop it and I, I didn't even have time to try... but I was there. I s-stayed with you until, until the medics came. I, I thought, I thought you, you--" but he was cut off by an unexpected burst of tears.

May rubbed his hand with her thumb, neither of them noticing that Tony had long since reentered the room. "It's not your fault, Baby. It's not." She sounded so tired that her words were beginning to slur. It was obvious that she was fighting to stay awake to comfort her distraught nephew. Despite her best efforts, she drifted back off to sleep before the boy's tears had time to slow.

Tony had gotten his coffee and walked back into the room just in time to hear Peter confess that he had seen the accident happen. The man was stunned, to say the least. How had he not realized, not even questioned it? It made sense that he would have been out as Spiderman during that time, making the possibility of him being a witness fairly significant.

Now, That changed everything. The kid wasn't just upset that it had happened, he was upset that he didn't stop it. He understood now. There was a substantial amount of guilt attached to this; he could relate. Tony abruptly realized that he had also failed to consider that this kid often took the entire weight of the world onto his own shoulders. He should have realized that this would undoubtedly be handled no differently. The boy felt responsible, because, of course he did. Then he had watched it happen, unable to do anything about. That would doubtlessly prove to amplify those feelings of liability and remorse.

Once the boy had broken into heavy tears the man quickly closed the distance between them, abandoning the coffee on a nearby table. He was standing, unnoticed, by the kid's side as his aunt was pulled back into a drug-induced sleep. He had never seen the boy look this vulnerable, this young before. He needed to fix it. So, in a slightly panicked breath, he started trying to console him. "Hey, don't cry. Don't cry, you're alright. Everything's fine, Well, it's going to be fine. I've got you. It wasn't your fault. It wasn't." Subsequently, without thinking he placed his hands on the kid's
shoulder's, pulling out of the chair where he sat and then into his chest where the boy completely fell apart.

Tony never imagined himself feeling so at ease with another person sobbing in his embrace but he was fine. It felt as natural as ever as one hand reaching around the boys back while the other came up to the back of his head, holding him in place against his body. The boy who had started out limp was soon wrapping his own arms around his mentor's middle pulling himself impossibly close, gripping the back of the man's shirt, as he quietly shushed him.

They stayed like that for quite a while. In time, Peter's sobs slowly began to die down into soft snuffles before eventually turning into quiet apologies. Tony continually affirming that he had nothing to be sorry for. "It's okay to be upset, Kiddo. You don't ever have to apologize for that.", he said not daring to let go until the boy was ready.

In time, Peter did pull away from the man. He stared at the floor as he began to wring his hands together in front of himself. Biting his lip he offered one last apology. "I'm so sorry, Mr. Stark."

Tony cocked his head and questioned with mock seriousness, "What exactly are you sorry for Mr. Parker?"

Peter continued to stare a the floor, eyes still red and wet. "I, I shouldn't have, I mean, you, you didn't have to--"

"--Pete, I don't have to do anything. If I don't want to do it, I can assure you that I won't. It's kind of a perk of being me."

This elicited a small laugh from the boy.

A few beats passed in silence before Tony spoke again. "Look's like May is asleep for the night", then looking at the clock on the wall, "It's after seven-thirty. Are you ready to head back to the compound? Maybe pick up some pizza on the way? We can come back tomorrow." Peter agreed he was ready to head back and pizza sounded perfect. He was physically and emotionally wiped out. Nothing sounded better than eating one of his favorite foods before getting back into the soft, bed in the guest room of Tony's suite. With that in mind, he followed Tony down to the car where Happy was waiting for them.

The plan had been to stop at a pizza place close to the compound and take it home. However, less
than an hour into the drive, it looked as though Peter would not be awake for much longer, despite the seemingly early hour and the fact that they had slept in that morning. In fairness, it had been an extremely emotional day for the kid. That was enough to wipe anyone out and with this in mind, Tony asked Happy to go ahead and stop at the next Pizza place he saw before the kid had a chance to nod off. He would have had the man stop at whatever restaurant was closest but he had already made a promise of pizza to the boy, who upon his next glance, had already fallen asleep.

Happy soon pulled the car the first decently reviewed pizza place they came across and began discussing the menu with Tony. Both men had assumed the kid would stay knocked out until Happy returned to the car with the food but it seemed the car coming to a still was enough to tug him out of his sleep. "Wh-Where are we?", Peter yawned.

"I promised you pizza, remember?", Tony smiled. "Happy's about to go in and order us something and since you're awake now, what do you want on yours?"

"Oh, um... Pepperoni? I guess. I like whatever... just not onions. Those are gross.", the boy said as he rubbed at his eyes before clumsily shifting around in his seat to face his mentor. "Actually... can I, can I maybe go inside with him?" He was slightly nervous about asking, he knew he had a tendency to get on Happy's nerves but he genuinely wanted out of the car for a little bit. He had that figured getting out and walking around might help wake him up some.

Thankfully, Happy seemed to be feeling agreeable at the moment. "It's fine with me... Then you can carry it all and I won't have to.", the man quipped with a smile.

This left Tony in the back of the car by himself. He figured now was as good of a time as any to check in with Pepper. She would want to be filled in on what the doctors were saying and would, no doubt, want to know that Peter was going to remain under his care for the foreseeable future.

As it wasn't even quite six o'clock yet, in California, so Tony was slightly surprised when Pepper picked up right away. He was able to quickly fill her in on May's condition and what little information they had been given about her recovery time. His future wife continued to be more than supportive, even as he went on to tell her, in detail, about everything he had researched and Peters meltdown in the hospital room. "Tony, I am so proud of you. I can't believe you actually did all that research in one night. Though I don't suppose I should be surprised.". There was a pause. "You're a good man. You know that?"

Tony gave a half smile, even though she couldn't see it. "Yeah? You think so? It seems to me like I still have plenty of time to screw this up."
"Tony", she responded with all seriousness. "I have seen you do some pretty insane things without ever giving it moments thought. Now, I admit, going to pick him up might have been a bit... impulsive... but it sounds like you're doing great. Just keep doing what you're doing. I'll be home in a few days."

"I can't wait for you to really get to know him. You're gonna love him, Pepper." It struck him immediately that he had just used the word 'love' in conjunction with Peter but he brushed it off as nothing more than a figure of speech.

"I'm sure that I will. Now. I need to get ready for a business dinner. I'll talk to you soon."

"Of course. Talk to you soon"

It seemed his conversation with his fiance had ended right on time as he saw a grinning Peter exit the building, a stack of pizzas in his hands. Happy behind him with a carryout tray of beverages looking just as pleased. Tony couldn't help but smile to himself as he watched the pair cross the parking lot towards him. He still wasn't completely convinced that he wouldn't screw this up at some point and he was more than sure that there would be more arguments to come but right now, at this moment, Tony was content.
Chapter 7

They had arrived back at the compound well after ten, and Peter was exhausted. The pizza had been completely devoured during the remainder of the car ride so he decided he wanted nothing more than to just get into bed. "Mr. Stark? I think I'm going to go to bed. I, I mean, if that's okay."

"Of course, it's okay. You don't have to ask permission to go to bed, Pete. Actually, isn't that my job? To tell you to go to bed?" Then, with a wave of his hand, "You know what? Go to bed, Kid. There. I did my job.", he smirked.

"Yeah, um", Peter laughed nervously, fidgeting where he stood. "O-Okay, well, um, Good night, Mr. Stark." Then after another tentative pause, he turned around and headed towards the room. He didn't know why he was so being so hesitant. Well, maybe he did, a little. There was a small part of him that wanted Tony to wrap his arms around him again. Maybe even embrace him the way May would do before she left for work, or when he was having a bad day, or sometimes before he went to bed. He sorely missed that feeling of connection that came from being close to someone who cares about you but he knew it was unreasonable to think that his mentor would ever be able to fill a role like that. He had already cried all over the man's shirt that night he wasn't going to push for anything else.

Tony had watched as Peter hesitated in front of him, he seemed to have been thinking about something. Then again, the kid always seemed to be thinking about something. What was new, was the fact that he wasn't sharing it. Usually, the boy's mouth went just as fast as his brain did. Whenever they would spend any amount of time together, the kid would ramble and chatter about whatever was on his mind. Never any need to fill in the blanks. The boy would readily express his every thought about they were working on at the time, or sometimes something about school, or some random movie he's seen. Never anything personal though. Their time together was usually short. There was never a reason for something like that to come up and maybe that was it. After spending several days together, it had caught Tony's attention that the typically hyper-verbal child had been keeping things to himself. There were moments when the boy was actually quiet. The problem, for Tony, was that he'd become so used to the kid babbling everything that was on his mind, that it was weird not knowing what Peter was thinking.

Kid in bed, Tony decided he would take a chance with those parenting books he had so carefully avoided the night before. He reasoned that it was because the kid might end up being with him for quite a while and there could potentially be some little tidbits of information in there that might prove useful at some point. It wouldn't hurt to at least skim the information. Who knows, maybe there would be information about how to get the kid to talk to him. Like, really talk to him. He sighed as he settled into the first book on the list. That's how he spent the next several hours until he finally decided to go to sleep.

In the guest room, Peter only managed to sleep for a few hours before he was awoken with the, long
since, familiar panicked rush that often came with his nightmares. When he was small his nightmares had consisted of various, childish renditions of what he believed happened to his parents when they didn't return home one day. Early in his teenage years those were quickly replaced with images of his Uncle Ben bleeding out right in his hands. Most recently, he found that he typically dreamed about himself drowning, being crushed or simply crashing down to the Earth at dizzying speeds. In the last couple of days, his nightmares began to center around May. Replaying the accident in slow motion, only it was as if he was in the car beside her, rather than a distant bystander. They would be laughing and singing along to the radio, as they often did, then without warning, they would both jolt forward in their seats and Peter would be forced to watch his aunts face contort in fear and pain before he would wake up with a start.

Peter's head shot up off the pillow as he gasped for breath. It took him several minutes to recognize his surroundings. He was thankful that FRIDAY had the foresight to slightly increase the light level in the room once he had awoken. As he ran his hands through his sweaty hair, he considered whether or not it was worth it to leave the room. The last time he had left the room at such an early hour, Tony had found him out, questioning him about his childish sleeping issues. However, the longer he sat up, awake in the bed the more fidgety he became. He had considered trying to go back to sleep but every time he closed his eyes he was met with the final scenes of his most recent nightmare. If he couldn't have the comfort of May's company, he could at least use a change in scenery.

He was going to have to be more careful this time. Quieter. He didn't want the man waking up and finding him out. He wasn't ready to have any more discussions regarding his less than pleasant dreams. He grabbed a science journal from his backpack before cracking the door open and slipped out of the room as silently as he could possibly manage. Once he had made it over to the couch he held his breath, waiting to see if his mentor was going to emerge. When he didn't, Peter let out a sigh of relief before grabbing the blanket and settling himself into the cushions.

Later that morning when Tony exited his room he was surprised to see a sleeping teenager sprawled across his couch with a science journal resting on his chin as if he has fallen asleep mid-sentence. He debated whether or not to wake him. A glance at his watch told him it might be a good idea. Even if his own sleeping patterns sucked at best, he figured consistent sleep routines would be a good idea for the kid. At least that's what the books he had read last night said. Either way, it was ten o'clock and the kid, no doubt, needed to eat.

Strolling over to the couch, he reached down to gently prod the boy awake. "Hey, Kid. C'mon, it's wake up time."

Peter only groaned and rolled himself over so that his back was to Tony, pulling the blanket over his face so that only the hair on the very top of his head was poking out. This, causing his already whiney voice to sound muffled. "Leave me alone. I'm sleeping"
Tony rolled his eyes but smiled at the teenage burrito before him. It was almost cute. Before he could think too much on that, he moved on to a new tactic. "Hey, Pete, If you get up right now, I'll let you pick what we do today."

Still mumbling into the back of the couch Peter replied, "I pick sleeping"

Now the man was starting to become marginally annoyed. "nu-uh. You don't get to pick anything unless you get up first.", he said as he started yanking the blanket off of the kid with surprising ease, considering the kid's abilities.

"Hey! Mr. Stark! W-why would you do that? I just got back to sleep.", the kid said with an indignant pout, now wide awake.

"Yeah? That was actually going to be my next question. Why are you out here instead of in the bed?"

"I, I just woke up early and, uh, wanted to, um, lay on the couch for a while? It-It's a, uh, really nice couch. Comfortable. So I guess I, um fell back asleep not, uh, not too long ago." He looked down at the floor. "I didn't mean to go to sleep out here, sorry.", he added quietly.

"Kid, I don't care that you're sleeping on the couch. I just wondered why you thought it was more comfortable than the four-figure mattress in the guest room." The only response he got was the kid staring at the floor causing Tony to sigh. He had a strong suspicion that he knew precisely why the kid was out there. He had just hoped that Peter would tell him. "So, when did you come out here?", he asked quietly, handing the boy a glass of juice.

Peter shrugged his shoulders leading the man to say his name, not some variety of nickname, his actual name, in a warning tone. He inwardly cringed before speaking, though he kept his answer short. "four"

"Four? And you just went back to sleep? It's after ten, Kiddo."

"Sorry"

Tony gave the kid what appeared to be a caring smile. "There nothing to be sorry for, Buddy. I guess I'm just really worried about you.", he said in a gentle, worried tone. Then, Upon, seeing
Peter's questioning eyes shoot up in his direction he added, sounding more like himself this time, "I know, that sounded weird to me too, now how about we go out for breakfast, lunch, or whatever and I'll take you over to the hospital."

Happy's not... coming?" It came out sounding hesitant but the only time he had ever been alone in the car with his mentor was the morning he had driven him back to the compound and that hadn't exactly gone well. He knew that technically, he had started it but that didn't mean that the argument they'd had that morning didn't leave him a little wary. He tried to tell himself, it was worth considering that the circumstances were different this time.

"It's his day off. What? I'm not good enough for you?", he said it with a small laugh but really he was sort of taken aback that the kid seemed nervous about being in the car with him. Giving some thought back to that first drive back from the hospital, he realized he had yelled. He had yelled a lot. Hell, he'd practically chewed the kid out for needing to pee. No wonder boy wasn't keen on the idea. His smile faded into a neutral expression before he sighed. "I won't yell this time. That, that was a bad night. I'm trying to not yell anymore."

Peter nodded, promptly including a timid, 'yes, sir'

"...and the whole 'sir' thing isn't necessary, a yes or a no would do just fine. It's the whole, shoulder shrugging thing that pisses me off. I just want an intelligible answer. Yeah?"

Peter tried to gauge how he was supposed to respond to that but ended up going with another 'yes, sir', to which Tony rolled his eyes.

"We're leaving here in thirty. Go get ready."

A prompt, thirty minutes later Peter reappeared in the livingroom showered, dressed and ready to go. Tony looked him over, as he always seemed to do, making Peter shift slightly from foot to foot. Being under the man's scrutinizing gaze made him feel uncomfortable. It didn't help that he had no idea what the man was analyzing, but his nerves were always instantly abated the moment his mentor would give him a satisfied nod and gesture for him to follow.

This time, the plan was to take one Tony's less flashy cars, though there would still be no denying who it belonged to, each car being tagged with a plate the read 'STARK' followed by a unique number. Peter took his time making his way over towards his mentor, who was waiting, keys in hand. He realized he had never genuinely taken the time to appreciate all of the cars stored there. He glanced down an aisle where a bright red car with black stripes on the hood grabbed his attention. He started to walk towards it when he heard the man call out to him. "Hey, Pete? What'd
"you find down there?", he asked with obvious amusement.

Peter paused when he noticed Tony was heading towards him to follow, then lead the man towards the car he was eyeing. "What is this? I've never seen anything like it. It's awesome...", As the last words came out of his mouth he reached forward to touch the shiny exterior before he quickly yanked his hand back.

"You can touch it. It doesn't bite. It's a 1976 Camero. I restored it myself. The interior is custom, of course, but I kept the exterior as classic as possible... You like cars or you just like this car?", Tony asked curiously. He all of a sudden, realized he had no idea what the kid's interests were, outside of Spider-man, a handful of school activities and of course engineering and science.

Peter was still slightly in awe when he finally responded. "I, I don't know. I don't really know that much about cars really. I've just never, I mean, this car is really cool Mr. Stark."

"Hmmm, if you like this one, then I have another one you might like.", Tony mused as he started to walk towards another area in the large garage. "It's a 1989 Jaguar convertible, it's also red, though this one I bought as is, haven't changed a thing."

Peter eagerly followed behind, occasionally pointing out, or asking a question about one car or another before the man came to a stop in front of the convertible he had mentioned moments before. He had been right. He liked, no, loved, that car too and before he could think, it was out of his mouth. "Oh my God, Mr. Stark! Can we take this one out? Like, can I ride in it? Please?"

The kid was bouncing around like an overexcited toddler when he had begged Tony to drive that car instead of the slightly more inconspicuous car he had carefully chosen for the day. "Kid, I don't know if that's such a good idea --"

"--but sometime?" Peter cut him off, excitement unabiding.

"Sure. One day we'll take it out and just drive it around for a while." Tony nearly felt the need to cover his ears when the teenager literally squealed. "Christ, Kid, don't do that. God, you're loud and everything echos in here.", he chastised. Then seeing the crestfallen look that crossed Peter's face he eased off before the kid could start apologizing... again. "Let's, uh, maybe save some of that excitement for when we actually get it outside, yeah? Ready to go now?"

Feeling slightly deflated but still overall pleased that his mentor had agreed to take him out in one of
his fancier cars at some point in the future, he began to follow his mentor back across the garage. He was still grinning ear to ear when they eventually got back to the original car. It had taken some time. Peter kept getting distracted and Tony humored it.

Having pulled out of the garage a gaze down at the clock revealed that they had spent way more time looking at cars than Tony had meant for them too. They had exited the Penthouse, close to eleven o'clock and it was now practically one. That being the case, Tony pulled into the first fast food place he came across. Burger King. That would do. Given the time, and the fact that he was Tony Stark it made sense to make use of the drive-through. "What do you want Kiddo?"

"You eat at Burger King?", the boy asked eyebrows up in question.

"Uh, yeah. Food is food. What do you want?"

"I just thought you would only eat at like, fancy kinds of places.", Peter reflected out loud.

"Kid, we ate pizza in the car last and at a diner near Queens just the other day. Why wouldn't I eat at Burger King? ... and what do you want. We're next."

"I don't know. I just didn't picture you eating drive-through that's all. Oh, can I get fries and a Double Whopper but with no onions?"

"Of course I eat drive-through, how do you think I survived college? ... what to drink?"

"Um... Dr. Pepper?" Peter added, dropping the previous topic, instead, he thanked the man for his lunch as they made their way back onto the road.

Unlike the last few times they had driven out to the hospital and back, the ride wasn't silent. Rather, they spent a considerably long time eagerly discussing cars, a subject Peter had decided he could get into. An hour into the conversation the two had already agreed that it would be 'a good learning experience' for the teenager to work on a car alongside Tony. Peter was beside himself at the prospect.

Eventually, Peter grew quiet and restless. It had been a long time since they had walked out of the penthouse. That combined with the large drink he'd consumed with lunch he was feeling rather anxious about the situation he was in. He really, really needed a bathroom. At the same time, he
really didn't want the man to get mad at him like he had the last time. He was also fairly certain that they were almost there and he could wait.

The kid had become less talkative and more fidgety before ultimately becoming completely still and silent. The completely still bothering Tony more than anything. The kid was never still for longer than ten seconds, some part of him was always moving, even if it was just his fingers drumming on his leg. He didn't have a lot of experience with this but he was pretty sure that whatever this was, he probably needed to know about it. "You alright, Kiddo?"

"Yep", Peter answered, probably a little too quickly if the concerned glance in his direction was anything to go by.

"You sure?"

"Yes..." Then taking a shaky breath because while he knew he could wait, he didn't particularly want to wait. He was pretty sure he had never had to pee so badly in his entire life. "well, no, I mean, it's not a big deal but..." he stopped to swallow, "do you think, I mean could we, uh, maybe... stop somewhere?" He visibly braced himself as the last words escaped his mouth before quickly adding "I promise I'll be really fast, but if you don't want to, it's okay. I-I mean, we'll be there in what, Um, half, half an hour? Tops, right? We're close?"

At this point, Tony recognized what was going on. The kid was worried he was going to get yelled at for requesting what appeared to be a much-needed stop. That was his own doing really. A-plus job once again Stark. "Kid, if you need to pee, it's fine. I'll pull off at the next place."

Peter blushed ever so slightly as he hissed through his teeth, "Yeah, uh, that, that would be good. I mean, if it's really okay. I could wait."

"It's fine, Pete, calm down."

As soon as they stopped, Peter had jumped out of the car, instantly disappearing behind the doors of a small service station. Tony had watched him dart inside before reaching for his phone which immediately lit up in his hand. The screen reading, 'Queen's Memorial Hospital'
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

To be clear, I am not a lawyer or a doctor. I make this shit up as I go. :)

Tony looked down at the caller id on his phone before cursing loudly to no one in particular. He couldn't think of any reason for the hospital to be calling him today. This had to be bad news. Thank God the kid was out of the car. However, he was due to return in mere minutes. Better make this quick. "This is Stark.", the man announced to whoever was on the other side of the line.

"Oh good, I'm glad I got a hold you. This is Sandy Olivett."

'The social worker lady from the hospital', Tony's mind provided for him.

"I was just calling to inform you that I will be discussing Peter's situation with his aunt sometime today. Once she has made a formal decision, we can get things settled into place. Sound good?"

Tony was feeling slightly disconcerted by the woman's words. He was just starting to kind of get used to having the kid around. He had made plans to teach him how to fix cars. He had only been there for three days. Shit. Was he actually upset at the idea that May might have a different plan that didn't include him? It seemed so. Alrighty.

A long pause later, "Are you still there? Mr. Stark?"

"Uh, yeah. I'm still here." He stammered before collecting himself. "I was actually on my way over there with the kid."

"That sounds perfect. Gives them the chance to discuss everything first. If I don't see you, I'll talk to you soon."

"Of course. Talk to you later." Just as Tony was ending the conversation, Peter had hopped back into the seat. Putting his phone away he glanced towards him. "Better? You ready now?"
"Yeah, Yeah I'm good.", the boy answered in breathy contentment, settling into the seat. Then as he snapped his seatbelt, he asked, "Who were you talking to?"

"Huh? Oh, it was the social worker lady from the hospital. She's going to be talking to your aunt soon. Wanted me to know."

"Oh." The boy let out a nervous breath. "Do, do you think that, uh, she's, I mean, she's not going to send me to a, like a group home, right? Do you think?"

"Of course not Pete. May would never allow it. Besides, I'll make sure she knows you can stay with me as long as she needs you to... if that's what you want of course."

"I, I, is that what you want? I, uh, I don't want to be in your way--"

"--You're not in my way, Kid. I don't mind you being there. Actually, I might even enjoy it, you know, when you're not being a pain in the ass.", Tony interrupted casually. Using sarcasm as a tool to help ease the tension that had been building in the car. Of course, Peter didn't take it that way.

"Oh. I, I, didn't mean to... be a pain I mean. I was really, really trying not to be a problem..."

"Jesus, Kid. I didn't mean it like that. You're not a pain in the ass. Well, sometimes you are, but it's okay. I don't really mind."

Peter laughed lightly at that, which was a relief to Tony. He had never paid much attention to how sensitive the boy was to criticism. Or, maybe this was new. Either way, he made a mental note to be a little more careful. The last thing he wanted was to provoke the kid into thinking he didn't like him.

After the car was parked, the pair walked up to the floor where May was. This time they were allowed to go into the unit without having to meet with the doctor first. That seemed to please Peter.

In the room, they were met in the room by a nurse they hadn't met yet. "You must be Peter!", the young man said. "She talks about you every time I come in here to check on her." He smiled warmly at them and stepped out of the way so that May could get a good look at them. "Look here Ms. Parker! Peter's come to visit."
May smiled at them. "Peter.", she said sounding much more aware than she had at any point the night before. "I'm so glad to see you. I was just telling Justin, here, about your Decathlon win last fall."

"She was, that's pretty impressive. You must be a pretty smart kid.", the nurse said as he finished up one last adjustment on May's IV. "Alright. I'm all done here, so I'll leave you guys to it. Let me know if you need anything, Ms. Parker. Otherwise, I'll see in you in about two hours." With that, he left the room, closing the door behind him.

May's gaze, went from Peter to Tony, who was standing behind him by a few strides. "Mr. Stark. They told me that you had come to pick Peter up at some point. I admit, after I saw you with him last night, I thought I had hallucinated it.", she smiled.

"No, It was really me, though I can see your point.", the man sighed. "I couldn't just leave him here. I promised you that I would keep him safe. Plus, I figured if he was calling me he must have no other options and ..." He paused griping his left wrist in front of himself. "I kinda like having the kid around."

"He called you because he trusts you", May affirmed. "That and his best friend is in Peru for another week and a half.", she added with a small laugh, though the action made her wince.

Tony was happy to see that May was feeling more lively and teasing today, even if it was obvious she was still in some pain. "Hmm, that explains it then." He looked over at Peter who had now pulled a chair up to his aunt's bedside. "Couldn't call your 'Guy in the Chair' so I was up next huh?"

Smirking, Peter looked back at his mentor. "Technically I considered calling MJ after Ned, but she's gone for the summer and I don't really know her parents."

"Nice, Kid. Thanks for that. I'll keep it in mind that I was third on your list of people to cover your ass the next time you need something." He made sure to smile at the kid as he teased. "Now, I'm going to get coffee."

Alone in the room together, May asked Peter how staying with Tony had been and he happily rambled story after story to her. Everything from Iron Man cooking eggs to the promise of a ride in the convertible he loved. He left out all of the arguments, not wanting her to even consider child services as an option. Besides, worst case scenario, if May was still in the hospital in two weeks, he could go stay with Ned.
"So you like it there? That's okay? If not, I can call Grace. I know you haven't met her but she's one of my coworkers, she had a son who is just a couple of years younger than you. I'm almost certain you could stay with her."

Peter's eyes grew wide. Staying with a coworker of May's, that he has never met, sounded near as bad a child services. "I'm fine! I want to stay. Mr. Stark, he's, he great. I would rather just stay there for now."

May seemed content with his answer and just nodded her head. "You can tell me if you change your mind at any time."

"I know. I will. It's going to be fine though."

Once that was settled the two were able to go back to talking about more pleasant things. Tony had reentered the room to see the pair sitting beside each other chatting quietly. It took moment or two for Peter noticed and greet him. "Oh, hey, Mr. Stark.", he said before turning his attention back to his aunt, his mentor satisfied to just sit in the chair by the door, sipping his coffee and doing some work on the tablet he'd carried in.

more than an hour had passed, when Ms. Olivett, entered the room with a gentle knock. She and Tony greeted each other with a handshake before she proceeded to move her attention to May.

Peter and Tony had been asked to exit the room while they spoke, this igniting an angry spark in the kid's eyes. He wasn't fond of being kept away from his aunt when she needed him. Nonetheless, with Tony incessantly tugging at his elbow, he left the room. Together, they walked down the hallway to the waiting area, where Tony swiped his card to buy him a candy bar and a bottle of water from the vending machine. "I bet by the time you're done with that, we'll be able to go back in", the man said in an attempt to placate the kid. However, it appeared that teenager had taken that as a challenge, seeing as he wolfed it all down in less than two minutes.

"Really, Pete? You could not have even tasted that.", the man said scolded.

"What? I was hungry.", the boy said innocently.

His mentor then threw up his hands in an annoyed gesture. "Well, why didn't you just say something."
Peter hung his head and resisted the urge to shrug his shoulders. "You'd just bought me, Burger King. I didn't want to be annoying."

Aggravation was definitely slipping into his tone. "What's annoying is you not telling me when you need shit." then taking a quick peek at his watch, "Besides, that was, almost three hours ago." He knew the kid ate all the time. He would come to the lab with a backpack stuffed full of snacks before Tony started keeping him some around the lab and gym for him.

Peter didn't know how to respond to that so he didn't.

"Look, after social worker lady comes back to get us, I'll go down to the cafeteria and get you a real snack. Yeah?"

They didn't have to wait much longer. Ms. Olivett came through the door and ushered them back into the room declaring everything settled. She set a few papers down in front of Tony and briefly went over their contents as he started to read through them. "The top one just needs one signature. It nullifies the papers we signed the other night since we now have Ms. Parker with us to make a formal decision. The next few papers, unlike the one you signed the other night, are not federally binding. They are more of an agreement between you and Ms. Parker, saying that you will be caring for Peter throughout the duration of her absence by taking on the role of 'caregiver'. While Ms. Parker remains Peter's League guardian, you Mr. Stark are more of a contracted--""

"--babysitter. Got it"

"He's fifteen, Mr. Stark. I hardly think the term babysitter applies here." The woman said smiling in his direction. He could hear May giggling in the background. "As I was saying, this contract would be binding in a civil court. However, non-compliance could reach a federal level if the care resulted in any kind of abuse or negligence. Ms. Parker has already signed her portion of those papers. The last one is a financial agreement. You two will need to discuss that. It is basically a 'child support' agreement, used to identify who will be taking care of which financial obligations while Peter is under your care. So once you have gone over it all and signed it, You can place it back into the folder and I will come back as soon as I can to get copies for each of you. Sound good?"

Tony just sort of murmured an agreement as he stared at the last paper. He had zero intentions of using any of the Parker's money. "May, we don't need this financial agreement. If he's staying at my place, I take care of everything."

May hesitated but understood where the man was coming from. She wasn't stupid. She knew he had enough money and that adding Peter to his household for a little while wouldn't even put a small
dent in it. She just didn't want it to turn into a charity case. "Okay, I think I can agree to that as long as you don't go overboard"

"Hmm. Define overboard."

May smiled. "You will take care of all of his needs, within a modest budget.--"

"--Define modest budget"

She ignored him in order to continue. "--but not every single one of his wants. No spoiling him."

"Define Spi--"

"Tony!" She nearly shouted but her face showed nothing but mirth.

"Fine.", he said as he signed the papers and filled in the financial agreement to reflect what they had just discussed.

Peter just sat back and watched the two as they interacted. It was weird knowing that his aunt was so readily willing to hand him over to Tony, even if that is what he'd said he wanted. Though, really it was the discussion of money that made him uncomfortable. Mostly because he hadn't even considered that. Sure he had no problem letting the man buy him food and provide him with a warm bed but May had given him permission to buy him things. He made a mental note to never mention anything he wanted to the man ever.

After all of the papers were sealed back into their manila envelope, Tony, as promised, had sauntered out of the room in order to get Peter a snack. He returned a short time later carrying a personal sized pizza and a rather large smoothie. Handing it to Peter, he caught the quickly passing, scrunched up look the boy gave when he read the pizza box marked as 'supreme' "Don't give me that look. I remembered to tell them no onions."

"Oh, I, I didn't... mean to? I, just...thank you... for getting me food I mean."

"Geez Kiddo, chill out. It's okay."
Then May cut in. "He's always like that. Better get used to it."

Switching his gaze from Peter to May, Tony asked, "Always like what?"

"Hesitant, eager to please.", she said with no judgment. "Sometimes it's hard to believe that this is the same kid that goes out and about all over the city... doing his, you know... extracurriculars."

"Maay!", the boy whined through a mouth full of onion-free pizza.

They didn't stay much longer after that. May looked tired and Tony had, as always, suggested that they could return again the next day. So, they said their goodbyes and started their journey back to the compound.

Once there, Peter had enthusiastically followed his mentor down into the lab where they sat in front of a screen scrolling for different websites looking for an interesting car to work on. They finally settled on a 1929 Roadster. The picture of the interior and the engine made it look like it would need a lot of work and that was exactly what they wanted.

When Tony went to make an offer on it, Peter nearly choked on the chips he was munching on. "Mr. Stark! That say's it's $31,000 dollars... and it doesn't even run. Didn't May tell you that you were supposed to be reasonable or something? You can't buy me a $31,000 car."

"Who said it's for you? You're like twelve, you can't even drive yet."

"Ugh, I know it's not for me, for me but, for the record, I'm fifteen and you know that and I do have my learners permit... Still, you can't just buy that so we can work on it. It's, it's too much. " He sounded exasperated.

"First of all, if you are learning how to drive, God help us. Second, I've got a little secret for ya, Pete. I would buy this car whether you were helping me or not. I mean, look at it. Sure, I might not have bought it today... but I would have bought it eventually. Trust me. I always need another project." About that time FRIDAY announced that Pepper was calling so the man stepped out of the room to talk to her, leaving Peter with instructions to start researching.
"Hey Pepper.", the man greeted, you could practically hear the smile in his voice.

"Hey Tony, You sound awfully pleased, and here I was worried about you.", she laughed.

"Nothing to worry about. I have it all under control."

"Do you now. Then why did FRIDAY just inform me that you just purchased another car?"

'Snitch', Tony thought to himself, glaring at the ceiling as he continued to listen to his fiance's line of questioning.

"I thought you were still working on that, that silver car... the one you bought a few months ago from that guy you met in the hotel parking lot in Miami."

"The El Camino? Pepper, honey. I finished that one, weeks ago. I've been designing suit updates since then but it turns out that the kid's interested in cars so I bought one for us to work on while he's here. It's his summer vacation, can't have him getting all bored."

"So, you're telling me that you bought the car... for Peter."

"No, I mean, sort of. Not like that. It's just a project. It's not his car."

"Okay, I get it. That's not actually why I was calling anyway. I wanted to let you know, I moved my meetings around so I can be home Saturday afternoon. I'll have to come back in a week, though. Then I have that trip to Hong Kong almost immediately after that. Anyway, I can't wait to meet Peter properly. Why don't you book us a nice dinner for Saturday night? Pick something Peter likes."

Tony laughed fondly. "The kid is fifteen, dear. He'll eat anything. Though he seems rather fond of pizza, cheeseburgers and.." he had to stop to laugh before adding "...Spaghetti O's" Tony had just about died laughing when he heard the kid quietly add that to the grocery order.

"Well, make it Italian then, what about that really nice place in Manhattan? What was it called? Buona Pandella?"
"They require ties and jackets.\textquotedbl", the man said flatly.

"That's what makes it a \textit{nice} restaurant. Since when do you care about that anyway?"

His thoughts had actually been for the kid. He had never seen Peter in a tie, he wasn't sure the kid owned a suit jacket and he knew the kid would probably have a heart attack when he saw that the side salad alone cost more than $17.

It seemed Pepper had already made up her mind, there would be no changing it so he sighed and agreed to make the reservation before hanging up. He could discuss the dress code with Peter later. If they had to go out shopping tomorrow, so be it.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

My kid has an FRC District Competition this weekend (and the State Competition next weekend) so I’ve had and will continue to have a lot of time to write between the qualifier matches. I’m pretty far ahead so, I thought I would just go ahead and post another chapter today. :) 

Returning to the lab, Tony found that Peter had moved on from his assigned research and had relocated to the corner of the lab where he typically created his web fluid. "What are you working on over there?", he asked as started heading over to his own work station.

"Oh, I'm making another batch of web fluid. Since I'm here, I might as well stock up."

"That makes sense. You get bored of the car already?" Peter's eyes shot in his mentor's direction.

"No! I, well, I downloaded some books and files onto the laptop. I figured I could do this while I waited."

"Ah. Good. I was worried that I had lost my assistant before we even started."

"Never, Mr. Stark.", the boy answered smiling.

"Alrighty.", the man replied, not really knowing how to respond. The kid had sounded so genuine it made his heart flutter a bit. "well, I have some stuff that I should have been working on two weeks ago for an SI meeting I have tomorrow."

"I thought Ms. Potts was in charge of SI."

"Yeah... making her CEO only gets me out of so much. I still have to go to the boring as hell board meetings and deal with the R&D department."
"Hmm.", Peter said nodding his head. "I guess I never really thought about it."

Tony looked over at the kid and cocked his head to the side. "Maybe you should go in with me one day..."

Peter's heart started to pound a little. Tony had mentioned in passing, that he might let him help with some SI projects but actually suggesting that he could go into the office was totally different. Up until the last couple of days, Peter was certain that his and Tony's relationship, if you could even call it that, was sort of compartmentalized soundly in the 'Super Hero Mentor' sort of category. Then again, the man did come and get him when he needed him and he had said a few times at this point that he was worried about him. This was getting confusing.

As Peter was shaking the confusing thoughts out of his head, he heard his mentor speaking to him again. "Hey Kiddo, you with me?"

"Huh? I mean, yeah, of course." The after an embarrassing pause he added, "W-what did you say?"

"I was asking you what you thought about coming to SI with me tomorrow. I have a couple of R&D meeting tomorrow. Then I noticed you were all spaced out. You alright?"

"I'm fine. I was just thinking."

"What about?", Tony asked him curiously.

"Oh, just about going to SI with you. I, uh, never really expected you to ask me about that. I mean, I just thought that you only kept me around for Spider-man...not that I blame you! I'm, I'm just Peter Parker..."

"Well, just Peter Parker... do you want to go with me to SI tomorrow or not?"

"Oh, I do!", Peter answered quickly.

He had noticed that his mentor didn't disagree about only keeping him around for Spider-man. Admittedly, kind of hurt. He had been starting to think that the man might care about him just a little
bit. He tried not to dwell on, keeping himself focused on his tasks.

The two of them continued to work in relative silence for quite a while until Peter began to yawn. After the third yawn and second dropped web-fluid canister, Tony suggested that Peter go on up to bed and he did so with very little argument. Tony followed closely behind, they had to leave by nine in the morning and it was well after one by the time he made it into his own bed.

The next morning, Tony was unsurprised to find a sleeping spiderling curled up on his couch, book in hand. He opted to start his pot of coffee, God, knows he would need it today, before wrestling the blankets away from the kid.

Once Peter's adept hearing picked up on the coffee pot starting he slowly sat himself up on the couch. "Mr. Stark? What time is it?", he yawned out.

"Eight", the man answered rubbing his eyes with the thumb and pointer finger that wasn't occupied with holding a coffee mug. "When did you come out here?"

"Oh. Um...around four-thirty. I think I went back to sleep pretty quick though. I only got through a couple of chapters."

"Hmm. You want to talk about it?"

"What? The chapters? There isn't anything to talk about really, It's an old physics book I found at Goodwill. I understand most of it, it's probably outdated information, was Published in 1996."

"No, kid. Do you want to talk about how you keep ending up here on the couch?", the man answered flatly. He was almost sure the kid was deflecting, then again lack of sleep can severely effect processing and Peter looked tired, he reasoned with himself.

"Not really", he whispered, making his way into the kitchen to get some cereal out of the pantry.

Tony frowned and sighed before answering the kid. "Well, let me know if you change your mind okay?"
"Yeah. I, uh, yeah. Okay."

"Now", Tony announced clapping his hands together, "We are leaving here in forty-five minutes. You need to shower and change into whatever the nicest thing you have with you is... but if that's just jeans and a t-shirt that's fine too. Yeah?"

"Yes sir, I think I have a plaid button down but I only brought jeans with me."

"That'll due. Now, there's something else I wanted to talk to you about", the man started as Peter poured himself a second bowl of cereal.

"Oh? Um... what about..." For some reason the way the man had said he needed to talk to him made him feel uneasy. He couldn't think of anything he might have done wrong. His face must have shown his apprehension because the man immediately started to explain.

"Not a big deal.", the man said holding his hands up as if in surrender. "Wanted you to know that Pepper is coming home tomorrow. She wants us to go out to dinner together--"

Peter's eyes grew wide "--Oh! That's fine I can stay here by myself. I won't get into any trouble. I--"

"--Kid! You didn't let me finish. You're coming. She wants to meet you properly."

"She wants me to come with you guys?"

"Of course she does. Now, the place we are going to be eating at has a dress code. You know how that works?"

Peter shifted in his seat. This already sounded out of his league. "I, yeah. Like, you have to were a tie and stuff right?"

"Exactly. Do you have a suit with a tie and jacket at your apartment? If you don't, we can go get one today."
"I have the one from homecoming, it was Bens' though so it's kind of old and doesn't really fit great. The jacket I mean. I, uh, I have like, dress pants and shoes and stuff."

"Alright, be sure to grab your key, we're going to stop by your apartment after we get done with the R&D meetings."

Still feeling a bit anxious, about the whole day really, Peter agreed. He knew his mentor wasn't going to approve of what he owned. The man was going to insist on buying him an entirely new outfit. He couldn't decide how he felt about that but there wasn't much time to dwell on it. He still needed to shower and get ready for the day.

While getting dressed, Peter realized that the only shoes he had with him were the ratty sneakers he had been wearing when he ran out the door towards the hospital. They were in pretty poor contrast to the nice dark jeans and the button down shirt he had put on. He kicked himself for not grabbing his leather slip-on shoes when he had collected clothes from his apartment. It should have been a given that he would have to dress 'nice' at some point while living with a billionaire. There was no changing that now, so he headed out into the living room.

As expected, Tony looked him over before they walked out the door. Peter was absolutely sure the man had noticed his torn up shoes but he didn't say anything about it. He just reached over and adjusted the turned up collar on his shirt before nodding in approval.

Once in the car and well on their way, it occurred to Peter that there was really no reason for him to be entering the SI building with Tony Stark and he started to internally panic. What were people going to say? To think? "Um, M-Mr. Stark?", he asked.

"Yeah?", the man answered as he looked the boy over in concern.

His voice sounded shakier than he wanted it to. "I was, um, wondering..."

When the boy's questioned trailed off, the man tried to fill in the blanks. "You need me to stop?"

"Oh no! Nothing like that. I just, I was wondering, um, what are we supposed to tell people about, you know, why I'm with you. I mean, what, what am I doing. I guess I don't know how to ask this..." He sounded flustered.
"You're my intern. It's that simple. You've been listed as my intern for months. The compound and SI have the same database. I've never had an intern listed under me before though, so I expect people will try to ask questions. You don't have to answer any of it, of course. Stick close to me. If you get uncomfortable, tell me. You can go sit in my office while I finish up."

"Oh, okay. Yeah, that, that sounds good... Thank you." He was surprised the man had come up with a backup plan if he became uncomfortable. Come to think of it, he was sort of surprised that his mentor had even considered that the attention might make him uncomfortable. Either he was that much of an open book or Tony was simply starting to figure him out.

When they entered the building, it surprised Peter, that no one even seemed to bat an eye. He half expected to be bombarded by employees wanting to get the man's attention or something. However, they strolled through the lobby to the elevator without any interceptions and went straight to Tony's office. It was spacious with large windows. There was an expensive looking desk that had papers stacked all over it, seemingly ignored and behind it, a connecting bathroom. In the corner was a small couch and a coffee table. That's where Peter ended up settling himself while Tony dug through the mountain of papers on his desk, grumbling about how there was no reason for 'all this shit' to not be digital.

"Alright, Pete, let's get going first meeting starts fifteen minutes ago. This one is with the Technology Department. They do phones, tablets, stuff like that. We'll get lunch after then we meet with the leaders in the Clean Energy Research Department. Should be out of here by three-thirty. We can go to your apartment, maybe a store and then the hospital, if you like."

Peter agreed and followed him down to the elevator that led to the R&D floors, where he was in absolute awe. It was huge. There were different labs around every corner set up for everything from clean energy initiatives to bioengineering research. Peter had to pause at each lab door to read the signs before jogging to catch up with his mentor.

Eventually, they reached what looked like a large conference room filled with a lot well dressed, adults. If Peter felt underdressed beside Tony, he really felt underdressed now, being the only one in jeans and battered shoes. He found himself taking a step behind the man as soon as they entered, while in the same motion the man pulled him around to the front, introducing him as his intern who was there to take notes and learn the ropes. Peter was concerned that this was where the uncomfortable questioning would start but it seemed that Tony's word was final and not to be questioned.

Peter had found the meeting interesting enough, even when his mentor looked seconds away from a nap in the chair where he sat. As the people in the room were talking, he found himself wanting to pipe up and ask questions but he didn't. There was no way he was going to draw that much attention
to himself even if he was really, really curious about some of the decisions being made. He never noticed that Tony was periodically glancing his direction.

It was when they made it back to the office, cafeteria lunch in hand, that the man started to question Peter. "Kid, I know you were thinking something during that meeting. In fact, at one point I was pretty sure you were going to have to cover up your mouth just to keep it in...What was it?"

"Um... nothing?" He wasn't sure why he was denying it. His mentor had brought him there to learn. *You learn by asking questions*, at least that's what Uncle Ben always told him.

"Oh, it was something... and whatever it was, was something big. Spill."

"It's just... When they were talking about demographics and target audiences..." Peter gave the man a tentative look as his words drifted to a stop.

"Go on", the man urged with a hand waving gesture.

"Well, they said that the target audience for the StarkPhone was fifteen to twenty-two and that they wanted to do a focus group with people ages eighteen to twenty-five. "

"I know what they said, I was there. Where are you going with this, Kid?"

Peter sighed, "No offense, Mr. Stark, but no one at my school has a StarkPhone. I mean, a few might have an old one but no one goes out to get the new one." He paused to evaluate the reaction but the man's face remained as neutral as ever. After a moment, the man raised his eyebrows and gave another quick gesture to get him talking again, so he continued. "They, They're, well, they're just too expensive. No one's parents will get them one. *Not even Flash.* So, so I was... sort of confused, I guess."

The man nodded his head and placed a hand under his chin as though he were thinking then took a deep breath. "Target audiences are based on statistics. In this case, they determined that individuals between the ages of fifteen and twenty-two are most likely to pick up on and engage with the newest forms of technology. Which I guess is backed up in the focus groups... I admit I don't really have anything to do with that part of the process. I mostly bounce around new ideas and help with debugging."
"So, so sales aren't tracked? Like who is actually buying them? Though, I suppose my school might be different... I'm there on a scholarship, the other parents are paying so maybe they don't want to spend the money on a fancy phone too?"

"You know what, Kid, I'm going to look into that. In the meantime, I'm getting you the newest StarkPhone today so--"

"No, no, nononono, you don't have to do that. That's like an over a thousand dollar phone. May made you promise not to go overboard!", Peter sputtered.

"This isn't a gift, *this is work*. As *my intern*, I want you to try it out, then, together we can see what can be changed to take the cost down, while still maintaining Stark quality. We'll mess around with it until we think we have a good version of a 'StarkPhone Lite'. Though, it could use a cooler name... Seriously though, Kiddo, technology should be accessible. We can work on that. Before we leave, we'll get you a phone and an extensive list of current features to go through. Yeah?"

His look of pure terror had melted into a tentative smile. "Yeah... okay. That doesn't sound so bad."

"Great.", the man said clapping his hands together before wiping them on a napkin. "As soon as you're done eating, we have one more meeting to go to. It starts five minutes ago.

"Don't you get in trouble for being late?"

The man looked at the boy incredulously. "Hi, Tony Stark here. My name is, literally, *on the building*. Who am I going to get in trouble with?"

Peter blushed a bit. "Ms. Potts?"

Tony sighed. "Touche. Guess you better hurry"

At those words, Peter shoved the last few bites of food into his mouth before declaring himself done.

The next meeting wasn't near as interesting. As much as he loved the Clean Energy Initiative, this session was mostly mundane business numbers. The last forty-five-minutes felt like hours and he
found himself elated to be exiting the room once it ended. "Oh my God, that was boring", Peter whined as they got into the car.

"Tell me about it. I have to do that shit all the time. You are so going with me to the next boring-as-fuck board meeting. I could use a distraction."

"Yes, sir!", Peter answered with delight, seemingly having already forgotten about how boring the last meeting was.

Tony rolled his eyes. "Next stop's your place. You brought your key?"

"Duh, you told me to get it. It's right here." The boy said digging through his pockets and pulling out his house key.

The man glanced over and started laughing out loud. "Really, Kid? I'm flattered."

It took a moment for Peter to realize what the man was talking about. Then he looked down at his key and groaned. He had totally forgotten about the Iron Man keychain he had attached to it. It had been a gift from Ned. He had given it to him shortly after he started visiting the compound regularly for training and updates. The other boy had thought it would be funny, but Peter thought it was awesome so he put his house key on it. This all of a sudden seemed like a shit idea as Iron Man himself was laughing at him.

"Mr. Staaark!", the boy whined, shoving the key back into his pocket at near lightning speed. "It, It was a present" the man continued to laugh with glee, "st-stop laughing! It's not even that funny! c'mon Mr. Stark..."

Once there, Peter made a point of outpacing his mentor up the stairs, just so he could unlock the door out of sight. He had already decided that he was going to force the man to buy him a new keychain while they were out. This was so not happening again.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Tag adds: Anxious Peter Parker

As Peter walked out of his bedroom to model his only suit, tie hanging loosely around his neck, Tony's face scrunched up into an indecipherable look. The boy, shifting foot to foot waiting for a verdict, though he already knew what it would be. They were going to end up shopping and he already hated it. There was no doubt in his mind, he would really hate shopping with Tony. The man was going to drag him into some ridiculously expensive tailor or something rather than simply going to Sears. He knew it. "Kid... I mean, that's fine for homecoming but I think it would be a good idea if we invested in getting you something a little more... well, more."

Peter sighed and threw himself onto the couch behind where the man was standing. "I hate shopping and there's nothing wrong with this suit."

"Like, I said Pete, it's fine for school events and whatnot. I just think that we need to get something a little more updated for tomorrow. We can make it quick.", the man promised, having turned to face him.

"Ugh, it's just a stupid suit, no one cares as long as it has a jacket and tie, right?", Peter pleaded.

Tony was already getting frustrated with this conversation. He didn't want the kid to feel like what he had wasn't good enough but, if he was being honest, what the kid had wasn't good enough. This wasn't a church service or a high school induction ceremony. It was a restaurant that would be filled with a bunch of snobby rich people who would be displaying their wealth by wearing nothing but the top of the line. The suit the boy had would stick out like a sore thumb and Peter, as he had recently learned, could be quite sensitive. "Look, Kiddo, I'm not saying that anyone will care. That was a lie. God forbid the media showed up "I'm just saying that there are several uses for a good suit. I can take care of the cost and then you can have something that will be appropriate for dinner and, I don't know, an interview or date or something. Hell, as my intern, you may end up going to other places with me where a nice suit would be required."

"I don't need it!", the boy near shouted, throwing his arms up in the air. "This one is fine. I don't need an expensive suit. There is literally nothing wrong with this one." The last thing Peter felt he needed to own was a $5,000 suit. Nearly all of his clothing came from the sales racks or goodwill. In fact, the biggest clothing purchase he had made in the last year was an $80 pair of sneakers and only because he had worn holes into his last ones.
Tony was teetering on the edge of getting pissed off at the kid's stubborn demeanor. "For the love of Christ, it doesn't have to be a custom Kiton. Just something that is a little bit more dressy. What you have is, is church clothes... It's great. What I need you in is a nice business suit."

At this point, it seemed as though, Peter was arguing out of pure, teenage obstinance. "Or...how about I just don't go at all. That would solve the whole problem!"

Now Tony had gone from frustrated to fuming. Why was the kid putting up such a fight? It was a fucking suit. "Oh, you're coming and you're coming in a brand-fucking-new suit if I have to wrestle you into it myself. Do you hear me, Parker!?"

The kid offered an indignant huff, gaze turning into a glare. "Right. I am stronger than you, you know."

"So, I'll wrestle you into it while in a suit of my own.", the man seethed through gritted teeth as he tried not to raise his voice.

"I... You...", the kid sputtered before storming off towards his own room, locking the door behind him. It actually felt good to be laying in his own bed. Even if he was doing so while trying not to cry tears of frustration. It had been a good couple of days. Why was he all of a sudden so emotional? Everything felt so overwhelming at the moment. The guardianship, the car, the internship, the phone, the impending dinner with Ms. Potts, the stupid suit... While, part of him wanted to cry it out and then break down and let his mentor buy him the suit, part of him insisted that he stand his ground and remain unmoved. It was frustrating to feel so conflicted and he ended up screaming into his pillow.

Tony, had now flopped himself down onto the couch, where Peter had been seated just moments before. The walls in the apartment were paper-thin, he didn't need to have enhanced hearing to pick up on the muffled screams coming from the kid's room. None of the damn books he read had prepared him for this, not really. He considered calling Pepper but then remembered that it was sort of her fault he was in this mess, to begin with. So, he opted to step outside and call Rhodey instead. Calling towards the kid's room that he would be right back as he exited.

Upon the first ring, Tony immediately regretted making the call. Was he really about to admit to one of his best friends that he needed help negotiating with a teenage boy? Seeing as the man pick up before the end of the second ring, it appeared so. "Hey, Rhodey. What's up?"
"Working. I'm assuming this is important if you're calling me in the middle of the afternoon on a Friday."

"Important is kind of relative isn't it?"

"Tony, I don't have time to play games with you. I had to step out of a meeting with my superiors to answer this.", then sighing audibly into the receiver, "So, whatever it is, get to the point, please."

Tony hesitated. "I pissed the kid off again.", he stated matter-of-factly.

"Jesus, Tony, what did you do now?"

"All I did was offer to buy him a new suit. I don't know why he's acting all... excessive about it. Damn near had a fucking tantrum."

"Who? You or him?", his friend asked, clearly smiling.

"Haha. You're so hilarious.", Tony deadpanned before allowing the irritation to slip back into his voice. "Look, are you going to help me or not."

"Alright fine, you've got me. Why does the kid need a suit, to begin with?"

"Pepper wants us to all go out to dinner together at that Italian place in Manhattan. The one that requires a tie and jacket. The kid isn't exactly set up for something like that so I told him I would buy him what he needed. Then he got all bent out of shape about it because he already has a suit. But the jacket is from, like, before he was born, undisputedly. I just want him to be able to blend in."

"Did you tell him that?"

"I mean, sort of, pretty much..."

"Do you think this is even about the suit?"
He was getting frustrated. "How the fuck should I know!? That's why I called you!"

"Tony, go talk to your damn kid."

Those last words made Tony falter a bit before he reminded the man of the teenager's parentage. "Not my kid, Rhodes."

"Oh, he's your's alright. Now either use that genius brain of yours to figure out what the kid is actually upset about or just go talk to him. Either way, I really need to get back to this meeting. Text me later."

With that, the call was disconnecting and Tony was left standing in the hallway no closer to knowing what he was doing than he was when the call had first started five minutes prior. *Fabulous.*

Grumbling a quiet 'I'm back' as he walked back through the door, he dropped himself back down onto the couch to think. Then all at once, it hit him. The child had suggested that if he didn't go at all, it would solve the whole problem. That was it! He needed to talk to the kid.

Meanwhile, Peter, in his bed, continued to wallow in his own misery. He had managed to piss his mentor off yet again and he had almost decided that he was ready to come out and tell the man that he would *reluctantly* go shopping with him *just to end the argument* when there was a knock at the door. "I'm coming.," he muttered, taking his time getting to the door to unlock it. He was still scowling, arms crossed over his chest when it opened.

The door now unlocked, Tony entered the room in one grand gesture already talking. He was on a mission. "Look, I think I know what your problem is but I'm gonna need you to confirm it. Yeah?", the man started. When Peter just stared at him, he continued. "This isn't *about* the damn suit is it. This is about the fucking dinner plans. You don't want to go. Is that it?"

*Shit.* It was true, he really didn't want to go to that dinner. He didn't want to wear a ridiculously overpriced suit, he was already nervous about sitting down to a meal with Ms. Potts and the thought of going into a restaurant that actually *had a dress code* had him nearly worried sick. "I, I mean, I don't...not want to go?", the boy said, but not before dropping his gaze to the floor.

"I don't know what that means, kid. Talk to me. Why don't you want to go? It's not Pepper is it?"
Peter peeled his eyes off of the floor, looking aghast. "Of course not! I mean, I'm kind of nervous about actually sitting with her and talking to her but..."

Not having the patience to allow the kid to gather his thoughts Tony was already urging him to go on after mere seconds. "...but what? If it's not Pepper then what is it?"

"It's kind of, well, all of it really.", the boy sounded almost on the verge of tears.

The man no longer felt the same amount of urgency he had felt when he entered the room. The defeated look on the kid's face was enough to calm him as he made his way to the edge of the bed and took a seat. There was no hesitation, this time, as he placed a gentle hand on the kid's knee and he was grateful when Peter didn't flinch. "Talk to me, Kid. I can't fix this unless we talk.", he sighed.

Taking a deep breath, he didn't want his mentor to get offended or angry at him. His feelings were sort of all over the place in the last few days and he wasn't sure how he would take that kind of reaction at the moment. "I, It's all been so, so overwhelming. I, I can't seem to figure out how I feel about anything."

The words were coming more easily, the more he spoke. "You've already done so much and now you want to go spend more money on me and then Ms. Potts wants to meet me and I'm nervous. I know what you're going to say, that I've met her before, but that was different. It was only in passing. Not eating dinner with her at some crazy expensive restaurant. Which I'm grateful that, you know, you want to take me to, it's just, that also makes me super nervous. I guess what I'm trying to say is that... I'm just, anxious? It's, it's been... a lot. I'm sorry."

Peter hadn't even realized that at some point he had begun to wring his hands together in his lap in a nervous gesture, until the man reached over and covered them with a hand of his own, causing the boy to still. "Jesus Kiddo, you had me scared to death. I thought... God, I don't know what I thought. This though. This we can work with. Look, how about I call Pepper and tell her that we won't be making that reservation. We can go to Olive Graden instead, I'll rent out the whole restaurant if I have to. Does that help?"

"No suit?", the boy asked in a cautious whine. He was aware that the question made him sound petulant but he wasn't exactly feeling great at the moment.

"No suit today", the man offered, hand still resting on Peter's. "That doesn't mean that we won't ever need to go get one. We just don't need to go get one today."
With the weight of the restaurant and the suit purchase off of his shoulder's, Peter felt he could relax a little and without thinking he leaned himself onto Tony's side. To his credit, the man only stiffened for a second before allowing himself to relax and let it happen. "I don't feel good.", the boy said casually.

That had the man frowning. He had never known the kid to complain about anything. Reaching over he passed a hand across the child's forehead. "You don't feel warm. Think it's just nerves?"

"Hmm? Maybe.", he answered, scrubbing his face with his hands as he sat back up. "Are we still going to go see May?"

"Yeah, of course, we're still going. Why don't you change back into your jeans while I see if there's anything for you to eat around here? Might help you feel better.", he said patting the kid on the shoulder as he stood.

Peter just nodded as we went to pick up his discarded clothing. He made a point of keeping the brown leather dress shoes on. He could bring the sneakers with him. Walking into the kitchen he found a bowl of hot Spaghetti-O's waiting for him, by the looks of it, at least two cans. His mentor was nowhere in sight. Assuming that he would be back any moment Peter started in on the bowl.

As expected, the man, walked back into the apartment only a few moments later. "Cleaned out the fridge and took the trash out.", he explained. "Didn't want you guys to come home to a rotten mess.", he smiled.

Peter thanked him and finished his pasta before washing his bowl and placing it back into the cupboard. The man had been right, eating had helped some.

Talking to May, once they got to the hospital made him feel even better. He was able to go over most of the day's events with her and she was easily able to him sort through his thoughts. All of this happened while Tony sat in the back of the room appearing to busy himself with his work.

The fact was, the man was not, in fact, busying himself with work, he was casually listening in. Taking mental notes on how the woman was able to get the kid to relax so quickly. It seemed easy enough. All she did was let him talk then either ask him simple yes and no questions or repeat what he had just said in the form of an inquiry.
After a while, May suggested that Peter go down to the cafeteria to sit and something to eat. He tried to avoid the suggestion but his stomach won out and he relented. Tony passing him a large bill as he walked out the door along with a request for coffee.

Once Peter was out of the room May turned her attention to Tony. "So, Peter seems to be pretty happy given the circumstances. Says everything is great."

Tony shuffled slightly on his feet. "Yeah, well, he's a good kid."

"Hmm... How's it really going?"

That had the man's attention. "It's going...well? He really is a good kid.", the man sighed.

"He is.", May asserted. "He's also a teenage boy. He seemed a little 'off' when he got here. I just wanted to make sure you were doing okay..."

"He may have been a little stressed out. I, uh, I think I got it under control?"

May smiled and nodded. "It can be tough sometimes. I know when he gets anxious or overextended he can get... testy. He hasn't mentioned anything but I assume you've seen it."

Tony grunted a laugh, "Yeah, I've seen it alright. I might have actually screwed up the first, uh, few times but it's getting better. I'm not going to change my mind or anything." If anything, he was persistent.

"I know you won't." Then she smiled at him knowingly. "He told me about the phone and the car. Nice move making those purchases for you, by the way."

This leading Tony to smirk. "I mean, technically they are for me. I wanted a new project and his comments about the phone were valid, they should be explored. I didn't make any of that up if that's what you're implying"

"I'm not implying anything at all," May answered honesty. "I just wanted to hear it from you that everything was going alright. Peter tends to hide things from me but I know you are aware of
that... he thinks he's protecting me. It's kind of sweet, actually, if it wasn't so damn irritating.", she finished with a contented sigh.

"I get it, I do but everything really is fine, or going to be fine...and just so you know, I really am trying. I, uh, read up on a bunch of stuff and Pepper will be back tomorrow, she'll know better than me what to do with him."

May hummed in acknowledgment "You know, he's admired you since he was a little boy. In fact, you two met long before you came to our apartment that day. Stark Expo. He talked about having met you for months.", she paused, the memory alone seemed to bring a smile to her face. "You don't need to know what to do with him. God knows Ben and I didn't know what to do with him when he first came to us. We figured it out though, together, all three of us. You guys will figure it out too."

Tony looked down at the floor, it was unusual for anyone to make him feel self-conscious but May sure had a way of doing it. "He doesn't talk to me May. I mean he talks to me, a lot but only about menial things. I don't know how to get him to really talk to me."

"He'll come to you when he's ready. Give him time."

He took a deep breath and released it. "I can do that."

May looked so tired but she still smiled. "I know you can."
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

tag adds: Platonic cuddling, Peter Parker & Pepper Potts

By the time the teenager had returned to the room, coffee for Tony in hand, May was asleep. He wanted to be disappointed but really, they had been there for a long time. His mentor suggested that they go ahead and leave for the compound and Peter briefly considered waking his aunt up to tell her goodbye but then thought better of it. She needed the rest.

The ride back to the compound was much quieter than the ride out. Tony was busy thinking about everything May had told him and Peter was just tired. He had his head resting on the window, watching the lights seemingly fly past them. Almost asleep, he jumped a little when his mentor said his name.

The man laughed. "I thought you had like, super spidey senses or something. That's the second time in less than a week that I've managed to scare you."

Pouting, Peter looked back at him. "I wasn't scared. You startled me... and my senses only warn me of danger, Mr. Stark. You aren't a threat."

Tony hummed in understanding before getting back to his original question. "Your aunt said you met me at a Stark Expo when you were little.--"

"--Oh yeah! I was six or something! It was so cool! There were those Hammer Bot things and one landed right in front of me. I was all ready to take it down with my fake repulser thingy when you landed beside me and blasted it. Then you told me--"

"--Nice work, Kid", they finished together.

Peter looked at his mentor, shock clear on his face. "You remember that!?"

Tony was a little taken aback. That kid had been Peter? "Remeber the stupid little kid who's ass I saved? Yeah, I remember. Holy shit Pete. That was you?"
Peter laughed nervously. "Yeah, uh, Kind of crazy right?"

Now smirking in amusement, Tony replied, "So, what I'm hearing here is that I have literally been covering your ass since you were in elementary school."

"To be fair, you didn't know it was me until tonight so... I'm not sure that counts."

"It counts if I say it counts."

"I don't think that's how it works, Mr. Stark.", said in mock annoyance.

Tony just laughed as the car fell back into a comfortable silence for the remainder of the trip.

Back at the compound, the two parted ways, Tony to the lab and Peter to the guest room. The man had invited him to the lab but he just really wanted some alone time. It had been a crazy day and he was drained. Laying in the bed, he sighed. It was still another week before Ned got home and he longed to talk to him. He settled for a short text requesting a phone call as soon as he hit the states. He smiled to himself as he thought about what exactly his friend was going to say when he found out that he had been living with Iron Man.

Text sent he decided to busy himself with the books he had downloaded to his laptop. After several hours of studying engines and exhaust systems, he decided there was no more avoiding it. He needed to sleep, so, he pulled back the covers and climbed in. He fell asleep almost instantly only to, as expected, wake up again a few hours later, heart racing, covered in sweat.

Groaning as soon as he came back to himself, then started into his newfound routine of calming down in the bed, changing his shirt, using the bathroom and then quietly sneaking into the living room, book in hand. Only this time, the living room wasn't empty. The second Peter stepped foot into the hallway he saw that the TV was on and his mentor was sitting on the couch. _Well, shit._

He considered turning around and making his way back to the room when he was spotted. "Hey, Kid. I was wondering when you'd be joining me."

Peter just blinked a few times where he stood. There was no way this was a coincidence. The man...
had set him up and there was no backing out of this now that he had been caught. "Wh-what are you doing Mr. Stark?"

"Watching 'How it's Made'. It's fascinating how inefficient some of these companies are.", he answered, taking in the boy's disheveled look and sweaty hair.

"Oh." His tired brain was having trouble coming up with anything else to say.

The kid was still frozen in place in the hallway when Tony spoke again. "Why don't you come over here? Look, they're sorting gumballs in the worst possible way. I bet you could come up with a better mechanism for that in your sleep."

The tired teenager wandered over towards the couch as requested, setting the textbook down on the table in favor of watching TV with his mentor. In his somewhat sleep-deprived state, he unthinkingly sat himself down on the center cushion beside his mentor rather than at the opposite end of the furniture as he normally would. He was close enough that their legs brushed together ever so slightly but Tony didn't seem to mind, he just continued to make the occasional quip about the things he found particularly ineffectual casually glancing at the boy as he did so.

Eventually, the show ended and Peter yawned. Tony turned the volume all the way down before turning himself slightly the see the kid beside him. "You sure you don't want to talk about this?", he sighed.

"Hmm? There nothing to talk about really.", the boy answered sleepily.

"You know you'd feel way better if you just got it all out. Right?", a concern in his voice.

Peter considered the man's words. He was tired of waking up like this and the man clearly already knew he was having nightmares so it's not like he could keep pretending it was a secret. Usually, May was who he went to but he hadn't mentioned the nightmares to her either. He didn't want the burden her with that. Especially since the dreams were about her, to begin with. A few hesitant breaths later he finally opened his mouth. "I, I keep dreaming about it."

Tony nodded his head but didn't say anything. Afraid that if he did the kid would stop talking.

"I see the wreck over and over again and then at some point it changes and I'm in the car with her. I
wake up as soon as the airbags go off. The-the noise and, and screams wake me up” He fidgeted where he sat. Hands starting to wring in his lap as they often did whenever he was feeling out of sorts.

Just as the man had done the day before, he rested his own hand atop Peter’s in an attempt to calm the nervous movements. It pleased him when it worked. "You know it's not your fault. You did everything you could and most importantly, May is going to be fine. It'll take some time but she will be fine. Until then, you have me... and Rhodey and Happy... and Pepper. We're all on the same side yeah?"

"I-I know it's just a dream but it feels so real. Every time... and while I know couldn't have actually stopped it, It feels like I should have been able to stop it. My senses warned me something was about to happen. If I wasn't so distracted by trying to get home first, maybe I would have noticed more quickly. Maybe I would have been able to get there in time to actually help. Sp-Spider-Man, he's, he's supposed to be better."

"Kid, You are better, you did help. Karen showed me the footage. You checked her vitals and stayed with her until the medics arrived. That was all you could do. You can't prevent every single tragedy. Sometimes all you can do is damage control. Support those who need support and wait for assistance from others. You did that. Seriously Kiddo, even Spider-Man can't be everywhere at once.... as much as I know you would like to be, you can't"

Peter had always been a tactile person, even more so since the spider bite. While words of encouragement were nice, to him, true comfort was being close to those he trusts the most. Oddly enough, Tony was quickly becoming one of those people. So, he took a chance and leaned into the man's side with a low whine. He was rewarded as his mentor wrapping an arm about his shoulders and pulled him closer before sliding them both down into a more comfortable position. Peter relaxed in his strong grip, tears slipping silently from his eyes.

They stayed that way until Peter gave in to his body's demands and fell asleep, the man falling asleep shortly thereafter.

Tony woke up first, a headache starting to bloom behind his eyes. He glanced down at the peacefully sleeping teenager who was still positioned snuggly against his side, drooling onto his shirt. Gross. It took some time for him to figure out how to extract himself from the couch without waking the kid up. Once he had done so, he made his way to the kitchen to start a pot of coffee before heading towards the bathroom where he dry-swallowed, what was probably a few too many pain killers. Pepper was going to be there in a couple of hours. He hadn't seen her in over a week. The last thing he wanted was to be nursing a migraine when she got there.

Back in the living room, he was happy to see the kid was still asleep. He wasn't sure that his head
could take the kid's incessant chattering at the moment. Though, he knew he would have to wake him soon. The kid would likely not want to be sprawled across the couch sleeping when Pepper arrived. He leaned over on the counter and rubbed his eyes as he sipped his coffee, maybe a hot shower would do him some good.

Peter woke up shortly after his mentor had left the room. Seeing as it was already lunchtime, he went into the kitchen to find himself some food. After walking around the kitchen for a bit, he settled on Spaghetti-O's. He was just finishing it up by swirling a singular piece of white bread around the bowl to sop up the remaining sauce when Tony walked back to the room. The man paused to look at him before pouring himself a second cup of coffee. "Kid, you know we're eating Italian for dinner tonight right?"

Peter nodded as he stuffed the last of the bread into his mouth. "I know but I like pasta. I can eat it twice."

Tony scrunched his face up. "Ew, Kiddo. How about we don't talk with our mouth full."

Nodding in agreement then smiled as he washed it down with a large swallow of the milk he'd poured himself. "Sorry."

"FRIDAY told me a little while ago that Pepper's plane landed, she'll be here soon. You may want to go ahead and change out of your pajama's. I mean, I don't care one way or another but I figured you might."

It was at that very moment that FRIDAY announced the woman's arrival causing Peter to jump up off the bar stool. "I'll clean up my bowl when I get back!" He shouted, causing Tony to flinch, then he sprinted down the hall and into the guest room. There was no way he was going to be meeting Pepper Pots in his pajamas.

"I got it.", the man laughed, taking the bowl over to the dishwashing.

When Pepper walked in the door, Tony was actually glad the kid was out of the room. It meant he could have a few minutes alone with her. He greeted her at the door with a gentle embrace and a few quick kisses before she pushed him away, laughing and inquiring about their young guest. After telling her he was changing clothes, maybe showering, he wasn't sure, she leaned back into him before they made their way over to the couch, where the throw blanket still lay discarded on the cushions.
They sat there together for quite a while, Tony talking about Peter and Pepper talking about the meetings and business dinners she had attended. All in all, just enjoying each others proximity. It soon occurred to Tony that the kid had been gone way too long. Glancing up at the ceiling he questioned his AI, "Hey FRIDAY? What's the kid doing?"

"Pacing sir.", the AI answered.

"Okay then", the man replied to no one in particular before looking over at Pepper. "I'm gonna go check on the kid. Be right back. Try not to miss me too much". he said leaning over and giving her one more soft kiss on the lips before walking away.

He quickly wrapped his knuckles on the guest room door before announcing that he was coming in. It wasn't a question this time, just a warning before he entered the room. "What are you doing kiddo? You've been in here for ages."

"H-have I? I'm sorry, I was just trying to decide what to wear and then I thought I might try to gel my hair back but I couldn't get it to look right so I showered again to get it out and then... Well, I don't know. I'm kinda nervous I guess.", the boy finally admitted.

Tony placed his hand on the kid's shoulder. "You're fine, you look fine, let's go out to the living room." He tried to give the kid a reassuring smile but the boy's eyes seemed to be glued to the floor. Keeping his hand firmly on Peter's shoulder he guided him out to where Pepper was waiting.

All of Peter's anxiety had been for nothing because as soon as the woman greeted him with her warm smile and friendly demeanor he felt more relaxed. Though, when she invited him to sit beside her on the couch he hesitated for a moment, making eye contact with Tony as if he was asking if it was okay. The man nodded and he sat. She began to ask him all kinds of questions about school, his friends and his interest. It didn't take long for him to forget that he had been worried at all.

As soon as there was a lull in the conversation, Peter looked over at Tony who was sitting in a nearby recliner, rubbing his temples and pinching the bridge of his nose. "Are, are you okay Mr. Stark?"

"Hmm?", the man squinted up at the pair sitting on the couch, the pressure behind his eyes had been building. "Oh, yeah, it's just a headache. I already took something for it, just need to wait it out."

"But you, you're okay, right?", the boy asked with legitimate concern.
The man tried to ignore the pain behind his eyes for a moment and bring his face back to neutral for the kid's sake. "Yeah, Pete, I'm fine. It's just a headache."

Before Peter could reply, Pepper piped up and asked him if he had visited his aunt yet that day. When he said that he hadn't she looked towards her obviously uncomfortable fiance and offered to take the boy to visit her while he rested. She knew how quickly his headaches could morph into migraines and with dinner plans on the horizon she wanted to give him every opportunity to get it under control.

Tony thought that sounded like the most fantastic idea he had ever heard but knowing how nervous Peter had been about just meeting Pepper, he was worried the kid would be anxious about her taking him to the hospital rather than himself. However, when he didn't see any outward signs that the boy was uncomfortable he nodded in agreement and offered to call Happy to drive them.

Peter had assumed that there wouldn't be time to go visit May that day seeing as they had slept until lunch and had plans with Pepper that evening. So, even though he was unsure about Pepper accompanying him to the hospital, without Tony, he kept quiet. He was just glad to hear that Happy would be driving them. At least that would mean a familiar face. He didn't have the opportunity to think about it for too long. Happy would be waiting for them out front in twenty minutes and he still needed to make sure he was ready to go.
Pepper walking into the hospital with him was a completely different experience. Happy didn't have to ask anyone to stand back and no one tried to aggressively force their way into their path to take a candid photo. It felt almost normal walking down the hall with Happy on his left side while Pepper remained half a step behind on his right, allowing them to lead the way.

Once they had made their way to the less populated areas of the hospital, Happy, as always, dropped off and headed to the cafeteria for coffee before making his way back to the car, or whatever it was he did while he waited. This left Peter alone with Pepper for the first time. At first, he was nervous about it but they quickly reached his aunt's room, causing all of his apprehension to melt away.

Unlike Tony, Pepper didn't quietly slip into the room and take a seat in the corner. Instead, she confidently entered the room behind Peter. When May greeted her nephew, she stepped forward to introduce herself, pulling a chair up right beside Peter's and joining in on the light-hearted conversation. Peter was surprisingly at ease.

May had been surprised to see someone other than Tony enter the room with her nephew but almost instantly took a liking to the woman. She appreciated Pepper's confidence and sense of humor but mostly she appreciated how relaxed Peter seemed to be with her presence. It was easy to fall into a rhythm of playful banter and time passed quickly.

At some point, Pepper's phone went off. A text from Tony reminding her to 'feed the spider-kid, he's eats all the damn time.' As if she would forget. She laughed lightly at the man's almost parental message and sent the boy down to get himself some food. This left the two women alone in the room together for a while, allowing them to get to know one another. It took mere minutes for it to become abundantly clear that the two would be close friends in no time at all.
By the time Peter and Pepper made their way back to the Penthouse, Tony had been feeling well enough, that he had settled himself into his office to work on looking up those statistics he and the boy had discussed when it came to StarkPhone sales. Turns out the kid had been onto something. *Interesting*. He would definitely be looking this over with Pepper later. He was becoming more and more enthusiastic about the enterprise he had assigned *his new intern*. About that time, FRIDAY announced the pair's return, so he closed up all of the holograms he had around his office and went to greet them. His face lit up when he saw the two of them laughing as they walked in the door. "What's so funny?", he asked in mock annoyance.

"Oh! Hey, Mr. Stark... Are, are you feeling better now? Everything's okay right?"

"I'm *fine*, Kid." He really wasn't used to having anyone quite that concerned about him. Sure Pepper, Rhodey and even Happy worried about him, but Peter seemed to be taking it to a whole new level. *It was just a headache. The kid was acting like he was going to end up... oh.* The kid didn't know that migraines were something he dealt with regularly, leaving him worried that he was *really* sick. "I get headaches all the time, Pete. Have for a long time now. I'm okay. I promise it's nothing to worry about.", he added softening his tone.

Peter's smile slowly returned to his face. "Look.", he said holding up a large cup, "Pepper got me a milkshake on the way back. It's like, *crazy good.* I didn't even know they *made* milkshake like this. It actually has bits of cheesecake in --"

Tony's mouth fell open in shock as he cut the kid of mid-description. "--Hey! How come she's Pepper and I'm Mr. Stark?"

Peter blushed and looked almost panicked between the two adults. He wasn't sure which name the man was upset about. "well, I, um, I mean... she..."

Thankfully, Pepper saved him from his stuttered explanation. "I asked him to call me Pepper.", she interjected with a satisfied smile.

Tony had yet to take his eyes of the kid, quickly softening his features at the apprehensive display before him. "Kid, I think we are way past 'Mr. Stark'. Don't you? If you can call her Pepper you can call me Tony. Yeah?"

The boy shifted on his feet. "Um, sure. I mean, yes sir... Tony.", he added, sounding unsure as he seemingly tested out the name.
The man rolled his eyes good-naturedly. "Oh my God, what have I said about the whole, 'sir' thing, it's not necessary."

Again, Pepper stepped in to save him. "He's being polite. I think it's nice.", she said giving the boy a light pat on the shoulder, before addressing the teenager himself, "Manners are a good thing. Don't listen to him."

Tony, not wanting to continue this line of discussion, looked down at his watch. "Well, would you look at the time. We should get ready to go to dinner."

The three of them entered the restaurant an hour before it was due to close, leaving the place mostly empty. That combined with the fact that Tony had called ahead to make sure there was a quiet section set aside for them, left little room for disturbances. Though the two waiters assigned to their table were almost too diligent, as they were constantly checking on them and refilling glasses that had barely been touched. Peter was almost uncomfortable with the level of attention they were receiving but at least they were somewhere familiar and not at the originally planned high-end place Pepper had wanted them to go to. He sat there, comfortably tucked between the two, now familiar adults and began to settle in, helping himself to a third breadstick.

The conversation at dinner had mostly centered around Peter, who a week ago would have been out of sorts sitting there with his idle on one side and a powerful CEO on the other but he found himself enjoying their company. As soon as he finished an entire plate of pasta he was eagerly agreeing to dessert Tony offered to purchase for him.

It wasn't until they reached the compound again that Peter started feeling somewhat insecure. Evening hours seemed to do that to him. He considered asking Tony if he could go to the lab with him for a while but the man addressed him before he had the chance. "Hey, Kiddo, I'm going to bed with Pepper in a little while, if you wake up and want some company, have FRIDAY get me okay?"

While he appreciated his mentor's offer there was no way he was going to be waking the man, and subsequently Pepper, up in the middle of the night just because he couldn't seem to get his own subconscious under control. So he just made his way towards the guest room. "I'll be fine, Goodnight Mr. Sta-Tony." Feeling somewhat despondent he decided he may as well go to his bed as well. It was rather late and he probably needed the sleep anyway.

When he predictably woke up at four in the morning he growled to himself before starting his into his now-familiar waking routine and headed out into the living room, this time carrying a magazine. Strangely enough, after last night, he was disappointed to see the couch was empty, even though he knew it would be. With Pepper home, the man was much more likely to sleep at night. It would be fine, he could take care of himself, he would read for a while, then go back to the guest room before
anyone knew the difference.

That had been the plan anyway. Nevertheless, he did fall asleep right there in the living room as he had several times now. This time, however, it was Pepper who found him there later in the morning.

Based on everything Tony had told her about the boy, Pepper was unsurprised to find him curled up on the furniture, a blanket tucked tightly around him. She grinned at the sight as she walked around to wake him. Unlike Tony, she didn't try to poke or prod him awake, instead, she delicately ran her fingers through his hair and carefully shook his shoulder.

Peter slowly came back to consciousness, as he felt a gentle hand run through his hair. He sighed at the considerate touch and stretched himself out, never opening his eyes. "'morning May, what's for breakfast?", he asked sleepily before prying his eyes open to find... not May, Pepper. He jumped up in a panic. "Shit! I mean... shoot! I'm sorry, I--"

Tony laughed as he walked down the hallway cut him off. "--Christ, Kid, chill out."

The boy now looking past Pepper towards his mentor and practically whined. "I'm, I'm in my pajamas..."

Now Pepper was laughing too. This was the worst morning of Peter's life, he was sure of it. Nothing would ever top being caught by the CEO of Stark Industries, sleeping on Iron Man's couch in his pajamas with... he wiped a hand across his chin... yep, drool running down his face and he had called her by his aunt's name- he'd basically called her mom. Not cool. He must have turned bright red by now but neither adult seemed overly concerned.

Pepper set a hand on the boy's upper arm rubbing it soothingly. "Peter, Sweetie, it's eight o'clock in the morning." She had to pause to suppress another fit of giggles. "We're all in our pajamas.", she finished by motioning towards hers and Tony's casual attire.

Peter wished the floor would just swallow him up right there but knowing it wouldn't, he tried to make an escape only to be held off by Tony inquiring him about where he was going. Apparently, they were about to make breakfast and his presence was required. Knowing his mentor was not likely to let him just avoid the situation for a moment as he wanted to, he lied. "I, I need to pee. I'll be right back.", he pleaded quietly enough for only Tony to hear. The man, of course, stepped out of his path.
Once in the guest room, Peter allowed his embarrassment to die down. Maybe Pepper hadn't even noticed what he called her, though she probably did notice when he cursed but she hadn't said anything... and she'd been right. They were all in their pajamas ... plus this wasn't just Tony's home. Pepper spent a lot of time here too and he supposed he should get used to that because, for the time being, he lived there too.

That had been an odd admission to make, even if it was only in his own head, and then it hit him, hard, he missed his own apartment. He desperately missed May and if anything, Pepper's caring presence was only exasperating his feelings of loss. He wanted to go home. His real home.

He had meant to go into the room to pull himself together and return to eat breakfast with the two waiting adults but everything was all of a sudden almost too much. He was teetering right at the edge of a breakdown and had no desire to return to the living room as was expected of him. So, he climbed into the bed and stayed.

Tony wasn't entirely surprised when the boy didn't return right away. After all, he had walked right past the hall toilet in favor of using the one connected to his room. He'd just assumed the kid wanted to change clothes in the process. When he didn't reappear upwards to twenty minutes later, the man started to question his intentions. Sure, he knew Peter was feeling flustered when he'd left the room but lying in order to avoid them completely wasn't something he was going to allow.

With a grunt of frustration, he left the kitchen where he had been meticulously cutting up fruit and headed down the hall towards the kid. He half expected Pepper to stop him but she didn't. She just gave him a quick pat on the lower back as he left the room reminding him to 'be nice' as he grumbled under his breath about what the Hell did this kid think he was trying to pull.

There was no warning knock this time. He just came through the door in one aggravated stride. "Parker!", he shouted as he scanned the room for the missing teenager. Laying eyes on the lump in the bed he went from aggravated to pissed off. The kid had clearly lied to his face about his motives, in order to get out of breakfast and go back to bed. He wasn't yelling at this point but he was pretty close. He tried to reel himself in before continuing. "Kid, I thought you were smarter than this. Did you legitimately think that this was going to work? That you could just lie right to my face, hide and not get caught?" When the boy made no move to answer him he stepped further into the room. "Eyes up, Pete. What did you think you were doing?"

It took all the way up to this moment for Tony to realize that the agglomeration of blankets was shaking ever so slightly. Shit. "Peter?" He was now rushing to the edge of the bed as his heart had dropped down into his stomach. What the actual fuck had happened in the last twenty minutes? He thought the kid was just being overly pissy about having been embarrassed, he wasn't expecting this.
Once his mentor had sat on the edge of the bed, Peter couldn't keep it in anymore. "I'm sorry. I'm just ready to go home." Then he raised a hand to his mouth as he tried to stifle any impending whimpers that might try to escape him.

Tony was at a loss. "What brought this on kiddo?", the man asked with concern. Something must have happened. That was the only possible explanation.

"N-nothing happened. I just, I got in here and I was going to come right back like I said would, but then I just, I started thinking and I just want to go home. I didn't mean to lie. I really was going to come back. I swear."

"Hey, calm down", he shushed the boy. "I'm not mad anymore. What on Earth were you thinking about, Buddy?"

Having heard that his mentor was no longer angry, the boy was able to calm himself down. Running his hands through his hair, he tried to decide if he wanted to answer that question or not. "I don't know?", he tried. Not considering that trying to lie at the moment was probably a bad idea.

"'You wanna rethink that answer?'", he asked with one eyebrow quirked.

Peter sighed. "sorry", he grumbled. "Okay, I kind of did lie at first, a little bit. I, uh, didn't need to use the bathroom...but I was going to come right back! I just wanted to come in here for a minute to breathe and then I started thinking about how I called Pepper, May and how stupid it was to be so upset about pajamas and that I should just get over it because she probably stays here a lot and now, I sort of do too, that made me think about May and our apartment and I, I guess, it, it hurt to think about all that." He had tried to say that all in one breath causing him to inhale sharply once he was done.

"Oh, Kid. Come here", the man said motioning for the kid to come closer. He didn't have to wait long before the boy was leaning over onto him. They only stayed that way for a moment. Soon the kid was, pulling away, sitting himself back up, looking towards the open door. His enhanced hearing had picked up on the sound of Pepper's footsteps heading their way.

The second she appeared in the doorway, Peter was apologizing. "I'm sorry."

Pepper looked between the two sitting on the bed. She almost felt like she had interrupted something but Tony beckoned her over. Without hesitation, she took a seat on Peter's other side as Tony placed
his hand down on Peter's knee. He still missed May and looked forward to visiting her later, but sitting there between the two adults he felt less homesick than he had before and everything felt manageable.

The rest of the day sort of went by in a blur. They ate the breakfast Pepper had made, promptly followed by having Happy drive them all over to the hospital. Peter was left to visit with May for a little while on his own before Pepper and Tony came in, lunch in hand. In fact, this was the longest stretch he spent with May since she had been admitted. It felt nice to be with her for so long. Even when she was just sleeping.

It was getting close to dinner time when they started saying their goodbyes and on the way out Peter hesitantly asked if they could stop by his apartment. He wanted to get something. Obviously, no one objected and when they arrived he quickly ran up the stairs and into the apartment. He only had one objective, he wasn't sure why he hadn't brought it with him to begin with, really. He walked into his room and grabbed an old faded looking plush blanket imprinted with an image of the solar system. It was the blanket that his parents had bought him when they visited the New York Science Center sometime before he could even remember, though he was told he was probably two or three. For some reason, that blanket had always meant 'home'.

He smiled, as he walking back to the car, the blanket wrapped casually around his shoulders and was thankful when he got back in and no one questioned it. Once back at the compound, he spread it out across on top of the other blankets on the guest room bed before climbing in and tucking it under his chin. He fell asleep feeling confident that there would be no nightmares that night.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Tag adds: Panic attacks, Precious Peter Parker, Tony Stark is good with kids

For the first time, in the nearly a week that Peter had been staying at the compound, he was woken up by FRIDAY. "Mr. Parker?", the AI waited for the teenagers grumbled acknowledgment. "It is seven-thirty-three in the morning and your presence has been requested in the Kitchen. Boss says you have twenty minutes before he comes in here to get you himself."

That was enough to get him moving. "Okay, Okay.", Peter grumbled before rolling out of bed to get ready for the day. He opted to hold off on a shower since he had only been allotted twenty minutes to get himself into the kitchen.

Exactly eighteen minutes later, he was walking into the kitchen, still feeling groggy from a surprisingly solid nights sleep. "Alright, I'm up.", he said rubbing his eyes. "What, why did you wake me up?", he asked yawning halfway through the question.

"We got up at this same time yesterday.", Tony reasoned with him as he leaned over the counter sipping at his coffee.

"No... this is earlier ... and that was different. I was in the living room, not the guestroom.", the boy practically groaned as he dropped himself onto a stool at the breakfast bar. Then glancing around, he added. "Where's Pepper?"

"Shower. She'll be out here in a few minutes."

Peter now had his arms crossed on the counter, head laying in the nest they created. "Oh, Are we going somewhere?"

"Nope"

"Then why am I up", he said in a tired kind of whine that only a true child could accomplish.
"Because", the man said as he straightened himself up from leaning over the bar. "We have work to do today."

This perked the kid up just a little bit. Though he remained slightly suspicious as he raised his head up off his arms. "What kind of work...?"

Tony was now grinning ear to ear. "The car was delivered while we were out yesterday."

He was definitely awake now. "Really? That's awesome! When are we going to start?"

"After I finish at least one more cup of coffee and you eat a Spider-Kid sized breakfast."

"Yes, sir!", Peter half-shouted, jumping off the stool to acquire enough food to satisfy Tony's requirements.

About that time, Pepper walked into the room. "What are you boys planning on doing today?"

"Working on a car", Peter answered her enthusiastically, mouth full of peanut butter and apple. Followed quickly by a displeased, "Hey, what was that for?", when Tony smacked him lightly on the back of his head.

"That was for you being gross and spitting apple bits all over my counter. I hope you know you're cleaning that up."

Peter rolled his eyes. "I got it.", he grumbled as he got up to grab a paper towel. "Sorry."

Pepper just laughed at the domestic sight before her, walking up behind her fiance, she wrapped her arms around him, allowing him to turn his head and kiss her on the cheek.

"Now, who's being gross..." the boy mumbled under his breath as he wiped off the counter.
Peter had been helping him in the garage for no more than twenty minutes and Tony was already getting frustrated. He was rolled up under the car and had requested that the kid get him a 3/4 inch wrench. It had been three whole minutes and there was still no tool in his hand. "Kid! Can you not find it or what?"

"No, I, I got it. I'm coming.", Peter yelled from a few feet away.

Tony, still blindly under the car could hear the kid's footsteps grow louder as he approached, before hearing a loud clang on the floor beside him. "Really kid?", the man asked in annoyance as he aimlessly searched by his side trying to find the dropped wrench. "You couldn't be bothered to put it in my hand."

"You, you don't like to be handed things...", the boy stated hesitantly

Tony lay there on his back, blinking stupidly at the bottom of the car. He contemplated the kid's words for a full two minutes before rolling himself out. "Well, apparently you can now officially hand me things.", then he quickly grabbed the stray tool and rolled himself back under the car before either of them could dwell on the implications of that realization.

They stayed down in the garage for hours until FRIDAY interrupted them. "Boss, It's one-fifteen and Ms. Potts has inquired, whether or not you and Mr. Parker plan to resurface today. She would also like for me to remind you to feed the spider-kid."

"Shit... fuck", Tony said, hitting his head on the bottom of the car as he tried to get up too quickly. "Kid! Why didn't you tell me what time it was!?"

"Hmm?", Peter said, mouth full of chips, that had seemingly appeared out of nowhere while spinning himself around in the rolling chair, looking bored.

"When did you do get chips?... and why didn't you get me any?", the man asked frowning.

"Oh, you were busy. I asked you if you wanted anything and you didn't answer. I guess you didn't hear me."
Tony suddenly felt like shit because apparently, he had been ignoring the kid completely. He was supposed to be teaching him. "Did you eat anything else?"

"Not really. I just went and got some chips and a can of Sprite. I was waiting for you to get lunch."

Tony sighed in aggravation, mostly with himself but Peter didn't know that. "Next time, just... you know what, there won't be a 'next time' because you're going to actually speak up so I can hear you... and just in case you don't... FRIDAY, When the kid's with me make sure we take a break every two hours. Oh and tell Pepper we're coming up now."

Feeling like he was getting in some kind of trouble, Peter was getting annoyed. Somehow this was being turned into his fault. "To be fair, Mr. Stark, I did try to tell you I was going to get food. You just weren't listening to me."

This only served to make Tony feel worse. So he handled it the only way he knew how. He got pissed. "I thought I was Tony now... and you could have worked a little harder to get my attention. Yeah?"

"Fine.", he all but snapped. He really hadn't tried terribly hard to get the man's attention. He was aware that his mentor was lost in his work and didn't feel the need to pull him out of it. It wasn't like he needed supervision to go get a snack and he hadn't realized that it was his job to tell his mentor when it was time to take a break.

When they walked back into the penthouse, Peter still had his arms crossed over his chest, a sour look on his face and Tony still looked as pissed off as ever.

Pepper looked between the two with a questioning look in her eyes. "What happened with you two?", she asked.

"Nothing." they both stated at the same time.

Pepper raised her eyebrows but ultimately decided to stay out of it. She wasn't planning on getting involved unless she had to. The two of them needed to learn to sort this kind of thing out themselves, really. So, she just doled out the sandwiched she had made earlier and left the room to go read.
Taking one look at the sandwiches, the kid scrunched up his nose. He didn't want to be rude to Pepper but she wasn't in the room anymore and he wasn't worried about Tony's feelings at the moment. "I'm not eating this. You can have it.", he complained as he got up to leave the kitchen.

"Kid, you have to eat. You can't just skip lunch because you're all angsty."

Peter rolled his eyes. "I'm not angsty. It's just gross. I don't want it. Besides, I had a bag of chips. I'm fine. I'm going to the guest room."

"What's with the attitude?", the man snapped.

"It's not an attitude. I just don't like it. Oh my God, it's not that serious!"

"Oh, it most definitely is an attitude. ...and if you don't like it, then don't eat it. Get something else."

Peter began to move about nervously, considering his next words carefully. "I, I can still... smell it, though."

Tony wasn't sure what to do with that. "Come again?"

The boy gave a nervous growl before expanding. "It's my, my senses... tuna, well most fish really...just, it smells really... strong..."

"That's the problem? Why didn't you just say that from the beginning?", the man asked in irritation.

The boy shrugged his shoulders and Tony was sure it was an intentional act just to piss him off.

"Parker!... I swear to God, you know I hate that.", the man snarled.

"sorry.", the boy answered, not really sounding sorry at all.
At this point, Tony had just about decided to give up on the argument. He wasn't even clear what they were arguing about at this point. "Just, make yourself something else and take it to the guest room. Bring out the dishes when you're done, though.", he stated, sounding defeated and moving himself and his sandwiches to the far side of the living room so the kid could make his lunch in peace.

By the time Peter was done eating, he found that his mentor had already returned to the garage. He had wavered before deciding to go back down himself. "Mr. Stark?", he practically whispered upon reentry.

"Yeah?", the man asked, not ever looking up from the engine.

The boy sighed. "I'm sorry."

"For what?", the man asked, still not making eye contact.

"For arguing?"

"Kid", the man said, leaning on the edge of the car before finally looking in the boy's direction. "What were we even arguing about? What the hell happened there?"

"I, well, I mean, I guess I got mad when, uh, when you... or when I thought, you weren't listening to me."

"Before? When you went to get chips?"

"Yeah, sort of.", the kid mumbled.

"Talk to me, kiddo. I can't fix this if we don't talk about it."

"It's, you said that I didn't speak up and, and tell you what time it was and stuff, but, but really, you weren't listening to me. Like, you forgot I was even there until FRIDAY said something."
Tony was taken aback. It hadn't occurred to him that kid would think he had been placing all of the blame on him. "Shit, kid. I didn't mean for that to happen. Alright?"

"I know you didn't mean to ignore me but, but, it's not...", he paused to take a deep breath, "*my fault* that you didn't know what time it was. I didn't *know* you wanted me to tell you that.", he finished, staring down at the glossy garage floor.

Tony was now running his greasy hands through his hair. This was exactly why he wasn't cut out for this shit. "You, you're right, Pete. I didn't ask you to tell me the time or anything like that. I just assumed that you would let me know when you were ready to stop and then I sort of got distracted. You're right. Not your fault. This one's on me."

Peter knew that was as close to an apology as he was ever going to get so he took it. "It's alright."

"*It's not alright... but it will be.* I'm trying."

"I know", Peter answered quietly. After a brief pause, he added, "Are we going to go see May today?"

"Sure, Pete. Do you want to go now? I can call Happy and be showered before he gets the car."

Peter shifted a little on his feet. "Can, can Pepper take me?"

*That hurt.* "Sure kid. Why don't you go ask her? I'm sure she'd love to.", he sighed. It was like he couldn't get this fucking right. Every damn time he thought he was getting somewhere with the kid. He fucked up.

While Peter was off with Happy and Pepper, Tony had some time to think. He considered calling Rhodey again but decided against it. He already knew what the man would say. 'Talk to the kid', he would tell him but he was pretty sure he had just done that. Only it ended in the kid dismissing him completely. He may have totally screwed this up this time. What if the kid didn't come back around? What if he couldn't fix this? *Shit.* He was starting to hyperventilate and all he could think was 'really? *I'm going to have a panic attack over this?* "FRIDAY get Rhodes on the phone", he managed to choke out.
Moments later his friend's voice was echoing through the garage. "Tony?"

"I fucked up" was all Tony could get out.

"FRIDAY said you were in distress. What happened?"

"Can't", the man managed to get out.

"Okay. How about I just ask you some yes or no questions then. That alright?"

"Yeah"

Is this about Pepper?

"No."

"Is this about Peter?"

"Yeah."

"Okay... is he okay?"

"Yes, God, yes."

"Is he... upset with... you?", his friend asked him cautiously.

"Yes.... fuck."

Rhodes just sighed into the phone. "Listen to me, man, whatever it is, the kid will get over it. He
always does. You need to *breathe.*"

"*I am breathing*, Tony barked out.

Rhodey laughed "Okay good, now you need to *breathe better.* Come on, count it out."

It took several minutes and multiple tactics to get Tony's heart rate back down to where it should be. Once that was taken care of the two men were able to go through the entire series of events that had lead to the man's latest panic attack. Rhodes being the reasonable one, as always. "Okay, so yeah, you fucked up but--"

"--Thanks, very helpful--", Tony interrupted.

"--shut up and hear me out.", the other man cut in. "*As I was saying.* Yeah, you fucked up but you also tried to fix it. You asked the kid what happened and he told you. Then you *actually* listened to him. He'll come around. He's a *teenage boy.* Give him time. Besides he's with Pepper and his aunt right?"

"Yep.", the man answered curtly.

"Then, they're probably talking to him about this same shit. Listen to me. It. Will. Be. Fine. Do you hear me?"

"Yeah", the man sighed. "I hear you."

"Good. Now, I'll be back soon. We should take the kid out to do something fun. Get the two of you out of the lab or garage or wherever you've been holed up, for a few hours."

Tony laughed. "Sure, if he's still talking to me and hasn't run off to live with Pepper, we'll do that."

"Oh get over yourself. *Everything's fine.* Shit, I'm late for a meeting, I gotta go... no more thinking about this until you talk to the kid again.", his friend added sternly before disconnecting.
They must have been on the phone for longer than the man realized because by the time he had gotten himself showered and settled into some mindless television show Pepper called to let him know that they would be back in an hour and had a late dinner with them. He ended up spending that hour alternating between pacing and trying to focus on whatever nonsense was on the TV.

When they finally made their way up to the suite, Tony was surprised to see that Pepper and not Peter was carrying the majority of the food. Peter was usually overly polite. He would never let Pepper carry everything like that. However, it only took a moment for him to realize why. The second the kid got in the door, he dropped the few bags he was carrying and threw himself at Tony. The man letting out an 'Oof' as he caught the boy in his arms.

"I'm so so sorry, Mr. Stark. Please don't be mad." He looked like he was on the brink of tears but none came.

"I'm not mad, Kid.", the man said as he continued to hold onto the slightly shaking child, looking at Pepper, eyebrows furrowed in question.

She smiled sadly in his direction. "He's been stressing out about this ever since we left but wouldn't let anyone call you."

Tony nodded and then switched his attention back to Peter. "Hey, Pete, I'm not mad. Actually, I thought you were mad at me."

The kid huffed a small laugh into the man's chest. "I'm not mad."

"Alright. So no ones mad. We're okay?"

"Yeah, yeah. We're okay." The kid said pulling away from his mentor, Pepper smiling at them from the sidelines.

Neither adult failed to notice that, from dinner on, the boy was all but glued to Tony's side. In fact, when the man had suggested that the kid should probably go to bed at just before midnight, he was reluctant. "I'm not really tired. Can't I just stay up a little longer?" Peter asked while trying to suppress a yawn.

"Kiddo, you look tired. Besides, Pepper and I are going to bed soon too."
"Actually", Pepper added, "I'm going to bed now. Some of us have work to do tomorrow.", she smiled as she stood. "Good night, Peter"

Tony looked over at the clearly tired boy with a teasing grin. "You want me to go tuck you in?" He was both stunned and tickled by the kid's answer.

"Would... would you?", the boy asked with apprehension, staring at his fidgeting hands.

Not sure how to proceed but also not wanting to rescind the offer the man answered with a less than confident. "Sure...why not." and followed the kid into the guest room.

Peter dragged himself over to the bed, where he collected his pajamas and then walked into the bathroom to get ready. Tony waited patiently on the edge of the bed. Once he had returned and climbed under the covers Tony stood and fumbled with the blankets, adjusting them around the boy's body, so that they lay straight. When the kid reached for the plush blanket, the man tugged it towards him and watched as the teenager pulled it up under his chin.

Now, Tony didn't know much about tucking a kid in. He parents hadn't really done that but sometimes, if he'd had a particularly bad day, Jarvis had. Whenever he did, he would always push Tony's hair out of his face and kiss him right on the forehead before giving him a few words of encouragement. So that's what he did for Peter. He carefully brushed the boy's hair back and slowly leaned down to lightly press his lips to his head. "A good nights sleep changes everything. Things will look brighter in the morning.", he recited from what, up until this moment, had been a long forgotten memory before turning to exit the room.

The boy already had his eyes closed but hummed in contentment as Tony brushed his hair back and as the man started to walk away he whispering a quiet. "G'night Tony."

The man whispering back, "Good night, Pete.", before closing the door behind him. 'One step forward', he thought to himself.
Chapter 14

The next morning, Pepper had gotten up before the sun had even begun to rise. She had several
meetings over the next few days and planned to stay at her own apartment in Manhattan until the
weekend. They would, of course, be seeing her from time to time over the next four days but this
more or less left Peter and Tony to their own devices.

Tony had gotten up shortly after Pepper. Her warm body was no longer up against his and the
prospect of sleeping anymore that day left when she did. As such, he made his way into the kitchen
to start a pot of coffee. Glancing into the living room, he was happy to see the kid was still in the
guest room and not on the couch. He decided to let him sleep in. It was his summer vacation after
all.

When Peter did finally wake up, it was late morning. Pushing down the embarrassment that crept up
when he suddenly remembered that Iron Man had literally kissed him good-night, he questioned
FRIDAY as to where his mentor was. Hearing confirmation that the man was already in the garage,
he went to the kitchen to hurriedly scrape together a fitting breakfast for himself. He searched for the
easiest meal he could think of. Cereal and a banana. Done. Then he rushed to get to the man's side
as quickly as possible. Today had to be better.

Upon entering the work area of the garage, Peter was immediately greeted by an enthusiastic Tony.
"Hey, Pete! You're just in time! Get over here and help me with this."

Tony made a point of including the kid in everything he did, desperately trying to make up for the
day before. Usually, they worked in the same room together but typically on different projects. If
they were sharing a project they tended to work on it one at a time, each doing their own part, rather
than side by side. Tony would instruct the kid from across the room. It was nice, the two of them
working so closely, the man thought as he guided the kid through the different components of the old
engine.

They stayed this way for some time until FRIDAY interrupted them at the prescribed two-hour
mark. Both of them reluctantly retreating to the showers and to the kitchen for lunch. After which
they met up with Happy to ride out to Queens to see May. Then it was off to dinner and back to the
compound where they worked on the car until nearly one in the morning when Peter could no longer
keep his eyes open.

The next couple of days went very much the same way. Except that sometimes they worked in the
lab rather than the garage and sometimes they met Pepper for dinner or She stopped by the hospital
to visit alongside them. All in all, the routine had been going smoothly.
Once Friday rolled around, things got switched up a bit. Pepper had a board meeting scheduled at the ungodly hour of eight in the morning, meaning that Tony was going to have to leave by six. So of course, this was the night that Peter's nightmares made a reappearance. After going to bed just after midnight, the kid was awake and reading on the couch by four-thirty.

At five-thirty when Tony finally dragged himself out of his room and to the coffee maker, he instantly spotted the boy peeking over the back of the couch at him. "Bad night?", the man asked, scrubbing his hands down his face. *God, it was early.*

"Yeah, I guess", the boy answered shrugging his shoulders.

"You eat anything?", the man inquired.

"No, I had some milk though. Can, can we get some, like, chocolate powder mix or something?"

Tony shook his head at the childish request. It was amazing how often he managed to forget that the kid was *a kid*. "You know all you have to do is tell FRIDAY to add it to the list. Why are you asking me?"

"Well", the boy started before standing up and wrapping his own blanket around his shoulders. "I was sort of hoping we could, maybe, stop and get some today. If we can't it's fine. I can wait until Monday's delivery. It's not a super big deal."

"Nah, It's fine. We'll get it today.", the man said as he watched the coffee begin to drip into the pot, willing it to go faster. "I have a board meeting this morning. Since you're up, do you want to come?"

Peter sighed, pulling the blanket more tightly around his body. "I, I don't think I have anything to wear. I only brought the one button down and it's dirty."

"I know you don't want to kiddo, but we should probably get you at least some new clothes to keep here." Peter twisted his nose at the comment but Tony continued. "but you could just wear a t-shirt you know. No one would care."

"I would care...", the boy grumbled.
"Okay, well, it would be big on you but you could wear one of my dress shirts if that's the only thing that's stopping you."

"With jeans?"

"Look, Buddy, I know you're not that much shorter than me but I think jeans that fit would be better than baggy dress pants. Don't you?"

The boy sighed. "I guess. Will Pepper be there?"

"Of course"

"Alright, I'll come.", Peter yawned.

Tony actually considered this to be a huge victory because having the boy at the meeting would make it way less boring. "Great. Eat something. We need to leave in the next thirty minutes. We can't be late to this one."

"Because of Pepper?", the boy asked smirking but Tony just ignored him and took his, finally full, cup of coffee with him back to his own room to quickly shower and change into his business attire.

The ride there had been uneventful. Peter slept almost the entire way. Even with traffic, they managed to make it to the conference room only three minutes late but still, Pepper was waiting outside the door, rapidly tapping her foot, staring Tony down before mollifying her expression and addressing Peter. "Good Morning, Peter, I didn't realize you were coming today. You look nice.", she smiled, looking at the slightly oversized shirt the boy had tucked into his jeans.

"Hi, Pepper, er, um, Ms. Potts.", the boy greeted nervously. It had all of a sudden occurred to him that he was about to walk into a room with a very powerful CEO and all of the shareholders of a top fortune 500 company. It felt daunting.

"You know, you don't have to call me Ms. Potts just because we're here okay?", She said, as if it were the most casual thing in the world, while she made her way into the room.
"Yes, ma'am", Peter whispered back, following, probably too closely, behind the two adults entering the room, notepad, and pencil in hand.

Tony, not wanting Peter to be too uncomfortable, rolled a chair right up beside him at the head of the table casually announcing that the boy was his intern and was there to take notes and observe the proceedings. No one argued. Especially after seeing Pepper, gently pat the teenager on the shoulder as she walked past to sit at Tony's right.

The meeting itself was, as Tony had promised, boring. At first, Peter had tried to stay focused and actually take notes but soon found himself having to work to keep his eyes from drooping. He hadn't really gotten a good night's sleep, adding to it, the room was stuffy and the topics of conversation were starting to go over his head. In order to keep himself awake, he started drawing out the periodic table. He began by counting out and sketching the appropriate number of boxes in the correct configuration. Then, he slowly started to fill in each box with accurate information. Name, symbol and atomic number. He had to skip a few here and there but he had managed to get, a good, three-quarters of the way done before Tony slid the notebook away from him.

Peter half panicked. He was sure he was about to get in trouble for not paying attention but instead his mentor, beckoned for the pencil he had been using and went through and filled in the missing information, erasing one or two mistakes and correcting them before casually sliding the notebook back over. Peter just looked back and forth between the paper and the man in confusion before hesitantly continuing. As he filled in the last square, Tony, again took the book and pencil from him, filling in the last few bits of missing data. Smirking he scrolled a quick 'nice work kiddo' onto the paper before sliding it back. Neither of them noticing Pepper glaring half-heartedly in their direction.

Another half an hour later, Peter was starting to fidget in his chair, Tony decided he should have mercy on the kid and give him the chance to get out of the room. Grabbing the notebook and pencil, he wrote a quick note. *This is taking forever. Go get me some coffee?*

Peter had never been so relieved to be sent on such a mundane errand. *I would love to* he passed back.

Tony pulled a coded, SI identification card out of his wallet and set it on the notebook. *Swipe this like a credit card. Get you something too*

Peter nodded and headed out of the room as quickly and quietly as possible, taking a deep breath once he was out in the hallway. The trip to the cafeteria and back didn't take near as long as he'd hoped it would. Sighing, he tried to reenter the room unnoticed but that's not how it happened. As
soon as he opened the door back up, it creaked...loudly, bringing all eyes to him. He tried to ignore the looks as he rushed back to his chair practically throwing the coffee at Tony, causing the man to have to fight back a fit of laughter while Peter turned a bright shade of red.

Thankfully the meeting didn't last much longer after that and as they made their way to Tony's office, Peter swore he was never going to another board meeting ever again in his life. The man smiled to himself because wasn't so sure about that. In fact, he was thinking that even if the kid never attended another board meeting with him there was no doubt in his mind that Peter would someday be running board meetings of his own. The kid was, that smart. Hell, maybe he would even take over for Pepper or himself one day. It wasn't the first time that particular thought had crossed his mind. Yet, it was the first time he had actually allowed himself to fully consider the possibility. The teenager had been living with him for nearly two weeks now and there was no denying that the kid had some serious potential.

With everything wrapped up at SI, they headed towards the hospital where Peter practically skipped into his aunt's room, Tony casually walking in behind him, taking his usual seat.

May was nearly sitting up today. They had been slowly working on her mobility for the last few days in an attempt to have her discharged into therapeutic care by Monday.

The nurse stopped by shortly after they had arrived and started going over the transfer information with May. As it were, the only facility with availability was over three hours from the compound. Tony could see the kid visibly pale at the news. The four hours round trip to and from the hospital was sometimes hard enough. Making it six, nearly seven with traffic would be pushing it for daily visits. He promptly began to rack his brain for a better solution but it was Pepper who had walked into the room unnoticed that had the most obvious answer. "Tony, why don't you staff the medical wing at the compound?", she had asked as she made her way across the room.

Peter's eyes practically lit up as he stared at his mentor with awestruck anticipation. "You, you could do that? That would work? She, she could come to stay at the compound?"

The man looked between Peter and May as he spoke. "Of course. I'm Tony Stark. I can do anything.--" 

"--debatable, but please continue.", Pepper interrupted smiling in his direction, as she tried to lighten the mood.

Tony gave her a look that was something between a smirk and a glare before continuing. "...If... that's something May would be okay with."
Peter looked at May who appeared somewhat conflicted. "Aunt May, you have to come to stay there. If, if you do, then I can see you all the time. I can help and, and you'll love it there. It's not like the city, it's, it's *really quiet*."

Tony found it interesting that the child had latched onto the fact that it was quiet at the compound as if it was a good thing. Though he supposed for a kid with enhanced hearing, perhaps it was. For him, the quiet was just a reminder of what he had lost, his team, *his family*. Having Peter consistently around for the last week and a half had been a nice change of pace. May joining them would make it even better, he thought to himself. *Less empty. Less quiet.*

May looked between Peter, Tony, and even Pepper's hopeful faces and felt as though she had no choice other than to relent and accept the offer. She knew by doing so, she was giving the man permission to cover all of the expenses. Insurance was going to cover *that* but the looks they were giving her made it feel like that was okay. "It would be nice to be closer to Peter...", she said hesitantly.

"So you'll do it? You'll come?", Peter asked with enthusiasm.

"I, yes, I suppose, if that were a viable option--"

"--it is", Tony promised, Pepper standing behind him nodding, Peter beside him grinning ear to ear.

"Well, let's do it then.", May finally agreed, leaving Peter to suppress a delighted squeal. He was potentially going to get the best of both worlds. He would be back with May while still having the option of being with Tony, *if the man would allow it*. That was, of course, the tricky part, waiting to see if his mentor would still want him around if May there in the medical wing. *He really hoped he did* because if so, he couldn't imagine a more perfect arrangement. Then, as if to add to his already elated mood, his phone went off.

A text from Ned, 'Just landed, I'll call you ASAP.'
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Tag adds: Ned Leeds, Peter Parker & Ned Leeds,

The ride back to the compound had been anything but quiet. For the first time in days, Tony found himself wishing upon wishing that the kid would just shut up. However as annoyed as he was, he worked to keep quiet about it. It was obvious that the boy was excited about May coming to stay at the compound and he didn't want to ruin that.

He was beyond thankful when he suddenly remembered that Peter had requested they stop at a store. As the kid ran in, cash in hand, Tony sighed in relief. The silence didn't last long, Happy tuned around to face him. "Chocolate milk Powder. You had me pull off the highway to buy chocolate milk Powder."

Tony looked up at his friend unamused. "You really have a problem with that?"

"Not really, don't you usually just order that kind of shit though?"

"Yeah, but he wanted it today and frankly, I needed a break from his constant motor-mouthing anyway. So, it worked out."

His friend laughed. "Now you know how I feel when I have to drive him everywhere."

"Meh, I don't normally mind. He's just a little more... exuberant, than usual today."

"Yet, you're buying him chocolate milk...". Happy replied with dry sarcasm.

Tony groaned and dropped his head down onto the back of the leather seat. "Think I can fake a headache to get him to stop talking?"

"I don't think it works that way, boss..."
About that time, they spotted Peter exiting the small convenience store. The man braced himself for the overly enthusiastic boy to reenter the car but was shocked when the previously high-spirited kid sat down, subdued beside him. "Did you not find what you wanted Kiddo? We can try another store. No need to settle.", the man said eyeing the small grocery bag.

"No, they had what I wanted. It's fine. Oh, here's your change.", the kid said handing over a handful of dollars and a few coins.

"Okay... then why are you acting all weird now?"

"I'm, I'm not acting weird, Mr. Stark.", the boy stuttered.

"Tony", the man corrected.

"Huh?", the boy asked, seemingly distracted. "Oh... yeah, Tony. Sorry"

"I wasn't looking for an apology Kid.", His mentor stated with concern. "What's going on in that big brain of yours?", he asked tapping a single finger on the boy's forehead.

"Um... nothing really. I just, well, the news was on the television in there. I guess I haven't been watching it lately."

Tony racked his brain for something that would be in the news that would upset the kid. He couldn't think of anything, in particular, so he urged him on. "Okay, what were they talking about?"

"I'm not totally sure, I just caught the last part. They were interviewing this lady and she, she um, she mentioned that Spider-Man hadn't been seen in days. I guess I've been, I don't know, not thinking about that. I should have been. Whatever happened, people were looking for me to stop it."

"Oh, Kid. Whatever happened, I'm sure the police had it under control." The man cocked his head to the side as if in deep thought. "I was kind of wondering when this would come up though. Are you ready to go back out?"
"I do miss patrolling. I haven't even put the suit on in almost two weeks. No wonder people are questioning Spider-man's whereabouts..." Then sighing he added, "The city needs me but I can't be the friendly neighborhood Spider-Man if I'm not even in the neighborhood..."

The man made a small hum of understanding. "When does your 'Guy in the Chair' get back?"

"Oh, he's sort of back already. He texted me when they landed. He's gonna call me later. Why?", the boy asked, clearly confused by the subject change. It did cross his mind that this could be a hint that the man wanted him to go stay there until May moved in.

"I just figured that you two haven't seen each other in a while and you would want to schedule a slumber party or something... that's a thing kids do right? Slumber parties?", the man grinned.

"Five-year-old girls have slumber parties, Tony...", the boy said with indignation but he was inwardly relieved that it didn't sound like the man was trying to pawn him off.

"But you do stay at his house sometimes, right?"

"Of course, but it's, it's not a slumber party."

"Alright, Perfect. You guys can plan a 'not a slumber party' and you can go be Spider-Man until your little heart's content-- As long as it's content by curfew. Outside of that, We'll have to work something out. Once May is settled in we can talk 'guidelines' again. Yeah?"

"Yeah." Peter smiled, the reminder that May was coming to stay with him lifted his spirits significantly and he went back to talking Tony's ear off. This time, the man didn't mind at all. It meant that he had done something right.

Back in the penthouse, the first thing Peter did was grab a cup and make himself some chocolate milk. It had been a while since he'd had any and he downed half of the glass in one breath before stopping to question the man standing beside him. "What's for dinner?"

"Uh, I was thinking about making spaghetti and meatballs. Any objections?"
"hmm-mm", the boy hummed into his cup, finishing the last of the milk and setting the cup on the counter. "I love spaghetti. Can I help?"

That was new. The kid had never asked to help cook before. Then again, they ate out or ordered in for the most part. When Pepper was there, she cooked regularly but Tony had never heard the boy ask to help her either. *Huh.* "Sure Buddy. You want to start grabbing what we need out of the pantry?"

"Yep", the kid answered hopping off the barstool in order to collect the items out of the pantry as his mentor listed them. He would never admit to it out loud but he loved cooking. It was something he did with his aunt at least a few times a week. When Pepper had been there and in the kitchen, Peter had considered offering to help several times but always backed out of the idea before he could act on it. Helping in the kitchen was something he shared with May. It almost made him feel like something of a traitor to even consider offering to help Pepper but, for some reason tonight, it felt right to be in there with Tony. He didn't think about it too much. Maybe it was just the peace that came with knowing his aunt would be there soon.

In the kitchen, the two of them easily fell into a rhythm. It was clear to Tony that the kid had done this before. As Peter started setting the table without prompting, the man smiled. He never in a million years would have imagined himself happily getting ready to sit down to dinner with a teenaged boy but this seemed to be his life at the moment. He had a hard time imagining what it would be like when the kid eventually left. The thought alone had a lump forming in his throat but he chose to swallow it down, choosing, instead, to focus on the boy sitting in front of him.

The pair were clearing the dishes when Peter's phone rang. His eyes lit up and a smile spread across his face as he looked at the screen. Tony knew exactly who it was without having to ask and shooed the kid out of the kitchen to go talk to his friend. The boy had done enough, he could finish cleaning up the mess while the two friends caught up.

Peter was already answering before he had even entered the guest room. "Ned!! Hey man, how was Peru?"

"It was okay. We mostly just sat at the house with my grandma. The food was great though. I learned how to make picarones. I'll have to show you some time. What about you? Did you know who, do anything interesting while I was gone?"

"Ugh, don't say it like that, it's weird and no, not really. Actually, I haven't even been out in, um, a while."
"Why? Is everything alright?", the other boy gasped before adding, "Oh my God, did Mr. Stark take the suit again? What happened!?"

"Wha?-- no, Ned. It's just, well, I've sort of been, busy?"

"Too busy to patrol? That doesn't sound like you."

This lead Peter into an animated story that covered everything from what had happened to May and how he ended up at the Avenger's Compound all the way up to making spaghetti with Tony as if it were an everyday event.

Ned was speechless for all of a full minute and a half before he spoke again. "Did you just tell me that Tony Stark...Iron Man, has like, practically adopted you? Dude... what even is your life?"

Peter laughed. This conversation was going exactly how he expected it would go and it was great. **God, he had missed talking to his best friend. "Not adopted... but yeah, my life... it's pretty crazy, man."**

Tony stood outside the kid's cracked door for a minute or two just listening to the kid laugh with his friend. He didn't want to interrupt them but it was nearing midnight and Pepper was going to be there early to help them start setting things up for May. She had to leave to go back to California on Monday, so this weekend was really her only chance to give any input. The man sighed and tapped the door with his knuckles. "Hey, Kid? It's uh, getting late. You might want to wrap it up. Pepper is going to be here pretty early and she has plans."

Peter turned to happily face his mentor. "Oh! Yeah, Okay", before turning his attention back to the phone in his hand. "Dude, I have to go to bed. I'll call you tomorrow. Don't forget to ask your mom about me coming over alright! Just not Monday."

Tony was just now realizing that the boys were on a video call. He could hear the other boy clear across the room. "Dude. Did Iron Man just send you to bed?" The man laughed to himself at the shock and awe in the other kid's voice. Then laughed out loud at his own kid's reactions to his friend's questions. **Wait, own kid?**

"Ned! *Come on man..."* the boy full on whining.
"What? It's awesome; like he's parenting you, dude. I would kill to have Iron Man as my dad. Oh my God, Don't tell my dad I said that --"

The boy had become a stuttering mess. "He, he can hear you, Ned! Shut, shut up... I, I gotta go. Call you tomorrow.", after that, he unceremoniously ended the phone call as fast as possible. Burying his face in the pillows of the bed he finally acknowledged his mentor's presence. "Oh my God, I'm so sorry", the boy moaned.

"Sorry for what?", the man laughed. "That was golden. I had no idea your ears could get that red. FRIDAY you have footage of that right?"

"Affirmative boss", the AI responded, causing Peter to groan loudly and mumble something about his impending death by embarrassment.

At this point, Tony had crossed the room and placed a hand on Peter's back, patting it gently. "You'll live, Kid. Get some sleep, alright?", his mentor chuckled deeply.

Peter just nodded into the pillow and waited for the man to leave the room before he made a move to get ready for bed. He had already been just starting to consider the fact that, sometimes it seemed like Tony was teetering right on the edge of crossing some sort of invisible line that had been drawn between mentor and parental figure. That didn't mean he was ready to outwardly acknowledge it, especially not to the man himself. Not when he had no idea how the man felt about him. He was getting attached and he wanted to believe that Tony was too. He was still trying to figure out how Tony saw him. It still periodically crossed Peter's mind that the man had not denied that he kept him around for Spider-Man, that night in the lab.

Back in his room, Tony was doing some thinking of his own. The entire night had been full of interesting events. Starting with admitting that he was enjoying the homeliness of things like cooking and sitting down at a table for dinner with the kid only to be blindsided by the realization that at some point the boy would return to his own home. Then the teenager's friend had accused him of parenting. More so, he had realized that he had internally referred to Peter as his own kid and didn't even know if that had been the first time because at the moment it felt nothing but natural. It hadn't quite been two weeks yet. How? Thank God, Pepper would be there tomorrow. Maybe she could talk some sense into him. Not his kid... Not his kid...

Unable to sleep, Peter spent hours staring at the ceiling, fretting and over-analyzing. His mind replayed every one of the awkward comments that Ned had made, right in front of Tony. The man seemed to have laughed it off... but Peter was very good at over-thinking things. Picking it apart until it hardly resembled what it was. As such he managed to work himself into a flurry of thoughts.
that, in a more calm state would have made no sense at all. Things like, 'What if he thought what Ned said was weird and stops spending so much time with me' and 'What if once May moves in he stops seeing me altogether. There would be no for it at that point. Not with his legal guardian there.' The fact that the man had been his sole comfort for a while now seemed to be forgotten, irrational thoughts pushing all truths aside.

By the time finally he fell into an unsettled sleep, it was out of pure exhaustion. He had gotten himself thoroughly worked up over nothing. This, prompting the nightmares to resurface with a vengeance. Only this time it was different. It wasn't about his parents, or Ben, or himself falling or even May, it was about Tony. While he couldn't remember the exact details, he certainly remembered what woke him up. The man had stood before him, angry. 'What the Hell were you thinking, Parker? That I was going to let you keep hanging around here like some sort of lost puppy? Nope, I did my part, I made sure that the state didn't end up with Spider-Man in their custody. My job's done. Now you can go home. I'll call Spider-Man when I need him.'

Unlike his typical nightmares, he didn't wake up feeling suffocated or panicked. He just felt crushing sadness. There was no sweaty hair or sticky t-shirt but his face and pillow were damp with tears. He didn't even know it was possible to cry in your sleep. He sat up, shaking and looked at the clock. He had only been asleep for an hour, at best, but there was no way he was going back to sleep. Not the way he was feeling.

It first, crossed his mind that he should ask FRIDAY about Tony, he always made him feel better. Then his mind supplied that maybe he shouldn't. Things were definitely uncomfortable when they had parted ways. Well, he was uncomfortable anyway, Tony had seemed fine, so perhaps he should wake him up. He had told him before that he could... but that was before. Maybe it was different now. He didn't want the man to think he was forcing him into a role he didn't want. Peter was painfully conflicted. He wanted reassurance that his dream had been nothing more than a dream but he was also terrified that it might be true. He was so lost in his own head that he hadn't realized he was mumbling his thoughts out loud, nor did he hear when FRIDAY had spoken up and offered him assistance.

While the boy was becoming more and more lost in his own flawed logic, Tony was sound asleep in his own bed right up until the moment that FRIDAY addressed him. "Boss. Mr. Parker appears to be in distress."

That was odd, Tony thought as he shook himself awake. The boy had suffered numerous nightmares in the last couple of weeks but the AI had never felt the need to report them. What was the boy doing that could have gotten the AI's attention? "What do you mean distress?"

"His heart rate is elevated and he appears to be disconcerted. He mentioned your name twice as he soliloquized. There was no response when addressed directly." That had the man out of bed and down the hall in seconds.
As Peter was pacing the room, he heard a knock at his door. His eye's shot in that direction but he remained silent. As the door was pushed open he saw his mentor standing there, one hand on his hip the other on the doorknob. 'Hey, Kid? FRIDAY said you were in distress. What's going on?"

Peter stood by the bed, stunned by his mentor's presence. His brain was still on overdrive, providing anxious negativity as opposing thoughts continued to clash inside his head. He didn't know how to respond so he just wrapped his arms around himself and tried not to crumble.

"Kid?", the man asked again in concern. "Talk to me, Buddy. What's going on? Nightmare?"

Peter was going to shrug his shoulders but he nodded instead. He knew the man probably wanted him to give a verbal response but he was afraid that if he opened his mouth, the only thing that would come out would be a pathetic whine.

"Hey, It's alright, your safe. May's safe. Everythings fine. I've got you. It was just a bad dream. Yeah?", the man tried to reassure the shivering boy before him. "You want us to go out to the couch?" When the boy made no move, he tried again. "Okay, do you want us to stay here? ... or wait... do you want me to go? You want to be alone?" That seemed unlikely but he was sort of clueless as to what was going through the kid's head at the moment.

"Don't go.", the boy finally answered; unfavorable notions, bit by bit, beginning to subside.

"Alright, I won't.", the man said crossing the room. He was about to reach out to take the kid by the shoulder when he paused. "Will you be okay if I touch you right now?"

Peter nodded in the affirmative and the second the man's hand made contact with his shoulder, the damn broke. "I, I...", he started but no other words would come.

Tony was starting to inwardly panic himself. He hadn't seen the kid like this, since that one night in the hospital. All he could think was that it must have been one hell of a nightmare to get the kid worked up into this state. "It's alright Pete, we can talk about it later. Just breath. Okay?", he said while wrapping his arms around the distraught boy.

After a few moments of just soaking in the comfort that his mentor's strong grip offered, Peter was able to calm himself enough to talk. "I dreamed that May was back and you didn't want me around anymore. You told me to go. You were only protecting Spider-Man. I was afraid it was true. It's,
it's not... is it?", the kid asked, fear clear in his eyes.

The man just squeezed the kid a little tighter. "Kid, I could never get rid of you, you've grown on me too much." He was laughing to himself as he whispered, "You're making me soft. You know that, right?" That caused the boy to let out a small laugh, making Tony feel like he had just won some sort of award. "What do you say we move this into another room?"
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Tag adds: Peter Parker is a Little Shit, Awesome Pepper Potts

The couch was nice but it was three in the morning and Tony wasn't sure he wanted to put his back and neck through that many hours on a piece of furniture meant for sitting and not sleeping, so he made the decision to take the kid with him into his own room. His bed was much larger and, honestly, more comfortable than the guest room bed. It made sense.

When his mentor had suggested that they leave the guest room, Peter didn't answer, he just allowed the man to lead the way to the couch. Only Tony didn't turn towards the living room, he turned further into the hall. The boy hesitated, now unsure as to whether or not he was supposed to be following him. Hearing the pause in footsteps, the man turned to look over his shoulder to ask him if he was coming. Giving a small nod, the boy walked towards his mentor and into Tony's personal bedroom.

Walking towards the bed, Tony motioned for Peter to get in. "C'mon, it's a sleepover." the man smiled.

Peter awkwardly climbed into the bed, Tony, following suit, pulling the thick blankets up over his own body before rolling over and looking at the boy. The boy looked stiff and nervous and had made no move to settle himself so Tony reached over and tried to adjust the covers for him. "Kid, you're gonna have to help me out at least a little bit, here. Come on now, under you go., he said lifting the blankets up and shaking them ever so slightly to get the teenager's attention.

As instructed, Peter hurriedly scooted himself under the waiting blankets still feeling uneasy. Not about Tony's intention of course! He knew what the man was doing. May had done the same thing in the past, allowed him to sleep with her whenever he'd had a particularly bad dream or was just too anxious to go back to sleep in his own bed. This was different though. He was still trying to figure out where his place was in the man's life. Whatever that place was, it was still evolving but they were far more familiar than they had been even a week ago. If this didn't prove that to be true, he didn't know what would but the hesitation was there all the same.

With the unwarranted doubt on his mind, he made a point of situating himself as close to the edge of the bed as possible. It was only a matter of seconds before a strong hand reached over and grabbed a hold of his wrist, silently tugging him towards the middle of the bed. Not, one to blatantly disobey, he scooched away from the edge and a little closer to his mentor. When the man didn't let go of his
wrist he sighed with marginal contentment and started to allow himself to sink into the mattress.

Feeling the kid, finally, relax, Tony returned to his original position on his back, one arm still stretched out across the bed, loosely holding onto the kid's wrist. He figured if the boy wanted him to let go, he would simply move away but he wasn't expecting that. He had slowly begun to realize that the child, for the most part, seemed to thrive on physical touch. However, he was not expecting to wake up some hours later to find the Spiderling was now laying so close to him that he could feel steady breathing on his exposed shoulder and a hand squarely in the middle of his chest, gripping his tank top as if it were a lifeline while the other seemed to be clinging to his arm. Blinking back his quiet surprise, he gave a tired smile in the kid's direction and went back to sleep.

It was Pepper and not FRIDAY who woke Tony up later that morning. She had arrived at the suite an hour and a half earlier than expected but still, it was late enough in the morning that she wasn’t going to feel too bad about walking unannounced into her fiance's bedroom to wake him up... or join him in bed, she hadn't decided.

Opening the door to the master bedroom, she was stunned. There was Tony, laying in bed sound asleep with Peter's head practically on his shoulder and one of the boy's arms wrapped around his middle. Biting back a smile she knelt down beside the bed and tried to gently pull her fiance from sleep. "Tony?", she whispered. When he blinked up at her she continued. "I'm here early, I'll get started, you and Peter rest okay? I'll order breakfast in." All the man could do in his sleep-hazed state was to nod and close his eyes back.

After waking up an hour or so later, Tony struggled for a few minutes trying to get out of the spiderling's sticky hands before realizing that he was going to have to wake him up. "Hey, Kid", he whispered but the boy didn't stir so he repeated himself a little louder. That seemed to do it, as the boy's eyes blinked open beside him. "Kid", he said as gently as possible, "I'm gonna need you to let go, okay?"

"Hmm?", Peter looked at the man in sleepy confusion.

"Can you let me up, Kiddo?"

All of a sudden things seemed to click and Peter gasped as he practically threw himself into a sitting position "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to--"

"-- Hey, You're fine. You're alright... Look, I'll be right back.", he said pointing in the direction of the en-suite bathroom. "I wasn't going to wake you up but couldn't get out of your weird spidey grip", the man smiled in what he hoped was a reassuring way.
"Oh! I, uh, yeah, o-okay. Sorry.", he stammered before laying himself back onto the pillows. As he waited for his mentor to return he, laid there thinking about how it was strange that he didn't feel at all embarrassed about having spent the night in his mentor's bedroom. Though he was nearly mortified that he had inadvertently spidered himself to the man in his sleep.

Once the man returned he sat on the edge of the bed. "You alright?"

"Yeah, I didn't mean to, uh, to... stick to you... "

Tony laughed at how flustered the kid sounded. "It's fine. Weird... but fine. You never answered my question, though. You're okay? You had a pretty rough night there, Kiddo."

"Oh."

"Yeah, 'Oh', you want to talk about it?"

Rolling himself over so that he was now staring at the ceiling, Peter tried to bargain his way out of this conversation. "I, I mean, we talked about it last night. Right? I, I already told you about the dream."

"Yeah, you did, Buddy. I guess I was just hoping that you would tell me what I did that made you think I would ever just tell you to leave like that."

Peter didn't want to have this conversation. How was he supposed to explain that he was confused about where Peter Parker and Spider-Man fit into Tony's life? All because of one comment made days ago and a stupid dream? "It was just a dream", the tried, hoping the man would just let it go.

He didn't. "Pete, you asked me if it was true. I need to know what's going on in your head. We need to talk about this."

Struggling to come up with what to say next, Peter went to his default, 'get out of this situation' lie. "I, um, I need to pee... can, can I use your bathroom?", he asked bouncing his leg in place for emphasis.
He was relatively certain that this was a repeat of the avoidance tactic the kid had used on him before, but he couldn't be positive and he didn't want to risk it, so he just sighed. "Sure, Pete. I'll be in the kitchen. Pepper's already here, she ordered us some breakfast."

Nodding, Peter made his way into the man's bathroom. "Okay. I'll, uh, I'll be there in a minute."

Out in the living room, Pepper was sitting at the table, StarkPad in hand waiting for the boys to emerge. She didn't plan on waking them up. Given the situation she had found them in, she had no doubt that it had been a late and more than likely a very emotional night for both of them. Tony, entering the room, moments later, running his hands through his hair only confirmed her suspicions. "Bad night?"

He paused to pour himself a cup of the hot coffee that Pepper had brewed earlier before answering, "Well, it wasn't great.", he nearly snapped. He hadn't meant for it to come out so sarcastically and he immediately felt bad about it. She was trying to help. "I didn't mean it like that.", he groaned, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"I know you didn't.", she said as she rose from her chair and made her way over to him. "Do you want to talk about it?", she asked, coming up behind him and wrapping her arms around his shoulders, giving him room to continue sipping at the coffee.

"I just wish he'd talk to me. I can't figure him out. I'm a genius and I can't figure out what a teenage boy is thinking."

Pepper, laughed lightly. "Talk to you? From what I can figure he rarely stops talking."

"Well, yeah, He talks all the damn time just not about anything important. Something's going on and I don't know what it is. It's driving me crazy and he won't tell me."

"You've asked him?"

"He's a master of avoidance, Pepper.", the man stated dryly.

"Hmm... sounds like someone I know.", she smiled, giving the man a squeeze.
About that time, Peter rounded the corner greeting each of them as if nothing had happened. Pepper let go of Tony and turned towards him. "Good morning Peter. I ordered all kinds of fruit pastries. They're over here on the bar, help yourself, alright? There's plenty."

Peter wandered over to where boxes of pastries were laid out and grabbed one from the first box he came to. He made a point of not making too much eye contact with either of them. Enhanced hearing was somewhat of a blessing and a curse. He knew they had been talking about him. He hadn't meant to cause Tony any stress, he just wasn't ready to have that conversation. Maybe it was selfish but he wasn't sure he would ever be ready to have that conversation.

After finishing, a third pastry, Peter attempted to leave the living room but Pepper stopped him. "Hey, Peter? I was wondering if you could ride out to your apartment with me. I want to get a few of May's things for her room. I thought you might want to help me. I bet you know exactly what she would want to have here."

"Oh, yeah. I can do that."

"Great. I would like to leave in the next thirty minutes if that's okay. I want to go to a couple of stores too. There are a few things I'd like to pick up and Tony has an errand he's asked me to run for him."

"Sure, I'll go get ready.\", the boy said as he started down the hallway.

He was back out and ready to leave in the allotted amount of time. Pepper was waiting for him near the door. "It's raining. Do you have a jacket here?\", she asked him kindly.

"Oh, I do, it's in the guest room. Just a sec.\", he answered turning to head back down the hall to grab it.

Once he was out of sight, Pepper addressed Tony, whispering. "The guest room? He's been here for two weeks and will probably be here for at least another month. You didn't think to start calling it his room?\" She asked in mild annoyance.

Tony stared at her for a moment before responding just as quietly. "I, it is the guest room... I suppose we could make it his room."
"No, we will make it his room. Besides, he'll need a place to stay when he comes to visit after he and May move back to their apartment.", she whispered back with a knowing smile.

Before Tony could respond, the boy had returned with a hoodie in his hand and Pepper was leading him out the door. It was going to be odd not having Peter around, even if their outing had been his idea. The last time he had been away from the kid was when he was trying to fight off a migraine, that hardly counted. He'd mostly slept. Taking a deep breath, he looked around the room before grabbing a pastry along with his coffee mug and heading to his home office. He supposed he had some work he could do. Pepper would be ecstatic if he actually caught up on his emails.

Peter was somewhat surprised to see that Pepper was driving them and not Happy. He was even more surprised when she led him to the red convertible that he had so desperately wanted to ride in. She stood outside of the car and grinned in his direction. "I thought you might want to take this car out today. It's too bad we can't take the top down. Just means we'll have to go out in it again sometime", she winked.

"This is amazing! Thank you!", he answered practically bouncing on his toes.

The first stop was his apartment. The pair went straight into May's room, each of them with a mission. Peter started by picking up a few framed photographs and the robe that Ben had given her one year for Christmas. Then he made it over to May's bedside table and noticed her reading glasses and a few of her favorite books. When a bookmark fell out of one of them as he picked it up, he suddenly felt bad for not bringing those to her sooner. "Hey, Pepper? I know she'll be at the compound in a couple of days but can we take her these books and her reading glasses today?"

"Of course, Peter. I think she'd like that.", the woman replied from across the room where she was collecting some clothing into a duffle bag. "We'll need to make it a quick visit though. Remember, we have a few more stops and I need to get back before any deliveries come. If it's left to Tony, nothing will end up where it's supposed to go.", she laughed.

"That's fine. I can be quick.", he said sounding only slightly dejected. He couldn't wait for May to be closer to him. Then visiting wouldn't be so hard. He could just see her whenever he wanted.

They had delivered the books and glasses to a very appreciative May and were on their way into the first store. It was not a store that Peter was any kind of excited about. It was a boring home goods store with walls and walls of curtains, throw pillows and bedspreads. He had to resist the urge to groan as they walked inside. Pepper must have sensed it because she felt the need to tell him that she knew exactly what she was after and it would be quick.
It, however, was not quick. When Pepper had said she knew exactly what she was after, she meant that she knew she needed a bed set and curtains for May's room and he discovered quickly that, that was not the same thing. They spent no less than half an hour just standing in front of a rack that held all various yellow curtains in at least a dozen shades while Pepper monologued about which one would look best with the natural light in the room. By the time they had made it to the bedspreads and sheets, she was trying to get him to give an opinion. Holding up multiple bed sets with flowers on them asking which one he thought May would like and he was trying to force himself to participate.

By the time the items were purchased Peter was pretty sure he was going to die of boredom. He had failed to plug his phone in the night before, as such, it had died three-quarters of the way through the store and they still had one more stop to make. He hoped the next errand really was quick. He was starving by now and ready to be anywhere but whatever store Pepper was about to drag him into next.

Pepper, again seeming to sense his every thought, pulled into a drive through to get him something to eat before going straight to the parking lot of a large department store. This time he did groan. "What are we getting here?", he asked trying to gauge how long this was going to take.

"That depends on you. Tony wanted me to take you to get some clothes. He said you needed some button downs, a suit jacket, and dress pants. He also said to tell you that you could get whatever other clothes you wanted. His exact words were 'Tell him don't be shy and to just fucking pick something' So I suggest you walk in with at least one extra thing.", she laughed.

"That, that sounds like something he would say.", the boy nodded looking glumly towards the front doors. He had already decided he was going to grab whatever they had in his size and call it a day.

Pepper, on the other hand, had already decided that he was going to try the clothes on. He had to work to keep his attitude to a minimum as she fussed over the collars and patterns, constantly having him try the next size up, just to see. This was not what he signed up for today. It was an hour and a half later that they finally made it to the check out with, two pairs of dress pants, a pair of khakis, two polos, a pack of socks, three dress shirts a tie and an over-priced suit jacket in tow. He had also picked up a t-shirt that he liked and a hoodie with a picture of Captain America's shield on it, the latter, just to piss Tony off.

He had now realized that this entire stupid trip had been the man's doing. The least Peter could do to express his displeasure was to walk back into the compound wearing Captain America merchandise. Pepper didn't say a word when he picked it up but she must have known his intentions because she had basically been reading his mind all day and was helping him remove the tags the second they reached the car. He knew it was petty but he was absolutely looking forward to seeing Tony's
reaction. Maybe Pepper was too because she made a point to straighten the back of the jacket for him once they got back to the compound.
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

On our way home from FRC championships. We had an excellent run. :) I'm in a good mood.

Somewhat, Happy knew when they were back because the second they pulled up to the front of the compound he was walking out the doors, taking the keys from Pepper's hand and getting all of the begs out of the back. The man took one look at Peter as he stepped out of the car and snorted a laugh. "Nice Jacket Kid. Buy that with the boss's money?"

"Yep.", Peter answered, popping the P.

Happy then turned his attention over to Pepper, leaning over and half whispering in her ear. "Somebody's gonna get it." She didn't answer him. Instead, she put her hand on Peter's back and led him inside, leaving Happy to follow them.

Inside the Penthouse, FRIDAY must have announced their arrival because Tony was sauntering out of his office the moment the door opened. He took one look at Peter and his jaw dropped. As he threw his arms up in the air he nearly shouted, "What the Hell kid?"

Feining innocence, Peter looked at the man in confusion. "W-What? Is it the new jacket? You don't like it?"

The man now had his hands crossed over his chest. It was obvious that he was trying to appear casual despite the fact that he was clearly annoyed. "Of all the jackets in the store, you had to pick that one?"

"Oh yeah, this was definitely the one I wanted. In fact, it's perfect. Never had a better jacket. I think I'll wear it everywhere.", the boy answered completely straight-faced.

"Like Hell, you will! You have a perfectly good white hoodie that you left the house with if I recall correctly- and I always do." There was definitely irritation in his voice this time.
There it was. That was the reaction Peter was looking for. "Yeah, but *you* bought me this one. That makes it my favorite."

Something between annoyance and indignation crossed the man's face. "*Kid*, I will buy you a hoodie in every color under the sun if you take that off and hand it over right now."

Peter grinned mischievously at the man as he turned towards the hall. "Nope. I think I'll keep it."

"Oh, no, you won't!", the man said sternly, positioning himself so he could chase after the boy should he run. The tone and posture making Peter smile.

"Oh, I'm keeping it... you deserve this! Look! I need to plug my phone in! Later, oh and thank you!!", Peter called out cheerfully as he hurried down the hall.

"You're a little shit! You know that!!", Tony called after him the other adults in the room clearly laughing behind him.

Once he was out of the room Tony bid Happy good-bye and turned to Pepper who was near tears with laughter. "You, are a traitor. I can't believe you let him get that."

Composing herself enough to reply the woman held her hands up in a defensive position. "As if I was going to stop him. I had been torturing the poor boy all day and *it was your idea*. Even when May warned me that he hated shopping I didn't realize it was *that* bad. He looked *miserable*, Tony."

The man just rolled his eyes. "Don't you have stuff to unpack or something."

She leaned over to give the man a kiss on the cheek. "Actually, I do. See you two for dinner?"

"Of course", he said turning his head to return the kiss but on the mouth this time.

With that, they parted ways. Tony, needed to go see Peter. He still needed to try and talk to him about the night before and now he needed to talk to him about making the guest room into his *room*. He wasn't sure how to broach either subject so he grabbed a bag of Oreos and headed in the kid's direction.
Once he got to the room he paused. The door was slightly ajar and it was clear that the boy was on a phone call. Just as he was about to walk away the door flew open and the teenager ran out of the room colliding with Tony's chest, knocking him clean to the floor. "Shit, Kid! What was that about?", the man said out of shock, more so than irritation.

For his part, the boy was instantly apologizing and offering a hand to help the man back to his feet. "I'm sorry! Holy Shit! I'm sorry!", then into his phone, "Ned, I gotta call you back!... I just do!!.... I'll call you-- I just-- bye!". He hung up and his attention was back to Tony. "Are you okay? I'm so sorry."

"I'm fine, Kiddo.", he man said but he groaned as he stood making Peter's face scrunch up in apologetic concern. "I mean it hurt, but I've had worse. I'll live. I was actually on my way to see you."

Peter shifted nervously on his feet. "I, uh, I was on my way to see you too. I didn't know you were right there. I'm sorry"

"Alright well, since we're out here now, let's take it to the couch. You first, what were you in such a hurry to get to me about?"

"Oh, um, Neds, mom said that I could spend the night on Wednesday. I was coming to ask you if that was okay." Right as the question left his mouth a thought occurred to him and it hit him like a ton of bricks. "Wait...I guess May will be here then so, do, do I ask her? Or do I ask you...?"

"I think you're okay to run this one by me this time but I suppose we'll need to get with May once she's settled in and figure all that out for future reference. Yeah?"

"Yeah. That sounds good. So, so can I? Go to Neds?"

"Of course. You guys haven't seen each other all summer right? Besides, it will give you some Spider-Man time and since it's not until Wednesday we'll have time to run some diagnostics on your suit and talk upgrades."

"Yes, sir! Thank you!! I'm gonna go call him back now, okay?", he said jumping up off the couch.
"Hey! Hold your horses there Buck-a-roo! I didn't get to talk yet. You can text him really quickly and then you can get us some milk to go with these Oreos. Got it?"

"Yes, sir", the boy answered all enthusiasm having left his voice. He wasn't sure what his mentor wanted to talk to him about but he doubted it was anything good.

Once the kid had returned with two glasses of milk, Tony opened up the oreo package and handed him a few. The boy reluctantly took them and started pulling them apart, setting the creme aside on the coffee table then dunking and eating the cookies. The man raised an eyebrow at him. "What are you doing to those poor Oreo's?"

It was Peter's turn to raise an eyebrow. "Eating them? H-how do you eat them?"

"I certainly don't make a mess of them. Just dunk it and eat it. Why would you take the filling out?"

"I eat that last."

"You eat a stack of plain creme filling... last."

"Well, sort of. I roll it into a ball first.", the boy said as if that was the most normal thing in the world.

Tony scrunched up his nose. "Kid. That's gross. You know that right?"

Peter made a small noise of annoyance. "Is, is this what you wanted to talk to me about?"

"Nope. I wanted to talk to you about the guest room."

The boy visibly paled. Why would he want to talk about the guest room? Was this where ended? Were things were going to go back to how they had been before? Tony being nothing more than a distant mentor who he occasionally worked with. Maybe he was going to send him to stay in a room in the MedBay. While he liked the idea of May being close, the idea of leaving the Penthouse where
Tony was made his stomach churn. He was really starting to like the idea of the man caring for him but maybe it was Spider-Man he cares about after all. He thought had already had this figured out and now Tony wanted to talk about the guest room. He had to swallow a few times before he felt he could safely open his mouth. "W-what, uh, what about it?"

"You alright, kiddo? You look like you're going to be sick."

Peter continued to swallow back the anxious nausea as he tried to reassure the man that he was fine. "I'm, I'm okay, Mr. St--Tony."

The man wasn't convinced but moved on. "I wanted to talk to you about turning the guest room into your room. You've, uh, been here for a while and, well, you're going to be here for a while longer so, I, we, Pepper and I, want you to have your own space. Plus, I, we, would like for you to have a place to stay when you come to visit us; after you've gone back to your apartment. We would need to get a few things to, you know, make it feel more like your own room. Maybe some, I don't know, posters and a new bedspread, whatever you want really. Just, stuff to make it yours. What, uh, what do you think?" Why was he so nervous about this? What was the kid just going to reject him?

"M-My room? Like, my own room in, in your house?"

"That's the idea. yeah."

"I don't need you to buy me things, to make me a room. What's in there is already really nice."

"It is a nice room but it's a generic guest room. I want it to be your room now. With things that you like in it."

Peter didn't know what to say. Tony had asked him to personalize a room in his home. Did that mean, he didn't just keep him around for Spider-Man? He hands were wringing in his lap, his right leg was bouncing in place and he seemed to have lost all control of his brain to mouth filter because before he could stop it the question was out. "Is the room for me or, or Spider-Man?"

Tony was completely perplexed by the question. "Pete, you are Spider-Man. You're literally the same person." The all of a sudden he was filled with dread. "Wait... You, you do know that right?"

Not even putting together what Tony's question had implied about his mental health Peter tried to
clarify in order to get an answer. "But, the room, you want it for me? Just me? You're not just
doing it for Spider-Man?"

"Pete. This is very important. Are you listening?" He was having to try really hard not to sound
panicked at this point as he waited for the boy to nod in confirmation. "Okay, You and Spider-Man,
same guy. You know that. You know that you can't have one without the other. Yes?"

"Well, I know that we aren't two people." His mentor sighed with obvious relief. "I just. I don't
know. I don't know if you would care about me, Peter Parker, if it wasn't for Spider-Man. I
mean, I am Spider-Man but, but is that part of me more important? ...to you I mean. Like, as, as an
asset or something?"

A realization abruptly made its way into Tony's head so fast had to blink back in surprise. "Kid... is
that what's been bothering you? You think I only care that you're Spider-Man?"

Peter didn't answer. He just continued to fidget nervously beside his mentor on the couch.

Tony, rested his hand atop Peter's jittery ones as he had in several times now, over the past two
weeks. He had to take a few deep breaths before he could reply. This was becoming an extremely
emotionally charged conversation and he wasn't good at those. "Pete, Buddy, I, well, let's start with
this... I'm Iron Man, yeah?" Peter nodded. "Okay, well, do you only like me for Iron Man?" God
he hoped the kid gave the right answer here... Otherwise he was fucked.

"No! You, you're so much more than that. You, you're a genius, an, uh, amazing engineer and, and
you own this huge awesome company--", the boy stammered until he was cut off by Tony.

"--So, if I stopped being Iron Man tomorrow--"

"--I would still think you're awesome. I like it when you teach me how to do things, like, even the
not super hero stuff. I would, I would still want to come and just do those, those things with you.
Like the car or, or go to SI with you..."

Once the kid's voice had trailed off into silence, Tony smiled at him, hoping that he would put all of
this together himself. He really didn't want have to say it. When the boy showed no visible signs
that he had put two and two together he reluctantly began to explain. "Kid, don't you see? It goes in
both ways. You're more than just Spider-Man. You're pretty damn smart yourself, and a damn
good engineer for your age and experience, at this rate you might be better than me one day and, kid,
this is the most important part... you have a heart. Everything you do, you do with passion. You’re just a really good kid and I like having you around. If I didn't, I wouldn't."

Peter had calmed significantly at this point. The man had expressed that he liked him for him and that was exactly what he needed to hear. He closed his eyes and deeply breathed, leaning back onto the cushions. He felt the weight of his mentor's hand lift from him, the loss of contact causing him to look in the man’s direction.

Seeing the face the kid had pulled when he moved away, he replaced his hand. This time on his knee, giving it a light squeeze. "You good?"

"Yeah. 'm Just tired."

"Hmm" The man nodded in understanding. Despite the fact that the kid had been back to sleep by three-thirty he'd ended up having to reluctantly wake him up at eight-forty-five. "You gonna go take a nap?"

"Maybe", he breathed out, running his hands through his hair.

"That's fine, I still have some emails to go through and Pepper's busy with, well, whatever she's busy with. Just be ready for dinner by seven, yeah? Pepper's cooking for us."

Peter just nodded before leaning himself over onto Tony. "What time is it now?"

The man glanced towards the ceiling. "FRIDAY?"

"It's four-thirty-three in the afternoon sir."

Peter drew himself closer into Tony's side before making a decision. "I don't know if I should take a nap right now., he had to stop to yawn. "It's already getting late."

The man moved to wrap an arm around the kid's shoulders. "Hmm, you could just stay here, watch some TV and rest. I still have to get to those emails though.", he smiled.
This caused Peter to shoot up into a sitting position again. "Oh, I'm sorry. I wasn't trying to--"

"-- give me a minute, I'll hang out with you. Need to get my tablet. I can do emails from right here. No big deal. Alright?"

By the time Pepper made her way up to the penthouse to start making dinner, she found both of them lightly snoring on the couch. Tony had a tablet precariously balanced on one thigh while the spiderling's head rested soundly on the other, the TV was droning on, unwatched, in the background. Shaking her head, she asked the AI how long they had been asleep. Hearing that it had already been over an hour she opted to wake them up. *God, knows they both had enough trouble sleeping at night.* Napping past six 'o'clock was probably not *the best idea,* so she went to work rousing the two and heading into the kitchen to start dinner. *She could get used this.*
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Tag adds: Hurt Peter Parker

Neither of them willingly awake, Peter and Tony sat down at the breakfast bar and watched as Pepper started to gather what she needed in order to prepare dinner. Rissoto and salad apparently. The three of them engaged in minimal conversation as the meal was prepared.

Mostly Pepper asks them a simple question here and there or requesting that one of the other of them give her a hand with something at the bar. At one point she had asked Tony to dice an onion but with a quick glance at the kid, informed Pepper that Peter didn't eat onions. "The kid doesn't eat onions, can you leave them out?"

Peter immediately jumped in. "No, it's fine, you don't have to change it for me. I can, I can just like, eat around them or whatever."

Smiling at him Pepper removed the onion from the cutting board she had set before her fiance. "If you don't like them, then we don't have to have them. Are you okay with garlic? Or, what about shallots?"

Having no idea what shallots were, he skipped that one and confirmed that garlic was fine as long as it wasn't too much. She nodded in understanding and set garlic and mushrooms by the cutting board instead. Tony started cutting and the three of them fell silent once again, Pepper occasionally handing a spoon over to Peter for him to taste the risotto as she seasoned it.

When it was nearly done, Peter set the table without being asked and Pepper thanked him profusely. The entire scene made Tony feel proud, which he thought was odd since none of the kid's manners had been learned from him. He didn't raise the kid. He didn't really have any right to be proud of that but he was all the same.

After dinner the three just as around the table chatting when Tony remembered something. "Oh! Pepper, Pete and I have been working on a little side project. He pointed out that he didn't know anyone his age with a StarkPhone despite the fact that they are the bottom to middle of our target audience. I tried to look into sales but I didn't find a whole lot. I did find a few comments regarding price online and within the focus groups."
Pepper looked at the man in question. It was uncommon to hear the man talk about anything SI related at home. Much less something sales related. "Okay, what are you getting at, Tony? What's your goal here?"

"My goal is to make the technology affordable for our target audience.", he said as if it were obvious.

"Or we could just look more into who our target audience should be. Someone is clearly buying them.", she laughed.

Tony shot a look at Peter who had gone from, interested in the conversation to shifting in his seat and he was pretty sure the boy was one more comment away from making an excuse to leave the room. He watched him as he spoke. "No, I want the technology to be accessible. Make a line that is specifically for teenagers and young adults who have limited income or are basically relying on their parents to buy their tech." Then turning to Pepper he added. "Besides, if we can get them hooked with our lite version, then we have customers for life. Yeah?"

Pepper seemed to consider it for a moment before she spoke again. "I guess it doesn't hurt to do the research. See what you two can come up with. If it looks good we can bring it to the board, though I can see how this would have merit. A growing customer base is a good thing as long as we are doing so while maintaining quality"

"Of, course, quality would be a priority, quality, and affordability. Right, Pete?"

Peter still looked nervous as he sat in his chair. He hadn't expected to be present when the man spoke to her about his ideas. "Uh, yeah, that's, um, that's what we said."

After dinner, Tony and Pepper continued to discuss business while Peter excused himself to the guest room--no, his room--to call Ned and maybe read. At some point, Pepper had stuck her head in to tell him that they were going to bed and that he should too.

He had no idea what time Pepper had come in to tell him to go to bed but it was a while ago. A quick glimpse at the time display in the corner of his laptop, he decided he should have listened.

The next morning, if you could even call it that as it was nearly twelve, he found the penthouse empty. There was a note for him on the bar, it looked like Pepper's handwriting, more, he assumed it was. It was smooth and neatly penned, whereas Tony's print tended to be small and boxy, looking
like what May would call 'chicken scratch'. It requested that he eat and join them in the Medical Wing.

After eating he made his way down to the designated area, where he was met with a bustle of energy. There were people coming and going and it took Peter some time to find a familiar face. When he finally did, it was Tony. He was standing near the front entrance, signing some papers and pointing people towards, where he assumed Pepper was. "Tony? What, who are all these people?"

"Hmm? Oh. Deliveries mostly, some of them are new staff."

"It's a lot of people."

"Well, we need a lot of people.", the man smiled at him. "And look, now we have a doctor here for when you go out and do dumb shit like getting stabbed. I won't have to be the one to sew you up."

The boy glared up at the man. "It was one time...you didn't actually need to sew me up, I heal, and it wasn't even my fault. How was I supposed to know the dude had like, four knives on him? I thought I had them all"

Tony just snorted a laugh and dropped the subject. "Did you see May's room yet?"

"I just got down here."

Tony looked down at his watch. "It's after twelve, Kid. When did you go to bed?"

"I, I don't really know for sure. I think it was around three maybe?"

"Well, your little spider butt better be in bed earlier tonight. Pepper is leaving tonight and I have a meeting with the head of bio-engineering in the morning and you're coming with. May is going to be released after lunch and we'll need to be there. Well, I need to be there. I just figured you would want to be there too."

"Of course!" A boring meeting was totally worth that.
About that time, Pepper rounded the corner and having spotted Peter, greeted him cheerfully before dragging him off to give him a tour of the apartment they had put together for May by the MedBay. It was quaint with a decent kitchen and one bedroom. Pepper explained that the hall they were on had several small apartments. At one time they had been used for staff, who wanted to live on site. Of course, there was no need for that nowadays. The only ones living there were Tony and Pepper, and now, for a while, Peter and May.

Peter hung around the apartment for quite a while, just going through things and setting up May's bedroom. At some point, he ran out of things to do and wandered off to the lab. Once there he didn't really know what to do. He had never actually been in there by himself. Not without a specific project and not longer than a few minutes. That being so, he just wandered around looking at different things laying around on the various workspaces. On one of the tables lay, what looked like some kind of version of an arc reactor he's never seen before. *That got his attention.* He approached the table with caution, half expecting to get in some kind of trouble for even being near it but no one, not even FRIDAY stopped him.

After another pause, he reached out to pick up the largest piece. It looked innocent enough. There were a few other screws and coils strewn across the workspace and when he bumped into the edge of the table a holographic display of the schematics opened up in front of him. After looking them over he was itching to put it together. He understood it *for the most part.*

Picking up a few of the parts, his finger quickly got to work. Somewhere around half an hour, later he was somewhat stuck. He looked over the schematics a few times and tried to make sense of the markings and equations. He searched the area for a clue or something that looked like the unknown item. He was about to give up when his eyes fell upon something that basically *looked like* what was pictured in the blueprints. Only, it was inside some kind of casing. It looked important and he wasn't sure if he should be touching it or not but he was so close to actually finishing whatever it was he had started, that it didn't take long for an impulse to take over, he took a chance and grabbed it out of its secure location. Instantly inserting it into the newly built... *whatever it was,* only to have every rash decision he had made in the last forty-five minutes blow up in his face, *literally.*

The second the, what he thought was the correct part clicked into what he assumed was the right place, the entire creation exploded right in his hands. Sharp bits of metal digging into his palms and coming up to hit him in the face, some just barely missing his unprotected eyes. It hurt like hell and there was no doubt in his mind that he was about to be in big trouble. He didn't even notice the damage to the highly technical holographic workbench. All he could focus on was his own blood slipping down his face, through his fingers, and onto the floor. *He was in so much trouble.*

He had no idea how long he had stood there dumbly staring at his hands and the slowly growing pool of red on the floor below them. His trance was only broken when Tony came running into the room, calling out his name in a state of panic, FRIDAY must have alerted him. "Kid!... Kid!... Pete!?” He questioned, before spotting the boy and making his way over to the back of the lab
where Peter stood. Once there, he lowered his voice, but the panic never left. "*Holy shit*, let me look at you."

Peter said nothing, he just held out his hands, though the man seemed to be much more interested in his face. Grabbing a first-aid kit from under a nearby table he started wiping down the cuts around his forehead, unaffected when the boy hissed in pain. "Kid, we need to get this looked at. There might be some shrapnel stuck in some of these wounds and this one by your eye might need stitches.", he said gently patting the gauze over the worst cut.

"I, I h-heal", he tried to bargain but his mentor wasn't going to have that.

"Yes you heal, I know, but you can't just heal *over the metal*. We have to get it out."

Peter was starting to tremble and he wasn't sure if it was from fear, cold or shock. "Why c-can't y-you just do, do it?"

"I probably could, but there are experts here, wouldn't that be better?"

"No.", the answer was curt and final. Seeing a doctor was *not* better than just letting Tony do it. Sure, he knew the man didn't have a medical degree but he had plenty of experience and he was a genius, after all. If he didn't know how to fix it, he would figure it out. Peter trusted him fully.

Tony sighed. "Fine, but if I get in over my head we're going to the professionals, yeah? I can have them sign an NDA that's so sound they won't even be allowed to *think* about giving up your identity without losing everything they have."

Peter just nodded as his mentor started barking directions at FRIDAY, having her clearing out the part of MedBay they needed to go to in order to take some x-rays. While they waited, Tony continued to clean up his hands and face with the harsh disinfectant and rough gauze, applying pressure to the biggest openings. "I know it hurts buddy, you can cry if you need to okay? No judgment."

That seemed to be all Peter needed to hear for the tears that had been pearling in the corners of his eyes, to start to spill, Tony occasionally catching them with his thumbs before they could fall completely down his cheeks.
X-Rays were done quickly. There was no shrapnel in his forehead much to Tony's relief but the boy's hands were another story. One look at that, and he cringed. "Hey, Pete, are you sure you want me digging around in your hands this much? If we let a doctor do it, they might be able to give you some drugs--"

"--Th-they won't w-work. Metabolism's t-too fast. Just, just do it quick."

He had forgotten that drugs didn't really work on the kid, they had talked about that when he'd had been stabbed. For some reason that felt much easier to deal with. Maybe it's because it had been barely a pocket knife that made its way into the kid's bicep. This was the kid's hands and it looked far worse. He was the adult here, he could make the kid see a doctor but for some reason, he relented and started getting things together for the process. "FRIDAY, can you be a dear and get Pepper in here?"

It didn't take long for her to get to them. Tony was already laying one of Peter's hands on a tray beside him, forceps in hand, advanced magnifying glasses resting on his nose. "What exactly happened?", she asked, worriedly. She had been there when FRIDAY said he was hurt but that was all the information she had available to her up until this moment.

Peter stayed quiet so Tony filled her in with what little information as he had. The rest of the story, he decided, could wait until this was under control. This was more important. Then without having to be asked, he watched as Pepper quickly stepped into the exact role he had called her in to fill. She sat at the head of the bed, where Peter lay and started running her hand through his now sweaty hair, whispering reassurances to him.

It took a little under an hour for Tony to remove everything, get the kid's hands wrapped up and place a few butterfly bandages to the boy's eyebrow. With his healing factor, the smallest cuts on his face were already practically gone, the larger ones would more than likely be nothing but pale scars by morning and completely gone by evening.

With the urgency of the incident having passed, Tony decided it was time to get the kid to talk. Worry abated, irritations was seeping in. "You know when I suggested that we were now staffed for when you did stupid shit, I didn't mean today. Now, you want to tell me what the fuck you were doing down there? At one of my work stations?"

Peter, still laying on the bed turned his head away from the man. It took him a minute or two to start talking. "$I was just bored I, I guess. So, I went to th-the lab. I look, looked around and I, I just...I just messed up." He was still shivering despite the blankets that Pepper had retrieved for him.
Tony said nothing at first. He just clenched his jaw. The room became tense with the silence. Peter still shivering in the blankets and Pepper not taking her eyes off of Tony as if she was trying to read his thoughts. "What. Did. You do, Kid.", he finally managed to hiss through his teeth.

Laying on the bed, Peppers hand still resting on his shoulder, Peter continues to avoid eye contact. He already knew he was in trouble but he hurt and he didn't want to be yelled at, at the moment. He had really hoped that the man would let it go until morning. "I, I, told you. I, I, messed up. I shouldn't have, have been there. I sh-shouldn't have t-touched it. I'm sorry."

"What exactly did you touch?" He really had no idea. He hadn't bothered to look, his attention had only been on Peter.

"I, I don't know what it was."

"So, you decided it would be a good idea to start messing with something of mine and you didn't even know what it was?", the man tried to clarify.

Peter's lip was trembling at this point and tears were back in his eyes, but this time it wasn't because of the pain. "Am, am I in trouble?"

"Oh, you're in lots of trouble, Kid.", he said and the worst part for Peter was that he didn't sound angry at all. Just... disappointed.

"I'm so sorry.", Peter whined.

"I know, kiddo, I know.", the man said, after which he asked Pepper to accompany the boy back up to the suite. Peter could eat something and then go sleep it off, they could talk more about it in the morning. He planned to go down into the lab, clean up and try to piece together what the boy had messed with and how he was going to handle it.

Peter and Pepper having left the room, he sighed and picked up his phone. He needed back up on this one. He needed to call May.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Tag adds: Co-Parenting, May Parker and Tony Stark co-parenting Peter Parker

Chapter Notes

Happy Avengers End Game release day... I hope. 😊.

Up in the suite, Peter sat at the table, while Peper went to work making him something to eat. Normally he would insist on doing it himself but with his hands aching and wrapped up he didn't even offer to help. As she went around the kitchen, busy putting together a quick meal, she paused to look at him. "Peter, you know, When FRIDAY told him that you were in the lab and injured, he nearly took out three people trying to get to you. You scared him half to death."

"I know. I just, well, I didn't know that was going to happen. I thought, I thought I had it under control. I didn't mean to."

"I know you didn't mean to, just, maybe keep that in mind next time you decide to leap head-first into something. He really cares about you." Peter's eye flickered up at her last words. "What, you didn't know?", she asked eyebrows raised.

"I mean, I guess I did. I've just never heard anyone say it like, like that before."

She nodded her head in understanding and set the plate she had made in front of him. "I need to go pack up. I'll be leaving in a couple of hours. You're okay here?"

He nodded his head as he gingerly picked up the sandwich she had given him.

"Call me if you need me. I'll be right down the hall.", she said as she rounded the corner.

~0~0~0~0~0~0~0~0~
Down in the lab, Tony was looking at the damage. The kid had been messing with an arc reactor design he had been toying with. The idea was to work it into some sort of housing unit for nanotech. It was nowhere near ready to even attempt to assemble. Hell, he hadn't even gotten to 'confirmation of concept' yet in the design process. The parts that had been laying around were for reference, tinkering.

When the kid had forced the power source into the inadequate unit, the energy wasn't containable and the sheer intensity of the expansion caused the entire thing to shatter with violent force. Running his hand over the obvious damage to the holographic workbench he took a long deep breath. This could have ended up way worse than it did. At least the workbench was replaceable.

Now that he had a full understanding of what the boy had actually done, even if he still wasn't sure what he had been thinking... he reluctantly called May. When she answered, she sounded tired and he immediately felt bad for having to call her at all. This was at least partially his own fault. He shouldn't leave shit like that laying around, though to be fair, it was in his area. The kid should have known better than to touch it. He was fifteen, not five. "Hey, May, It's Tony.", he said sounding defeated. "I didn't mean to wake you up.", he added.

"It's fine, I wasn't really asleep. I was reading and might have dozed off, but that's not the same thing.", she chuckled. "You never call me. Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, everything is fine, now anyway, but I do need to run something by you."

"Okay, I'm listening.", she said, a question in her voice.

Tony went on to explain in detail what had happened from how he and Pepper had been distracted getting everything ready in the MedBay and didn't even notice when Peter had wandered off to their time in the MedBay removing the fragments of metal from the kid's hands. Then, how it had never occurred to him that the boy would go down into the lab and get into things he shouldn't and certainly never expected him to get hurt doing so.

May was understanding, which took Tony by surprise. The boy had gotten hurt on his watch. He was supposed to be keeping him safe. However, instead of sounding angry and yelling as he'd expected, she sighed and sounded completely at ease, as if she had been waiting for something like this to happen. "That sound like something he would do. He's extremely smart but he also has very little self-control. I think his brain goes faster than his common sense can keep up with... Why do you think I worry about him going out at night?" The line went silent for a beat. "So, what are you going to do about it? I can't imagine you're happy with his decision-making skills right now."
"I'm not. I'm actually pretty pissed, to be honest. I don't know how I'm supposed to handle this. None of the books I read said what to do, when a kid, impulsively, inadvertently blows shit up."

"If any kid was going to do that, it would be Peter.", she laughed. It was easy for her to be calm about the situation. Peter was perfectly fine, it wasn't her property that had been damaged, though she did feel bad about that, and she wasn't the one who had to deal with the aftermath. "What would your parents have done?", she asked with interest.

Tony let out a small dark laugh. "My dad would have yelled about how much of a disappointment I was turning out to be before practically throwing me over to Jarvis and letting him deal with me instead. He, he didn't really have the patience nor the desire to handle, well, me in general."

"Okay, well, what would Jarvis have done?" She didn't know that name but she assumed it was some sort of caregiver that Tony had grown up with.

Tony was silent for a few moments. "He, he would have made sure I got cleaned up and taken care of... then he would probably have tried to make some sort of reassurances that my father didn't mean what he had said, that he was only worried. I would argue that he had meant every word of it, then Jarvis would drop it. Maybe remind me to not do whatever I did again. Which, I inevitably would anyway because I'm me."

"I'm so sorry Tony. I--"

"--There's nothing to be sorry about. I just want to make sure this doesn't happen again."

"From what you've told me, you're doing fine. You were as calm as you could be in that situation and you took care of him yourself."

"Sure, right before I sent him away with Pepper.", he said sitting at a desk, propping his head upon his hand.

"I think that's a little different. Don't you?"

"I guess so... What would you do?", he asked curiously.
"I would do exactly what you did, then I would talk to him about it. Explain why what he did was unacceptable and what precautions were going to be put in place to prevent it from happening again... and possibly ground him because let's be honest, he had to have had some inclination that he wasn't supposed to be touching whatever the thing was."

"I, I suppose I can do that. Wait, he's supposed to spend the night with that Ned kid on Wednesday...and, you know, do his spider thing. Do I take that back?"

"Nah, Ned didn't do anything wrong and that's just as much for him as it is for Peter. Maybe take away something more relevant."

"Like lab time...?"

"Exactly."

Tony sighed, he wanted to interject that he didn't do anything wrong either and that the lab time was just as much for him as it was for Peter but he knew she was right. That's what would hit home for the kid. "Yeah, alright. I'll, uh, talk to him tomorrow I guess."

"Alright, Tony, thank you for taking care of him."

"Don't mention it.", he said before ending the call and making his way back up to the penthouse.

Pepper was waiting for him in the living room. "So... what's the plan?, she asked having already conjectured that her finance had contacted the boy's aunt.

"A good talking to... and no lab time for a week.", the last part he said he said almost painfully.

"I'm sorry. I know you love your Tony-Peter lab play dates.", she said with sympathetic teasing, giving a small smile.

Tony just huffed and started rummaging through the refrigerator for something to eat before
deciding, that with the kid in bed, it was a good chance for him to make himself a tuna sandwich. As he was sitting down, Pepper cocked her head to the side. "How was he able to get his hands on something like that anyway?"

The man stood there looking dumbfounded for a moment before replying. "I- I don't know... FRIDAY? Why would you even let the kid open up the case holding the core"

The AI was quiet for a moment. "Mr. Parker was given full access to the Avengers Compound. No other parameters exist outside of the Baby Gate Protocol. There was no reason for me to alert you when he accessed the core."

Tony nodded. "Okay. New Protocol. You are to alert me anytime the kid goes anywhere near my work stations or private supplies without my permission. You keep him safe. Alert me when he does anything that could be a potential danger to his wellbeing. Let's call it the Tattle Tell Protocol, shall we?"

"Of course, Boss. Tattle Tell Protocol is now activated."

Tony sighed and looked towards Pepper, who gave him a reassuring smile. "He's Fine Tony", she said simply, before leaning over to give him a gentle kiss on the forehead.

"He's fine", the man agreed. "and it won't happen again... right FRIDAY?"

The AI replied quickly. "Mr. Parker's wellbeing has been upgraded to a priority"

"Good girl", the man whispered before laying back on the couch, sandwich forgotten.

Only an hour or so later, Pepper was leaving to head back to California for a week. Tony missed her the second the door closed. Her being there as support had been nice. As he made his way to his own room, he peeked in on the kid, who was sleeping soundly on his back, both hands resting on his chest. He had to resist the urge to walk across the room and run his hand through the kid's hair but not wanting to chance waking him up, he sighed and made his way to his own bed instead.

The next morning, the two of them ate breakfast in semi-silence. Peter's face had mostly healed, his hands were still sore, probably from having an amateur mucking around in them for an hour but they no longer required bindings.
When it was just about time to meet Happy in the garage, Peter still hadn't emerged from his room. Tony stood by the door, rapidly tapping his foot and checking his watch. Letting out a frustrated grunt and walking down the hallway. "Kid? What's the hold-up. We've got to go!" By the time he made it to the kid's door, he could hear a muffled voice in the background and was immediately pissed. They were already going to be later than he wanted to be and the kid was on the phone instead of getting ready to leave.

He pushed the door open and made his way into the room, arms crossed over his chest. "Who are you even talking to this early in the morning? We. Have. To. Go. Happy's waiting and you know how much he hates to wait."

The boy jumped and instantly closed the holographic video he had been playing. He hadn't heard Tony come in, he had been fully focused on the video in front of him. "Oh, I'm not talking to anyone, it was a video--"

"--Yeah? Well, we don't have time for that either. Where's your tie? I know Pepper got you one."

Holding the tie up in front of him, he flipped the paused video back up. "It's right here. I was trying to figure out how to tie it. May did it last time."

"Oh.", the man said, half in surprise. "Come here. I got it. We'll have to teach you how to do it yourself at some point but today... we're in a hurry." Then with just a few flicks of his wrists, he was adjusting the tie snuggly under Peter's collar. "There you go. Ready now?"

"Yeah, I'm good.", Peter said, smiling at himself in the mirror. Tony was smiling too as he looked Peter over, quickly giving a nod of approval and leading them towards what would end up being the most uncomfortable car ride of his life.

The second the car hit the road, Tony rolled up the privacy window, separating them from Happy and faced Peter. "Alright Pete, we need to talk"

The smile that Peter had been carrying since his mentor had fixed his tie, fell from his face as his stomach dropped. He didn't answer he just nodded and turned his body towards the man sitting beside him. He knew where this was going.
"First thing: I just want you to know that I'm not mad about you going to the lab yesterday. I get it, you were bored but this...". he said gesturing towards Peter's face and hands, "can't happen again. You were lucky this time. That huge cut across your forehead stopped centimeters from your eye, kiddo."

Peter nodded again as he hung his head low, only periodically glancing up to appease the man with some kind of eye contact.

"What I am mad about it is that 'A', you were touching my things. I let you have full access to the lab trusting that you would stick to your own projects. I'm glad you're interested in other stuff too but you cannot be messing around with things that you don't have permission to mess around with. Yeah?" Tony waited for a nod before he continued. "'B' You were in the lab, actively working on something without taking any safety precautions. I can't even begin to tell to you how bad it would have been if some of that metal had hit you in the eye. You know better Kiddo."

Peter nodded. "I, I know. I'm sorry."

"Oh, I'm not done yet because speaking of things you know better than to do, I am sure you had to have had some concept that you shouldn't have been meddling with technology you don't even understand yet."

"I do. It's just-- I mean, I'm sorry." Peter's voice was beginning to grow thick with tears of regret and embarrassment. He did know better.

Seeing the kids face starting to fall into something between misery and remorse, Tony was starting to lose his resolve. God, he didn't want to punish him. "I know you are Buddy. Listen, I talked to May--"

At those words, Peter's eyes urgently made their way back up to the man's face. "--you called Aunt May?"

"Yeah Kid, I kind of had to. You got hurt. We can't keep secrets like that. Anyway, We agreed that it would be best if you didn't have any time in the lab for a week. That should, uh, give you some time to think about, you know, not being quite so impetuous."

Tears were now settling themselves into the corners of Peter's eyes. He lived for lab time with Tony. "What, what about the garage?", he asked carefully.
Tony sighed sadly. He hadn't considered that. "Yeah, that should probably be off limits too."

"Okay" Then the tears were falling. Peter was surprised when Tony reached over to wipe them away.

"When you get back into the labs and garage in a week, there are going to be a few new rules. Like, you have to tell me when you go in and when you're done. Yeah?"

"yes, sir"

Tony nodded, "And, FRIDAY's been updated to make sure that you keep your hands on your own projects. She'll tell me if you don't and if you ever go near my things without my explicit permission again, you will lose the privilege of being allowed in there unsupervised at all. You got all that?"

"Yes, sir. I got it."

"Good. Now come here.", he said holding his arm out so the kid would know that he meant it.

Peter accepted without question. He leaned over on to the man's side, still attempting to fight back the majority of his tears. He didn't even know why he was crying in the first place. It's not like he had never been grounded before. Maybe it was the fact that it was Tony and not May correcting him this time that made it feel worse. Whatever the reason, he was glad they still had a good bit of driving to do before they got to SI because the last thing he wanted was to walk into the building with a runny nose and red-rimmed eyes.

As soon as Peter had settled himself into Tony's side the man opened the privacy window back up and asked Happy for some tissues. The driver passed them through looking concerned and asking if everything was okay. Peter was relieved when his mentor didn't sell him out. He didn't want everyone to know what he had done. It was bad enough that May and Pepper knew.

By the time they had pulled up to the SI building, Peter was feeling less heartbroken and more like himself. As he walked into the building, beside his mentor this time, instead of behind him, he felt almost proud. He wasn't sure if it was the new clothes or if it was knowing that May was getting out of the hospital in just a few hours. More likely, it was that he was just feeling more secure than ever about how close he and Tony had become. There was no longer any doubt in his mind, the man cared about him and wanted him to be there.
The meeting itself wasn't near as boring as he thought it would be, he even found himself feeling confident enough to ask a question or two as they came up, nodding enthusiastically as he received the answers. Tony looked on proudly as Peter interacted with the department head. He hadn't expected the kid to actually join in on the discussion, especially after the morning they'd had but it certainly made the meeting more enjoyable and time passed quickly. Soon they were back in the car, heading towards the hospital.
Chapter 20

In the hospital room, it became clear that May wasn't going to be released for a few more hours. Tony sat there grumbling about inefficiency as Peter paced the room despite May's frequent suggestion that he sit and relax. He'd already taken the kid down to the cafeteria to eat and sent him out again shortly after to get him coffee but he was certain that the kid asked him 'How much longer?' one more time he was going to have to start banging his head up against the wall....and then there it was... again...

"Hey, Tony? How much longer do you think? It's almost three...", Peter said for the third time in the past twenty minutes.

Seeing a look of frustrated exhaustion cross the man's face, May cut in. "Peter, Please! Just sit down." She pleaded.

"I-- okay. Fine.", Peter answered dropping himself back into the chair he has spent all of five minutes in since they had arrived at noon.

Then, as if summoned by some sort of magic to save Tony's sanity, the doctor knocked and made his way into the room. "Good Afternoon, Ms. Parker. How are you feeling?"

The doctor spent only a few minutes going over May's chart and asking some basic questions before deeming her ready to be released into therapeutic care. He raised his eyebrows but managed to keep his surprise in check as he read off what facility she would be going to. It really shouldn't have been that shocking with Tony Stark standing right there in the corner of the room.

"So we can go now?" Peter pipped up as the doctor was signing off on a few papers.

"Almost." The doctor smiled. "We need the nurses to come in and disconnect everything and then it's just a matter of waiting for her ride."

Peter looked confused. "She's not riding with us?"

Tony stepped in, as the doctor was busy working his way through the papers with May. "No, Bud. She's not quite ready to sit in a car for two hours. She'll be in the back of an ambulance. I bet you could ride with her if you want. We'll ask." Though he had already decided that he would pay
whoever he had to pay to make sure that happened if that's what the boy wanted.

Peter nodded and made his way back to the chair near May's bed, sighing as he sat. He was ready to go.

Thankfully it didn't take much longer to get everything squared away and soon they were all in route towards the compound. Tony riding with Happy, and Peter, after some quiet negotiations, with May.

The evening wasn't as peaceful as Peter had imagined it to be, though no one had really told him what to expect. Instead of settling May into her room and spending the evening in her company, he was being constantly pushed aside as the new doctors, nurses and therapist, got her set up and comfortable. Going over schedules and recovery plans. It was frustrating him and it was starting to show. Just as soon as Tony entered the small apartment with some take out he complained. "Can't you tell them to leave us alone for five minutes!?!"

"They need to do their jobs, Pete. They should be wrapping it up here soon. Now come over here and help me get this onto plates. I got you the chicken and the vegetable lo-mein you asked for, plus some egg drop soup."

Peter begrudgingly got up and made an effort to help Tony sort through all of the food he had purchased.

True to his word, the staff all seemed to clear out about the time, Tony tapped on May's door, entering with her plate in hand. "I hope you like Chinese. If not, blame Pete, he picked it."

"I like anything. Thank you so much for doing all of this.", she answered with sincerity.

"Oh yeah, Thanks Mr. Stark!", Peter added as he followed into the room balancing a bowl of soup in one hand, a plate piled high with noodles in the other and a can of soda tucked under his chin.

Tony rolled his eyes and pointed an accusatory finger at the boy. "It's still Tony and don't you dare drop that on this carpet! I'm not cleaning it up."

"I'm not gonna drop it! I have, like perfect balance and I, you know, stick to things..."
After dinner was eaten and cleaned up, Tony excused himself to the lab. Peter didn't even question it. Even if it wasn't currently off limits, he was just happy to be in May's presence and simply suggested that they have a 'Movie Night'. So, that's how they spent the evening, May in her bed and Peter curled up in the large soft armchair beside it.

May fell asleep one and a half movies in and Peter was just starting to doze off when he heard a light tapping on the doorframe beside him. It was Tony. "Hey, Kiddo, you know your bed is probably more comfortable. You can come back here in the morning if you want to.", he whispered.

"FRIDAY is in here too?", he asked glancing around the room as there would be visual evidence of the AI's existence.

"FRIDAY is wherever I want her to be so, yeah. I thought it would come in handy."

"Oh. Do I have to sleep in my room? Can't, can't I just stay here?"

Neither of them had noticed that May had woken up. "Oh, sweetie, you should go sleep in a bed. I'm literally not going anywhere.", she laughed. "I'll still be here when you wake up."

Peter yawned and nodded before walking over to May so she could hug her good-night. Tony stood nearby, leaning on the door frame. "So, do I get one of those?"

He had asked teasingly but Peter didn't seem to notice or care. "Yeah, of course.", he said as he paused on his way out the door to hug the man tightly around the middle, happy when the man reciprocated with just as much force. Then as he was walking out of the apartment he turned and yelled 'Good-night!' before making his exit.

Being that it was close to midnight, Tony hesitated before he addressed May. "So... we're going to need to talk about some things, aren't we. I mean about the kid and how we're going to make this
work. You and I both sort of being here and all."

May smiled. "I don't think there is any 'sort of' about this. We are most definitely both here... but yes, I suppose we are."

Tony nodded. "Yeah, okay. I just want us to be on the same page is all."

"I understand. I don't think we're going to get much time to talk until Wednesday though. Without lab privileges, I imagine Peter is going to be here every second of the day until then."

Tony half smiled. "Yeah, I suppose you're right." Then he added along with a mischevious grin "Maybe I can send him shopping with Happy."

"Oh, I don't think he's likely to fall for that again.", the woman laughed in earnest causing a small laugh to escape Tony at the same time.

"I didn't think so...", he continued to laugh. "Anyway... well, good-night. We'll talk soon, yeah?"

"Of course. Good-Night Tony."

Tony entered the kitchen the next morning expecting to find it empty, however, it was instead occupied by a teenager who was bustling around stuffing handfuls of blueberries into his mouth and trying to pour a glass of juice while simultaneously buttering a couple of slices of toast. "Whoa, slow down, what's the hurry Kiddo?"

Biting into the toast he had buttered Peter tried to answer. "I'm going to go see May.", he managed to get out clearly enough for the man to understand despite the fact that his mouth was stuffed with fruit and toast.

The man made his way across the kitchen and lightly popped the kid in the back of the head for spitting all over his counter again. "You're cleaning that up.", he said reaching over for nearby roll of paper towels. "May's not going anywhere. Besides, I need to talk to you. Slow down and sit before you choke."
"I'm not going to choke", Peter answered after making sure he has swallowed everything down with a gulp of juice. "Can't we talk later? I mean, you're not going anywhere either, are you? Like, other than the lab and stuff?"

The teenager sounded almost annoyed as he spoke solidifying Tony’s resolve to make the kid sit and listen to him now. "My house, my rules, kid. Now, sit down." He definitely saw it when Peter rolled his eyes but he chose to ignore it. "I have a meeting to go to first thing tomorrow morn--"

"--I don't want to go.", the boy interjected, quickly cutting the man off.

"Well, good. Because you weren't invited. It's with the Accords committee, which I don't want you anywhere near. You are either here or with May until they leave. Yeah? No wandering around the compound." Not that the kid had ever actually gone to the area of the compound where the conference rooms were but he had full access, he could get there if he wanted to and God forbid the kid choose that moment to come looking for him.

"I'll be with May... Oh and, um, Tony? Am I still allowed to go to Ned's house after lunch tomorrow?" Then his eyes shifted downward. "Or am I grounded from that too. I, um, I need to tell him, you know. If, If I'm not going..."

Remembering the words May had used, he repeated them back to the boy. "Ned didn't do anything wrong and it's just as much for him as it is for you. You can still go."

Peter raised an eyebrow. "That's exactly what May would say..."

"Yeah, well, we talked about it. What did you expect?", the man asked sounding almost irritated.

"I, I didn't know. I mean, maybe you had different rules about that. I just wanted to ask." He tried not to sound too defensive as he spoke but it was coming through.

"Relax, will ya?. You're not in trouble for asking, Kiddo. The plans with Ned haven't changed. I do need you to give me your suit though, I still need to run diagnostics on it before you go out."

"You, you're going to work on it without me?"
Sighing the man looked the kid in the eyes. "Yeah, I suppose I am. Get it to me and then you're free to go run off to see your aunt or whatever but I want your spider butt back up here before dinner, there's something I need your help with."

"Yes sir, is that all?", Peter answered impatiently, already turning towards the hall. Upon confirmation, that the man had nothing to add, he ran off to his room to get the suit as requested and practically threw it into his mentor's hands as he ran towards the door. "Bye! I'll see you later!"

With the kid having run off the way he did, it left Tony wondering when exactly 'later' would be. He had only asked for him to return before dinner. Frowning to himself, he decided to brush that thought off and take his unfinished coffee down to the lab.

That's how the majority of the day was spent. Peter with May, either in her room or watching as she worked with the therapist and Tony in the lab working on The Spider-Man suit and eventually some projects of his own. While sitting at his workbench, the man thought to ask FRIDAY to remind him when it was six so he could track down the kid but when the reminder came and he found the boy to still be with his aunt, he decided to backtrack. Peter had her now and he needed to step back. It seemed only right, so he continued to focus on work set before him.

By the time, seven o'clock rolled around and the nurse suggested dinner to May, Peter practically jumped up out of his chair. "Mr. Stark wanted to see me before dinner. I, I forgot."

May just smiled at him. "Why don't you go eat dinner with him? I'm fine here and Leslie, will keep me company, okay?"

Peter hesitated. He didn't like the idea of a nurse keeping May company. Not knowing that he was in the same building with her right now and wouldn't be tomorrow. "He, he would get me if he really wanted me... right?" Then remembering that the man had FRIDAY there he tried to ask the AI. "FRIDAY? Where is he? Is he waiting for me?"

"The boss is currently in his private workshop. He inquired as to your whereabouts hour ago but did not request that I summon you."

May looked only slightly surprised when the AI answered. She had heard Peter talk about it before, she just hadn't realized that it was in the apartment set aside for her as well. She made a mental note to feel out what she could use the AI for later. Right now her focus was on Peter who was currently looking discontent with the answer he had received. "Peter? What are you thinking over there?"
"I, um, well, he said he wanted my help with something before dinner... I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do now." He cheeks tinged pink at his next words. "It's not like I can go in the lab and ask him."

"Hmm... I guess not. Can't you talk to the ceiling lady? What did you call her? FRIDAY?"

"Yeah, I guess so... I, just, what if he doesn't want to be bothered? What if he didn't ask for me because he changed his mind? He could be doing something really important and I shouldn't distract him from it."

Sighing, May watched as her nephew started talking himself into a tizzy. It would never cease to amaze her how quickly Peter could let go of solid truths and let completely false ideas take over. "Stop it. I'm pretty sure after everything he's done for you, us really, over the last couple of weeks should be more than enough to prove that it wouldn't bother him for you to ask him something like that."

Looking over at his aunt once more for reassurance he addressed the AI once again. "Um, FRIDAY? Can you ask Tony if he still wanted to see me?"

The AI had been quiet for several minutes now, leaving Peter to anxiously wring his hands in his lap while he waited. Then, Tony's voice filled the room. "Kid, if you want to be with May it's fine. I get it. I'll put your suit on your desk for you so you can pack it, yeah?"

Peter was confused. "I, I thought you said I had to come to see you before dinner, like, you wanted my help with something or, or something. I didn't mean to forget. I can come right now if you want me to." His voice had been trailing off by the end. He wasn't sure what he was supposed to be saying.

"It can wait, Kiddo. It's fine. You should be with May." He hadn't meant for it to come out sounding as disappointed as it did. He knew the boy was just trying to make up for lost time with his aunt and that was likely more important.

"O-OKay, Tony. I, I guess I'll, um, still see you later... right?"

"Sure, Kid. I'll see you later."
However, they didn't end up seeing each other later because Tony got completely caught up in what he was doing and Peter was sent to bed at eleven by May, who was ready to go to bed herself. By the time the man his way up to the penthouse at nearly two in the morning, the boy had long since been asleep. He walked into the room and placed the Spider suit on the desk as promised before hesitating beside the bed for a moment where Peter was curled up on his side, blankets wound tightly around his body. Before he could talk himself out of it, he was leaned over brushing the overgrown hair out of the kid's eyes and kissing him ever so lightly on the temple. "G'night Pete.", he whispered quietly as he slipped out of the room.
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Tag adds: Ned Leeds & Peter Parker, Ned Leeds is a Good Bro

Peter ended up waking earlier than he would have liked. When he rolled over and saw that it was only six-thirty in the morning, he tried to roll back over and go to sleep. However before he could, his brain started working. He was going to see Ned today. He was going to be Spider-Man today. Excitement coursing through his body, he went ahead and hopped out of bed.

With it being so early, he didn't feel the need to rush down to where May was. As such, he took his time getting his breakfast together before taking a seat at the table. Before long, Tony emerged from the hallway, looking rumpled and worn out despite the fact that the day had just begun. "Are you okay Mr. Stark?", he asked from the table as the man walked up to the coffee pot.

"Huh? Oh... just tired's all.", answered starting the pot before leaning onto the counter and rubbing his hands down his face. "You remember I have that meeting right? No traipsing all over the compound today? ...and it's Tony."

"I know and I didn't forget. The only other place I go besides here and May's is the lab or garage and I'm not allowed to go to either of those places right now."

"You know you have full access to this whole building right? You could go explore or something, just not today and I mean it." Then the whole lab disaster crossed his mind. "Swear to me that you'll stay away from the accords committee... I'll set FRIDAY up to babysit you if I need to.", he added though he had already decided that he was definitely going to be doing that whether the kid promised or not.

Peter sat at the table and resisted the urge to roll his eyes. "I'm not going to go anywhere except to see May and to Ned's after lunch."

"That's right. I should be done by then, I'll take you."

"You don't have to do that, Tony. I talked to Happy last night. He said he would."
"Hmm, well, I'll let him know he doesn't have to anymore. I've got you. I'll meet you up here at twelve-thirty for lunch and then we'll go. Yeah?"

"Yeah, alright" Peter dropped his chin onto his hands, elbows propped up on the table. "If there's an accords meeting does that mean that Mr. Rhodes is here?"

Tony smiled at the question. He appreciated that the kid liked his friend enough to ask about him. "He is. Actually wants to take you out to 'do something fun' while he's in town. Only if you want to though."

"Why wouldn't I want to! That sounds amazing! You would come too right?"

"Sure, why not.", he answered as he started on his second cup of coffee. Then he looked at his watch. "Shit! I need to get dressed. I'll see you for lunch Kiddo."

Peter rose from his chair as his mentor hurried out of the room. Seeing as it was almost eight he went to his room to pack his backpack to take to Ned's and quickly shower. He intended to spend the bulk of the morning with May before it was time to meet Tony for lunch and leave.

By the time Tony made it to the conference room where the meeting was scheduled he wasn't sure why he had been in such a rush. The only ones in the room were Rhodey and one other representative. Evidently, everyone else was delayed and they would be holding off the start of the meeting for them to arrive.

After a full hour waiting, Tony was becoming impatient. Restlessly sitting in his chair, he continuously checked his watch. It was ten o'clock and he was supposed to have lunch ready for the kid by twelve-thirty. A couple of others had slowly made their way into the room and everyone was eyeing the fidgety billionaire until finally, someone spoke up. "Do you have somewhere more important to be, Stark?"

"Yep", the man answered curtly. "I'm out of here at noon whether we're done or not so I hope all your little friends show soon."

Everyone, aside from Rhodes, seemed to glare in his direction and he didn't give one half a shit about it he was going to be driving his kid to his friend's house, not Happy. Period. *Wait did he just call him his kid again?* Either way, he had to shrug it off at the moment because everyone had arrived
and proceedings were going to begin.

Unlike the last fourteen or so meetings they'd had in the last few months this one actually seemed to be getting somewhere, which is why Tony started getting antsy as the long hand on the clock moved closer and closer to the twelve. He tried to focus on the proposal in front of him but his mind kept wandering back to his pending obligation to the boy. Rhodes must have noticed because his phone went off seconds later with a message. 'What is with you today. This is what you wanted. They're finally listening.', he read.

'I know but I have to take the kid somewhere at twelve-thirty.', he quickly typed back.

'What? Happy can't do it.'

'I told him I would do it.', he grumbled as he typed.

'Whatever man, it's your funeral', Tony read before shooting a glare in his friend's direction and putting his phone back into his pocket. He needed to get back to the document he was supposed to be going over.

By the time twelve-twenty-five had rolled around, Tony'd had enough. "Alright, there's a lot to think about here. How about we adjourn and meet back again in a week.", he said with every ounce of Stark confidence he had, only to be told to sit down. He had been getting aggravated and after being told, five minutes later, that they would be in this meeting until a decision had been made, he finally snapped. "Look, I get it that you want to play hard to get or whatever, but my kid's upstairs waiting for me. Rhodes will fill me in later. I trust his input. I'm out."

Everyone in the room went silent, including Rhodes who had now gotten up out of his chair.

"What?", the snapped when he saw his friend's wide-eyed expression. Then, upon glancing around the room it seemed that everyone was displaying varying degrees of the same emotion on their faces. "Is it actually that surprising that I have someone waiting for me? I'm a billionaire, a philanthropist, and a god damn superhero, there's no end to the list of people who want to meet with me.", he stated with annoyance.

Rhodey was the first to speak. He tried to draw the man's attention to his mistake cautiously. "Tony, you said 'your kid' was waiting for you..."
The realization of his slip of the tongue hit him hard. *Shit, how was he going to fix this?* He grappled for the right words to say before he finally sputtered something of an explanation. "Yeah, you know, that new intern of mine. The kid, my kid, *my intern*. He's, uh, he's here to take some documents and prototypes from my home lab to the SI headquarters with me. We have to be there by three and I promised him lunch." The lie had become easier the longer he spoke and everyone in the room *seemed to accept* it. "So, as you can see, I have a kid to feed and a deadline to meet... also, I'd like to point out that I showed up on time.", he smirked as he walked towards the door. This time no one stopping him.

As he sprinted towards the elevator, he couldn't help but hope that he hadn't pissed anyone off too much. He would have to count on Rhodey to handle it from there. They needed these amendments. As soon as he made it through the penthouse door he was met with a very anxious looking Peter.

"Oh, Mr. Stark! There you are. I thought, I thought you weren't coming.", his anxious posture now melting into something comfortable.

"No, I'm here. I can understand why you would think that though. Meeting went longer than it should have, but I'm here now. It's almost one, you want to just pick up some drive-through?"

"Can we get Taco Bell this time?", the boy asked with enthusiasm.

Tony did his best to assume a look of disgust. "If we must...", he sighed but when he saw the kid's smile falter, he dropped the act. "Taco Bell is great. I haven't had that in, well, years. Let's get going. Grab your stuff. Wait, you told May 'bye' right?"

The kid had already taken off towards his still generic looking room. Tony planned to correct that as soon as the boy got back. Pepper would kill him if she returned and nothing had changed yet. Peter was back in front of him in seconds, overstuffed backpack half slung over his shoulder. "You never answered me Kiddo, did you already tell May 'good-bye'?"

"Of course!", the boy answered, already walking towards the door before his mentor had time to look him over. He was ready to go. He'd been looking forward to this for days. "Oh yeah, I wanted to ask you! Can I pick the car today? Please, Tony?", he begged. "We're only going to Ned's house."

All Tony could do was smile because the kid had called him 'Tony' this time. "Sure Pete."
With that, they were off. Peter had picked one of the flashiest cars in the garage. Though, not a convertible, at Tony's rigid insistence. He didn't need pictures of himself driving a kid around in his front seat all over the internet.

They made good time getting to Ned's house and Tony was unsurprised when Ned met them outside. As Peter exited the car he could hear the other boy as he approached the car. "Oh my God, you're Iron Man.", he said in a breathy squeal, causing Tony to smirk.

Peter, hearing Ned's comment, managed to get himself out of the car, by his friend's side and had a hand over the other boy's mouth in record time. "C'mon Ned. You promised...", the boy half whined, half begged.

Watching their exchange Tony's expression morphed from a smirk to unadulterated delight. "Wait, wait, wait what exactly did you make him promise?", he called through the window he had opened as soon as Peter had slammed the door shut.

"Nothing!", Peter blurted out as his friend tried to remove the hand from his mouth. He was clearly using his super strength, maybe even sticking to him.

"Pete, stop tormenting your friend." the man drawled. "Let him go. kid."

Peter reluctantly released his friend who had to take several deep breaths before he spoke again. "Dude! I couldn't breathe. You almost killed me in front of Iron Man"

Rolling his eyes, Peter looked at his friend. "Stop calling him Iron Man... and you're fine. You weren't going to die. Don't be so dramatic."

Tony was not stepping out of the car waving his hand in Peter's direction as he made his way over to where the boys stood. "No, no, no, you leave him alone. I want to know what you made him promise.", he laughed. Then looking over at Ned, "Well, come on kid. Spill it."

Looking frantically back and forth between his best friend and Tony Stark, Ned couldn't seem to form a sentence.

"Way to go, Tony, you broke him", Peter said with no real humor, once arm crossed over his chest, the other covering his eyes.
"Shush you, give him a minute.", Tony smiled, never taking his eyes off of the sputtering Ned. 
"He's going to start talking any second now."

As predicted, Ned seemed to snap out of it mere second later. "He, uh, he made me promise not to, um, not to embarrass him?"

"..and you did an excellent job Ned, Thanks for that.", Peter replied with sarcasm as Tony continued to laugh.

"Sorry Dude.", the other boy whispered as Tony patted him on the shoulder and walked back to the car.

Before driving off, he beckoned Peter over to his side of the car. "Alright Kiddo, It's been a while since you last patrolled, you remember the rules?"

"Yep. But, since, since it's summer, can I come in at eleven instead of nine-thirty?"

"That depends on the rest of your answer. what are the other rules?"

"Ugh. Don't take on anything too big, just look out for the little guy, you're my backup, call you if I need you. I didn't forget. Besides I have Karen and Ned."

"Hmm... could have done with less attitude but you got the gist of it. You can stay out 'til eleven this time."

"Thank you. Can I go now?", Peter answer impatiently.

"Sure, go be with your 'guy in the chair'. I'll pick you up tomorrow around two, yeah?"

"Yep! See you tomorrow!", he called out as he ran past his friend, grabbing him by the arm and dragging him towards the house.
Inside and settled in Ned's room, the two boys were able to talk. Peter was beyond happy to be back with his friend, just sitting on the floor building legos and laughing about everything they had been doing over the summer. It wasn't until Ned's mom called them for dinner that Peter realized he had missed his opportunity to go out as Spider-Man for the afternoon. He wasn't too disappointed, it felt good to simply hang out with his friend. It was only eight-thirty. He had all night, well, until eleven anyway.

As soon as they were done eating, both boys practically ran back to the bedroom. Ned had barely locked the door before Peter was dumping out his bag, stuffing only the suit back into it. Being as it wasn't dark yet, he was going to have to change in an alley and it didn't take him long to hop out of Ned's window and find one that would meet his needs.

He was grinning gear to ear as he pulled the mask down over his face. "Hey, Karen. Long time, no see. Can you connect me with Ned?"

"Of course Peter. Welcome back.", the AI replied warmly.

The boy's spent the evening chatting as Peter went around helping wherever he saw a need. He wasn't even disappointed when it was nearly time to head back and the most threatening thing that he dealt was a simple shoplifting incident. The men involved weren't even armed. 'Easy Peasy', the boys quipped in unison as Spider-Man swung off to the top of a building. He sat up there silently watching the people below for several minutes before the sound of Ned's voice, snapped him out of his trance.

"Peter... hey, Peter, you there? It's already eleven. Won't you get in trouble if you're late?"

Peter just hummed in agreement and went to swing back to Ned's. He really wished he could stay out just a little longer. It had been so long, he really felt like he deserved it. He's only stayed out past curfew once, it was months ago. Karen had given him several warning but didn't seem to tell on him until he was nearly two hours late. That's when Tony had actually, called him out on it anyway. "Hey, how much trouble do you think I'd be in if I stayed out just a little longer? Your mom go to bed yet?"

"I dunno, man. I mean yeah, my mom's in bed already but what about Iron Man."

"Come on man, seriously, quit calling him that. It's weird."
Ned spun around in his chair, "He is Iron Man. What do you call him?"

For some reason, the question made Peter uncomfortable. "I, well, he, I mean, he told me to just, just call him Tony, so, you know, sometimes I do."

"That is completely awesome. You're on a first name basis with Iron Man, Dude."

Peter rolled his eyes before he remembered his friend couldn't see him. "Sure, Ned.", he said before quietly sighing and settling himself on another rooftop. "I think I'm gonna give myself another hour. I'll come back to your's by midnight. You gonna stay on the line or go to bed?"

"If you're staying up I'm staying up. It's been forever."

"Yeah, it has been.", Peter answered with contentment.

By eleven-fifteen, Karen had already started warning Peter of his missed curfew and despite his pleading, by eleven-thirty, she was 'contacting Mr. Stark'. He couldn't quite make it the entirety of the way back Ned's window before she had connected with him. Both boys were panicking but the second Tony's face appeared in the corner of Peter's vision he knew he was screwed. "Oh, uh, Hey, Mr. uh, Mr. Stark. What's, what's up?", he stuttered out despite his plan to remain casual.

"Kid, it's past your curfew, what the hell do you think you're doing?"

"I, um, lost track of time?"

"Are you actually trying to lie to me right now?"

"N-no? Maybe? Okay, yes, a little bit. I didn't think Karen would call you until later. I mean, last time it took two hours so I thought, I thought maybe I had like a one hour grace period or something. Then she started calling you as I was going back. So, really it wasn't completely fair. Look, I'm already back in Ned's room. You can check.", the boy rambled half in panic.

"It's cute how you thought that I would give you a grace period of an entire hour on your curfew after you completely blew it last time. Do you know how long I had to listen to your aunt yell at me
about that? Though I suppose I should be impressed that it took you four and a half months to test it out."

"Am, am I in trouble?" Then looking at Ned for support, Peter tightened his jaw in suspense as he awaited his mentor's answer.

"To be clear, I'm not exactly thrilled. However, I can see in the report that you did scurry your little spider butt back to Ned's as soon as Karen said she was contacting me. Next time I would appreciate it if you just did what you're told and went home when you're supposed to, yeah?"

Still unsure of whether or not he was in trouble Peter gave a hesitant 'yes sir' before inquiring further. "But, I'm... not in trouble?"

"Not this time Bud but it better not happen again."

"It won't. I promise.", Peter replied quickly and he meant it. The last thing he wanted was to get in trouble with Tony again. That had been awful.

"Alright, Kiddo, you should eat something and then you and your guy in the chair should go to bed sometime before sunrise."

Peter smiled, "Yes sir... oh, and, um, good-night, Tony."

"Night, Kid."
Chapter 22

While Peter was out galavanting all over Queens as Spider-Man, Tony was casually thumping on the doorframe of May's bedroom, brown paper bag in hand. "Hey, May. I thought we could talk over some pastries from that bakery in Queens that the kid likes. I was going to start some coffee. You want some?"

Setting her book down on the bedside table, she looked up at Tony. "I'd love some. Thank you."

Tony just nodded and set the bag down on the nearby table before going to start the coffee as promised. As soon as it began to drip, he came back into May's room. They carried on with good-natured prattle as the man made his way back and forth between the coffee pot and the room, preparing their beverages and grabbing plates and napkins. Once he had finally seated himself comfortably, coffee in his hand and a pastry on the plate in front of him he reasoned that it was time to get down to business. "So, the kid. Do we have a plan?"

May laughed at the man's immediate change in demeanor. He had gone from casual and easy-going to stiff and methodical as if it were a flip of a coin. "Tony, we're talking about a teenager, not a corporate contract. Relax." Taking a sip of her coffee she watched, in amusement, as a flustered look crossed the man's face.

"I know he's a teenager. What does that even mean?", he asked in frustration.

"It means, we're just drinking coffee and talking. There's no need to get all uptight. Relax."

He looked May squarely in the eyes and blinked a few times. Was he really getting all out of sorts over this? It was just a discussion. No different than any of the others they'd had regarding Peter's wellbeing. Though this time it was slightly different. He was playing a much larger role. "I am relaxed. I'm the definition of relaxed. Never been more relaxed in my life.", he defended.

May just smirked before nodding behind her cup of coffee. "Hmm. OKay then, let's talk."
They spent the next several hours talking about Peter. Mostly about rules and guidelines, how different responsibilities would be divided and how the whole Spider-Man plight would play out while there for the summer. Sometimes they would muse over one thing or another that Peter had done in the past or speculate what he would do in the future. Neither of them concerned about the time that was passing quickly.

It wasn't until FRIDAY had alerted Tony that Karen was attempting to connect that he even considered glancing at the time. Seeing as it was past the boy's curfew, he sighed. It had already been decided that everything Spider-Man would be his jurisdiction unless it involved injury and even then she only asked to be kept in the loop. That meant he was on his own for this one.

May watched in amusement as Tony held up his phone talking to Peter who was still in his Spider-Man suit. She said nothing as the man called her nephew out on his lie and proceeded to give him a hard time about his choices. She knew he had it in him, even if he didn't.

After the phone call had ended, Tony, who had been pacing the room, dropped back into the chair by May's bed. He ran his hands through his hair and let out a deep breath. "That went well?"

May nodded. "I knew you could do it."

"That makes one of us", the man grumbled, grabbing his mug and walking out of the room to refill his mug.

It wasn't long after, that Tony decided to go to his own room and call Pepper. It wasn't too terribly late there and he wanted to talk to him about his and May's conversation. She was, of course, unsurprised at the amount of responsibility he had been willing to retain. She knew him better than he knew himself at times.

The call ended when Pepper deemed it entirely too late for her to be on the phone when she had to be at the office early the next morning. Tony glancing at his own watch cringed as the numbers read out his fate. It was after three in the morning and Rhodey wanted to meet him for an early lunch before going with him get Peter from his friend's house. Supposedly he had some sort of a plan for after they had acquired said teenager. Whatever it was, he hoped he could handle it on five or six hours of sleep.

When Rhodey entered the Penthouse the next morning, Happy in tow, he knew he was not ready for this. The other two men were laughing and carrying on as if whatever was planned for the day
couldn't be any more exciting. Finding Tony on the couch half asleep with a mug of coffee in his hand they instructed him to change into something he didn't mind getting dirty. That request alone was almost enough for Tony to turn on his heels and go back to bed but he knew the kid was expecting him so, he did as was recommended and changed.

With an early lunch behind them, the three men were making there way towards where Peter was waiting. They were an hour out when Tony's phone rang. It was Peter trying his best to convince Tony to come and get him later so that he could get in some more patrol time and was trying his damnest to not take no for an answer. "The answer is no, Kid. We're almost there, we have plans. You better be outside and waiting for us at two."

Peter begrudgingly gave in and was waiting outside as requested. He was excited to see, that not only did Tony and Happy come to get him but Rhodes was in the car as well. Climbing into the backseat he was greeted by a brown shirt being thrown into his face by Tony. "Here, Kid change your shirt."

"Why?", he asked as he started peeling off the shirt he had changed into that morning. Once that task was completed he glanced around him and noticed that all three men were dressed more casually than he had ever seen them before. Tony was in Jeans and a faded green t-shirt, Rhodes was in full on camouflage and Happy, well, he couldn't see exactly what he had on, but there was a camouflage hat turned backward on his head. "Wh-where are we going?", he asked still looking from man to man.

This time, it was Happy who pipped up from the front seat. "Ever play paintball before?"

"Um... no?", the boy answered. That was not an activity that he had ever even considered. He was usually more of a 'go to the library' or 'build with legos' kind of person.

Now Rhodey was smiling at him. "Well then, you're in for a treat. I even managed to talk Happy into tagging along to make even teams. It's you and Tony against me and Happy."

"That, that sounds great.", Peter replied hesitantly. "Where are we going? I mean, I know to play paintball but, like where?"

"It's about an hour past the compound", Tony answered. "I own some undeveloped land there. It's pretty much perfect for this kind of thing."
"Oh. So you've done this before?", Peter asked his mentor.

"It's been a while, but yeah.", the man smiled almost sadly. "Used to play a lot actually. Called it a 'training exercise' but really it was just as an excuse to shoot at each other."

Peter didn't ask any more questions about it. He was able to surmise that paintball was something the team used to do together. As he looked out the window, he tried to imagine all of the Avengers out in civilian clothes playing paintball in the woods together but he was having trouble picturing it. He wondered if the accords would ever be straightened out enough that the team could get back together.

At a little over three-quarters of the way there, they stopped to get some food before they hit the middle of nowhere. After some mild debate, they ended up sitting inside a practically empty Burger King with cheeseburgers and milkshakes, all three men trying to speak loudly over one another. Each of them angling to be the one to teach Peter the rules and give him tips on how to play to win. It was overwhelming really but Peter sat there and nodded his head like a champ.

Pulling into the wooded area, Peter's hesitation was starting to turn into excitement as they started unloading the trunk and Tony started teaching him how to aim and shoot. He soon found himself participating in the playful banter adding his own shrills of laughter as they loaded up and headed out to their separate bases.

They ended up playing two rounds of a 'capture the flag' style game. Tony and Peter had won both times, though the last game had been close. By the end both Rhodey and Happy claiming that it was cheating when Peter used his spider abilities to climb trees and flip silently from branch to branch before ultimately landing on the ground behind the two unsuspecting men, taking them both out in seconds. Peter feigned innocence while Tony had called them both sore losers continued to gloat in jest.

It had been so much fun that Peter had begged to play just one more time but the sun was already starting to set and despite the abundance of snacks they had carried along, the kid needed an adequate meal so they left for the compound. "Alright, kid, I know you must be hungry so here's the deal, when we get back you go up to your room and shower then you can go down to see May. I'm sure she's dying to hear you chatterbox about everything you've been up to the last two days. I already ordered some food, I'll bring it down when it gets there, Yeah?"

"Yes, sir.", the boy smiled widely. "Are we going to do this again sometime?"

"Absolutely", Rhodes answered from beside him. "That was the most fun I've had in a long ass time
but next time you're on my team, kid."

Tony whipped his head around to face his friend. "Nuh-uh, hands off. He's mine."

"Uh, you can't just hog the kid. Besides doesn't he get a say in this?"


Rhodey was smirking as Peter sat in stunned silence, still looking at his phone. "Your kid huh?"

Tony just stared at him for a moment. He could see Peter out of the corner of his eye, on his phone, pretending that he wasn't paying attention. The only indication that he had that the boy was in fact listening was that he had abruptly paused in the middle of rapidly typing but he never looked up. "Well, uh, yeah. I mean, he's not like mine, mine. I didn't raise him or anything but sure, sort of. Why not." He tried to sound casual. Stealing another look in Peter's direction, he still had no clue as to what was going through the boy's mind.

When the man had referred to him as 'his kid' Peter hadn't really been paying attention, however, when Rhodey had pointed it out, that he noticed. When he first registered the remark, it took him by surprise. It took a few moments for him to realize that he had inadvertently stopped what he was doing but Tony's attention seemed to be on his friend so he figured he could continue to play it off like he wasn't listening. He had to fight back a smile when the man didn't deny it, though he was decidedly not telling Ned about this.

Back at the compound, Peter hurried out of the car shouting a quick 'bye' to both Rodney and Happy before quickly making his way through the front door and towards the elevator, Tony right behind him. Once they walked inside the suite, he tried to take off down the hall only to be stopped by his mentor grabbing him by the elbow. "Hey, your shoes are covered in mud, take them off first. I'm not cleaning that up." He rolled his eyes in response but proceeded to toe the shoes off just inside the door and take off to go shower and get down to May.

May was, of course, happy to see him and began to ask him questions about what he had been up to but Peter cut her off. "He called me his kid.", Peter half whispered as if the man might walk in at any second and catch him talking about it.

"Okay.", May began because even she couldn't quite read how the boy was feeling about this revelation. "What do you think about that?"
"I, I don't know." Peter was now shifting on his feet and beginning to pace. A sure sign that a thorough rambling was about to begin. "I, I mean, I've been living with him for like, what, over two weeks? That's half, half a month and we've been together for most of it. He does things with me all the time now. He, um, he even does things, like, like a, well, a parent would do? It was really weird at first but I think, I think I actually might kind of like it... Is, is that okay?"

May tilted her head to the side looking her nephew over as if she was calculating what he had meant by the question. "So, you used to think it was weird when Tony acted like he cared but now you like it?", she asked more to help him clarify his thoughts than for herself.

"I mean, yeah. It, it took a while for me to realize that he was doing all, well all, you know...", he paused in his pacing to make a circular waving motion with his hand. "...that kind of stuff because he liked me and not just because I'm, uh, I'm Spider-man. Then I thought, I thought maybe he was starting to like me, just me and then Ned started saying he was acting like my dad and that, that was just, weird but he's not completely wrong because I had already kind of noticed it myself I just didn't want to bring it up, really." He had to stop to take a few deep breaths before he continued. May sat and patiently waited. "I, I just don't know how... what, what do you think?"

May took a few moments to consider her words carefully. She in no way wanted to influence or invalidate his feelings. "I think that he's done a lot for us over the last few weeks. Like, you said, you've spent a lot of time together--"

"--but is it okay for me to like it that he called me his kid, because I'm, I'm not. Not really..."

"Peter, sweetie, it's not about whether or not you're really his. You know that's not how families are made."

"This is different though. I had my mom and dad and then I had you and Uncle Ben and now I have you. I, I don't, is it okay to have someone else?"

"Is that what you're worried about? Peter, you can always have someone else. There's always room for more." There was nothing but tenderness in her expression. It had never occurred to her how hard it would be for him to allow another person to get so close to him. He was a friendly boy and instantly took a liking to just about anyone, once the hesitation was gone but this was different. This wasn't about friendly, kind or accepting, this was about him truly letting another person into his life as a whole.
"Yeah... yeah. I guess you're right.", he said as he finally ceased his pacing and sat himself down in the chair. He felt much better knowing that May wasn't upset that he liked it when Tony treated him like he was his kid. He didn't want her to think that she wasn't good enough and was leaving him feeling like he needed more.

"I'm always right", she laughed.

Then a figure appeared in the doorway. "Always right about what?", Tony asked as he walked into the room carrying a bag with what appeared to be some kind of hot sandwiches and chips in it.

"Everything", Peter answered without humor but his smile said otherwise.
First of all, Holy crap. I never expected this many people to actually care about this story enough to follow it. So, THANK YOU for all of the comments, kudos, bookmarks, and subscriptions. It feels oddly validating. ;)

Now for some Tag adds: Headaches & migraines, Tony Stark is Helping

The remainder of the week carried on painfully slowly for Peter. The excitement of May's constant presence had worn off and Tony was spending the majority of his time in the lab, which he was still grounded from. By Saturday he had read every science journal he had brought with him, he had practically memorized the books he'd gotten about cars and a few phone games could only hold his attention for so long. In short, he was going stir crazy.

As he spiritlessly made his way into the kitchen to find something to snack on, he was met by Tony walking in the door. "Hey, Kid. What've you been up to today?"

Peter had to combat the urge to glare at the man. "Nothing. Absolutely nothing."

Tony didn't seem phased by the boy's apathetic tone. He hadn't meant to spend as much time in the lab as he had but at the same time, he did have things he needed to do. Plus, he figured the kid was supposed to be somewhat bored, it was a punishment after all. "Yeah? I'd invite you to come into the lab with me but you're still grounded. Why don't call Ned or something?"

"I know I'm still grounded.", Peter glared without censor but the man didn't even notice, his back was turned. "I'm bored though! ...and I did talk to Ned. Twice today. That's boring too.", he added slumping his back against the counter.

"That's the point of being grounded right?", the man asked yet he didn't sound like he was actually interested in the answer as he continued to rummage through the pantry. "Did you eat all the peanut butter?"

"Ugh! How much longer until I'm un-grounded?"
"Chill out, Kid, you'll be back in the lab on Monday. Now seriously. Did you eat all the peanut butter or can I just not find it?"

"I didn't eat all the peanut butter! It's right, right there.", he said, pointing to the far side of the pantry from where he stood. "When can I go patrol again?" He figured if he couldn't go to the lab he could at least press for more Spider-man time. Not being allowed in the lab and not having the ability to go spider around the city all the time, was causing him to become overly restless. He needed to do something.

Tony, quickly made a sandwich and stuck the spoon he had used to make it into his mouth.

"Well?", Peter urged after a full two minutes.

"Soon.", he answered, dropping the spoon into the dishwasher before picking up his sandwich. "Why don't you go explore the compound.", he suggested before biting into his extremely late lunch.

"Fine.", Peter answered with a sigh. He hadn't actually done that yet so it seemed like a really good idea. He didn't however, need Tony to know that.

As soon as Tony had finished the last of his sandwich he made his way back to the lab and Peter left to go investigate more of the compound. He started with one of the areas he was most familiar with, he walked past the training room he had been in several times with Happy and Tony to practice hand to hand combat. He'd never been any further down that hall than that.

The first thing he came across was a huge lap pool. He instantly felt excitement bubble up inside him. Despite having had an extremely unpleasant experience involving, practically drowning in a lake, he still loved swimming. Walking inside his enthusiasm died down. The chlorine burned his sensitive nose despite what had to be the most effective ventilation system out there and the echoing of the water as it flowed through the pumps seemed to tear through his ears.

Despite the offensive sounds and smell, he removed his shoes and rolled up his pants before seating himself at the edge of the water and putting his feet in. Typically during the summer, he and Ned would go to the nearby outdoor public pool with a waterslide. He decided he would have to text Ned and see if he wanted to go sometime soon. Being fully open, the chlorine was never a problem there and the painfully rhythmic whoosh of the pumps was covered by the shrills of laughter and the splashing of the water that came from the herds of people who would flock there to seek solace from the sweltering heat.
He had been in there for less than ten minutes but his nose, eyes, and head had already had enough. So, pulling his feet out of the water he grabbed his shoes and started walking towards a glass door that led outside. What he found was nothing short of amazing. To the right was what looked almost like a park with a soft trail, bench-like swings, and well-maintained gardens. To the left was a hard surfaced track with, what looked like a large scoreboard over it, except it seemed to track of laps and times.

He decided to start with the track. Slipping his shoes back on, he started out slowly walking along the far right lane and watched as his speed was tracked on the screen, labeled as 'lane six'. He hoped over the lines onto lane three and the numbers immediately moved to correlate with his new location. He hopped lanes a few times, trying to figure out how the mechanism worked before finally deciding it had something to do with weight distribution and sensors. He would have to remember to ask Tony later.

Having pinned down the basics of the tracks workings he decided to try running. He had never tested his speed before. He hesitantly started running at the start line. He knew he was holding back but he wanted to start slow. Once he crossed the one-mile finish line he looked up. 4:43.86. He went again, faster this time. 3:28.16. And once more pushing himself a little harder. 2:09.33. He considered going a few more times just to see exactly how fast he truly was but settled against it. Sports weren't really his thing and just knowing that he could go well above a normal human average was good enough for him at the moment.

He decided to walk back through the pool area and sit by the water again before heading back upstairs. This time he forced himself to sit there a little longer he wanted to enjoy the sensation of the water flowing between his toes as he moved them through the cool, clear liquid. It didn't take terribly long for him to, sadly, decide that it just wasn't worth it. His head was starting to ache and he wasn't sure if it was the noise, the smell or the combination of the two. Either way, he sighed and left to go back up to the suite before it could get any worse.

By the time he was back up in the suite, the fuzziness in his head had yet to clear as he thought it would. He laid himself down on the bed closed his eyes. He hoped, by laying in quiet darkness that the room provided, the pain in his head would ease up. It had been a while since he'd had a headache but he made a mental note to completely avoid indoor pools from here on out.

He must have dozed off because the next thing he knew, Tony was shaking him awake. "Kid...hey, wake up, it's dinner time."

Peter came back to consciousness, with a groan. He head was now pounding. He tried to crack an eye open but closed it back again the second the light hit him. "I'm not hungry, can, can you please shut the door back?"
Quirking an eyebrow, Tony addressed the boy carefully. His first instinct was to be annoyed that the kid was trying to get out of dinner but it occurred to him that the Peter generally didn't just skip meals for no reason. "You okay?", he asked pulling the door to so that the strip of light no longer crossed the child's face.

"I'm alright, Mr. uh... Tony. M' head hurts is all.", he said bringing both hands up to the sides of his head. "I thought I could just sleep it off."

Looking the boy over with concern the man asked, "You normally get headaches?" He didn't know. Though, he was pretty sure the kid hadn't had one in the three weeks he'd been living there and May hadn't ever mentioned anything about it either.

"No. I, just, I think it was the pool.", Peter all but whispered, all of a sudden even his own voice sounded loud. His hands slipped down from his temples to his ears in response.

"The pool...? Why would that give you a headache?", the man asked lowering his voice, to match Peter's.

Peter, at this point, had his eyes closed as tightly as possible, completely scrunching up his face. "The, the, uh smell I think. The chemicals and, and maybe the noise? I was only putting my feet in but, but think I stayed in there longer than I should have. I knew it was bothering me. I just, I like swimming and it seemed like a good idea at the time. I guess. I've only ever been to the outdoor pools. I didn't know it would get this, this bad."

Running his hand through the boy's hair he sighed. He couldn't offer the kid anything for it. It wouldn't work. He really needed to contact someone he could trust to help him synthesize a class of drugs that would work with the teenager's metabolism. "Shh, it's alright. We can talk about it later. I'll be right back."

Having stepped out of the room the first thing he did was call May who seemed just as clueless as he was. The kid had been telling the truth. This hadn't really happened before. This left him trying to figure out what to do next. A few clicks of his tongue later, he was getting a glass of water, to combat potential dehydration and a cool cloth to go over the kid's eyes.

Reentering the room, Peter flinched as the light hit his squinted eyes. The man mentally kicked himself for not considering that. "FRIDAY?", he whispered just loud enough for the AI to register, "Be a dear and dim the hall lights by seventy percent" Then he made his way back over to Peter's bedside. "Hey, kiddo, sit up, drink this okay?" Upon seeing the boys questioning look he added, "It's just water. It might help."
Peter nodded as he sat up and took the glass. Sitting up had been a bad idea. It made the ache in his head temporarily morph into a sharp pain behind his eyes, radiating into his skull. He didn't really want the water but if the man thought it might help he was willing to try. Tipping the glass towards his mouth he managed to down about half of the cup before he had to stop. He tried to hand it back to his mentor but the man only urged him to finish it. "Hmm-mm", he hummed shaking his head frantically in the negative. He didn't trust himself to open his mouth right now. The water seemed to be wanting to make it's way back up.

The man must have noticed because he took the glass and stepped back from the bed. "You gonna throw up?", he asked as casually as one can ask that question. Peter didn't answer him, he just tried to lay himself back down before anything bad could happen. Namely puking on the man's expensive carpet. Tony must have taken that as a maybe because he disappeared into the en-suite bathroom and returned with the lined trashcan. "I'm gonna set this right here just in case.", he said as he placed the reciprocal at the boy's bedside.

Peter managed to nod his head to let the man know he understood and that must have been confirmation enough because Tony didn't mention it any further. Instead, he placed the cloth he'd carried in over the miserable boy's forehead and eyes and turned to leave. "Alright kiddo, I'll come to check on you in a little bit, okay?", if he had been expecting an answer, then he was going to be disappointed because Peter had already begun attempting to tune out his surroundings.

He had been asleep for several hours before he fully woke up. He noted immediately that the pain in his head had receded to a dull manageable ache. Slowly bringing himself into a sitting position, he vaguely remembered the man coming in and replacing the rag on his forehead a few times. When sitting didn't cause any distress to his head or stomach he opted to go ahead and chance standing up. Either way, he needed to get to his feet but before he could Tony walked into the room. "Hey kiddo, FRIDAY said you were awake. How are you feeling?"

Peter settled himself at the edge of the bed. "Better? I mean, mostly better."

"Stomach doing okay?", the man asked, glancing into the bucket beside the bed, happy to see it was still empty.

"I think so...", he said while slowly lifting himself off the bed. He shifted on his feet for a few seconds before taking a few tentative steps, subsequently pausing to look towards Tony. "I'll, uh, I'll be right back.", he added before continuing his way across the room.

Tony, sat on the edge of the bed and watched as Peter carefully made his way over towards the bathroom. The boy soon returned, shivering slightly. He took his place back on the edge of the bed
right at his mentor's side. "I still don't really feel so good.", he murmured, leaning his weight onto the man beside him, absorbing his warmth.

"Yeah? Think you can handle some food? You haven't eaten in hours.", the man stated as he wrapped his arm around the kid, rubbing his hand up and down his goosebump covered arm. "It's sixty-seven degrees in here, why are you so cold?", he asked, pulling the kid in a little more tightly.

"I don't know. Maybe, maybe because I just woke up?"

"Maybe", the man mused. "Why don't you put something with long sleeves on, I'll go make you something to eat."

"I only have hoodies with me. I don't have any long sleeve shirts here."

"Oh.", Tony said. He hadn't really considered that the kid had only packed for a week tops and it was summer. "Hang on, I'll get you something."

Peter sat shivering on the bed, waiting for his mentor to return. It didn't take long. Tony was soon reentering the room carrying a faded sweatshirt. "This one might actually fit you. I've had it a while.", he said, smiling as he handed it over. Peter just thanked him and slipped it on. "It looks good on you, kid. You should just keep it", he replied, smiling fondly.

It wasn't until then, that Peter took a good look at the article of clothing. It was one of Tony's MIT sweatshirts, it had grown faded and soft from years of wear. He was somewhat surprised that the man would let him use it let alone keep it. It felt like one of those things that you kept tucked away for safe keeping. Maybe to give to your own children one day. "I, I mean are you sure? This looks pretty, pretty important. I'm not sure I should have it..., he hesitantly stated but he was having trouble suppressing the grin that was trying to play on his lips.

"I'm sure. It definitely suits you." As he looked the boy over, he could see that he was nervous about the gesture. Tony couldn't sort out why. It was just an old sweatshirt. Sure it had been important enough for him to feel the desire to keep in the back of his closet for, God only knows how many, years now but for some reason, it felt absolutely right for Peter to have it now. "It doesn't fit me anymore, I've held onto it long enough and I really want you to have it... but I'll tell you what, since I'm giving you my MIT sweatshirt, you have to get me a new the second you finish your orientation in a few years. Yeah?"
Peter could no longer hold back the smile. "I, I can do that." MIT was sort of his dream school, he didn't know if Tony already knew that or if the man was just projecting his own desires at him. Either way, he was happy to accept the deal because he couldn't envision a more perfect compromise.

Having followed his mentor into the kitchen, Peter suddenly registered how dark it was outside. "What time is it?", he asked as he rested his still slightly painful head down onto his arms at the breakfast bar.

"Ten. Well, a little after ten. You've been sleeping off and on for the last five hours.", he answered, never looking up from the cabinet he was digging through.

Peter flinched as the man continued to dig through the pots and pans. It seemed that while the light was no longer affecting his eyes, his hearing was still a little overly sensitive. He tried to casually cover his ears. "Oh", was all he managed to answer. He sighed in relief when the man finally found what he was looking for and the kitchen grew quiet again.

A short time later the two of them were sitting side by side eating buttered pasta with parmesan. By the time Peter had finished his second bowl of pasta and several cups of apple sauce, his head was no longer aching and so he tried to bargain for some Oreos.

It took some time but he had eventually managed to talk Tony into letting him have the cookies. "Fine but if you throw up, I'm not cleaning it.", the man pointed out accusingly.

"Ugh, I'm not going to throw up. I'm fine. My head doesn't even hurt anymore. You want some?"

Upon the man's reluctant agreement, the boy happily headed towards the couch, dessert in hand. Tony followed him with two glasses of milk. They spent quite a while like that before Peter started to yawn. Turns out that a five-hour nap while fighting a headache isn't that restful. As such, both of them were in bed by midnight.
Chapter 24

The next day was going slightly better. It was his last day of grounding, Pepper was due to come home that evening and Tony had suggested that they 'cook the girls some dinner together' in May's apartment. That was something to look forward to.

He had spent the majority of his time with May but as soon as her therapist showed up that afternoon he’d left to go back upstairs. When he walked in, Tony was sitting at the bar with a laptop open. "Good timing, Kid, I was just about to go look for you, well, have FRIDAY look for you. Come here, I really need you to help me with this and it needs to be done before Pepper get back"

"What is it?", Peter asked, walking towards the kitchen. He had planned to grab a snack to take it back to his room and eat it while reading. His mentor seemed to have other plans, either way, he was still hungry.

"Shopping.", the man answered flatly.

Peter, who had been peeling an orange over the trashcan, paused. "You know doing it online doesn't make me hate shopping any less, right Tony?", he said before continuing his task.

"Even if it's for you? Pete, we need to get your room set up. Peppers going to kick our asses for not having it done already. At least this way we can say we ordered it. Yeah? And get a plate, you're gonna make a mess and I'm not cleaning it up for you."

"Fine", he moaned, grabbing a plate and plopping down onto the barstool beside his mentor. "I just want it to go on record that I didn't ask for any of this."

Tony smirked. "FRIDAY, dear? Did you get that?"

"Indeed. Would you like for me to store it in your personal file?", the AI responded.

"Nah, let's start a new file. Call it 'The Baby Book'.", he laughed looking at Peters annoyed posture.
“Whatever”, the boy grumbled, "Let's just get this over with."

They spent a little over an hour going through options. Peter, firmly refusing any new furniture. What was already in the room was fine. He didn't see any need to change it. Tony, aware that getting the kid to sit with him to shop for anything at all was a win, let it go quickly.

Surprisingly, Peter wasn't bored out of his mind throughout the process. In fact, it was almost fun. The first thing Tony had suggested was a comforter from the children's department that depicted a cartoon image of himself as Iron Man. For the entire duration on the shopping spree, the man continued to go back to it and ask the kid if he was sure he didn't want that one instead. Peter laughed every time but continued to adamantly decline.

As soon as they were done, Tony sent Peter out of the room to make the payment. He didn't want the kid to see the total and freak out. Plus he planned on going back and adding a few things that had gotten the kid's attention. He'd suggested that they add one or two of the more interesting items to the cart but the boy insisted he didn't need them.

He clicked the button to confirm the order at the same second that Pepper walked through the door. He quickly closed the laptop and stood to greet her. "You're home early", he said with a smile.

"Not really.", she laughed. "I said I would be home before four and it's a little after three now. Last I checked that counted as before four.", she answered playfully before reaching out to embrace the man. "How does Peter's new room look? Did you guys get it all done?"

Tony froze. Damn, she was good, he had assumed he had until at least dinner time before he had to own up to any of that. "Uh... we, well, we may have just ordered the stuff for it... recently. It should be here--"

"--How recently?", she asked eyebrows up and looking directly at the laptop still sitting on the bar.

*Change the subject, Tony, change the subject.* "That's not really here nor there at the moment, dear," he said with a wave of his hand. "Peter and I plan to cook dinner for you and May tonight. We haven't settled on anything yet, but with Peter in charge, I can guarantee pasta will be involved. I told May seven I hope that's okay.", he told her making sure to give her his best winning smile.

Pepper shook her head and let it go. Giving the man a quick kiss she asked him where Peter was and advanced in that direction. Finding the door to be open she walked in, tapping lightly on the
frame as she did so. The boy wasn't surprised to see her, he had heard her coming, but he smiled none the less. "Oh hi, Pepper. How, how was your trip?", he asked, with slight uncertainty. He was glad to see her but Tony had mentioned that she might not be happy about their procrastination and he didn't really want to be in trouble with her.

"It was as good as could be expected. Just work really. How about you? I see you and Tony didn't get this room done. What were you up to instead?"

Her tone was even and pleasant as she spoke but the words themselves made Peter nervous. His eyes dropped to the floor as he tried to explain. "I, well, I was with May a lot and, and then Ned and I guess--"

"Peter.", the woman smiled, laying hand on his shoulder. "It's fine. Tony said you two ordered some things. Do you want to tell me about it? I might not be here when it's all done. I have to leave for Hong Kong in a couple of days."

After a few steady breaths he was able to tell Pepper about the decor he had settled on for his room. She asked him a few questions here and there and he was soon back at ease with her presence. They talked for a while before Tony made his way into the room as well. He joined the affable exchange for some time before making a few witty excuses meant to get him some alone time with Pepper. It didn't take long for pepper to come around and follow the man out of the room, smiling.

Peter, no longer eager to be alone in his room went down to find May and wait for the pair to arrive. It wouldn't be too long. It was already five and when he and Tony actually planned a dinner it usually happened around seven. Sure enough an hour later the two of them entered May's apartment. Pepper went directly to greet May, the two had quite a bit to catch up on, and Tony sat with Peter. "Alright Pete, it's decision-making time. What are we making for dinner?"

"Oh, um, I don't know. You decide." Peter didn't really know what to suggest. If it was just May and/or Tony and himself he would have made a quick choice. He knew what they liked. Pepper, he thought, would be a little harder to please. When she cooked it tended to be foods that he would consider fancy or complicated. Things he wouldn't generally pick to make at home.

"Buddy, I told you yesterday you would be in charge. You haven't even been thinking about it?" He was marginally annoyed at the kid's lack of planning. It wasn't like he'd asked him to plan a wedding, just pick something for dinner.

"Well, I mean I did think about it. I don't really know what we can make. Like, what everybody likes.", he said nervously wringing his hands.
"By everyone, I assume you mean Pepper because you know May and myself would eat anything you chose and for the record so would Pepper.", the man smiled, grabbing ahold of Peter's fidgety hands.

Peter was sure he wasn't getting out of this, so he sighed. "I, I guess, maybe, we could make cheeseburgers? Maybe some pasta salad too?"

"That sounds perfect, I'll go grab what we need."

Peter nodded and walked into May's room to join the conversation, though, what actually happened was him watching them have a conversation. He mostly sat quietly until Tony came to get him, then the two of them worked diligently in the kitchen preparing the menu Peter had settled on. At some point, Tony had promised Peter that he would teach him how to make real hamburgers on a grill. Peter laughed but the thought excited him. Just like the last time they had been in the kitchen together, things flowed easily and the time passed quickly and they were eating by six-thirty.

Eating dinner with all three adults felt natural. They chatted and quipped as if a dinner together was an everyday occurrence. It was comfortable and Peter loved it. At some point during the meal, the room grew somewhat quiet and Peter decided it was a good time to bring the question he'd had the day before again. "So... when can I go patrol again?", he said trying to sound casual.

All three adults looked at him. May spoke first. "I guess, that's something we'll need to figure out. Tony? What do you think?"

The man sighed. He knew based on their discussion that this decision was going to be on him and he had been thinking it over for some time. "Kid, the logistics of you going out every night are kind of a nightmare--"

"--I know!", Peter interjected. "I know I can't go all the time like, like before but I can't just, not go. I'm spider-man. The city needs me!", he pleaded.

"Look Pete", the man started. "I think we can work out a way for you to go a few times a week, plus whatever time you can work out with your 'Guy in the Chair'--"

"--but when!?", Peter asked impatiently.
Tony was getting irritated now. "That depends, do you plan on continuing to interrupt me or do I get to actually speak?", the man spat. All eyes were now on him but it was like he had forgotten that anyone else was in the room.

Peter hung his head low and fidgetted in his seat. "I'm sorry", he mumbled. It was never his intention to make the man angry. He just wanted an answer. It felt like he couldn't get the man to understand how important this was.

"As I was saying... I think we can work out some time during the week. I almost always have a few days where I'm required to go to the office. You can tag along to a few of them and get some patrol time in too."

"Tomorrow?", the boy asked timidly.

Tony sighed and looked between the two women for support but neither of them seemed entirely interested in getting involved. "Yes, tomorrow. I need to be at SI at eleven. You can patrol while I'm there. So, until five or so." He knew he sounded defeated and he wasn't even sure why. It wasn't like he wanted to stop the kid from going out. Maybe he was subconsciously preparing himself for the fight that was about to ensue.

"That's great but what about after dark, Tony. That's when the interesting stuff happens."

Tony scoffed. He was pretty sure he and the boy had different opinions on what 'interesting' was. "Just eat your burger, we'll talk about it later.", he nearly snapped.

The remainder of the meal was mostly quiet. As soon as everyone was done and Peter had done his part with the dishes and disappeared to his room. Tony wasn't listening to him and it was frustrating. He just wanted to go out. He had been doing it for ages. Before Tony knew his name even. Now he felt like the same man who had given him an advantage by supplying him with a super technical suit was holding him back. It wasn't fair and the more he thought about it the angrier he became. Not knowing how to let out his frustration he ended up picking up some random things off his floor and tossing them. When that didn't help he knocked the books off of his desk listening to them hit the floor with a satisfying thud leading him to toss a few more things to the floor before falling face first onto the bed.

Half an hour his mentor was knocking on his locked door. When Peter finally acquiesced and unlocked it the man sauntered in, eyeing the room while letting out a low whistle. "Geez, Kiddo,
"What did you do to this room?", he asked, ignoring Peter's hostile posture.

"What does it matter? It's my room?", Peter asked throwing his hands up in the air.

"Sure, it's your room but it's still my house.", the man replied with heat this time. "You know you'd better clean this up, right?"

Peter couldn't help but still for a moment. As angry as he was with the man, those last words had him blinking dumbly in the man's direction. "Did, did you just tell me to, to clean my room?", he said trying to maintain his angry tone but the truth was he was more amused than anything at the moment.

"Uh, yeah.", the man answered in annoyance. "and you can start with those books you obviously knocked onto the fucking floor... while we're at it, why are there dishes in here?", he added glaring at the empty cups on the desk.

Sputtering in response, Peter tried to get himself back on track to defend himself. He didn't get very far though, the man looked pissed off and that was enough to cause Peter to grow quiet, though not enough to get him moving on cleaning up the mess he'd made. He stood there in by the bed arms crossed, a scowl across his face.

Tony stared right back, contemplating whether or not this fell into May's jurisdiction. They hadn't really discussed toddler style temper tantrums. He tried to think back to the books he'd read. 'Don't let the child see you lose your temper', they had said. Tony huffed. Too damn late for that, he thought before making the decision to simply walk out of the room, resisting the urge to slam the door behind himself. It felt like the right move at the time, he didn't want to scream at the kid any more than he already had.

Not knowing what else to do, he carried himself back down to May's apartment where the two women sat drinking tea together. It wasn't his intention but he entered the room beside himself with negative energy. "I don't know what to do with him", he sputtered in annoyance, not making eye contact with either of the women in the room. "He's acting like a damn child!", he spat.

Pepper looked from Tony to May trying to gauge how this was going to play out but May looked like the absolute picture of calm confidence. "What did he do this time?", she asked easily. She had considered reminding the man that Peter is a child but it didn't seem like that should be the main focus right now.
"I don't even know.", he answered in frustration. "It looks like he threw half his damn room onto the floor like a fucking two-year-old. All I know is he better clean it up. I'm sure as hell not doing it."

"Good, you shouldn't. Once he gets over whatever he's all ruffled up about, he can clean it up.", May assured. "I can talk to him if you want me to, but I feel like this is between you two and you should at least try."

"Talk to him about what exactly", the man asked as he seated himself beside his fiance. "Oh, my God. Please tell me I don't have to ground him again.", he groaned as he ran both of his hands down his face.

Pepper patted him on the shoulder as she addressed May. "Tony's having Peter withdrawals in the lab. Hasn't gotten anything done in days."

"That's not true!", the man asserted, pointing a finger in her direction. "I've gotten a lot done. Just not any of the fun stuff."

"Oh, I'm sorry May, my mistake. He hasn't gotten any fun stuff done in days.", Pepper smiled.

May had to reel in the laughter before she could get back on the subject. "No, you don't have to ground him again, I mean unless you want to. We did decide that you had that authority...", she said, more to remind the man that he had agreed to step into this role than to actually encourage him to ground the boy.

"No.", he answered curtly. "Just because I can doesn't mean I want to.", he added nearly monotone.

"It doesn't.", May agreed. "What are you going to do instead. surly, you don't plan on ignoring it completely. Not as pissed off as you were when you walked in here."

Tony threw his hands up in grievance. "I don't know what to do about it, May! That's why I'm here. You're the expert."

"Oh my God.", May said with amused frustration. "What do you think you should do. Think about it. What makes sense." Tony grew quiet and Pepper placed her hand on his leg in reassurance as he sat there deep in thought. When a minute or so had passed with no response May continued "Do you even know what he's upset about?", she questioned.
The man blinked back in surprise. "I, I guess not. Not really. I figured it all stemmed from the whole Spider-man conversation"

"Hmm", May hummed neutrally. "Maybe you should go talk to him then..."

"...and if he has another damned temper tantrum...?"

"Then you wait a little longer but I can almost promise you that he's up there freaking out right now trying to decide how much trouble he's in."

"Fine", the man replied, "I'll go check on him." As he made his way out of his chair he looked at Pepper. "You're staying here I guess, huh."

"Absolutely", she nodded with a smile. "I'll be up in a little while for bed."

Tony sighed and headed towards the door. "Yay me.", he grumbled to no one in particular but both women seemed to have heard him because he walked out to the sound of their snickering in the background.
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

I am, like, stupid far ahead in writing this so, I may put out a few extra chapters a week for a little while. :)

Tony hesitated as he walked through the door, he really hated this part of the whole *co-parenting* thing, as May had dubbed it. He didn't feel fit to be anyone's parent but he also didn't want May to think that he couldn't handle taking care of the kid while she recovered and send him somewhere else. Beside's Peter had grown on him. To be fair, he had really liked the kid from the beginning, but now it was different, *maybe something about it had always been different*. Maybe it was that his relationship with Peter was unique from than any other relationship he'd ever had. Everyone he was ever close to had become *his* support system. *He needed them*. With Peter, for the first time, it was the other way around. He was the one offering support. The boy made him feel like *he was needed*, and not as a superhero, billionaire or philanthropist... just himself, as a whole. The concept had taken time to sink in but here he was now, willing to be whatever the kid needed him to be.

Making his way back to the boy's room, his chest bubbled with cautious anticipation. He took a few deep breaths before, knocking on the door for the second time that evening. "Kid? Open it up." He assumed the teenager had locked the door back after he'd left and he knew, in theory, he could simply have FRIDAY override, said lock and just walk in, but that seemed counterproductive to his goal of getting the boy to talk to him. Instead, he stood outside the door for several minutes before questioning the AI. "FRIDAY? What's the kid doing?", he asked, sounding exhausted.

"Mr. Parker is currently located on the east lawn track."

"Oh", he said, opening the door to look inside. At least the mess was cleaned up. "How long's he been there?", the man asked out of curiosity.

"Mr. Parker left the suite thirty-two minutes ago and has been running the track for the last twenty-four minutes.", The AI answered effortlessly.

Seeing as running seemed like a perfectly healthy outlet, Tony was in no rush to get to the track. As he was walked past the door leading to the lap pool he shook his head. He hoped the kid had figured out that there was another way out to the lawn.

Outside, he watched Peter run from the sidelines for a couple of minutes before drawing attention to
his presence. He'd known the kid was fast. He didn't know he was *that fast*. The teenager was already on his eighteenth mile when he had walked outside and was on his twentieth before he made it all the way to the edge of the track to flag the boy down.

Peter stopped right in front of his mentor. His hair sweaty hair was falling in his eyes and his shirt was sticking to his body. Despite all of that the kid seemed to be barely out of breath. "Mr. Stark! How, how did you know I was here?", he asked stupidly. As if Tony Stark didn't have an AI that watched over, pretty much the entire compound.

"Kid, what are you doing out here?"

"Run, running? It, um, I just, I needed *move*. I don't even *like* running... but I'm, I'm tired of being cooped up all the time. I can't be in the lab and I can't patrol... I need to get back to patrolling. *I need to.*", the boy pleaded.

"Alright, I hear you.", the man began because he did. He understood. Peter was used to being out flipping and swinging all over the city at will and he'd only been able to get that kind of energy out, one time, for a few hours in the last several weeks. "For now, let's just get you cleaned up and hydrated. You're all sweaty. Then we can talk about it *and I do mean* talk. If you start yelling or throwing shit, the conversation is over. Yes?"

"Yes sir", the boy answered wholeheartedly taking a few long strides to catch up with his mentor, who had already started walking towards the building. While running wouldn't have been his preferred method, he felt way less stir crazy than he had a few hours ago. Walking past the pool, he sighed audibly causing Tony to look back at him but neither of them said anything.

The second they walked in the door, Tony was thrusting a glass of water into his hands and demanding that he finish it before ushering him off to the shower. It didn't take long for Peter to make his way back out to the living room, showered and in fresh pajamas. His mentor was waiting for him. "I'm sorry, and, I did clean up the mess. I'm, uh, sorry about that too.", he said as he shuffled into the room. Rounding his way to the front of the couch where he saw yet another glass of water on the coffee table, assuming it was for him, he picked it up and sat down. "Am I in trouble?", he asked quietly.

"I'm not happy... but I'm unclear if that's the same thing. I'm not grounding you if that's what you're asking."

Peter nodded, finally drinking down the water in his hands. "Not being grounded isn't the same as not being in trouble. Like, are you mad?"
"I was mad, I'm not anymore. Now, I'm more worried, annoyed maybe, but mostly worried. You left after dinner without so much as a 'see you later' to anyone and then came up here to throw shit around. When I asked you about it you copped an attitude. I walked out because I didn't want to yell at you, well, yell at you anymore. By the time I made my way back up here to try and talk to you about it, you were gone. I'm just glad you went to the track and didn't take off or some dumb shit like that." He didn't feel the need to fill the kid in on the fact that he couldn't have snuck off entirely even if he'd wanted too. He had installed the 'Baby Gate Protocol' by day two. FRIDAY would tell him if the kid ever breached the property lines.

"I would never run away, Mr. Stark.", Peter answered defensively. "I'm not stupid."

"I didn't say that you were Pete... and can we please go back to you calling me Tony?" Peter stiffened for a moment before nodding in the affirmative. "Why do you do that?", the man asked with interest.

"Do what?", the boy asked, skittishly.

"Go back and forth between calling me, Tony and Mr. Stark?" He wasn't trying to make the kid uncomfortable, though it seemed he had. Peter had grown tense and was fidgeting with the empty cup in his hand. Not wanting to have another broken glass incident, Tony reached over and removed it from the boy's grasp, setting it back down the on the table.

"I, I don't guess I know.", he said, letting go of the cup as his mentor took ahold of it. "Sometimes, I forget?"

Tony just hummed in response. "You can call me whatever you're comfortable with, but I really like it when you call me Tony. Mr. Starks feels way too formal.", he smiled. "Now, back to business.", he said firmly, clapping his hands together. "Please just talk to me when you're upset. I don't read minds Kiddo... and before you ask, yes you can still go patrolling tomorrow. We'll try to make a point of you getting out to Queens at least a few times a week. I'm sure Happy would be, well, happy to drive you. Plus you have Ned there so that would open up some nights. Yeah?"

Peter visibly relaxed. "Yeah. Thank you.", he said, pushing his wet hair out of his eyes, for the third time in as many minutes.

"You need a hair cut.", the man stated matter-of-factly. "We can do that tomorrow too."
Peter just nodded in agreement. A few weeks ago he would have found it insane to have Iron Man offering to take him to get a hair cut but today it seemed perfectly normal. He had grown used to the fact that Tony was there to take care of those kinds of things for him now. He still hated it when the man tried to spend a ton of money on him, but a fifteen dollar hair cut, that he desperately needed was fine. "Thank you. I was going to ask you but I never got around to it."

"Not a problem.", the man said with a wave of his hand. "Pepper's going to be with May for a while, you want to watch a movie or something? I can make popcorn." He had considered adding that he owed Pepper, and his aunt, really, an apology but decided against it. He didn't need to. Peter would do it all on his own because he was just that good. Sure, the boy had his moments but as a whole, he was way better than Tony ever was at his age.

"Yeah, that would be great."

With a pleased nod of the head, Tony was up and in the kitchen popping several bags of popcorn and carrying it into the living room in one oversized bowl. Once the man had sat back down on the couch and was flipping through movies, Peter, cautiously settling himself closer to the man's side. He let out a contented hum when the man wrapped an arm around his shoulders.

They were nearly through with the movie they had chosen when Pepper walked in. She didn't say anything, she quietly slipped around the couch and sat at Peter's other side. Tony reached across the kid to offer her what little popcorn that was left in the bowl and when she declined Peter took it and finished it off, happily. The man looked, contentedly, across the couch at the kid, who had quickly wormed his way into his heart, and his future wife. His family.

Once the movie was over, Peter, as predicted turned to Pepper and apologized for leaving the apartment without saying anything. The woman, being as kind as ever, thanked him for his apology and to Peter's surprise leaned in to hug him. Hugs were something he'd only recently starting sharing with Tony, and he didn't really know Pepper as well. He was almost worried that the embrace was going to be awkward but it wasn't. Pepper was quick and gentle and it felt genuine and right.

It was approaching midnight when Peter finally made his way to bed, at Pepper suggestion. He, of course, didn't argue. It had been kind of a bumpy evening and between the stress and the running he was worn out, so he bid the two adults good-night and went to his room. Once there he called May to apologize and to tell her good-night as well. By the time his head finally hit his pillow he was asleep within seconds, however, he didn't stay that way.

He hadn't had woken up in the middle of the night in what he thought was at least a week, maybe more, he wasn't really keeping track. He was glad this one wasn't as bad as the last one. While he
was, sweaty, shaky and out of sorts, he figured he wasn't so much so, that the AI would sell him out as she had before, which was good because Tony would want him to talk about it and to be honest, he couldn't even remember what this one was about. He'd woken up with a start but there was no imagery lingering in behind his eyelids as there normally was. The fear was there but the dream was gone. It was just... empty.

He tried reasoning with himself that if he couldn't even remember what it was about then he had nothing to be panicking about. After a few minutes of attempting to slow his heart rate he, unsteadily, got up to change his shirt and use the bathroom. Then, standing in the middle of the room staring at the door, attempting to determine what he wanted to do next. He didn't want to be alone. He considered going to May, but she wasn't really back on her feet yet. She was only getting around with the assistance of nurses or therapists so she couldn't join him on her couch and her bed was too small for him to climb in with her. Then he thought about Tony, but Pepper was with him and while he was comfortable being around her, he didn't want to wake her up. Shivering where he stood, he went to put on the sweatshirt Tony had given him and opted to go out to the couch.

Unlike every other time he'd gone out to the living room after a nightmare, this time it didn't seem to help. He fidgeted on the couch for a few minutes before, going to make himself some chocolate milk, only to find that there wasn't enough powder left for a full glass. Sighing he poured himself some juice instead. Sitting at the bar it all of a sudden occurred to him that he didn't even know what time it was. Maybe it was late enough that someone else would be awake soon but luck wasn't on his side. It was only three in the morning meaning he would be alone for hours unless he chose to seek someone out. Sighing again, he put his cup in the dishwasher and went back to his room, to at least try to go back to sleep.

He tossed and turned in his bed for no more than half of an hour before he gave up. He couldn't settle himself. For no discernable reason, the unease wouldn't leave him. The thought crossed his mind that he could, simply, go into the man's room and maybe wake him up without waking Pepper but he quickly shook that idea and the images that came along with it out of his head. "FRIDAY?", he asked quietly. "Is Tony awake or, or Pepper, or May?"

The AI took a moment to respond. "Mr. Stark, Ms. Potts, and Ms. Parker are all asleep. Would you like for me to wake them for you?"

"No!", Peter answered hurriedly. "Just, can you wake up Mr. Stark but not Pepper? Is that possible?"

"While I can't guarantee that Ms. Potts would remain sleeping I can limit my request so that only Mr. Stark is summoned.", the AI responded patiently. It was fascinating how life-like Tony could program his AI's to sound.
"Yeah, yeah, do that. I guess." Against his best efforts, he remained shaky for no tangible reason and although his body was tired he couldn't seem to calm his nerves enough to go back to bed. He just prayed that when Tony had said he could wake him up that he'd meant it. Being yelled at right now would probably bring him to tears and he really didn't want that.

It wasn't but a few moments later that Tony opened his door. It felt almost like de-ja-vu as the man stood before him, one hand was on his hip while the other rested on the doorknob. "Hey, Pete, you alright? FRIDAY said you asked for me."

Unlike, the last time, Peter was able to answer him. "Yeah, I, uh, I can't sleep", he said wrapping his arms around his body, in part to help put a stop to his shivering but mostly for the comfort it brought him. "You, you said I could wake you up, right? You're not mad?"

Tony rolled his eyes and made his way into the room. He had been slightly panicked when the AI had said that Peter had requested his presence. He was half expecting to walk in to find that the boy was sick or strung out from a particularly bad nightmare as he had been before. Neither of those things being the case his panic died down to concern and he found himself feeling legitimately honored that the boy had called for him rather than going to May. "I'm not mad. I want you to call me if you need me.", he said as he crossed the room to pull the boy into his grasp, rubbing his hands on up and down the shivering form. "You want to talk about it?"

"There's nothing to talk about, I don't even remember what it was about. I just woke up... anxious."

"It's alright. That's fine. I've got you.", Tony reassured for several minutes before offering the boy a choice. "Couch or bed?", he asked, knowing Peter had to be tired still. God knows he was.

Peter stiffened in the man's arms. "What about Pepper?"

Tony took that question to mean that the kid wanted to be in a bed and the tensing of his body to mean he didn't know how to proceed. So, he adjusted his answer accordingly. "She's fine. I can stay with you here if you want me to." When the teenager nodded into his chest, he opted to feel the situation out a bit further. "Do you want me to sit by the bed until you fall asleep or do you want me to stay?"

There was more hesitation before the kid made any sort of decision, though it came out as more of a question. "You could stay?"
"I can stay", he confirmed, giving the boy's arms a light squeeze before letting go completely and gesturing towards the bed.

Peter had felt more relaxed the moment his mentor had opened his door but he was concerned that the apprehensive feelings would return the moment the man left the room. Yet, he was so exhausted that the couch didn't sound near as nice as a bed did and having Tony sit in a chair to watch him sleep didn't sound near as comforting as being beside him. Plus, he already felt bad for waking him up in the first place, he really didn't like the idea of asking him to stay awake longer to wait for him to fall asleep.

The bed in Peter's room was smaller than his own but it didn't seem to matter because just like the time before, the spiderling's head ended up practically on his shoulder within ten minutes of being asleep. As Tony lay on his back, one hand under his head, the other resting on his abdomen, he smiled to himself because he could get used to this. Maybe May was right, he did have it in him to parent someone, as long as that someone was Peter. 'Take that Howard', he thought to himself as he drifted off to sleep.

Pepper was unsurprised to wake up alone the next morning. She knew Tony had gone to Peter in the night. As she pulled herself out of bed she questioned FRIDAY as to where the two of them were and smiled when her answer came in the form of a holographic snapshot being displayed before her. "Save that image to The Baby Book File please", she said with fondness as she examined the picture with such intensity that it was almost as if she were trying to lock into her memory.

The ever intuitive AI responded almost smugly. "Already done, Ms. Potts."
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Tag adds: Brief mention of attempted kidnapping, Attempted kidnapping

Having checked on the boys, Pepper got dressed and went out to the living room. On a whim, she decided to order some doughnuts, thinking that Peter might enjoy a treat after the night he'd had. By the time they had arrived, coffee was already brewing and Tony and Peter had just emerged from the bedroom looking slightly disheveled from sleep. Peter was running his hands through his overgrown hair and Tony was pinching the bridge of his nose as if he were seconds away from a headache.

"Good morning boys.", Pepper said sounding as chipper as ever as pair entered the room. Gesturing towards the bar she smiled. "I got us some doughnuts. I thought you two might deserve some this morning"

Peter rapidly perked up at the mention of the confections. "Thank you, Pepper!", he chirped happily as he rounded the corner towards the bar. He was already stuffing one into his mouth when he added on, "I love doughnuts!" Tony wasn't even awake enough to correct him, all he could do was grunt and throw the roll of paper towels half-heartedly in his direction as he poured his first cup of coffee.

By the time he, he had downed his second cup of coffee and started into his third doughnut Tony was much more pleasant and conversational. They were up surprisingly early and had a while before he had to leave for the office. As such, they all got dressed and sat around the kitchen, talking. Peter was impatient, to say the least. "How much longer until we leave?", he asked for the second time in twenty minutes.

"Jesus, Pete, we're still leaving at nine. Can you just chill out and sit?" Then looking over at Pepper, he added, "He's antsy. Apparently, we don't have enough room for a growing spider-boy to expend his exorbitant amounts of spirited energy."

Pepper raised an eyebrow and looked between them. "How is that even possible, there's a gym, a track, a lap pool--"

"--yeah, let's not talk about the lap pool", Tony interrupted. When Pepper looked between the pair still baffled he began to clarify. "Kid thought he would mess around in there the other day, turns out that Spidey can't handle the smell of the chlorine, at least not in an indoor setting... apparently."
"What happened?", she asked face having gone from confused to on edge.

"Headache", Tony supplied, "Well, more like a migraine really, not sure. Seemed to mess with his senses too, had him out of commission for hours."

"Yeah", Peter added. "It was awful which sucks because I like swimming. That reminds me! Tony, can we go swimming at the outdoor pool near my apartment one day? Please? It has a waterslide and everything. It would be awesome. Oh, and could Ned come to?"

"Kid, I don't think that's such a great idea, I mean for me. You and Ned can go all out.", he said shaking his head in amusement. He was thrilled that the kid was that eager to spend time with him but he knew the second he stepped foot into a public pool people would be bombarding him and pretty much ruin the experience the kid was going for. "Buddy, nobody would leave us alone."

"Why don't we build a pool here? It could be done in two weeks if we found the right people and offered the right motivation.", Pepper mused. "The landscaping might take a little longer but it could be functional fairly quickly."

Peter wanted to be upset about the amount of money that would cost to build something just so he could have a place to swim but he didn't quite hold back the excitement that coursed through his entire body. Before he could stop himself he was making suggestions. "With a water slide? ...and maybe one of those basketball goal things on the side? I don't really care about basketball but that might be really fun." He was bouncing on his toes as he spoke and both adults were grinning back at him with affinity.

"Whatever you want, Pete.", the man said smiling. He's never seen the kid so readily interested in spending his money. It had been like pulling teeth to get the kid to pick a comforter for his bed without commenting on the cost. That must mean that the boy really really wanted this and Tony was ecstatic to give it to him.

"Thank you! Oh my God, this is so totally awesome!! I can't wait to tell Ned! He's going to freak out. Wait! He can come, right? That, that would be okay?"

"Of course, can't have a brand new pool and not share it with your 'Guy in the Chair'.", Tony laughed. "You know he could come over before there's a pool right? I don't mind."
"Really?", Peter practically squeaked. "Like, when? Can he come over Friday? Wait, can I patrol on Friday and then he can come?"

Tony looked at Pepper because, to be honest, she knew his schedule better than anyone. When she nodded in approval and Tony told him that would be fine as long as it was okay with Ned's mom, he yelled, making both adults flinch at the volume.

"Christ, Kid! Inside voice, will ya?"

Peter's hands flew up to his mouth as he muttered a muffled apology through his hands. Tony just shook his head and checked his watch. "Look, Kiddo, I know I said nine but we actually need to leave now if we're going to get your hair cut. You got your Spidey suit packed?"

"Yep!", Peter replied as he bounced down the hall to get his backpack.

As it turns out letting Tony Stark take you to get your hair cut mean going to an over-priced salon and then paying double to be seen without an appointment. Peter begged and pleaded to go somewhere cheaper to no avail. "Please, Tony, there's a Great Clips in Queens that I go to all the time. It's fine. I just need a trim. Please"

"Kid, if I'm paying then I pick. Come on, this where I get my hair done, you'll love it."

In the end, he ended up having his hair washed, cut and styled while sitting in a leather barber's chair, being offered a variety of pricey looking drinks and snacks, none of which he accepted. Tony, on the other hand, sat backward in a chair he'd pulled up to the stylist station popping chocolate covered macadamia nuts into his mouth while drinking sparkling water out of a champagne glass.

When all was said and done, Peter had to admit his hair looked better than it ever had before, he kind of felt bad that he was about to pull a mask down over it. Then, at the checkout, despite his protest, Tony ended up purchasing all of the recommended products. All except the shampoo, which Peter insisted he didn't need because apple scented shampoo was the superior shampoo and would use nothing else.

Tony laughed when the boy pulled out his phone and took a selfie in front of the salon door. "What? It's for my Instagram story...", he whined which only seemed to make the man laugh harder. "Whatever, Mr. Stark, your just too old to understand."
"I am completely offended by that, Kid.", the man said, still giggling.

"You should be", Peter grumbled, slipping his phone back into his pocket.

After that, they were on their way to SI, where Tony was going to be late as usual. As such there was no time to really go over the kid's parameters again. Instead, the man had to give a quick rundown and trusted that he would behave. "I gotta get going, don't do anything stupid. Use Happy as your point man today. Be back here in your regular clothes by five. If you need Happy to pick you up text him. Yeah?"

"yes, sir!"

"By five, I mean it kid."

"I know, I know, five. Got it. Bye!", Peter called out, cheerily, as he ran towards the closest alley with coverage and webbing his backpack to the wall. "Karen? Connect me with Ned please!", he requested the second the mask was over his head.

"Welcome back Peter! Connecting to Ned..."

The afternoon was spent galavanting all over the city. Even he had to concede that he spent more time swinging around than doing any actual hero work for the first hour or so before really getting down to business. Being day-light hours there wasn't much to do. Helping where he could and just looking out for the little guy.

His curfew was rapidly approaching, so he was winding down for the day and considering grabbing a hotdog or two when heard someone screaming. He instantly pointed himself in that direction and got there just in time to prevent a kidnapping. After a few witty quips as he webbed the bad guy to the wall, Karen contacted the police. That was the easy part. Now, mission accomplished, he was left feeling completely inept with a crying three-year-old on his hip. He didn't know what to do. He couldn't be there when the police arrived, vigilantism wasn't exactly seen as a good thing at the moment, but he also couldn't leave the screaming toddler unattended in the alleyway. Karen was no help and Ned kept repeating everything he'd already thought of. *Happy call Happy*, his brain finally supplied. When the man didn't answer he was frantic but was trying to keep it together for the preschooler he now seemed to be in charge of. "Uh, Karen? How much longer until the police get here?", he asked while trying to rock and shush the small child.
"They should be here within eight minutes. You should be prepared to make a quick exit in seven."

Not knowing what to do next, Peter turned his attention to the little girl in his arms, his heart was still racing. "Hey, hey, listen, kid, Don't cry, you're alright. I know you're, uh, you're still kind of scared but the police are on their way and, and you're safe. yeah?" That seemed to help the little girls crying became less hysterical even if she was still crying. Peter figured that was the best he was going to get at the moment. At least she was no longer screaming in his ear. That helped. He could think a little more clearly now.

"Okay, okay, you can do this. You're Spider-man", he said out loud to himself, while still trying to soothe the little girl with rocking motions and periodically throwing in a quiet 'It's okay, kid, I've got you. You're alright. You're safe. Everything's fine.', not ever piecing together that he sounded just like Tony did whenever he was trying to calm him. "Alright, Karen can you give me a count down to the police' arrival. Ned, stay on the line in case I need back up. Okay? Happy's not answering but if I get into trouble keep trying. You still have his number right?"

Both, the AI and Ned confirmed that they understood at the same time allowing Peter some relief. There was a plan.

That taken care of he turned his attention back to the still sobbing child. He needed to get her to understand what was about to happen. "What's your name, Kiddo?", he asked in what he hoped was a reassuring tone, as he anxiously watched the countdown in the corner of his vision.

"Kaitlyn", a small voice provided between sobs.

"Alright, Kate here's what's going to happen. The police are going to be here in, um, three minutes, so as soon as we hear the sirens I'm going to put you down right there", he said pointing towards a tree right outside the alley. "You're going to wait there until the nice police officer comes to take you to your mom, yeah?"

"I'm scared", the child wailed in his ear causing him to flinch.

"I know, I know", he said bouncing the girl on his hip and pointing towards the top of the building beside them. "but, uh, I'll be right up there watching you. You're safe."

About that time, the sirens Peter had been hearing for the last several seconds became close enough for the girl to hear and she looked pleadingly at Peter as he set her down by the tree. "I know, Kate,
I get it, but you're alright. I'll be right up there", he called out as she shot a web towards the building he had identified and that's where he sat until the police finished what they needed to do and the child was giving him a small wave as she was placed in a car seat in the back of a police car.

It wasn't until then that he'd realized that he had missed a return call from Happy and both Ned and Karen were trying to warn him of the time. It was already four minutes after five. The tension that had finally started to leave his chest was back again as he thought about the possible consequences of being late. He should have called Happy but instead, he propelled himself in the direction of SI, Karen, providing him with the quickest route.

He had nearly made it to the alley where his clothes were when Tony's face popped up in his line of vision. Before Peter could get out any kind of excuse Tony was holding up his hands. "It's okay, Kid, Karen sent me the footage. You did great. Just calm down and get back safely alright?"

As soon as Tony had stepped out of his meeting just before five, he was met by Happy who was apologizing up and down for missing a call from Peter and was near panicked that the kid hadn't answered when he called back, only moments before.

When Happy said that Peter hadn't even left a message he was beyond worried. If the boy had wanted a ride, he would have left a message or texted the man like he'd been asked to do. Walking down to the lobby there was no Peter in sight, thus increasing the man's level of anxiety. About that time, Karen sent an urgent message to his phone in the form of video footage from Peter's suit.

Stepping into a small empty conference room he immediately projected the video. If Karen had felt the need to send it then it must be important. Tony watched at first with horror as his kid panicked, not knowing how to handle the situation he was in. Soon after pride took over as he listened to Peter collect himself enough to calm the girl down and come up with a solid plan. It didn't get past him that the boy was imitating the same tone and words he often used with the boy when he was equally distressed. The video footage ended with Peter telling the girl that he would stay there and watch until over her until the police took her back to her mom. He didn't know he was capable of feeling that much pride in someone else until that moment.

A quick look at the boy's vitals and location showed that his heart rate was still way too high and that he was movie quickly towards the building. After everything the kid had been through and accomplished, he was still worried about missing curfew. Tony sighed and called the kid up. He didn't want him panicking across the city trying to avoid being in trouble.

After reassuring the Peter that he wasn't in any trouble, he agreed to meet Peter in the car, by the alley where his backpack was. Pulling up to the curve they found a fidgeting Peter standing there waiting, backpack tossed over his shoulder. Tony wanted to jump out of the car, hold onto him and never let him go but he knew that would only serve to draw attention. So, he sat in the back of the
car waiting for the boy to quickly climb in. Not wasting any time, Tony pulled the boy into a hug. "I am so, so proud of you kid."

"Yeah? I panicked though... what if I had done the wrong thing?", the kid asked in trepidation.

Tony relented and let go of the kid in order to make eye contact. "Pete, you did a great job. Yeah, you panicked a little but you know what? You still did the right thing. You pulled it together and allowed yourself to think it through and that couldn't have been easy with that kid screaming in your ear like that. I know that must have been hell on your senses, Kiddo. The important thing is that that little girl is safe because of you.

Peter nodded in confirmation before dropping his body abruptly onto the man's side. The adrenalin was finally abating and shakey exhaustion was taking over. "Can, can we get something to eat?", he asked, voice trembling slightly.

"Of course, anything in particular that you want?", Tony asked readjusting himself to accommodate the weight that was now digging into his ribs.

"No. ...well, whatever's closest. I think, I think I need to eat. Like, soon. I don't feel good." It didn't happen often but sometimes after a particularly rousing patrol, his blood sugar would drop too quickly with the adrenaline crash.

Happy having heard the conversation, turned directly into a McDonald's drive-through. Order in hand, Peter instantly drank down an entire large coke, hoping that the sugar and caffeine would help. It wasn't until that done that he started eating the food Happy had ordered him. He was relieved when he felt finally better afterward and was able to relax. He thought he would fall asleep but sometime, within the hour, the drink he had so greedily taken in was having its effect on him and he found himself in need of yet another stop. My God, all he wanted to do was get back to the compound. Frustrated, he sat up from where he'd been leaning on the window. "If it's okay, can we can stop somewhere please?"

Tony, who had been engaging with his phone glanced over at him. "We can if we need to. You alright?"

"Mm-hmm, I'm fine. Just need a bathroom.", he said tiredly, rubbing his hands up and down his face.
"Okay. Not a problem", Tony said casually while nodding in understanding. He should have been expecting that. "Happy?"

"Yeah, I got it boss", the man replied sounding nearly as tired as Peter did.

All of his needs met, Peter had to fight to stay awake for the remainder of the ride and carried himself slowly inside to shower and put on his most comfy clothes, which happened to be Tony's sweat pants and t-shirt from the very first night.
Chapter 27

It wasn't even eight-thirty by the time Peter made it back out into the living room, glancing around the room he didn't see Tony anywhere. "FRIDAY, Where did Tony go?", he asked, somewhat confused. He'd only been in the shower for ten minutes and the man had already left?

The AI took no time at all answering his inquiry. "The boss is in his personal lab and wanted me to remind you that you are no longer grounded."

That brought a smile to Peter's face. As tired as he was he hadn't even considered that it was Monday and he was allowed back into the lab areas. Somewhat perked up by that news, he grabbed his shoes bounded towards the elevator. When he entered the lab he almost sighed with satisfaction. He had missed being there. He'd missed the smell, the sounds, the various flashed of light and sparks but mostly he'd missed Tony's company.

Before he could make it ten steps in Tony was already talking to him, eyes never leaving the screen he was studying. "Hey, Kid! Welcome back. Got anything you want to work on? It's been a while.” He seemed to be just as pleased to have Peter back as Peter was to be back.

Peter smiled and shook his head in the negative. "Not really, I mean, not right now. Can I just watch for a bit? I wanted to go see Aunt May, then maybe I'll come back and work on something.”, he said smile never leaving his face.

"Sounds good, Kiddo", he said before really taking a moment to look the boy over. "... hey, aren't those my clothes?" He was half smiling and sounded amused but had his arms crossed over his chest like as if he didn't approve.

"Uh huh. So, now you're a clothes thief, are you?"

"This is the stuff you handed me when I first got here. It got mixed with my stuff in the laundry and I never remembered to return it. It's, it's comfortable.", he added shrugging his shoulders.

"I see, and you don't own any comfortable clothes? You have to highjack mine?", the man teased.
"No, Mr. Stark! I, I do... they're just, just not, not here.", the boy stuttered slightly, feeling put on the spot, even though he knew the man was only messing with him.

Tony dropped the act as soon as the kid started stuttering. "It's fine, Pete, you can keep them. We really need to go grab you some more clothes from your apartment, better yet, get some new ones. You can keep some of them here if you'd like. I'm not trying to replace your wardrobe."

Peter, now feeling better about the situation, sat down on a tall stool near his mentor, his heels didn't touch the floor, thus leaving room for him to kick his feet as he thought about what his mentor had just said. "All the clothes are the apartment are for winter... or dirty. I got all the clean stuff when we went there before.", he said before hopping back off the stool and crossing the distance between himself and Tony. He was trying to get a good look at what the man was doing.

"Sound like we need to go shopping to me", the man said with a grin.

Peter huffed. "Why does everyone want me to go shopping?"

It struck Tony, that the kid didn't decline but he chose to ignore that at the moment. "Because it's fun."

"It's really not.", he answered drily. "What are you working on?"

"I beg to differ, shopping is extremely fun. You've never been shopping with me. I make it fun."

"Okay, fine, you make it fun. Awesome. What are you working on?", he replied impatiently. The code in front of him looked complicated and he was itching to know what it was for. Coding wasn't his strong suit but he really wanted to learn and there was no one better to learn it from than Tony Stark himself.

Tony finally turned to look at the kid again. "Geez, Kid. Relax, will ya?. It's some incomplete code for the new Iron Man Mark I've been toying with. It's nowhere near ready to test or anything. I'm literally just messing around... so you'll go shopping with me?"

The teenager grumbled under his breath before actually answering. "Can we go home when I'm
ready to leave?" Peter hadn't even realized that he'd slipped up and called the compound home but Tony definitely didn't miss it and it brought a genuine smile to his face.

"Look, Pete, I promise that if I start to bore you to death we can come back home. Pinky swear and all that jazz. How about tomorrow? I don't have anywhere else to be."

Peter, shifted on his feet. "Is Pepper going to want to come?" He knew that if she came, he would have to try everything on and that did not sound like any kind of fun. He just hoped that Tony wasn't as much of a stickler for that. I mean, he knew what size he wore. It wasn't that complicated to buy sweat pants and t-shirts.

"She might want to...however, she has to go into the office all day but now I'm curious. Do you not want her to come?", the man asked somewhat amused.

"No, sir... I mean...not, not especially? Last time she made me try on everything and it took forever. I know what size I wear."

Tony smiled and reiterated that Pepper wouldn't be able to come even if she wanted to and that he wouldn't make him try a bunch of things on. They weren't looking for dress clothes, they could stick to the basics. There would be no need for it. That seemed to be enough to make Peter agreeable. Until a thought seemed to strike him and he pulled a face that Tony couldn't quite read.

All but ready to agree, it hit Peter that he had been forced into getting a high-end hair cut just hours before. He didn't want the same thing to happen again. "We're going to go to, like, the mall or something right? Not some weird rich people store where the t-shirts cost forty dollars, right?"

It was all the man could do not to laugh. "Oh my God, Pete, we can go to the mall if that's what you want but for the record, I wasn't planning on taking you to Fifth Avenue or anything."

Already regretting his decision he told the man 'fine' and started to step away to go see May. Before he completely exited the room, he took a deep breath before addressing his mentor one more time. "Oh, um Mr. Sta--Tony?", he asked. The man didn't look up but he gave a noise to indicate that he was listening. "I was, um, wondering... if, if you could maybe help me work on coding and stuff. It's, I want to be better at it and, and you're really good at it so, I was... you know, just wondering. You can say no! I mean, I took a class at school but it was pretty basic. I, uh, I had wanted to, um, test out of it and go on to the next one but, I, sort of missed that day and then--"
"--Kid!" he half shouted, in order to stop the kid's rambling before it could digress any further. "Yes. yes, we can do that. I don't know when, but we'll make time. Now, you should go see May before it gets any later." He shook his head and smiled as he watched the kid scurry happily out the door yelling 'thank you!' over his shoulder.

May was happy to see her nephew walk in the door and noticed right away that his hair had been cut. This lead Peter into an animated explanation of the entire ordeal, including showing her the picture that he had taken of himself outside of the shop. She laughed and asked question throughout the story quipping about how nice it would be to be pampered like that. He didn't agree but she insisted. They went back and forth about it for some times before he eventually let her win the ridiculous argument with a laugh.

After a quiet moment, May asked him how is patrol went. That was unusual. She didn't typically ask him that. Not that she wasn't interested, on the contrary, she seemed to enjoy listening to him ramble and carry on about what he had been up to while out and about. The thing was, she typically waited for him to come to her. "It was good. W-why do you ask?", he questioned trying to sound casual.

"Well, Tony sent me a message and a video earlier. He seemed awfully proud of you. His exact words were 'Will you look at this kid, isn't he amazing?'. I'd be willing to bet that Pepper got the same message. I agree with him. You are pretty amazing and what you did for that girl was incredible."

"I don't why everyone is so proud.", Peter said, twisting his nose up in self-deprecation. "I literally panicked."

"You did", May stated matter-of-factly. "Then you were able to reel it in and do what you needed to do to get the job done. That girl is safe because of you. You were her hero today.", she said with a smile.

While he still wasn't one hundred present happy with the way he handled the situation as a while, he knew that everyone was right about one part. He had saved that girl, Kaitlyn. She was safe with her family because of him and he decided that that was something he could be proud of.

They talked for a little while longer until Peter was ready to do nothing else but lay in his bed. He bid May good-night with a hug and left to go back up to the suite. He was only slightly surprised to find Pepper was there alone. She had just gotten back from a business dinner but Tony was nowhere in sight. He would have thought that the man would have come up to see her when she arrived. "Hi, Pepper. Where's Tony?", he asked, still scanning the room as if he would appear at any moment.
"He's still in his lab. Don't worry, I'll drag him back up here by midnight to go to bed.", she smiled warmly. "Did you need something or were you just asking?", she inquired from across the room where she was getting a glass of water.

"I just wondered.", he said before bouncing slightly on his toes. "I think I'm gonna go down and see him for a minute.", he added mumbling. Pepper nodded and moved down the hall towards the bedroom saying something about changing into something more comfortable. Peter made a small sound to signal that he was listening and left the moment she disappeared into the room.

Reentering the lab, he found his mentor right where he'd left him, still working on the same project. He looked deep in thought as he rapidly typed and studied the assortment of letters and numbers displayed before him. Peter was right on the very edge of changing his mind and walking out when the man spotted him. "Hey, Pete. How was your visit? Come to work on something or are you here to hang out?", he asked, still somewhat engrossed in his work.

"Oh, It was good and um, actually, I came down to, uh, to tell you that I'm going to go to bed." He tried to look casual but he was feeling anything but. He had come all the way down there to hug the man good-night and now, it all of the sudden felt silly and childish.

"It's not quite eleven, that's kind of early for you isn't it?", Tony asked still not looking towards him.

"Maybe, I'm tired though. So...", he didn't finish the thought. He had already told the man he intended to go to bed. There was no reason to repeat it.

"Well.", the man said, finally giving Peter his full attention. "If you're tired then you should sleep. I suppose you did have a long day." He smiled and started to cross the room towards him. "Come here", he added, arms open.

Peter was ever so grateful that the man had offered a hug on his own accord. He was sure that he would have lost his nerve and walked out before allowing himself to ask, even if that had been half the reason he had gone looking for him.

He closed the distance between them and embraced the man. "Good-Night, Tony", he mumbled into his mentor's chest.

"G'nite Pete. See you in the morning, yeah?"
"Mm-hmm", Peter agreed as he broke away from Tony. "See you tomorrow.", he said before finally making his way up to his room, offering Pepper a quick 'good-night, as he walked past her down the hall. Unlike most nights, he was sound asleep well before midnight.

The thing about going to bed early is that you wake up early, so when Peter was wide awake before the clock hit nine he wasn’t surprised. He lay there for a few minutes staring at the ceiling, trying to decide if he wanted to get up or not. When he remembered that Tony wanted to take him shopping he groaned and rolled back over, wondering why he had agreed to go in the first place. The only thing that was able to finally convince him to get out of bed was his rumbling stomach.

He quickly ate his breakfast and went straight back into his room. He hoped by not being out in the open when Tony got up that maybe the man would forget about the impromptu plans they’d made the night before. Of course, it didn’t work that way. He wasn’t sure why he thought it would, really. It was right after eleven the man can into his room wearing jeans and a plain white t-shirt, a wide grin spreading across his face. "Hey, kid! It's shopping day! Up and at ‘em!", he called out as he came through the door without so much as a knock.

"I’m up", Peter grumbled. "I've been up... and shouldn't you, like, knock or something?", he added hesitantly.

"It's my house, Kid", he said as if it were obvious.

"Well, what if I was naked or something. Then what?", Peter asked, somewhat haughtily, as he sat up and crossed his over his chest.

"Then I would hope you had a towel handy. Now, Come on, get up. I want to get going soon. Chop-chop"

Suppressing a smile at his mentor's enthusiasm, Peter got up and started getting ready for the day. Tony was waiting for him right by the front door when he exited from the hallway. "You good to go or do you need to eat something first?"

Peter looked briefly toward the kitchen. He had eaten breakfast a couple of hours ago but a snack did sound good. "Um... Can I grab something really quick and take it to the car?", he finally asked. As much as he would love to delay this outing, he could tell Tony was excited and he didn't want to spoil it.
"Sure, Kiddo. Go for it."

"Thanks, Tony", he smiled before hurrying off to collect himself a decent and portable snack before they both made their way to the garage. "Is Happy not coming?", Peter asked curiously as he climbed into the passenger seat. Whenever they went to the hospital, Happy had always come to run interference so they could get to May's room undisturbed, he figured the mall would be worse.

"Nope. You've got me and only me today.", he answered smiling in Peter's direction.

"Oh, Aren't people going to, like, bother you?", the boy asked hesitantly.

"Maybe... but I'm a big boy. I can handle it. Besides, it won't be that bad. I'll take care of anything that might come up.", he said stealing a look in Peter's direction.

Peter nodded his head. "Oh, okay... that's good."

"You're not worried, are you?"

"I was... a little. I'm not now."

"Oh yeah?", he asked, not really expecting an answer, though, knowing Peter he should have.

Peter looked at the man dumbfounded. "Well, yeah. You said it wouldn't be that bad and that you'd handle it, so I don't need to worry anymore."

Looking back over at Peter, Tony smiled because obviously, the kid trusted him emphatically. He couldn't even figure out why but he would try his damnedest to never do anything that would ruin that. "Exactly."

After that, the talking went down to a minimum in favor of singing and drumming along to the radio. Taking turns picking songs and laughing when one or the other forgot the words. They only stopped once in order to eat lunch. The stop had been quick and they soon were back to singing and
When Tony, eventually, pulled into the mall parking lot, Peter was actually disappointed. Not just because they were at the mall but because the ride there had been fun. They started walking towards the front entrance and the closer they got the further the smile on Peter's face dropped. No matter how many times the man promised that this trip would be fun, he had yet to accept it. He would just have to wait and see.

"Oh come on, Kid. Cheer up. I'll buy you some Dippin Dots or a pretzel or something", Tony said as he threw an arm over his shoulders bringing a smile back to Peter's face.
So far, the trip to the mall hadn't been horrendous, of course, they hadn't actually done any shopping yet either. Tony, was true to his word and bought Peter some ice cream the second they walked in the door. They strolled around for a little while, looking in store windows and talking. During which time, hardly anyone disturbed them. In fact, it seemed that most people stared for a moment before moving on. As if they were trying to decide if they had just run into Tony Stark or not. Most of them seemed to decide that it couldn't possibly be him. After all, why would the Tony Stark be at the mall with some random teenager? Tony must have predicted it would go exactly that way.

As Peter was tossing the empty plastic cup and spoon into a nearby trashcan, the window display of the store across from it caught his attention. The store, it's self seemed to carry a random assortment of pop culture items. What caught his eye was a selection of Star Wars figures in cases. He had no intentions of owning one, he just wanted to look so he wandered that direction, Tony following loosely behind.

Tony watched the kid carefully examine the various figures set up by the window, he wanted to rush over and offer to buy them but he didn't want to be pushy so, instead, he wandered around the store himself for a bit. Ultimately he found himself in front of a small display with a random assortment of key chains. Casually spinning it around his eyes landed on a small silver and black key chain in the shape of a spider. He picked it up and turned it over in his hand. It was nearly identical to the emblem on the Spider-man suit, save for a few small details. It only took a split second for a decision to be made. He wasn't going to ask the boy about it. He was just going to give it to him.

Having purchased the small item he slipped it into his pocket and joined the kid at the t-shirt wall where he stood. "Hey, Kid. See anything you like?"

Peter shrugged his shoulders, not taking his eyes off of the large display. "There are a few good ones, I guess."

Tony nodded his head, now scanning the images as well. "I like that one.", he said pointing to a shirt in the top right corner of the wall.

Peter followed the man's finger to find a shirt donning the image of the Iron Man helmet, along with
"You should get that one. I think you need it.", the man laughed.

Peter didn't miss a beat. "I have an Iron Man shirt, thank you."

Tony sputtered on the spot. "You what? How come I've never seen it?"

Peter looked, unamused at the man in question. "Really? You don't know why? Maybe because you would act all weird about it... or laugh... or both probably."

The man didn't respond he just grinned at him because he was probably right. He wasn't going to admit that, though. Instead, he pointed out a shirt with a rainbow-colored kitten on it and suggested that one as well. Peter laughed and declined before pointing out a shirt with a realistically portrayed panda eating a brightly colored doughnut. "Yeah? Maybe you need that one.", he said teasing, before then trying to backtrack when Tony agreed. "Oh my God! I was just kidding. You don't actually need that shirt. Tony! Oh my God...

The kid's reaction was only proving to egg the man on as he proceeded to locate the correct size and toss it over his arm for purchase. "Yep. I'm getting. It's perfect for me.", the man laughed as Peter continues to shake his head in disbelief. "Now I get to pick one for you right? That's how this works? Don't answer that. Of course, that's how this works.", said leaning over to find the cubby with the Iron Man shirts folded in it. "What size?" When Peter didn't answer, he guessed and threw that one over his arm as well. "Still looking or are you ready to move on?"

Peter stared at the man for a moment before deciding there was nothing he could do about it and said he was ready. They walked out the door with Tony carrying the bag, still smiling.

"Where to next Kiddo?", Tony asked over his shoulder, seeing as the boy was walking at least three strides behind him now.

"Home?", Peter tried.

"Nope. No can do. Come on, you never go to the mall with Ned?", the man asked, pausing so that the boy could catch up.
"Well, I mean, we do sometimes but mostly just so we can go to the arcade or the Lego Store when Ned's grandma sends him some money."

"Okay. Lego Store it is. Let's find a map of this place.", he said dragging the boy along by his bicep towards a sign that looked like it could have a map on it.

They were soon on their way to the other side of the mall. As they passed the pretzel stand, Peter hesitated slightly but ended up quickly moving to keep in step with his mentor. Tony noticed of course and halted. "Did you want one?", the man asked.

"Oh, um, they just smelled good. I don't need one or anything. I'm fine."

Tony sighed and took a step to stand directly in front of the kid. "I didn't ask if you needed one. I asked if you wanted one.", he explained slowly as if he were talking to a toddler.

"I, uh, I mostly, mostly just want a drink... I'm thirsty.", Peter finally admitted. He really was thirsty. He had been ever since he'd finished the ice cream. He just didn't want to bring it up. He figured that at some point they would pass a water fountain and he would be fine but if the man was offering a pretzel maybe he wouldn't mind getting him a drink.

"Alright, let's get a drink then. Lemonade?", he asked the boy as he studied the drink options.

"Yes, please. That sounds good."

Tony ended up getting them each a lemonade and a pretzel, after which they made their way to the Lego Store. Peter took his time going around the store pointing out the different sets that he had and which ones he and Ned had worked on together. Laughing about how they'd essentially had to build the Death Star twice. At some point, he meandered over to a large table filled with a large assortment of legos pieces and started snapping them together. As he did so, his mentor continued to walk around the store and look at the collection of projects they had to offer. By the time he'd made his way back to where Peter was, the boy had built an architecturally sound bridge and had done so with great detail. "Did you build that or did you find it in there and finish it?", he asked.

Peter, who was still focusing on placing the final pieces on his creation never looked up. "Oh, I built. I could have done better but there are only so many pieces here.", he answered casually.
Tony was in awe. He knew the kid was great at engineering, he'd built his own web shooters after all. This was different. The boy had literally thrown together and sturdy and appealing structure in less than ten minutes. "It looks good. You did that in ten minutes?", the man asked almost proudly.

"Mm-hmm, well, I mean I wasn't timing it or anything I just know I didn't spend much time on it. I've made more interesting ones. Are you ready to go?"

"Not if you aren't. We not in any kind of rush, though we do need to get you some more clothes before we leave today. You want to pick out one of these sets to work on at the compound?"

Peter peered up at the man. "Will you do it with me?"

Tony wasn't expecting the teenager to ask him that. He assumed the boy would work on it with his friend when he visited on Friday. "I can if you want me to. What about you and Ned? Maybe you should pick two sets?"

"Can I? I mean, that's not too much? They're kind of expensive.", Peter said hesitantly.

Tony rolled his eyes but smiled. "Look who you're talking to, Kid. I think I can handle two Lego sets."

They walked around the store and Peter ended up picking two of the smaller sets. He picked up a small model of the Iron Man helmet to work on with Tony and a model the Avengers jet to work on with Ned. Tony, of course, insisted that he was being too modest and went ahead and picked up a giant box containing a model of large Star Wars ship. Peter didn't even get a good look at which one it was before the man had it up on the counter.

The kid didn't complain as much as Tony thought he would at the checkout. Of course, Peter had wandered off by the time the total come up, which was probably for the best.

After that stop, Tony insisted that they get the bulk of the clothes shopping out of the way. Peter didn't spend too much time complaining. After the man had already spent a fortune on Legos for him and he didn't want to seem ungrateful. Yet, he was surprised when the trip inside the clothing store only took about thirty minutes or so. Tony didn't make him try anything on and he was thankful beyond measure.
Back into the busy mall corridor, Tony half expected the kid to ask to go home again. When he didn't he made his way towards a book store that looked like it carried shirts and a few other interesting items that the teenager might like. He must have been right because the second they walked into the store, Peter was pointing out the things he thought were funny before wandering off to flip through some T-shirts that were hanging on a rack. At that point, Tony went back up to the front of the store where there were some comfy armchairs and sat down to check his phone. He was caught off guard when the boy came up beside him and requested his attention. "Um, Mr. Sta-- Tony?", he'd asked quietly.

Tony was starting to catch on that the boy reverted back to the more formal title whenever he was nervous about something. "Yeah, Pete?", he murmured still looking down at his phone. He hoped that by remaining casual, the boy would relax.

"I um, I was wondering, I mean, could you come to look at these shirts?", the kid had asked him hesitantly, staring at the floor.

"Sure.", he replied, slipping his phone back into his pocket and grunting slightly as he stood to follow.

Once they made their way over to the rack of random shirts, Peter pulled out a couple that he'd liked. Tony laughed, appropriately at the puns and asked the kid if he wanted them. When Peter cautiously confirmed that he did, the man was elated and happily made his way up to the register to pay for the items. It was there, that the first person of the day had actually noticed or cared that Tony Stark was at the mall. The cashier having seen the name on the credit card was instantly asking to take a picture. Of course, after that, word spread fast and everyone wanted to have their picture taken with him or get him to sign things.

With all of that to compete with, the trip was no longer fun. Tony seemed to be occupied by everyone else, even when he was telling them no, that he didn't have time for pictures at the moment. By the time they made it to the gaming store, Peter had reluctantly agreed to go to, he was no longer interested in looking instead he paused just outside the door where people were still watching them. "Mr. Stark? Can we just go home now? Please?"

Tony sighed but agreed. He knew that the people pointing and crowding around him was enough to make the boy uncomfortable. "Sure, Buddy. I'm glad we got you some new things. Those Lego sets will look great in your new room. Yeah?", he said as he placed his arm over the boy's shoulders, not considering the repercussions of that move on a PR level. He was more interested in getting the kid more relaxed.
"Yes, sir.", Peter answered quietly while still avoiding eye contact with all of the people looking back at him.

Tony smiled at him. The 'yes, sir' and 'no, sir' business was starting to fade away during casual conversations. Though just like the title 'Mr. Stark', it would reappear when the boy was anxious. In a way, he was glad. It gave him something to gauge the boy's discomfort by.

Not too long after getting back on the road, they ended up stopping for dinner, choosing to use the drive-through and sit in the car rather than going in. Tony, having finished his food, sat in the front seat waiting until Peter to be ready to go. Looking down at his phone he was met with multiple notifications from FRIDAY about his name circulating on social media. He inwardly groaned before unlocking the phone to check on the alerts. The first on the list was a trending picture of him at the mall with his arm around Peter as they exited the Game store. He was endlessly grateful that the boy's anxious nature had him mostly looking at the floor. It was hard to make out his features and no one seemed to have figured out his name, though most people seemed to assume it was 'Stark Jr.'

A moment or two later, Peter had gotten out to throw away all of the trash and refill his drink, so he had a moment alone in the car. Sighing, he dialed Pepper, she would know best how to sort this out. "Pepper, love of my life--"

"--I've already seen it Tony", the woman interrupted with no heat. "I've contacted PR and we're going to go with the truth. He's a family friend and a minor, we ask that people respect his privacy. They're already putting out the social media fires."

Tony was quiet for a second. "I feel like you have had a plan for this all along", he finally stated.

"Of course I did", she laughed. "I'm actually shocked that it took this long for pictures and theories to circulate.", she laughed. "I can see how they would mistake Peter for your son. From afar, he looks an awful lot like you and his age alone makes it seem like a likely possibility. Given your past... tendencies... I had a plan in place from the moment you started seeing him regularly."

"That, my dear, is why I love you so much", he said and the remainder of their conversation was brief and focused mainly on the highlights of the mall trip. "Alright, Pepper, Kid's heading back to the car. See you soon.", he added hanging up before the boy made it all the way to the passenger side door.

As soon as Peter got it the car he could see that something wasn't right. Tony looked... concerned. "What, What happened?", he asked sounding unsettled.
"Nothing you need to worry about right now.", Tony began, trying to sound more collected than he felt. "Just, some pictures made it to the internet, people, uh, people think that... well, that you're mine." He looked over at the boy who was staring wide-eyed at him and took a breath. "Pepper's already on it. There will be a statement put out, saying that you're a family friend and reminding people that you're a minor so they should leave you alone."

"Oh.", was all Peter could manage for a moment. He sat in the seat looking at Tony who was looking back at him with worry before he spoke again. "I, I guess... wait, do people know who I am? I mean, I know they think I'm your's but, but they don't know who I really am... right?"

Tony was unsure if the boy meant his real identity or his secret one but the answer was the same nonetheless. "No. No one knows your name or who you are and we won't be telling them. We may have to say more one day but not today. Right now, we're just putting out the fires. Hopefully people with move on after we address it."

"So, so, like, what about the pictures?"

"What about them?", Tony asked. He wasn't sure if the kid was asking if they could be deleted or if he was recognizable in them.

Peter was now wringing his hands in his lap. The last thing he wanted was for the kid from his school to see pictures of him walking around the mall with Tony. They already didn't believe him that he knew the man, let alone that he's been spending the summer with him. It would get turned every which way but the truth and it would be far worse than anything the media could come up with, he didn't want that. "Can you see me? Will people know it's me?"

Tony sighed again. "You can't see your face clearly if that's what your asking. At least not in the ones I've seen. FRIDAY will alert me as soon as anything new pops up." When the boy quietly nodded, he reached over and grabbed ahold of the kid's twisting hands with one of his own and flicked his phone with the other in order to project the offending images between them. In one, Peter was looking down and to the side, you could only see a slightly backlit profile. The other was only the back of his head, as Tony who had his arm around him was looking back over his shoulder assessing the small crowd.

"Okay, that's not so bad.", Peter answered sounding relieved. No one would be able to prove that it was him.
"No, It's really not. As far as these things go, this should clear up pretty easily.", the man smiled.
"You ready to go back?"

"Mm-hmm. I'm ready.", he answered, snapping his seat belt. "Thank you for taking me to the mall, Tony. It was fun... I guess.", he added, smiling with sincerity.

Tony laughed. "Because I'm fun. We've been over this, Kiddo... but, you're welcome.", he smiled. "Any time."
Walking back into the penthouse, large Old Navy bag in tow, Tony was happy to see Pepper was already home. "I didn't realize you would be back. I grabbed an early dinner with the kid. Did you eat? I could make you something.", he offered, setting the bag down on one of the kitchen stools.

Pepper got up from the couch and walked towards the kitchen where Tony stood. "Actually, I haven't had anything yet.", she said setting the man in motion to prepare her something to eat. "How was the mall? Is that all you got him?"

Having gotten everything he needed to create a decent salad out of the refrigerator, Tony wandered back over to the counter before answering. "Mall was great for a while and no, I got him other things too."

"Oh? Like what? Where is he by the way?", she asked settling herself down onto a stool.

"He went down to see May and took all of the quote-unquote, 'fun things' with him to show her.", he smirked.

Pepper smiled as she watched her fiance, cut up and collect all the various vegetables into a bowl. "Hmm, what sort of fun stuff"

"I want to say he was mostly interested in showing her the Lego sets but he took the more interesting t-shirts we bought with him too. What dressing do you want? We have Ranch ala Kid, all-natural blue cheese and an orange vinaigrette"

Laughing, Pepper reached for the vinaigrette. "Sounds like you two had a good time."

Tony stood at the counter across from Pepper picking at the leftover vegetables laying on the cutting board and went on to relay the highlights of their trip, including the shirt he had gotten himself, at Peter's teasing suggestion. By the time he had finished and was pouring Pepper a glass of wine,
Peter walked in the door. “Oh, hi Pepper. I, uh, didn't know you were here…”, he said, feeling like he had interrupted something.

“Hi, Peter. How's May doing? I haven't had a chance to visit her today.”, Pepper asked warmly, having noticed the boys hesitation.

“She's good. Um, she's getting better.”, he said holding the bags he'd carried up close to himself.

“Tony said you two had fun at the mall today. What did you get?”

“Oh! He got me some Legos. I picked these two.”, he said pulling the two smaller boxes out of the bag. "...and Tony picked this one. I told him he didn't have to but it's really cool. Ned's going to love it.”, he answered enthusiastically before picking up the other bags and pulling the shirts out, passing one to Tony. "Here's yours.”, he said with mock irritation, giving the ridiculous shirt to the man standing before him, and proceeding to show Pepper the two shirts he had picked for himself along with the one Tony had insisted on buying him.

After loading all of the things back into bags he headed towards his room to call Ned. Meanwhile, in the living room, Pepper finished her glass of wine and Tony read a book that the kid had left lying around. He was actually getting drawn into the ridiculous story when Pepper called him. "...Tony!", he finally heard her say.

“Hmm? Sorry.”, he grumbled. "Come again?"

"I said, you remember I'm leaving for Hong Kong tomorrow evening, right? I'll be gone at least ten days."

The truth was he hadn’t remembered that. Well, he remembered she had an upcoming trip to Hong Kong, he just hadn't remembered that it was starting tomorrow. "Already? You just got back.”, he practically pouted as he folding up the book and set it back on the coffee table where he'd found it.

"I know but you knew this was going to happen when I split my trip to California. After this trip, I should be in New York for a while unless that Dubai contract goes through and if that's the case, you're coming too."

"What about the kid?", Tony asked with one eyebrow quirked.
Pepper rolled her eyes. "We're talking at least two to three weeks from now. If he's still here, he'll have his aunt or, he could just come with you if he wants to." She paused to gauge the man's reaction. Seeing that his face had fallen at her flawless logic, she laughed before taking on a slightly more serious tone. "You won't be able to get out of this that easily.", she added with a smirk.

Tony scoffed, "I wasn't trying to get out of anything. I just don't want the kid wandering around without supervision. That's all.", he said trying to sound confident but faltering slightly under his future wife's, knowing gaze. Then picking the book back up, he changed the subject. "What about that pool. Did you get a chance to look into that?"

"I did, actually. They want to come by tomorrow and look at the area. They can start working on it right away. Said it could be ready in as little as ten days if they don't have to do any dramatic leveling. I told them you would be here if they had any questions. We've already everything, they shouldn't really need anything else, but you could handle that right?"

Rolling his eyes, Tony glared at her. "Of course I can handle that. Who do you think I am?"

"I think you're you.", she smiled back, leaning in for a kiss. "You don't have any SI meetings tomorrow. Are you meeting with the Accords?"

"Not this week. I may need to go to Washington for the next one, I, uh, may have pissed some people off last time."

Pepper almost rolled her eyes. "Really? That doesn't sound like you at all.", she said with obvious sarcasm.

"What? I was on time, they were all late, I had to be somewhere with the kid. Rhodey had it under control.", the man defended.

"I know how important these amendments are to you. What happened?"

"I told the kid I would take him to his friend's house. The meeting ran stupid late because no one else bothered to be on time and I may have accidentally called the kid my kid and that seemed to shut everyone up for once... Don't worry I told them he was my intern. and not like, my actual kid. Either way, I walked out, Rhodey filled me in later."
"Tony...", the woman nearly whined as she laid her head back on the couch. "Oh my God, I can only put out so many fires. Please, get yourself under control."

"I know, I know", the man grumbled before declaring himself ready to move to the bedroom.

As he walked down the hallway he heard the kid still awake and peeked his head in. The boy was lying across his bed with the old physics book he'd brought with him. "Hey, Kiddo, I'm going to bed with Pepper. You get all of your stuff put away?"

"Yeah, I did.", he answered before closing his book. "What are we doing tomorrow?"

"Not much. I don't have any meetings and Pepper's leaving for her trip tomorrow night. Why do you ask?" Peter shrugged his shoulders, staring at the bed and Tony gave him a full minute to tag something onto that before getting annoyed. "Why. Do. You. Ask?", he repeated slowly to prompt the boy into speaking.

Peter's eyes lifted to his mentor's face. "I was just wondering if we could do the Legos tomorrow. That's all. We don't have to if you don't want to, Tony. I understand."

Uncrossing his arms and softening his features Tony strode across the room towards the boy on the bed. "That sounds good Kiddo," He said reaching out to pat the kid's shoulder. "I'm going to bed okay? Pepper's waiting on me. You staying up?"

"It's only ten-thirty.", Peter pointed out with question.

Tony quirked an eyebrow. "I said I was going to bed, not that I was going to sleep."

Peter's eyes grew comically wide. "Ew, Mr. Stark, that's, that's ... ew."

Laughing in earnest at the teenager's flustered reply, Tony moved his hand from Peter's shoulder up to his hair, running his fingers gently through it. He couldn't help but notice the way the boy leaned into his hand as it made its way across his scalp. "Good night, Buddy. You know where to find me."
Nodding his head, Peter sat up on the bed and looked towards his mentor. "Mm-hmm. Good-night."

Seeing as the kid had sat up, Tony, leaned over to give the kid a quick hug. "Go to sleep soon, yeah?" The boy nodded his head and he made his way out of the room and the rest of the way down the hall into his own bedroom where Pepper was waiting.

Back in his own room, he found Pepper already in the bed waiting for him. As he reached into his pockets to empty them onto the dresser, his fingers wrapped around the keychain he'd forgotten he had purchased. Turning it over in his hand he smiled before setting it down beside his wallet. He briefly contemplating saving it for when the boy turned sixteen in a few weeks time but, in reality, he knew he wouldn't be able to hold off that long. The kid was going to love it.

The next morning, Pepper got up early to pack and go finish a few things at the office before her flight. Both, Tony and Peter were up to see her off, leaving them once again alone up in the penthouse together. This time, however, Tony felt more confident. He was way more comfortable with his role in Peter's life and May was just an elevator ride away if he needed advice.

Breakfast out of the way, Peter disappeared into his room only to reappear moments later, Lego box in hand. "Hey, Tony? Do you want to do this with me? I mean, I understand if you have work to do. I just wanted to ask." He shifted a bit on his feet as he awaited his mentor's response.

"Sure, Pete. We can work on that for a little while. I also want us to go over some of those StarkPhone features today. I'd like to have a proposal by the end of the month."

"Okay!", Peter readily answered. Making his way over towards the coffee table to tear into the box. When he and Ned worked on Legos, they generally did so on the floor but Peter figured Tony might prefer to be on the couch for his part.

The first several minutes of Peter laughing in delight as he had to explain how the directions worked several times before carefully disclosing that he and Ned usually didn't use them at all. Figuring it out on their own was half the fun.

It took a little time for Tony to get into the same rhythm as the kid. He found himself having to occasionally reference the small instruction packet and was overly impressed when Peter would catch him doing so and proceed to talk him through whatever step they were at without even glancing at the pictures. They had been working on it for a little over an hour, they were nearly
halfway through it and Tony felt like he was actually slowing the kid down when FRIDAY announced a delivery. It took a split second for him to realize that it was all of the new things for Peter's room that had been checked in and sent up.

Peter looked at all of the packages with his arms crossed. He was sure all they had ordered was a bed set, some curtains, a few posters, and a rug. This looked like way too many boxes. "Is some of this for something else?", he asked. "It's not all mine, is it? This looks like too much."

"Oh, I may have added a couple of things after you walked off. If you hate it we don't have to use it but I think you'll like it just fine.", the man replied with a smirk on his face.

The Legos lay forgotten as they opened parcels and tore through packaging. The new sheets and blankets were sent for an immediate wash at Tony's insistence because washing them would make them softer. As such they ended up hanging the red curtains first, Peter climbing the wall to get them in place over the near ceiling high window. Tony blinked in astonishment as he did so. Sure, he had seen the kid do his spider thing a hundred times over but it never ceased to amuse him to see the boy doing such things as Peter. Watching a teenager, dressed in sweat pants and a t-shirt crawl all over your walls and ceiling wasn't something you see every day. Once the curtains were in place, Tony called him down. "Alright, Spider-boy get down here so we can take care of the rest of this stuff."

"Okay!", Peter shouted happily as he flipped gracefully to the floor right in front of Tony.

The majority of the decor was generic but in Peter's favorite colors, red. The comforter he had chosen was red on one side and black on the other, while the sheets they had agreed on had an almost indistinguishable pattern on them. They appeared to be solid black but upon inspection, you could see the alternating flat and glossy checkers. The rug was nothing more than a large red circle that sat right before the bed. Tony watched as Peter put it all into place, periodically checking with FRIDAY about the status of the pool contractors, happy that they had not needed anything from him.

This much accomplished they stopped for lunch. Before adding the finishing touches. Tony had managed to sneak the Star Wars themed lamp and desk set into the order, Peter was grateful of course but still managed to make it awkward. "You, you didn't have to do that. I mean, there was already a lamp there and I, mean I didn't need those things. Of course, I guess I didn't need any of it, but, but, thank you. I kno--"

"--I got it because I wanted you to have it", the man cut in. "There's one more box. I'm sure it's the posters you picked and maybe one or two other small things I threw in there.", he smiled.
Peter hesitated but got into the last box. He pulled out the two posters he had selected on his own first. One that featured the Periodic Table and a replica of the original Star Wars movie poster. Seeing a third poster in the box he slowly unrolled it and gave a half sort of laugh. "Really Tony?"

"I thought you could use one more poster and you had already left so I just picked one I thought you would like...", the man stated faining innocence, as he eyed the Iron Man poster he had added to the cart before watching the boy dig deeper into the last box.

Peter pulled out several flat boxes of varying sizes. Opening each one slowly, he found several matching, empty picture frames in varying sizes. Peter looked at the man in question. "Picture frames?", he asked not ungratefully. He just wasn't sure what the man had in mind.

"Yeah, I uh, noticed that you keep a cork board in your room in your apartment with pictures all over it. I thought you might like to have some here too but I figured having them in frames over the desk would look nice. I only got eight but we can get more... as many as you want."

Peter found the gesture to be a bit overwhelming and set them down so he could stroll across the room towards his mentor. "Thank you. I, uh, I actually love pictures.", he said before quietly adding. They help you remember things or people... even after they're gone."

Tony smiled and wrapped the kid in his arms. "I'm glad you like them. You'll tell me if you want more right?"

"I want more", Peter softly laughed into the man's chest.

"I'll order enough to cover the entire wall if that's what you want" He smiled at the boy and brought his hand up to the back of his head, raking his finger through his hair causing the boy to sigh.

A short time later, they were down in the lab. Peter was agonizing over which pictures to print. Tony wanted to try and help but the entire ordeal seemed entirely too personal. As he worked on his own project, Peter would come over to him from time to time just to show him a photograph. By far his favorite so far was a picture of an overjoyed Peter standing between May and Ben Parker holding up a blue ribbon he had received for a school science fair. May and Peter were looking right at the camera while Ben was looking proudly towards Peter, though the smile on his face was clear and evident.

In the end when Peter was done with the printing and had started working on getting the pictures into
the frames, Tony was surprised to see that he had earned a spot on Peter's wall. He didn't even know the picture existed. From what Peter told him, May had taken it one day while Tony was at their apartment. In the picture, Peter was sitting at the kitchen table clearly working on homework. His head was resting on his hand as he looks up at Tony who slightly leaned over and looking down at him. He had one hand on the boy's shoulder while the other was pointing to something in the text. They were both smiling. "Can you print me one of those too?", he asked casually. He didn't know why but something about that picture made his heart swell.

"Sure", Peter said without question.

"Is that the only picture she took of us?", he asked trying to sound not completely interested.

"I don't know...It's the only one I know about. I had her send it to my phone."

"Hmm", Tony hummed, "It's a good picture."

They both jumped when FRIDAY announced that there were multiple media files of the two of them together stored in The Baby Book file.

Tony looked towards the ceiling in question. He only remembered having two or three snapshots and a handful of short videos clips saved but the AI made it sound like there was more than that. "Show me what you've got, darling."

All of a sudden the two of them were surrounded by what had to be more than fifty images. The AI had created its own algorithm based on the stills that Tony had asked to be stored and sort of ran away with it. There were pictures of Tony and Peter asleep on the couch, of Peter and Pepper in the kitchen together laughing, of Peter with Tony in the garage and Pictures of May, Pepper and Tony all in May's room smiling as Peter spoke. "Would you look at that", he whispered in awe. "Good girl.", he added under his breath examining each picture with a smile.

After a moment or two, his waved his hands dismissing the display and looked at Peter "I, uh, suppose we should get some work done on that phone of your, huh?" When Peter nodded in agreement, the settled down at the closest workbench to talk.
They spent several hours in the lab discussing features and testing out how well certain functions would work at a lower capacity before Peter complained that he was starving. Glancing at his watch, the man could understand why. While it was only around five-thirty, they had been in the workshop since two with no significant breaks. "Pizza?" When Peter hesitated he rolled his eyes amended his question. "Snack now, then Pizza?"

"Yeah, that sounds good. Can we get extra cheese?"

"Of course... FRIDAY can you order us a few pizzas? The usual but add extra cheese." Once the AI had confirmed that pizza had been ordered and was due to arrive within the hour the pair headed upstairs.

Tony sat on the couch and called out some movie choices as Peter proceeded to peel a second orange while snacking on the segments of the first one. "Whatever you want to watch is fine.", he called back across the room between bites.

The man turned around on the couch in order to look at the boy behind him. "Kid, last time I picked you complained the whole time that it was 'old' and 'boring'.", he reminded the kid flatly.

"Fine. Let's watch, um...", the last words sort of trailed off into a mumbled string of syllables. The choice had been impulsive, the idea jumped into his head and was out of his mouth before he had time to think it through. He had regretted his answer the second it hit his tongue but there wasn't much to stop it.

"Come again?", the man asked in amusement rather than annoyance.

Giving a huff, Peter shuffled back into the room, where he dropped down onto the couch, plate in hand. "I said, let's watch, um... Star Wars?"

Eyeing the teenager's jittery posture he grinned "Kid, I am almost certain that is not what you just said..."

"I know.", Peter said defensively. "I changed my mind. Star Wars is good. You can pick which one. I don't care.", he grumbled quietly.
Tony smiled in his direction. "Oh, but you see, now I really want to know what you said... Spill it, Kid." He legitimately wanted to know. It was never his intention to rattle the boy, though he would soon realize that is exactly what his innocent inquiry had managed to do.

Peter stiffened before taking a deep breath. He couldn't believe he had opened his mouth to suggest such a childish movie. He was glad that Tony hadn't heard him and now he felt locked into saying it again. The man wasn't likely to let it go, he rarely did and the last thing Peter wanted was for Tony to laugh at his childish choice in movies. His brain was turning as he tried to figure out what to say next but he could feel his mentor looking in his direction, awaiting his answer. He needed a moment to decide how to handle this without the man's gaze burning into him. Not sure how to accomplish that, he attempted to make an escape. "It's not really important... I'll, uh, be right back. I need to go to the bathroom.", he tried.

"Nope. Won't work this time.", the man said firmly. "You literally just got back from the bathroom not ten minutes ago."

"Well, I need to go again!", the boy snapped bringing his hands up to his hair but making no effort to get up, his attempt had already been thwarted.

Sighing Tony relented to a degree. "Look, you don't have to tell me what you said if it makes you that uncomfortable.", he said calmly. ".. but there's literally no reason for you to lie to get out of it.", he added with some force but still gently enough that Peter could hopefully tell that he wasn't really mad at him.

Peter was now looking firmly at the floor because despite Tony's efforts he still wasn't sure if he was in trouble or not. "I'm sorry."

"Relax, will ya? You're not in trouble.", Tony said, rolling his eyes. "But seriously, Kid, why would you lie about that? Things would be so much easier if you would just talk to me. Tell me what's going in that brain of yours."

Peters' hands, still clinging to his hair began to tug at it lightly as he considered his next words. "Sometimes I just need a break... to breathe--!", the boy finally got out sounding strained.

"--So say that. What's so hard about that?", Tony asked.
"I don't know, Mr. Stark... Maybe, maybe because that doesn't usually work.", Peter answered, taking a deep breath and bringing his hands back down to his lap where they wrang together. It was obvious, even to him, that the man was trying to help him. That didn't calm his nerves completely but it did help.

"Doesn't work with who? With May?", Tony asked motioning towards the Legos still left on the table, Snapping a few together himself.

Scooting down onto the floor and taking hold of a lego, Peter began to twirl it around in his fingers. "No. It, it works fine with her. It's, you know, other people. Like school and stuff."

Tony felt his heart sink just a little bit at those words. "This isn't school, Pete. You don't have to make up a reason to leave the room when you're with me. Tell me you need a minute and I'll understand.", he suggested with a shrug of his shoulders, handing Peter the collection of legos he had pieced together. When the kid took them readily he smiled.

"I know this isn't school...", he answered sounding much calmer but some amount of nervousness was coming through in his voice. "...but, but when you say need a minute by yourself to think, most people don't really want to let you go... If you say you need to go to the bathroom they do. So, it's just easier to say that. " He glanced up at his mentor in an attempt to determine what he was going to say next.

Making a point to not make eye contact with the kid, Tony continued to focus on the task before them. "You don't have to lie to me... ever.", he repeated. "About anything really but especially not about something like needing a moment to think... or breathe. Alright? Just talk to me." Taking a deep breath he chanced a look at the boy who seemed adequately occupied. Getting the kid to engage with the small toys as a distraction had been one of his more genius ideas. Points for Tony.

"Yes, sir.", he said quietly. "I can do that."

Tony nodded his head in understanding. "I'd appreciate that. Now do you really want to watch Star Wars or do you want to tell me what you said the first time? No pressure... and you don't have to lie."

"You'll think I'm a baby", Peter answered directly, setting the legos he'd been holding back on the table and pulling his legs up to his chest, wrapping his arms around them.
Placing a hand on the kid's knee, he smirked. "I won't think you're a baby. It's just a movie, Kiddo."

"Fine.", Peter answered dropping his cheek down onto the knee that was not currently being covered by Tony's hand. "Lion King"

Tony huffed a small laugh, causing the boy to lift he head and glare. "What? Let's watch it. I've never seen it.", he said moving his hand up onto the top of the disgruntled looking boy's head. "FRIDAY?"

As soon as the movie started Peter made his way back up onto the couch beside his mentor returning to the previously peeled orange. As soon as the Pizza arrived Tony brushed the legos carefully aside to make room for the boxes as they continued to watch their movie. Tony would never admit it to anyone except Peter and would deny it emphatically if anyone ever called him out on it, but he actually kind of enjoyed the film. Of course, he couldn't be sure if it was the movie itself he enjoyed or if it was listening to the kid beside him hum and sing along with all the music.

Being as the movie ended well before ten, Tony suggested that they go back down to the lab. Peter, however, declined. He considered asking the man to join him in the gym but he thought better of it. He'd already taken up enough of his time for the evening. If he wanted to work in the lab then that was fine.

"Are you going to stay up here?", Tony asked him somewhat concerned. It was fairly unusual for the boy to decline an invitation to the lab.

"I might go see May...or maybe go to the gym. I don't know."

"Suit yourself, Kid. You know where to find me.", he said with a smile as he started towards the door.

Having checked with FRIDAY, Peter was pleased to hear that May was still awake. He practically skipped into the apartment to see her. He was surprised to find her sitting in the living room in a large chair rather than in her bed. He quickly noted that there was a nurse close by. "May! Hey, you're out here! That's awesome."

"Yep, another week or so and I should be able to get out here on my own.", she smiled.
"Does that mean that we're going back to the apartment soon?"

"No, Sweetie, not too soon. At least couple of more weeks. I'm sorry."

"No, It's fine", Peter chirped. "I don't mind being here. I mean, I miss seeing Ned all the time and I really miss, you know..." He paused glancing towards the nurse who was in the kitchen making tea. "...going out whenever I want, but I like it here."

The two of them sat and talked for a little while until May was ready to go back to her bed. Peter took that opportunity to go ahead and head out for the evening, choosing to go spend some time in the gym. He wished there was someone to go with him. It was boring on his own but it was better than sitting around.

He wandered through the large echoing room for a while. Glancing at the ring where Tony had practiced hand to hand combat with him a few times. Smiling when he thought about the first time he had come to the compound to train. He'd been trying his hardest to keep up with what the man was teaching him while focusing on pulling his punches so he didn't hurt him. Once they were in the ring facing each other, Tony had eventually called him out on it and despite Peter's protest, insisted that he could take it and for him to stop holding back. It wasn't until Peter sent him flying out of the ring and into a wall that he relented and started wearing an Iron Man suit when they sparred in earnest. At the time he had nearly freaked out but now, thinking back on it, it was almost funny.

Seeing as sparring wasn't an option and he was somewhat afraid he would tear up a punching bag, he went outside. After running a few laps he gave in and went back to the lab with Tony.

"What's up, Kid?", the man greeted the second the doors slid open.

"Nothing much. May wanted to go to bed and the gym's not really that great by yourself.", Peter answered, planting himself on a stool beside Tony. "I wish I could just go out."

"Couple more days. Is Ned still coming here after on Friday?"

"Of course. He wouldn't miss it for anything.", Peter laughed. "I think he's more excited to see you than he is to see me."

Tony laughed, glancing at the boy beside him. "What do you want to work on?"
"Can I just watch you?", Peter asked.

As far as Tony could figure, that seemed to be the kid's new favorite past time. Not that he minded. For the most part, the boy would just sit nearby and talk, ask a question or two here and there. It was just now occurring to him that Peter hadn't actively worked on anything since before he was grounded but since it was already getting late, he let it go for the night. He'd question it later. "Sure, Kid but I'm not really doing anything interesting. Just tinkering.", he smiled.

After a while, Peter was yawning and hugging Tony good-night.

The next couple of days where similarly mundane. He and Tony worked on the car a little more and finally finished that lego Iron Man helmet, which was now proudly displayed on a bookshelf in the living room at Tony's insistence. Peter visited with May daily and one night, he and Tony came and made her dinner. With everything having been so calm and quiet it made sense that Peter would wake up Friday morning brimming with excitement. He was going to attend one meeting with Tony and then go out patrolling before picking Ned up to take him back to the compound.

"Morning Tony!", Peter greeted the man as he wandered into the kitchen a little later that morning. "What time are we leaving?"

"I need to be there at eleven so, nine.", he grumbled as he started the coffee pot. "Are you still planning on coming with me to the R&D meeting this morning?"

"Mm-hmm, but then I'm going to go out if that's still okay."

"As long as you eat lunch before you go... and you know you'll need to be back by six so we can go get Ned, right?", he said rubbing his temples as he waited for the coffee to brew.

Peter rigorously nodded in the affirmative. "I will and I remember."

By the time Tony had a second cup of coffee in him, he was eagerly standing in front of the floor length mirror in his closet teaching Peter, step by step how to tie a tie. It only took Peter a couple of tries to make it through all of the motions without prompting. "You got it, Kiddo.", the man praised as he straightened the knot ever so slightly.
The day had gone exactly as planned, Peter attended the meeting, swallowed his lunch practically whole and still had enough time to patrol for a good four hours. By five-forty-five he had already walked back into the SI building with Happy and was now sitting patiently on the couch in Tony's office awaiting his return. As excited as he was to have Ned spend the night with him, the comfortable couch and the quiet office had him nearly instantly dozing off. Thankfully, he didn't have to wait long before the man was entering the room and tossing his tie onto his desk. "Hey, Kid. You missed all the fun.", not sounding amused in the least. "Ready to go?"

Perking up slightly at his mentors return, Peter stood all the way up and stretched. "Yes, sir", he sighed without a second thought this causing Tony's eyes to flicker over towards the boy.

"Are you okay? Patrol went alright?", the man asked with slight worry. Neither Happy nor Karen had reported anything to him so he was fairly sure that everything was okay on that front but it struck him as odd that the boy had reverted back to 'yes, sir'.

"I'm fine. Everything was great... why?", Peter stated sounding perplexed.

Looking the kid over to make sure he really did seem alright, Tony finally answered. "No reason.", he shrugged. "I'm not allowed to ask about your day?"

Peter squinted his eyes at his mentor who seemed to be thoroughly examining him. "Why are you acting all weird?"

"I am not acting weird.", he defended as he walked towards the door.

Now it was Peter's turn to shrug his shoulders. "Whatever you say, Tony." He tried to sound uninterested but he was actually feeling anything but. He replayed the conversation in his head a few times trying to figure out what he had missed. Coming up with nothing he had to work to not start over-thinking it.

Tony had eased up greatly at the boy's use of his name. Maybe he was acting weird. It's not like it was unusual for the kid to be polite, he thought as they made their way towards the car where Happy was waiting. He decided to write it off as a fluke. No big deal, nothing to worry himself over.
Tony, wordlessly, went ahead and took the passenger seat beside Happy in order to give the boys some space. It was easier that way, then he wouldn't have to get out and change seats in ten minutes when they got there. However, for the time being, that meant Peter was alone in the back seat, still trying to figure out what was going on with Tony. It felt like there was something he wasn't telling him. He shook the thoughts from his head just a few short minutes later as they pulled up to Ned's house where the other boy was sitting on the steps waiting for them with clear anticipation.
As soon as the car rolled to a stop Ned was already jumping up and hurrying over. Happy didn't bother to get out to open the door since Peter was already climbing out. "Hey, Ned!", Peter called leading into a multi-step handshake before Happy was fussing over his shoulder for the two of them to 'just get in the car'.

"Alright, alright", Peter laughed as he crawled in first quickly followed by an over-excited Ned.

"Oh, Hi, Mr. Happy and um... Iron-- ow!", Ned shouted glaring at Peter who poignantly glared back. "Fine... Hi, Mr. Stark", he grumbled still rubbing his arm where Peter had smacked him. Both Tony and Happy laughed but neither of them said anything. They just left the two friends to talk while they carried on a conversation of their own.

The boys sat in the back chattering and laughing loudly for nearly an hour before Peter addressed Tony again. "Hey, Tony? What are doing for dinner?"

"Hmm?" the man hummed looking over his shoulder. He had been actively tuning out all of the gossip and random noises coming from the back of the car. As such it took longer than it should have to register that Peter was talking to him.

"I was asking about dinner. I'm starving.", Peter moaned, dropping his head on to the back of the driver's seat.

Tony glanced behind him, rolling his eyes at the melodramatic scene before him. "I'm pretty sure you aren't starving..."

"I'm pretty sure I am, Tony... Can we get something? Please?"

The man turned his body so that he could see the other boy sitting behind him, a fake tremble playing on his bottom lip. "What about you Ned? Am I starving two children in the back of my car?", he
"I could eat!", Ned pipped up happily, ignoring all of the dramatics.

"Alright fine.", the man conceded. "What do you want?"

"Pizza!" both boys managed to yell at once causing Tony to groan. It was going to be a long night.

Against what would have probably been better judgment, they all piled out of the car and into a crowded Pizza joint. Tony tugged his baseball cap a little further down on his head as they entered the crowd. It didn't take long to be seated and he was grateful to have been tucked in a corner table away from the majority of the traffic because keeping Ned quiet about his identity was becoming something of a chore. How that kid had managed to keep Peter's identity safe was baffling, really.

An hour later, the pizza was gone and the two rambunctious boys had resorted to playing 'football' with a folded up napkin to pass the time until the check came. Tony watched with amusement, surprised that was a game that kid still played. Once the check had arrived, Tony hurriedly ushered the younger two out the door and back into the car so that he could be out of sight before his name came up with the card Happy would be using to pay.

"Thank you for the pizza, Tony!", Peter said as the man made his way into the passenger side door.

"Yeah, thanks!", Ned added before looking towards Peter with a grin. "Dude, I ate pizza with Iron Man."

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Back at the compound, Tony looked pleadingly at Happy. "Do you, maybe, want to come up for some coffee?"

The man raised his eyebrows and laughed, placing a hand over his heart. "Why, Mr. Stark! Are you trying to get me into your bed?"

Tony tried and failed to fight back the laugh that arose within him before taking a deep breath and
motioning towards the teenagers who were currently wandering around nearby in the large garage. "No. I was trying to not be left alone with those two knuckleheads."

"Oh no, not on your life. They're all yours. Besides, There's a new Hallmark movie coming on in an hour and I don't plan on missing it. Have fun!"

"Mm-hmm, thanks a lot Happy!", Tony called after the man who was picking up his pace as he made his get-away.

After depositing the boys in the penthouse, Tony made his way down to the lab. There was no reason for him to hang around the chaos. The kitchen was loaded with snacks and Peter was a good kid. If they needed anything he was sure Peter would come and find him. Besides, he had FRIDAY watching after them as well. So, when he waltzed back into the suite at just after two in the morning he was unprepared for what awaited him.

The living room was trashed. Well, trashed, by Tony standards. Shoes had been kicked off right by the door. There were legos separated into different piles all over the floor, a half-built project sitting on the coffee table along with some abandoned dishes and empty cans and chip bags were all over the breakfast bar. He glanced around the room attempting to locate the two heathens when he spotted Peter coming down the hall. "What the hell did you guys do in here?", Tony asked in mild irritation. It was a mess but nothing was destroyed.

"Um, legos... and video games...", he answered hesitantly. He didn't think they had done anything wrong, they didn't break anything or go anywhere outside of his room, the great room and for a few minutes, May's room. FRIDAY had walked them through how to set up the game system Ned brought so he was sure he hadn't messed that up either.

"It's a mess in here, Kid. I hope you don't think I'm cleaning this up.", he said gesturing towards the room and wiping his hand across the crumby counter before dusting his hands off.

"Oh no! I always clean up after Ned spends the night! I wasn't going to leave it a mess. It's just, it got late and I was going to get it in the morning. I'm sorry." He was already darting around the room grabbing cups to place in the dishwasher.

"Where's Ned?", Tony asked glancing around the room. "You can leave the legos out if you think you're going back to them in the morning."
"Yes, sir", Peter replied, returning the legos he had scooped up back to their pile before making his way over to the kitchen to clean up the trash. "Ned's asleep"

"Why aren't you asleep?", the man asked, now sitting at the kitchen table, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Why aren't I asleep?", he added quietly under his breath, but Peter heard it anyway.

"Oh, well, he just fell asleep a little while ago and I was going to come out here and work on the legos some more.", he answered casually, sitting down in the chair opposite his mentor. "Are you going to bed now?"

"Why?", Tony asked, quirking an eyebrow. "Are you waiting for me to go to bed so you can do something stupid? FRIDAY keeps an eye on you, you know..."

Peter huffed and stood up to make himself a bowl of cereal. "I don't need a babysitter."

"I beg to differ.", Tony added a tired moment later, with no real heat. "I seem to remember an incident where a spider-kid got bored and blew shit up."

Dropping a spoon into his bowl with a splash, Peter half-heartedly glared at the man. "That was a one-time thing."

"Mm-hmm, because now I have FRIDAY making sure you don't do dumb shit when I'm not watching."

Sighing, Peter started eating his cereal. He was halfway through the large bowl before he spoke again. "I don't try to do stupid things" For some reason, he couldn't let go of the fact that Tony, apparently, felt like he needed constant supervision. "I mean, I think, all in all, I'm pretty good at not doing stupid things.", he added still sounding deep in thought.

"Yeah, your right, Kiddo.", The man said breathing deeply and leaning back on the chair. "I just want to make sure you're safe, that's all." Then with a yawn and a stretch he added, "I'm going to get a few hours of sleep. You should too... What time are we returning Ned?"

Peter who was placing his bowl carefully into the dishwasher, looked over at his mentor. "We told his mom it would be around four. That's what you told me to say..."
"That's fine. I probably did say that." Then he strolled across the kitchen to where the boy stood and gave him a quick side-hug before going to bed. "G'night Kid. Go to sleep. Yeah?"

Only Peter didn't go to bed. As soon as Tony had rounded the corner he sat down on the floor and started to work on the large spaceship again. By five o'clock in the morning, he was finally starting to run out of steam. Clicking together the last couple of pieces he had in his hands, he laid down across the couch.

By eight-thirty Ned was shaking him awake. "Peter... Peter, Hey, come on man, Wake up."

"What do you want Ned?", Peter groaned as he rolled over. "I'm tired"

"Yeah, well, I'm starving. Come on, get some breakfast with me."

Peter sighed and pulled the blanket tighter around himself. "You can go get whatever you want. There's cereal in the pantry."

"Dude, I am not going to go through Tony Stark's kitchen by myself. Please get up?" Then after a few seconds of no reply from Peter, the boy gave up. "Fine. I'm turning on Super Smash Brother's though."

It was at about that same time that Tony came into the room. Only seeing Ned over the back of the couch he placed his hands on his hips. "Why do I keep running into you two, one at a time. Where's Pete?"

Ned, whipped his head around so fast you would think that he would have hurt himself. "Mr. Stark!? Oh, yeah, uh, Peter's right here actually. He's still asleep."

"No, I'm not...", Peter half whined, half groaned as he sat up. "You guys are too loud."

Tony looked at the exhausted child and frowned. "When did you go to bed?" It was obvious that the kid had been up long after he had suggested he go to bed. The half-finished lego creation was now nearly complete and the boy's eyes looked glossy and bruised with lack of sleep.
Looking in his mentor's direction he stood up, scrunching his face up in concentration. "I don't know for sure. Maybe five?", he yawned as he shuffled his way towards where Tony was currently leaning on the counter by the coffee maker.

Straightening himself up, Tony braced himself and held out an arm in anticipation. He was almost certain that he was about to have a large mass of teenager flop against him where he stood. "You want to go back to bed? I can have FRIDAY wake you up in an hour or so.", he said as he readjusted his balance to take on the added weight that was now, as predicted, leaning up against him.

Peter just shook his head and sighed. "No, I'm up now. Besides..." He paused to yawn deeply. "...Ned's here and he wants breakfast."

Looking across the room Tony met eyes with the other boy who currently had an unreadable expression on his face. He figured that the kid, who was still getting over his own hero worship was probably somewhat dazed by himself and Peter's current display of familiarity. He could understand that. All of these new found emotions sometimes astonished him too.

After giving the boy in his arms a light squeeze he attempted to break away. "Alright, breakfast it is then. Eggs and waffles? I could maybe make some pancakes..."

Wandering back over to where Ned was Peter shrugged his shoulders. "Whatever you want. I'm just tired."

As the morning went on Peter started to perk up. Eating breakfast seemed to help and soon after he was sitting on the couch happily playing video games with Ned who was constantly pointing out details 'that you could only possibly see on a screen that big.' "Seriously, dude, it's like playing games in a movie theatre.", the boy said in awe as they paused to change games.

"I'm just glad you brought it! I haven't gotten to play in ages."

"I know right?", Ned said with a smile before his eyes darted over to where Tony had sat down in the nearby recliner and was pretending to read despite all of the noise in the room.

After watching the boys play for no more than twenty minutes, Tony couldn't keep quiet anymore. "What is this?", he said motioning towards the television. Anything that could get his kid, who had
only had about three hours of sleep, this cheerful was worth knowing about.

Ned spoke up first. "It's Super Smash Brothers.", he said as if it was unbelievable that anyone wouldn't know what that was.

"It's a Nintendo game, Tony. Ned and I have been trying to unlock all of the characters since Christmas. It's awesome.", Peter added with a broad smile.

Tony raised an eyebrow at him. "If you like it so much why didn't you bring it with you. Do you want to stop by your apartment on the way back today?"

"Oh.", Peter replied, not taking his eyes off the screen. "I, um, I don't actually have it. I just play it with Ned."

"You don't have the game? ... I can get it for you if you want your own copy."

Peter paused the game at this point because he wasn't going to be able to say this and concentrate on winning. "No, I, uh, I don't have the system. This...", he said pointing towards the docking station resting on the floor below the TV, "this is the newest one. I have an older one. It won't play this game. I mean it will play a game kind of like it, but it's not the same. I'm just happy Ned has it. I can play it with him."

A quick search on his tablet later, he knew there was no way the kid was going to allow him to buy it for him. However, being the genius that he is, he had another plan. "Hmm...", he casually acknowledged. "Show me how to play."

The two teenagers looked at each other in surprise but they each took the time to animatedly go over the rules and controls with the man. They spent the next hour, switching controllers and taking turns. It turned out that Tony was actually really good at it, which seemed sort of unfair since he had just learned how to play that morning. Both boys took their losses in stride as Tony proceeded to unlock several items for them. In fact, he continued to play long after Peter and Ned, had decided to stop and go back to the lego model on the floor.

At some point, Tony had disappeared to his office after telling both teenagers to be ready to walk out the door at two. As such both boys had begun roaming around the penthouse, collecting discarded items and cleaning up their messes. When the man returned at the appointed time he was satisfied to see that the living room was now free of clutter and the counters had been wiped down.
Just as they were about to walk out the door Peter asked if they could stop by his apartment, he wanted to swap out some books. When Tony agreed and saw the boy drop his key into his pocket he suddenly remembered the small spider keychain he had purchased and excused himself to go grab it.

The ride back to Ned's house was much quieter than the ride to the compound as both boys seemed to be worn out. There was no lively antics or loud laughing. Despite that, Ned's constant questions and random stories were enough to keep the car somewhat lively. Peter had run inside with Ned for a few minutes before returning to the car, this time seating himself in the front with Tony. "You still want to stop at your place?", he asked after the kid immediately kicked his shoes off and curled up in the seat.

"Mm-hmm, I do", Peter mumbled.

Tony only nodded and continued the short drive to the apartment where he then had to wait for Peter to put his shoes back on. "I don't know why you took them off. You knew we were coming here next."

"I don't know.", Peter groused. "I'm tired and I wanted to be comfortable."

"Well, next time how about you don't get quite so comfortable when you know we're stopping again in less than ten minutes, yeah?"

Shoes back on his feet, Peter pulled his key out of his pocket making a vigorous effort to keep his Iron Man Keychain hidden in his hand. Before he could get the car door open, Tony stopped him. "Oh, hey, wait a second. I have something for you. It's not a big deal, it's tiny really. I think you'll like it though...", he rambled as he dug through his pocket to find the trinket. "Here you go.", he said placing the spider in the boy's hand. "Now, to be clear, you can't get rid of the Iron Man one. You can use both of them.", he smiled. "I think they look good together", he added without a thought.

Peter smiled widely at the keychain his mentor had placed in his open hand. "I love it, Tony. This is amazing. Where did you even find it? I didn't know they made anything like this."

Tony just shrugged his shoulders. "I found it at the mall and thought you might like it. Looks almost exactly like your spider emblem."
"Yeah, it does... and you're right. It does look good with the Iron Man one.", Peter said as he finished attaching the new item to his key, holding it up to examine.

It only took him a few minutes to swap out the books he had brought with him. This time, making sure to grab his required summer reading book. He still had that report to do. Then, after a quick glance around his room to see if there was anything else he wanted, he jogged back down the stairs where Tony was waiting for him.

"Alright, Kiddo.", the man greeted him. "You all set? Need anything before we get back on the highway?"

"Nope. I'm ready to go back", he proclaimed in earnest.

The spiderling was soundly asleep before they even made it the highway and Tony allowed it because even if he slept all the way back to the compound, it would still only add up to about five hours total for the boy to have slept in nearly thirty-six. This meant that the ride was almost completely silent outside of the classic rock playing quietly in the background. Tony took a deep breath and sped up slightly. With any luck, there would be a package waiting for him when he got back home.
Having pulled into his private garage at the compound, Tony made an attempt to rouse the sleeping boy. It was taking more effort than he'd expected. "Come on, Pete. Up and at 'em. Let's go inside.", he prodded. All of this resulting in nothing more than a few mumbled complaints and groans.

"I'm too tired.", Peter whined dramatically as he curled up more tightly into the seat. "Just leave me here."

Tony rolled his eyes. Even though the garage was climate controlled, he was not planning on leaving the kid to sleep in the front seat of the car. "No, you are definitely coming inside. Now, let's go... I'm not carrying you."

Finally yielding to his mentor's demands, Peter uncurled himself and opened the door. "Fine.", he yawned. Then as he was standing beside the car stretching he added, "I want to eat dinner with May tonight."

"Sure. You should probably call her so the staff can make enough for you too.", the man muttered as he fiddled with the lockbox, putting away the car keys.

"No", Peter said, sounding slightly more awake now. "I meant all of us. Like, you too. I like it when we all eat together and Aunt May can come out to the living room now."

The man smiled to himself. This kid. "Sounds like a plan, Kiddo. You should still call. I'll order something, okay?"

Peter just nodded and began to follow his mentor who was not heading towards the elevator. "Where are we going?"

"Oh, I need to grab a package that was left at the front. You know what, why don't you go ahead to May's. Want me to carry your backpack up to your room for you?"

Peter agreed and handed over his bag with a quick 'thank you', then started towards the elevator while Tony crossed the garage towards the front entrance. He was pleased to see the package he was waiting for had arrived. God bless same-day delivery. Shifting the weight of the backpack so it didn't throw him off balance, he leaned over and picked up the decent sized brown box, then
promptly started towards the penthouse.

Having safely stored the box and backpack in the suite, Tony took a moment to order some take out. He wished he's asked the kid what he wanted. This entire meal together thing was his idea and it seemed important to him. A few careful thought's later he ended up ordering some Thai food. He knew both Peter and May enjoyed it and he was generally game for anything, so it seemed like the logical choice. That taken care of he moved on to May's apartment where he halfway expected to find a, once again, sleeping, Peter Parker.

That, however, was not the case. What he did walk into was some kind of enthusiastic explanation of his time with Ned. May was on the couch nodding along in all of the right places as Peter's hands gestured wildly with every dramatic detail. It wasn't until he got all the way inside that he noticed, May was holding the keychain he'd given the boy in the car. It made him smile because that must have been one of the first things he told her about and at some point, him making the kid happy had become some sort of wonderfully bizarre priority.

At first, watching the two of them interact made, Tony feel out of place. Like he was on the outside looking in. Then the second Peter had chattered his way to a stopping point he turned to Tony. "Hey, Tony! Look, May can come out here. It'll be so much easier to all sit together now. Especially when Pepper gets back. We won't all have to squeeze into the bedroom.", he rambled before looking thoughtfully towards his mentor. "I wish she was here now."

Now, that right there had Tony needing a moment to collect himself. He knew that Peter liked Pepper and that he was comfortable in her presence and he counted that as 'win' enough. Hearing the boy, who he was starting to inadvertently think of as his own, wistfully indicate that he missed her company was almost too much. He had to clear his throat and advertently avoid May's perceptive looks before he could speak. "Yeah? Me too. Another week.", he smiled.

"Mm-hmm.", he hummed warmly before practically beaming at Tony. "That means she'll be home the same time the new pool is ready. Right?"

Tony laughed at the dramatic change in the emotional climate of the room. "Yeah. I suppose so."

May, who had somehow been left out of the loop regarding a new pool looked between the two in confusion. "New pool? When did this come up?"

"After the whole 'spiders don't do well trapped in a room that smells like chlorine' fiasco.", Tony promptly supplied.
"Yeah!", Peter eagerly started to explain. "When I asked Tony if we could go to the outdoor pool together, he said it wouldn't be fun because no one would leave him alone but Pepper thought it would be a good idea to build an outdoor pool in the back so that I could get to go swimming with them while I'm here. Then Tony said I could invite Ned to come to swim too. They started it the other day and it should be done enough to use in a week... when Pepper gets back."

Looking at Tony in an almost exasperated manner May rolled her eyes. "You're building him a pool."

"No.", Tony said defensively. "Pepper is building him a pool."

May laughed, "With your money?"

"That's not really here nor there, May.", Tony said with a wave of his hand. "Let's focus on the positive, shall we? The point is, the compound is getting a new pool. The how and why aren't really important..." He glanced towards the clock on the wall. "Oh, would you look at the time. The food should be arriving any minute now. I'll be right back." By the time the last words had made it out of his mouth, he was out the door, May shaking her head at his antics.

As soon as all of the food had been polished off and the dishes have been taken care of, the two adults found themselves casually talking over coffee. May was now in her large chair while Tony was settled on the far side of the couch closest to May. Peter had been at the opposite end of the couch occasionally adding something to the conversation, more often defending himself as the pair exchanged various stories centering around Peter's comedic misfortunes.

"I don't think you understand", May said, still giggling. "He literally walked directly into the doorframe, face first. He had a black eye for a week. The worst part was, the next day was picture day."

"Please tell me you still have that picture", Tony quipped, smiling with glee when May nodded vigorously in the positive. "Perfect. I want a framed copy of it right in my living room for everyone to enjoy." After a few seconds passed with no reaction from the boy, Tony started to become concerned that he had crossed some sort of line. "Pete?", he asked casually, glancing beside him. "Oh.", he said lowering his voice. "He's asleep."

"I'm not surprised.", May said. "Doesn't sound like he slept much last night."
"I suppose that's how sleepovers go? ... more fun than sleep? I never really did that, unless of course, you count college. In which case I spent most nights having more fun than sleeping, probably too much fun."

"Oh, stop it.", May chuckled before rapidly changing the subject.

The two of them continued to talk well into the night. Pausing occasionally when Peter would make a noise or move to reposition himself on the couch. Neither adult said anything when Peter's head to end up right smack in the middle of Tony's lap. Nor, did either of them acknowledge it when Tony's hand made it's way into the boy's hair causing him to sigh in contentment.

They stayed that way for quite a while until May was ready to move into her bedroom and Tony's back was demanding that he stand. The man somehow managed to carefully remove himself from the couch without disturbing the sleeping spiderling. Then stretching out his stiff muscles he watched as May's nurse helped her back into her bedroom before turning his attention back to the boy. "Hey, May? I think I might just leave him here, rather than wake him up again. Is that okay with you?", he asked with a yawn.

"More than okay", May agreed tiredly before speaking to the nurse who was currently helping her to bed. "We have extra pillows and blankets don't we, Leslie?"

"Of course, Ms. Parker", came the sweet voice of the evening nurse. "I'll go get some out of the hall closet."

"I've got it", Tony called, already on his way to obtain said items. "You just get May settled."

He managed to get the kid's head on a pillow before tucking the blanket in around him. Choosing to ignore the strong urge to kiss the boy on the head, he turned to bid good-night to May.

It felt strange entering the penthouse alone. With no Pepper and no Peter, it was just... quiet. He once again found himself questioning what life was going to be like when May and, in turn, Peter returned to their apartment in Queens. He'd had the boy's company for nearly a month now and it had become the new normal. He sighed heavily at the thought and decided that he didn't particularly want to go to bed with all of that on his mind. Instead, he opted to go ahead and open that package he had received earlier, the contents occupying him long enough for the desire to sleep to finally take over.
Early the next morning, Peter woke up momentarily addled about his whereabouts. It took him longer than he would like to admit to realize he was still on the couch in May's apartment in the compound. Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, he wandered into May's bedroom, only to find her still asleep. Not sure what he should do from there, he simply went back to the couch and folded up the blanket he had been covered with at some point after he fell asleep. He briefly wondered if it had been Tony or the nurse.

As he was placing the folded blanket on top of the pillow, the day nurse walked in, startling Peter where he stood. "I'm sorry.", he said though he was unsure about what he was apologizing for. For her part, the nurse tried to carry on some friendly conversation as she got to work making tea and getting breakfast ready for May. She had offered to fix something for Peter as well but he declined, he only planned to stay long enough to see May and then he was going to go up to make his own breakfast in the more familiar kitchen.

Peter fully expected to walk into a quiet living room when he arrived back at the suite. Yet, that was not the case. Upon, entering the room he found Tony sitting on the couch. "Morning Kiddo, how'd you sleep?", he asked without ever turning around.

Having finally registered what was on the television, Peter pushed his mentor's inquiry aside in a slight panic. "Oh my god! Did Ned leave his Nintendo here? His mom is going to kill him. We have to take it back to him, Tony!", he managed to say all in one breath.

"Relax, will ya?. You helped Ned pack his up, Kid. He didn't leave it here.", the man laughed. "This is mine."

Having been completely thrown off by Tony's last comment, it took a moment for Peter to start talking again. "You, yours? When? I thought you said you had never played before..."

"I hadn't", the man answered simply. "I bought this yesterday... for myself."

"For yourself.", Peter repeated.

"Yep", Tony answered, popping the 'p'. "But I'm a nice guy.", he added with a shrug of his shoulders. "I'll let you play it sometimes. Maybe even let you borrow it if you say 'pretty please'."

Breakfast having been forgotten for the moment, Peter sat down beside his mentor who automatically
passed him a controller. They only managed to play for about thirty minutes before Peter's stomach was grumbling loud enough for Tony to hear across the couch. "Jesus, Kid. Did you not eat breakfast with May?"

"No... I was going to eat when I come back here, then I sort of got distracted.", he blushed slightly.

"Why would you not eat before you came back?", Tony asked. "I know there is food enough in there, even to feed you."

Scrunching up his nose, Peter looked towards his mentor. "I know but I didn't want the nurse making me breakfast. That's weird."

Tony laughed. "You let me make you breakfast all the time. In fact, Sometimes you ask me to make you breakfast..."

"That was weird at first too... and in my defense, you make really good eggs and I don't know how to cook bacon by myself."

A smile was tugging at the corners of Tony's mouth as the boy spoke. "Yeah? You've got some pretty low standards there, Kid, but how about I go make you some bacon and eggs."

"That would be awesome.", Peter smiled, pulling his feet up onto the couch so that he was now sitting criss-cross on the cushion still happily playing the game. It only took a few moments for the sound of grease crackling in the pan to fill the room leading the smell of freshly cooked bacon to float across the room to where he sat. Breathing deeply he, turned off the game and glided across the room to the breakfast bar where he could watch the man cook. In no time at all, a glass of orange juice was placed in front of him followed by a plate piled high with the savory treats that Tony had prepared. "Thank you, so much. This looks amazing.", he practically purred as he started to dig in.

"No problem, kiddo.", the man said as he took his place beside him with his own serving. "How about, after we eat, you go take a shower. Then we can go down to the garage. The part we needed came in the other day."

It wasn't until then that Peter realized he hadn't showered since Friday morning and that he had been wearing the same clothes since he had finished patrol. It was, now, Sunday morning. He was sort of shocked that Tony hadn't said anything sooner. "Oh, yeah. I suppose I should do that.", he muttered quietly under his breath.
From there they had what had become a fairly typical day for them. They worked in the garage until lunch before going their separate ways by early afternoon. In this case, Tony to his office to work on emails and go over documents that Pepper had been sending him from Hong Kong and Peter to May's and later to his own room to read. It wasn't until close to eight that they saw each other again.

Tony was in the middle of skimming through his email for anything else that needed his urgent attention when there was a nearly silent knock on the office door. "Mr. Stark?", a tentative voice asked before the boy fully appeared, though still lingering just outside of the doorway, shifting his weight left to right. "I was wonder--", the boy started before cutting himself off as if he suddenly felt a pressing need to explain his presence. "--FRI-FRIDAY said I could come in here..."

The man had glanced up from his email the second he heard a knock on the door but he was still sort of altering between the kid's face and the screen in front of him. "She's right. You're fine. What did you need?"

"Oh! I don't need anything, Mr. Stark.", Peter replied, holding his hands up in a defensive position. "I just wanted to ask you a question, but it can wait. I didn't mean to interrupt you."

Tony sighed, getting up to cross the room. "You're fine, Kid. You didn't interrupt anything. If I didn't want to be disturbed FRIDAY would have told you that. I left the door open for a reason." Once he was in front of the boy, he took him by the shoulder and gently tugged him all the way into the room.

"Oh, okay.", Peter replied taking a breath and looking around. "I've never been in here.", he mused mostly to himself.

"You've been here a month and you've not seen the inside of my office?"

"Well, no. Usually, you come in here when I'm doing other things and I didn't want to be in the way so I never-- Hey!" The boy's eyes had fallen on a picture sitting on the corner of Tony's desk. It was his the picture that the man had requested a copy of when he was filling his own picture frames. "Why do you have a picture of me on your desk?"

"What else was I going to do with it?", the man asked with one eyebrow quirked.

"I don't know...not, not...that." In Peter's extremely minimal experience, that may have been almost...
completely limited to things he's seen on tv or in movies, pictures placed in offices were generally limited to family photos.

"Does it bother you?", Tony asked curiously. The boy had the exact same image hanging up over his desk. The only difference was that Tony's version was smaller.

"No. I just didn't think that you would, like, frame it or anything."

"Kid, you have that same picture framed in your room."

Peter was starting to feel a bit uncomfortable with the conversation and he considered asking if they could talk about it later but he didn't. "That's different", he nearly whispered.

"How is it different, Pete?", the man asked placing a hand on each of the kid's sagging shoulders.

Now, Peter was ready to make that escape. He had no idea how to tell the man that putting a picture of a kid on your desk was sort of a parental move and he was both thrilled and nervous that the man had done so. "Can, can we talk about this later? Please? I, I need a minute."

"Sure, kiddo.", the man sighed. "You want to tell me what brought you in here in the first place?"

"Oh, I was just going to ask if I was supposed to eat dinner without you or if I was supposed to go to May's or something. It was getting late."

Looking at his watch, Tony sighed. "You didn't eat yet?"

"I was waiting for you and then, I wasn't sure what I was supposed to be doing so I came to ask.", somewhat defensively. He was concerned about where this was going.

"No, no, it's fine. I'm not upset with you. I didn't mean to lose track of time like that, that's all. I'm glad you came to ask.", the man said, to which Peter only nodded in reply. "Come on, Let's go to the kitchen." Since the boy's arrival Tony had been getting better and better about eating on what he assumed was a more regular schedule, he still managed to occasionally get so involved in his work that pretty much all self-care would go out the window. That's generally where FRIDAY or Pepper
would come in and remind him that he was still human. Now, it seemed he had Peter for that too. He smiled to himself as he guided the kid towards the kitchen. He could live with that.
Chapter 33

Once they were comfortably seated on the tall stools by the counter, with their dinners in front of them, Tony decided to try and go back to the earlier conversation regarding the picture on his desk. It's not like it was important. He was just a curious and persistent person by nature. He didn't like loose ends or unanswered questions, basically, his nagging brain needed to know.

"So, kid, you never really answered me before. Are you ready to tell me how me having a picture of you in my office is different than you having a picture of me in your room?"

Peter, who had been stirring the steaming, hot canned pasta in the bowl in front of him stilled. "Not really", he mumbled towards the bowl, blowing on a small spoonful before placing it in his mouth.

The man just sighed. He wondered if he should let it go altogether. He didn't want to but maybe, just maybe, he should. The books he had read so many weeks ago had said he shouldn't be overly assertive or demanding when it came to getting the kid to open up and May had basically said the same thing. 'He'll come to you when he's ready', rang clearly in his mind as he sat there looking at the teenager beside him. "Alright, Pete, you win. You can tell me when you're ready."

That only served to make Peter feel guilty, which was sort of the opposite of what his mentor had been going for. He sat there and silently picked at his food for several minutes before he pressuring himself into talking, though he continued to avoid eye-contact. "People only put pictures of, like, family and stuff in their offices."

This time Tony stilled. He hadn't been expecting the kid to say that. He hadn't even considered that. When he'd decided to add that picture to the desk it was because he thought it would be nice to look at when he was spending long hours in there, dealing with things he would rather not be dealing with. The kid tended to make him feel, well, happy. The way the boy had commented on the implications of having his image right there beside Pepper's kind of hurt. It almost sounded like Peter was upset that it was there. He had already accepted that the kid had basically become part of his family when he called the boy his kid in front of the entire accords committee and again in front of Rhodes, Happy and the kid, himself.

When the room had been silent for a few beats too long Peter timidly spoke up again, eyes still intensely studying the now cooling pasta. "Is, is that why you put it in there?"

Tony's entire body went slightly rigid as he calculated what the appropriate response to the kid's question was. Peter had already known that he's called him 'his', he'd sat there and heard him say it. So, he wasn't sure why he was so hesitant to confirm it now. Maybe it was because his legal
guardian, his *actual parent*, was not even a five minutes walk from where they sat and the fact was, Peter wasn't his no matter how much he wished it was true. He was still sorting out what he should say when the boy's voice broke through. "Do you need a minute, Mr. Stark? ...I'd understand..."

When Tony looked up at those words, the two of them managed to lock eyes, neither of them daring to look away. "No, Kid. I'm okay." He smiled with genuine fondness before sighing. "I guess to answer your question, I, uh, I know you aren't legitimately, *mine* but--"

"--That's not how families are made, Mr. Stark.", Peter hurriedly interjected before he lost the confidence to do so.

"Exactly", the man sighed again, more heavily this time. The air in the room seemed to be getting thicker the longer they spoke "...and I suppose you've become a big part of my family. I've had Rhodey, Pepper, and Happy for a long time... I had the team for a while", he added thoughtfully, before taking a deep breath. "Now I have you" Then desperately feeling like he needed to break the tension that had built up around them, he added, "...and your Aunt Hottie of course."

"Tony!", the boy shouted in exasperation, "You can't call her that. You're about to get married..."

*That was the exact reaction he had been going for.* "I'm just messing with you, now, eat your dinner."

There were several minutes of comfortable silence before Peter was looking back in his mentor's direction. "What are we doing tomorrow?", the boy asked causing Tony to let out a breath he hadn't even realized he'd been holding.

So very thankful for the change in subject, Tony moved on to explain the different meetings he had at SI and which, if any, Peter wanted to come to. When the boy opted to go out and patrol rather than attend any of them, he was slightly disappointed. He tried to brush it off. After all the kid had come with him on Friday. "If you're coming with me then you'll need to be ready to go by nine-thirty on the dot. Happy's driving."

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After eating a quick lunch in a nearby cafe with Tony and Happy, Peter took slug his backpack over his shoulder and took off down the street towards the alley he had been using to change into his suit.
Pulling the mask over his face, there was a momentary feeling of let-down as he remembered that he couldn't connect with Ned because was attending a Highschool STEAM camp all week. Brushing that feeling aside, he shot a web towards the nearest building and took off swinging further and further into the city.

At first, he kept himself busy with everything from helping an old lady carry her groceries and tracking down a lost dog to stopping a pickpocket and catching a shoplifter. After a while, there seemed to be a lull in action that led to Peter simply sitting on a rooftop, with a giant soft pretzel in his hand, watching the hustle and bustle of the city below him. Just as he was about to leap down and search the city for more things that he could do, his ears rang with the sharp alarm coming from a nearby bank.

Bank Robbers. That was within his wheel-house. He could handle a few men with guns and keep the people safe, so he rapidly swung himself in that direction. Once inside, he hesitated ever so slightly. There were only three 'bad guys' but they seemed to be armed with the kinds of weapons that Tony had very specifically told him to stay away from. 'Let someone else handle it', he had been told but where Peter Parker was eager to be the hero. It was his responsibility. He was already there and people were in danger, he couldn't focus on what Tony wanted right now. There was a job to do.

Wall-crawling silently into the area where the first of the men was holding a large group of hostages, he managed to web the weapon to the wall before ever being noticed. This, resulting in a rapidly paced sparring match as Peter tried to capture the man. As they continued to dodge one another, the second man showed up and based his use of language, he was not happy to see that Spider-man was there. "Hey man, watch it with the bad words will ya? There are children in this room", he quipped, dodging the first man's punches while still keeping an eye on the second.

A moment later his spider-sense was screaming and the weapon in the second guy's hand was going off. The laser-like beam coming dangerously close to his head and hitting the wall behind him. "Dude! That's not very nice! You could have killed me!", he shouted as he webbed up the first guy and made an effort to get the weapon out of the second man's possession.

In the end, all it took was a few swift moves and strategically placed kicks to have the first two men incapacitated, both tightly wound in webbing and their weapons well out of reach. Peter's next move was to get the innocent bystanders out of the bank as quickly as possible. There was still one more criminal to deal with but it seemed logical to empty the building first. Look out for the little guy.

Ushering the last of the hostages out the door he darted towards the back of the bank where Karen was showing him a heat signature. Once he had located the last man, he was unsurprised to see that he'd been able to use some sort of insane technology to crack the code on the vault. Upon closer
inspection, he thought that he'd managed to enter the vicinity without the man's knowledge. Then out of nowhere, he found himself stunned by one of the weapons he's been harboring. There were a good thirty seconds where he couldn't move, couldn't breathe and then just as quickly, the numbing sensation was gone and he was back on his feet. He only succeeded in getting one shot of his webs out before he found himself once again stunned, this time his body flying backward into the vault. Unable to do anything he watched in dread as the heavy door began to close, locking its self shut with an echoing clank.

As soon as he was able to move again he leapt to his feet running towards the door and relentlessly pounded on it. He was trapped. He was trapped and they were going to get away. There was no time to think about that, getting out of the vault had to be his priority. There was nothing else he could do until he was free. His mind was racing and Karen was decidedly unhelpful. Surely there was some sort of emergency escape procedure. He just needed to find it. It shouldn't be that hard...

He was just starting to go over the room in search of a plan when the lights when out, causing the room to become more than just dark. In an instant, his vision had become so black that it felt unnatural. He could almost feel the inky blackness run through his body taking his breath away. Blinking several times, he stretched out his hands out of pure instinct and tried to remain calm. Spider-man was not afraid of the dark. As he was starting to reorient himself, having laid hands on the interworkings of the door, when a loud bang echoed in his ears, vibrating throughout his body. He hit his knees, covering his ears with his hands as he fell.

For a sound to penetrate the thick walls of the vault so clearly, the blast had to have been very close, or worse, very large. Thank God he'd gotten everyone out. Everyone but himself, he thought with alarm. It wasn't until then that he became nearly frozen in dread, just teetering on the very edge of hysteria. This wasn't like a building falling on him, there was no way to lift himself out and despite his strength, he couldn't push his weight onto the door and expect it to open, he'd tried that already.

The longer he stood there, listening to the sounds of more and more rubble hit the outside surface of the vault, the smaller the room felt. Being unable to see anything around him, there was very little he could do to prove to himself that the walls were not, in fact, caving in with the threat of crushing him. He soon found himself curled into a tight, defensive ball in what he guessed was the middle of the pitch black room. He was just about to peel his mask off in an attempt to get more air when his vision was all of a sudden filled with Tony. "I'm coming, Kid", the man said, his face scrunched up in concern.

"I'm good. I'm okay.", Peter began to breathlessly chant but he wasn't sure if it was for Tony's sake or his own. His heart was still pounding.

"You are. You're alright. Your heart rate is a bit out of whack but all of your other vital suggest that you're fine. I'll be there in two minutes, okay? Hang in there for two minutes. I'm coming."
As promised, two minutes later Iron Man himself was blasting through the vault door and approaching the distressed Spiderling who was still folded up on the floor, shaking.

The second the light broke dramatically into the room, Peter squinted in that direction, drinking in the warmth it seemed to offer after sitting in the cold and seemingly infinite darkness for so long. He lifted his head slightly when he saw Tony enter the room, faceplate lifting as if to prove that it was truly him. "I'm here, Kiddo. I've got you. You're alright.\textquotedbl", he murmured, kneeling down beside the boy despite the protest of his cracking knees.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm good.\textquotedbl", Peter breathed out, attempting to bring himself into a more upright, sitting position so that he could better see his mentor. However as he tried to do so, he found the man's still armored arms reaching under his, and pulling him close. The closeness seemed to be what cut the one very thin thread that was keeping Peter from falling apart because as soon as his cheek landed on the armored shoulder he lost it.

Tony tried to carefully but quickly bring the boy back together because they still needed to get out of there. No one needed to see Spider-man sobbing on Iron Man's shoulder. "It's alright, I know, I know.\textquotedbl", he tried to soothe. "We've got to get out of here Buddy. I know you must be ready to get out of here..."

"Yeah. I'm, I'm ready. Please.\textquotedbl" He sniffed before taking a deep breath and standing up Tony following directly behind him. Stumbling over the rubble and not quite back to himself enough to think to climb or swing his way out of the mess, he tiredly paused to lean on an exposed support beam and looked towards the small portion of the building that was still standing. His chest was still rising and falling in a deep and nearly rhythmic fashion, as his body began to shiver. He needed to catch his breath.

Having closed his eyes for a moment to block out the radiating sun, he startled when Tony placed a heavy hand on his shoulder. "Hey, Kid? How about I carry you, just this once.\textquotedbl" He was still feeling overly concerned despite the fact that he knew there was nothing physically wrong with the boy. He'd run the injury report the second Karen had notified him of the incident and run it a second time upon finding him curled in on himself inside of the vault.

Peter just nodded and allowed himself to be scooped up. He was shaky, tired and still uneasy from the event. Being carried, literally, like a baby out of the debris was the least of his concerns at the moment so he took the brief opportunity to close his eyes again. Head resting casually on the cool metal of the armor.

After being gently laid down on what he could only assume was the roof of the SI building, he jolted
up. "Did they get away? Everyone got out, right?"

Tony who was no longer encased in the Iron Man suit, turned to face him, pinching the bridge of his nose. He wanted to yell at the kid but he also knew that wasn't going to solve anything. It never had in the past. Why would it now? "They didn't get away. No one was hurt."

"Oh, thank God.", Peter breathed.

"What were you thinking, Kid? I thought I told you to stay. Away. From. Alien weapons. There are other agencies out there to take care of that shit.", he near-shouted but managed to keep himself mostly composed.

"I had it under control. If that door hadn't shut I would have been fine. I am fine. Nothing happened. I got everyone out and the bad guys didn't get away", Peter pointed out with slightly less confidence than he would ever like to admit. Tony looked pissed.

"Everyone but you! Jesus Christ, Pete, You scared the shit out of me. Do you have any idea how long you could have been stuck in there if I didn't come and save your ass? Did anyone other than the guy who locked you in there even know you were there?--"

"--I would have found a way out!", he defended. "I've gotten out of worse situations without...", his voice trailed off for a moment as an unreadable expression crossed his mentor's face. "...without...your... help...", he finished nervously, dry swallowing after the last word made it past his teeth.

Tony took a moment to try and sort out what the kid had meant by that. There hadn't been anything disastrous in the reports that he received regularly from the boy's AI since he'd returned the suit. Was he talking about the plane? That had been a pretty terrifying ordeal... there was no footage on that, he hadn't had the suit. Wait. What else happened while didn't have the suit? They'd never truly discussed it. All he knew was, he'd save the plane, crashing it in the process, there must be more, he thought. "What do you mean situations? What kind of situations?", he asked. His voice had gone up half an octave as he tried to not completely freak out at the possibilities.

Peter who was just now starting to come down from his own anxiety became suddenly hyper-aware of what he had just set into motion. After everything that had happened with the Vulture, he'd only left a note on the beach. He never went into detail about what had led up to that moment, even when Happy had asked him about it, that very first time he'd driven him out to the compound. Ned was the only one who knew everything. Not even May had gotten a full version of the story. Tony wouldn't fall for the gaps in events. He could tell when he was lying better than Aunt May. It was
Standing there on the top of a building with the summer sun beating down on his back, Peter pulled his mask off revealing his, hot, red and sweaty features. "Do we have to talk about it here?", he pleaded. "I mean, I'll tell you everything, I swear but can, can we please not do it here?" It was going to be a long story and he was already miserable.

The heat of the day soaking into his dark suit, Tony eased up. "Go change, Kid. I'll have Happy meet you outside the alley. I'll be in my office." He said those words with such finality that Peter just nodded and swung off towards where he'd stored his backpack.
Half an hour later, Peter walked into the man's office building feeling grungy and underdressed. His cheeks were still glowing, his hair was stiff and ruffled with sweat and he was wearing nothing but basketball shorts and a wrinkled t-shirt, hardly business attire. He was pretty sure that the only reason he wasn't getting too many side-ways looks was that he was being escorted by Happy. He wondered if that combined with his disheveled appearance made him look guilty of something. That, thought in mind he lowered his head, Happy giving him a gentle pat on the shoulder as they reached the office door. "You'll live, Kid. Need anything?"

"Come on in, Kid.", the man nearly whispered in Peter's direction before turning to Happy. "Can you get the kid some water? Maybe a snack or something? ...and me some coffee. I don't have nearly enough coffee in me right now for this."

"When did I become your errand boy?", Happy grumbled under his breath after giving Peter one more reassuring look.

"Thanks, Happy", Tony said in earnest as the man turned to retrieve the requested items.

Happy tuned to look over his shoulder at the man. "You're welcome. Really." Then smiling widely he added. "I think the kid's manners are rubbing off on you."

"Oh, be quiet! ...and go get my coffee already. This is what I pay you for!"

"No, it's not.", the man added laughing and shaking his head. "But I do it anyway... You're welcome."
Turning back into the office, he looked at Peter who had made no effort to seat himself anywhere in the room. "Sit, Kiddo. We aren't leaving anytime soon."

"I, I'm gross.", the boy stated, still staring at the floor.

Tony rolled his eyes and walked into the connecting bathroom, beckoning for Peter to follow him. Once the boy had made his way to the doorway, he grabbed a hand towel off the rack and began to saturate it in warm water before tossing it into the kid's hands. "There, clean up best you can with that.", he said motioning towards the hand soap and remaining hand towels. "You can take a shower tonight. Hurry up. Happy's bringing you something to eat and I'm sure you're thirsty."

Peter nodded his head as the man turned sideways to walk past him. Once the door was shut he removed his shirt and washed up best he could in the small sink. He considered leaning over and trying to at least rinse out his hair but he was trying not to make too big of a mess. Sighing he used the last available towel to wipe off the counter and floor before exiting and taking the nearly empty container of deodorant out of his backpack. He had to shake it vigorously in order to get the can to provide him with an adequate amount of the spray that Tony had dubbed 'Canned Essence of Teenager' because no self-respecting adult would use an antiperspirant called 'Signature Island'.

As he was dropping the now empty can into the trashcan beside Tony's desk, Happy walked in holding a beverage carrier and a small take-out carton. Before the man could get the items set down on the table, Peter was already clamoring to get his hands on the large water bottle that he knew was for him. He'd managed to down half the bottle in a few large gulps before Tony started badgering him to slow down as he started to finish it off.

Once it was empty he set it down and glanced between Happy who was walking out the door and Tony who was now sitting on the couch looking at him expectantly. Knowing full well that there wasn't likely to be any tolerance for stalling, Peter grabbed the food container and a bottle of red Powerade before settled himself onto the couch.

Once seated, Peter set the food aside and began to compulsively sip at the drink as he waited for Tony to start questioning him. He didn't have to wait long. "Alright, Kiddo. What's the story. Give it to me."

Peter looked at the man fully for the first time since entering the room. While he had looked decidedly pissed off on the rooftop, now he just looked worried. Another gulp of the drink and a couple of steadying breaths later, he launched into a detailed explanation. "It was the night of Homecoming. Liz, my date, Liz... well, her dad, it turned out he was the Vulture..."
Tony managed to stay relatively quiet at first as the kid explained how he'd ditched his date, stolen and then wrecked a car and taken off after the very man he's been told to stay away from. He wanted to be angry about that, but the boy had tried to contact Happy. If he'd had the suit, he would have been able to get to him, no reason to rely on Happy who had been too occupied with the move to hear Ned out. Tony was having trouble sorting out what he'd been thinking when he took it. If he'd been paying better attention to the kid he would have known that taking the suit away would never stop him. *It was his fault.*

When the boy had gone on to explain how the Vulture had destroyed the support columns in the warehouse, Tony's blood ran cold. He wasn't sure he wanted to hear where this part of the story was going but he continued to listen. "...and then, then I was just stuck, the building fell on me and I was stuck. I didn't know what to do, I panicked because I didn't have my phone or anything. No one could hear me. I tried, but there was just no one there. Then, then I remembered when you said that if I was nothing without the suit, that I shouldn't have it.--"

"--I was wrong", Tony cut in. "You should have had it. *I could have helped you, Kid.* You shouldn't have been alone. That should have never happened like that." *My fault, my fault, my fault...*

"But it *did* happen like that, Tony and, and I was able to *save myself.* I got myself out. I lifted it and got out because I was still Spider-man, even without the suit. I didn't need anyone else."

"Sometimes you need someone else. You can't save yourself every time. It's okay to ask for help, to get help, to have a team." As much as he meant them, those words hurt more than he cared to admit. He'd been a part of a team once and look where it got him. "You have me, Kid. I'm on your team."

Peter huffed a laugh despite the seriousness of the conversation. "Team Iron Man, right?"

"Sure, Kiddo, Team Iron Man." he laughed lightly before pulling Peter over so that he was now leaning back onto his chest so that he couldn't see the wetness building in his eyes. Then, resting his chin on the top of his head he thoughtfully added, "You know Rhodey's on your team too... and Happy, even though he might not always show it. Your Aunt May and Pepper, they've got your back too... and let's not forget your 'guy in the chair', yeah?"

"Mm-hmm", Peter hummed in contentment. "You have them on your team to you know."
"Yeah, I know. Sometimes I forget though. Good thing I have you here to remind me." It was a nice reminder that even with the Avengers scattered across, God knows where he did still have a team to rely on. Taking a deep breath, he wiped a hand across his eyes and down his face as of to erase any signs of the previous emotions.

"Anytime", Peter sighed, finally picking up the styrofoam carton that Happy had carried in for him. Leaning back down onto his mentor he started to pick at the fries that had been covered in ranch dressing and cheese. Occasionally Tony would reach around him and steal one out of the container but mostly they just sat there, quietly enjoying each others company until there came a light knock at the door and FRIDAY announced that Happy was requesting entrance.

With a nod of Tony's head, the AI unlocked the door, allowing Happy to step inside. "Hey, I hate to break the 'father-son bonding moment' but it's after seven and frankly I want to go home."

"Oh.", was all Tony managed to get out of his mouth as he continued to process the fact that he had just been accused of being Peter's father. Standing up, he stared at the other man for no less than thirty seconds before Peter, who seemed completely unfazed by the association, interrupted his thoughts. "Are we leaving, like, right this second? Because if we are, I need to go to the bathroom first."

Recovering himself quickly once the boy had spoken up, Tony turned his eyes towards Peter. "Yeah... Yeah, we should go ahead and get out of here, so be quick about it."

"Very quick.", Happy added sternly before turning to walk back out the door. "I'll be in the car... don't make me wait!"

Seated in the back of the car together, Tony found himself replaying everything the kid had told him back in the office. It occurred to him at some point that they sort of got sidetracked and he'd never let the kid finish the story. "Hey, Kid? I interrupted you earlier. Never got to hear what happened after you got out from under the building."

"Well, you pretty much, already know that part. I just stopped the Vulture guy from stealing the plane then left a note and made sure that someone came to get the stuff."

"That's all that happened? No gritty details that you left out?"

"Nope. I told you everything about that part already. If I hadn't you would know because for some
Tony laughed. He knew he'd called the kid out on some lies in the past but he didn't realize that was something surprising. "Kid, you're a terrible liar."

"I'm not really. May almost never finds me out." As soon said that he regretted it. He'd just basically admitted that he lied to May. When Tony quirked an eyebrow at him, he struggled to dig himself out of the hole he'd just dug. "Not, not that I do that. I mean, once or, or twice... but it's not like it's a regular thing. I, I'm, I'm not a liar. ", he finished hesitantly.

"I know you're not, Kiddo. You're too good for that. That's what makes you a terrible liar. I can feel your guilt the second you deviate from the truth."

Not knowing what else to say to that, he just apologized and went back to the game he'd been playing on his phone. The remainder of the ride was quiet and as soon as they got back to the penthouse, Peter was in the kitchen. A box of cheese fries could hardly be considered a passable dinner for an average teenage boy, let alone an enhanced one and he was hungry.

Once he had scrapped together enough food to be considered a somewhat balanced dinner he took a seat beside Tony, who was picking at a bag of almonds at the bar. It was just before ten when Tony announced he was going down to the lab. Peter nodded his head and gave a small verbal acknowledgment as he rinsed his plate and placed it in the dishwasher. His plan was to read for a little while and then go to bed, as such, he went ahead and told the man good-night.

It didn't work out that way. Once his eyes began to droop around midnight, he got ready for bed and asked Friday to turn out the lights. As soon as the lights were out the darkness consumed him and he was hurriedly requesting for the lights to go back on. Brushing it off, he laughed at himself for the ridiculous reaction and again asked FRIDAY to turn the lights down. When the darkness coated the room, once again, he found himself staring intently at the small stripe of light coming out from under his closed door. There was light, he wasn't trapped, he was safe in his bed. Taking a deep breath he shut his eyes in an attempt to sleep but he was periodically taken over by the impulse to open them again, just to check to see if the ribbon of light was still filtering into the room.

He knew that he could ask FRIDAY to raise the lights ever so slightly, he could turn on the bathroom light or even crack his door open but he flat out refused to give in to such a juvenal and irrational fear. Instead, he fought back the nagging disquiet that was lurking in the back of his thoughts and fell into an unrestful sleep.

When he woke up the first time it was only three in the morning and despite the fact that the sun had
yet to rise and penetrate the room, past the curtains, his eyes had now adjusted to lack of sufficient light yet he still found himself uneasy. He briefly wondered if Tony had ever made it to bed but not so much so that he felt the need to ask. Instead, he crept out of bed and cracked his door open so that a beam of light from the hall would cut across the top portion of his bed.

The next morning, when Tony padded down the hallway he saw the boy’s door open and assumed he was up already. Then after leaving the hallway, was confused by the lack of teenager in the kitchen. He immediately went to check the couch, it had been a while, since the boy had ended up sleeping there but, then again, yesterday had been...rough. Finding the couch empty he looked towards the hall bathroom only to find the door open and the room unoccupied. "FRIDAY? Where's the kid?", he asked assuming that Peter had left the suite altogether.

"Mr. Parker is currently asleep in his room, Boss. Would you like for me to wake him?"

"Nah, that's alright. Let him sleep.", he replied. As far as he knew the kid always slept with the door shut but he assumed that the boy had just stayed up so late that he was too tired to get up and shut it all the way. Shrugging it off he started the coffee pot and leaned onto the counter.

Just as he was pouring his first cup of coffee FRIDAY alerted him that Rhodey was calling. "Put it through to the office.", he sighed, as he finished filling his mug and took off down the hallway.

"What's up, Darling? Did you miss me?", Tony answered languidly.

Rhodey scoffed. "Miss your annoying ass? I don't think so. How's the kid doing though?"

Tony smiled to himself. "Oh, him you miss, huh? I see how it is. I feed you and provide you with a place to stay whenever you're in town... at no cost and that's the thanks I get?" Before the other man could say anything to that he continued. "Kid's fine. Giving me gray hair, but fine. When are you coming back?"

"That's what I was calling you about. The committee wants to meet here, in Washington."

"When?"

"Wednesday--"
"--That's tomorrow! They can't just up and decide these things like that. I have other things going on., he shouted as he slammed his coffee mug down onto the desk causing it to slosh over the side.

Rhodey laughed out loud. "Other things? Like playing father-of the-Year? Tony, they do this all the time. This is hardly the first time they've called a last-minute meeting."

"Yeah? Well, no one even asked me this time. What if I was out of the country with SI? Am I just supposed to drop ever--"

"--Tony! I knew you weren't out of the country. I okayed it. I didn't realize it would get your panties all in a wad. This Proposal they want to discuss, it's what you wanted. Why are you fighting this?"

"I'm not fighting it.", Tony scoffed. "I have other...things... on my plate and now I have to take off today to DC to meet with a bunch of bureaucratic idiots about something that should have been settled months ago."

"Is this about the Kid? Couldn't he stay there with his aunt?", Rhodey asked, nearing irritation.

"I suppose he could...", Tony sighed, before going back to his coffee.

"Just bring him with you. It's one meeting, you can take him to the International Spy Museum or Chucky-Cheese or something afterward."

"And what do I do with him while I'm in the meeting?", Tony said intently as he leaned back in his chair and studied the photo of the kid sitting on his desk.

"How should I know? He's fifteen. What does he normally do when you leave him alone?" When the line was silent Rhodes laughed. "Oh my God. It's been a month. You haven't left him alone in an entire month? Tony! He's not five!"

Feeling the need to defend himself Tony fervently tried to explain himself. "It's not that I haven't left him alone! I mean he goes out and does his spider thing--"
"--which you monitor", Rhodey helpfully chimed in.

"And he stays in the penthouse when I go to the lab sometimes--"

"--but you're in the same building and you have FRIDAY babysitting him, I'm sure. *I know you, Tony. What do you do when you go into the office?*

Tony sighed, sounding defeated. "He comes with me."

Rhodey was still chuckling when he finally responded. "You are the worst helicopter dad ever."

*I am not.*, he grumbled. "It just... hasn't come up."

Rhodey noted that his friend hadn't bucked at the title so much as the implied accusation and smiled. "Well, now it has. Figure it out. See you in Washington. Wednesday, Ten AM. Same office as last time."

After that, the line went silent. He'd have to talk to the Kid... and May to figure this out and he needed to do it soon if he wanted to be in DC at any kind of a reasonable hour. He still needed to have time to get a plane ready and get a hotel room. Still grumbling to himself about the timing, he rose to his feet and went to go wake up the kid.
Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

This chapter includes some descriptions of illness. If you're not up for it, all the Paragraphs that include any detail have a bold letter at the beginning. That's how I'll handle anything like that in the future as well.

Chapter Notes

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*~*~Happy Birthday, Tony Stark!*~*~*
~~~~~~~~~~~~

I wasn't going to post a chapter today but then I realized what day it was and said 'what the Hell.' ;(0)

Tag adds: Sick Peter Parker, vomiting,

Tony chose to wake Peter up himself rather than have FRIDAY do. Pushing the door all the way open, he walked across the room and sat on the edge of the teenager's bed. That alone seemed to be enough to pull the kid out of his sleep. "Tony?", the boy asked, looking slightly blurry eyed.

"That's me.", Tony smiled back at him. "I need to talk to you about something. Can you go ahead and get up and meet me in the kitchen?"

"What do you want to talk to me about?", the boy asked rubbing his face, his head still soundly on the pillow.

"A trip I need to go on. I'll tell you more about it when you can keep your eyes open.", he said, laughing as the boy's eyes drifted closed for a split second before snapping open again.

"Mm-hmm. I'll be right there.", he replied, already trying to untangle himself from the blankets with Tony's help. As soon as his feet were on the floor, his mentor gave him a gentle pat on the back before walking out the door, closing it behind himself.
Having dragged himself out of bed and woken up a bit more, he stumbled into the kitchen where he spotted Tony sitting at the table. "Hey, Kid. Get some breakfast. I can talk while you eat."

Nodding in response Peter went to work preparing himself a few packets of oatmeal and pouring himself a glass of milk before plopping down in the chair across from Tony. "So. What kind of trip?", Peter asked as he stirred the steaming bowl in an attempt to get it to cool more quickly.

He didn't know why the idea of Tony leaving was making him so anxious. Of course, the man was going to have to go out of town at some point while he was there and it wasn't like he couldn't be left alone. He just, for whatever reason, didn't want him to leave. There wasn't a lot of time to dwell on it before his previous question was being answered.

Tony sighed, taking a sip of his coffee. "Well, I found out this morning that I have a meeting with Accords Committee in Washington DC, tomorrow. So, you have two choices, well, maybe two choices. I haven't actually run this by May yet. It's only one night but we could make it more if you wanted to.", he practically rambled before taking a deep breath. "Anyway, what I'm trying to say is that you could come with me if you wanted. You would have to stay in the hotel during the meeting but after that, we could go, I don't know, sight-seeing or something. Of course, you could stay here if you would rather. It's up to you, Kiddo."

Peter's eyes lit up with happy relief. "Sort of like a vacation?"

Tony shrugged his shoulders. "Sure, I guess it could be."

"I've only been to Washington the one time and it was with my class... I didn't get to, um, see, that much... because, well, you know...", he said sheepishly before perking right back up. "That would be awesome, Tony! I mean, if you're sure I won't be in the way."

"You won't be in the way.", Tony said, rolling his eyes good-naturedly before questioning the AI. "Is May up?" It was after practically ten but he still felt the need to ask.

"Ms. Parker is currently in a therapy session with Dr. Waters. Would you like for me to connect you?"

"No, it's fine. I'll go see her in a little bit", he said with a wave of his hand. "Alright, Kid, I'm going to go make a quick phone call about a plane. We'll go to see May as soon as I'm done."
"Okay.", Peter chirped happily as he scraped the last bite of oatmeal out of his bowl and quickly cleaned up after himself before going back to his room to text Ned. He would want to know that there was a possibility of him getting to go to DC with Tony.

Soon the two of them were walking into May's apartment and Tony was thoroughly explaining the nature of the trip and how Peter wanted to accompany him. As he spoke, the boy nodded his head emphatically and cut in a few times to express his uncontainable excitement. Once they were done, May looked between them deliberately before settling her gaze on Peter. "Are you planning on packing the suit?"

"No, he's not!", Tony offered through his teeth. He could see Peter practically glaring at him in the corner of his eye. "There's no need for it. If anything were to happen. I'm there."

"Yeah", Peter laughed nervously. "I, um, wouldn't even need it. Tony'll be there. So, yeah..."

Tony could hear the guilt in the boy's tone as he spoke. He knew full well, that he was planning on packing the suit no matter what. "If anything I would pack the suit and it could stay locked in its case... unless there is some crazy off the wall circumstance where I deem it necessary for him to have it." May just looked at him with her eyebrows raised. "Not that, that would happen.", he added firmly, now looking at Peter.

After a few quiet seconds, May finally relented. "I don't actually mind if he goes." Looking at the smile grow even bigger on Peter's face she added, "You'll send me pictures right, sweetie?".

"Of course!", he answered already dashing over and hugging her. "This is going to so awesome! Thank you!"

"Alright, Kid", Tony interrupted. "You should probably go pack. Make sure you have at least one set of dress clothes and maybe your swim trunks, yeah?"

"I will!", Peter called out already hurrying towards the door, leaving the two adults alone in the room together.

Tony hesitated, choosing not to follow the boy out. Instead, he turned to May. "Thank you for letting him come.", he said, wondering if Happy was right and the kid's manners were rubbing off on him.
"Well, I wasn't going to say 'no'. If I did he probably wouldn't speak to me for a week. He loves you, Tony."

He shifted on his feet, unsure of how to respond. "I think 'love' might be kind of strong word to--"

"--Don't you dare", May warned. "He loves you and if you don't feel the same way, well, there's nothing I can do about it... but don't you dare stand there and try to invalidate that."

"I'm not. I would never.", he defended. "...and I know... and... I do too.", he stammered. "Love him I mean."

"Hmm... I know you do.", May said wittingly. "I also know that you called him yours.--"

"--I didn't mean it like that, May. I wasn't trying to be presumptuous or misleading and I certainly wasn't trying to displace you. It just sort of... happened. It--"

"--It's fine, Tony. We've been in this together for going on over a month now. I'm glad you two have gotten so close. He needs that. Another adult, a male role model or whatever. He isn't always going to tell me everything. I'm glad he has you."

"Yeah, well, I'm, uh, glad I have him too", Tony said somewhat insecurely before bouncing back. "I should go check on the Kid and finish packing. I'll be in touch.", he said as he turned towards the door.

"That's all I ask!", May called after him laughing.

Up in the penthouse, Tony looked dubiously at the small duffle bag sitting in the living room. "This is everything you need?"

"Uh-huh. I packed some shorts, t-shirts, and socks and stuff... and my swimsuit like you told me to."

"Where are your dress clothes?", Tony asked looking around for where the kid might have put the hangers.
"Oh! They're in there too!"

Tony couldn't help but laugh. "Kid... You don't pack those like that. They'll be a wrinkled mess. Take them out of there and put them back on the hangers.", he said between laughs.

With his cheeks getting pinker by the second, Peter tried to justify himself. "I, I didn't know that. I've never had to pack anything, like, like that before! Stop laughing!"

"You're fine, Kiddo. Just bring it all to me when you're done. I put it with my things.", he said still smiling, as he walked past the boy, giving him a pat on the shoulder. "And be sure to eat something too, we need to go soon."

In his room, Tony was talking to Pepper and finishing up his own packing when Peter's silhouette appeared in his doorway. "Hang on a second Dear. I need to talk to the kid, real quick.", he said before fully facing the teenager who was lingering in the doorway. "Hey, Pete, you got those clothes for me?"

"Mm-hmm", Peter said, still looking a bit sheepish as he handed over the hangers.

"And you ate right?"

"Yeah, I ate."

"Great. You want to say 'hi' to Pepper?", he asked gesturing vaguely towards the ceiling.

Peter smiled. "Of course I do... Hi Pepper!", he greeted enthusiastically

"Hi Peter", Pepper said, her voice echoing sweetly through the room. "Tony said you two were going to go to Washington DC. Are you excited?"

"I am so excited. This is going to be so much fun.", the kid nearly squealed.
Tony smiled at the boy's delight but at the same time, he just hoped he could make this short trip live up to the hype. A few quick minutes later he glanced at down at his watch and cringed. He didn't want to interrupt Pepper, who was talking to the boy about but at the same time, it was getting late and they had a plane to catch. Even if it was his own plane, it couldn't wait for them without end. The window of takeoff clearance was only so long. "Alright, we really need to get going. I'll talk to you soon, Pepper. Love you."

"Love you too, Tony... and you Peter. Bye!", she said before ending the call.

It took a second for Peter to process that Pepper had just indicated that she loved him. 'I love you too', he thought to himself with unexpected ease before taking a few steps towards Tony and hugging him from behind.

"Oof", Tony grunted, he had been leaning over the bed packing when Peter abruptly grabbed a hold of his middle. He quickly finished zipping up the garment bag and attempted to straighten himself up. Once upright, he took a hold of the kid's hands as he turned himself around in boy's grip, this leaving Peter's head to now fall on his chest rather than his back. "What's this for?", he asked as he reciprocated the gesture.

"I don't know", Peter breathed out. "I just wanted to hug you, that's all."

"Okay...", Tony said, elongating the simple word. He held onto the boy, patiently waiting for him to relinquish his hold for only a few moments before the urgency of their time restraints forced him to be the first to pull away. "We'll have plenty of time for that later.", he half smiled. "Right now, we have a plane to catch. You ready to go?"

Peter nodded in agreement, a frisson of excitement and anticipation sweeping over him. "I'm ready.", he grinned.

"Happy's off today so we're going to have to carry all of this ourselves."

"I've got it!", Peter helpfully declared before taking most of the luggage into his own hands. Tony quickly looked the boy over and nodded towards to door, indicating that he would follow Peter this time.

Then, as they were pulling out of the garage Peter stiffened in his seat. "It's raining.", he announced with no context.
"Yeah, it's three o'clock in the afternoon in July. It does that.", the man answered as if that was explanation enough.

Peter twisted a little in his seat. "But we're about to get on a plane.", he added timidly.

"...and...?", Tony asked with slight annoyance. It tended to get on his nerves when the kid danced around things. He preferred it when people just got to the point with him.

"...and it's raining, Mr. Stark. We're about to get on a plane and it's raining." He couldn't understand how Tony didn't see this as a problem.

Tony was still completely flummoxed by the kid's remark but took notice that he had all of a sudden become 'Mr. Stark'. "You do know that planes can still fly in the rain right?"

"That's safe? It's a small plane...", the boy wondered out loud, his face scrunched up in question.

Hearing the skittishness in the boy's tone of voice he tried to soften his own. "It's a summer thunderstorm, not a hurricane. It's fine."

Peter nodded but remained quiet for the remainder of the short ride to the private airport.

They arrived at the airport just as the rain was starting to let up a little, giving them the opportunity to dart into the plane without getting soaked. Tony had immediately sat himself down in one of the cushioned seats while Peter hesitated slightly. He'd traveled on a plane exactly twice. Once to fly to Germany and once to fly back. Both times, Happy had been rather critical of his choice in seats. He didn't want that to happen this time. Not with Tony. Just as he was about to make a move to sit he heard Tony calling him. "Kid, are you going to come to sit down or what?", he asked patting the seat across from him.

"Yeah. I'm coming, Tony", Peter gasped gratefully. While is previous flights had been painfully long, there wasn't any thundering rain. He was appreciative that the man was going to let him sit close by. He was even more thankful for that when they hit some major turbulence due to the storm.

His stomach started doing somersaults and his heart nearly dropped every time the plane dipped. It
occurred to him that this was his first time flying in an airplane since he'd crashed with one by the beach alongside the Vulture. He took several deep breaths as he tried to keep his heart and stomach in place.

The flight was only supposed to be a little over an hour but Peter was ready to be back on the ground within the first thirty minutes. "Is this normal?", Peter finally asked, gripping the armrests a little too tightly while repeatedly swallowing the excessive amounts of would-be drool that kept pooling under his tongue. He hazily wondered if he was air-sick or panicking.

"It's only a little turbulence", the man said matter-of-factly. "It's completely normal. I know you've been on an airplane before...", he added casually, never looking up from his tablet. Unlike Peter, Tony had not given a singular thought to the plane crash the kid had dealt with several months earlier. It simply slipped his mind.

"Yeah", Peter swallowed. "...but this didn't happen. I mean, not like this." He'd leaned his head back on the seat for barely an instant before he was pitching forward with an unexpected gag. *That got Tony to look up.*

"*Shit, Kid.*", he startled, grabbing for a sick bag and tossing it into the boy's lap before ringing for the attendant.

Peter grabbed the bag and had it open just in time for the next gag to escape him, though nothing came out of his mouth save for a few strings of saliva. He was just about to pull the bag away from his face when he retched in earnest for the first time, followed by several more productive heaves. Once he finally felt like there was nothing else that could possibly come out of him, he glanced up at Tony who rather than looking disgusted as he imagined, looked sympathetic. "Think you're done?", he'd asked him carefully after meeting eyes.

Peter nodded his head gently. He was still slightly out of breath and his eyes were still watering from the effort but his stomach seemed to be okay for the time being.

With that confirmation, Tony reached over and removed the bag from his clutch, replacing it with a cool, damp washcloth. He then quickly sealed up the bag and proceeded to discreetly hand it over to the nearby attendant for disposal.

"Thanks.", Peter whispered after wiping his face off. "I didn't mean for that to happen. I'm Sorry."
"I didn't think it was on purpose.", Tony huffed with a light laugh. "Why didn't you tell me that flying makes you sick?"

Still feeling a bit queasy, Peter swallowed a few times before replying. "I didn't know."

Tony looked at him questioningly. "You didn't get sick on the plane to or from Germany?"

"No", Peter answered carefully. "The plane didn't rock this much, and I slept a lot." He paused to for a moment in thought. "Well, now that I think about it, I did get a little nauseous sometimes but I thought I was just hungry or tired or something, it always just...passed. I didn't ever, you know...throw up.", he breathed out before politely accepting the glass of ginger ale the attendant was offering him. He debated mentioning that Germany wasn't actually his last encounter with an airplane and he somewhat wondered if that particular experience was half his problem but he thought better of it. He didn't want the man to think he was such a baby that he couldn't get over it. That had been months ago at this point.

"Fair enough.", Tony murmured. "You're feeling better now?"

He took a few small sips of the cold drink before answering. " Mostly. I think I might just try to sleep through it."

"That's fine. We'll be landing in about thirty more minutes though.", he said before handing him an empty bag. "Hold onto that just in case. We'll get you some Dramamine for the flight home... or maybe we'll just drive."

Peter nodded in appreciation and closed his eyes not opening them back up until the plane was solidly on the ground. Nothing made him happier than to run down the steps onto the tarmac.
In complete contrast to Peter's rapid and unsophisticated descent down aircraft's stairway, Tony paused every so slightly at the door before moving to saunter down to the steps with an almost arrogant swagger. It was a cultivated mannerism that had become second nature when on display to the public. However, by the time both feet had hit the pavement his entire demeanor changed and he hurriedly began to cross the distance between himself and Peter, essentially ignoring the man who was trying to hand him the keys to the waiting car. "Could you give me a minute?", he shot out, holding his hand up to stop the man from following him as he quickly made it to the edge of the grass where Peter stood bent over with his hands on his knees panting. "You good? Still sick?", he asked placing a hand on the boy's back.

Despite the fact that Peter had kept his eyes shut for the remainder of the flight, he hadn't managed to sleep. He'd been entirely too anxious to allow himself to relax. Remaining outwardly calm for the remainder of the flight had been a difficult task as nausea slowly built it's way back up inside of him. It was just as he was starting to think he might end up having to open up that second sick bag that the pilot announced that they were about to land. "Yeah, I'm good.", he eventually replied. "I'm off the plane. I needed to be off the plane.", he half laughed as he continued to try and pull himself together.

"Are you okay to ride in the car or do you need a few minutes?", Tony asked cautiously. "We can wait around here for a bit if we need to. Not in a hurry." He didn't want the kid to feel rushed and make the wrong decision here.

Peter straightened himself up and took a deep breath in through his nose. "I'm good. The car's okay."

"Alright, well, let's get going then.", the man said giving the boy's shoulder a gentle squeeze.

~o~o~o~o~o~o~

Just walking into the hotel lobby with Tony was an uncomfortable experience for Peter. All of their luggage had been piled onto a cart by a nicely dressed man who then followed them into the lobby while another person parked the car. Peter followed so closely behind Tony that, without realizing it,
he looked like a small child readying himself to grab onto his father's coattails. The man didn't seem to
mind or even notice as he confidently carried himself to the front desk. The woman there waiting for
him seemed completely unfazed by Tony's presence, which oddly enough helped Peter to relax
some. "Mr. Stark", she began. "We're glad to have you back, I see you decided to change things up
a little bit this time.", she said offering him the keys to the room he had requested. "I hope you enjoy
your stay in the Jefferson Suite."

Tony thanked her and started towards the room, Peter still so close behind that when the man
stopped at the elevator he crashed right into him. "I'm sorry, Mr. Stark.", Peter gasped. "I didn't
mean to."

Looking over his shoulder, Tony took half a step backward to put just a little bit more space between
them. "It's fine, Kiddo. Are you alright?"

Noticing that both his mentor and the porter both now had their eyes on him he felt himself shrink.
Unable to get anything more than a few 'um's and 'uh's out of his mouth he, shrugged his shoulders.
Tony in all his mercy didn't say anything about it, rather, he put his hand on the boy's shoulder and
gave him a reassuring smile. "Relax, will ya? You're alright.", he whispered.

Peter just nodded, thankful the man didn't remove his hand from his shoulder as they climbed into the
elevator and finally found their way into the suite. As soon as they were inside Peter stood there in
the middle of the room internally begging for the porter to hurry up and unload the luggage. The
unfamiliar man kept glancing towards him and it made him feel uncomfortable but not afraid, his
spider senses were quite. Even so, he didn't even attempt to relax until he was alone in the large
space with Tony alone.

"Hey, come here, Kiddo.", Tony called from the table by the window. "Are you hungry or is your
stomach still settling?"

Peter started to walk towards him, glancing at the double french doors to his left and the singular
doors to his right. "I'm, I'm okay, Mr. Stark."

The man sighed. "Stop that."

"S-stop what?", the boy stuttered apprehensively.

Tony couldn't help but laugh. "Stop stressing out. You're fine.", he said closing the distance
between them and letting Peter rest his head on his chest. "Look, I'm going to order us some room service. I haven't had anything but coffee today and you, well, I know for a fact your stomach is empty. So, let's eat and then we can talk about what we want to do for the rest of the afternoon, evening, whatever. Yeah?"

Peter took a deep breath, inhaling the man's cologne as he desperately tried to calm himself. "That sounds nice.", he murmured into the man's chest. "I am hungry."

As soon as the food was on its way, Peter carried his bag into the room that Tony had pointed him towards. He was happy to see that the space was set up like a traditional hotel room. A tightly made up double bed and side table, a small dresser with a TV and a large armchair by the curtain-covered window. The only difference was the quality and clean, modern decor. He sat on the edge of the bed for several minutes before unpacking his bag into the dresser as Tony had instructed. That taken care of he wandered over to the window and pulled the gauzy curtain out of the way so he could look out. When he did, all of the apprehension he had been feeling left him and was replaced with giddy excitement.

"Tony!", he called as he came barreling out of the room. "Tony, you can see everything from up here! You can see the Washington Monument and the gardens and...everything! It's awesome!"

Coming out of his room the second he heard the boy call his name, Tony smiled. He was starting to get worried about how nervous the kid was acting. It was causing him to wonder if bringing him had been a good idea or not, but whatever the reason was for the kid's uneasiness, it seemed to have melted away. "Yeah? Did you take a picture for May?"

"No! ... But I totally should."

"Why don't you take it from the balcony?", Tony asked pointing towards the curtain-covered glass door behind the table.

"Oh my God! There's a balcony? This is crazy!", he shouted as he darted out the door, phone in hand.

By the time he returned inside from what ended up being a video call with Ned, there was a broad assortment of foods, spread out across the large table. "I didn't know what you wanted and you were being all weird so I ordered a little bit of everything," Tony explained. "I made of point of getting you some pasta, though."
Sitting around the table, they discussed how they wanted to handle the next couple of days. Well, Tony tried to discuss it. Peter, mostly agreed with whatever he suggested without any thought and continuously jabbered about whatever random topic popped into his head. Considering how quiet, miserable and anxious the kid had been ever since they had left the compound, Tony tried not to get too terribly annoyed. "Kid! you're not even listening to me."

"Yes, I am! You said we should see if Mr. Rhodes wanted to get dinner with us tomorrow night."

"Uh-huh, what about after that, Mr. Parker? What did I just suggest?, he asked with an eyebrow quirked.

Peter, smiled broadly as he tried to think back to what the man might have said. "Um..."

"That's what I thought.", Tony replied seriously before shaking his head in amusement. "I was saying that we should just walk around some tonight and see what we come across. Then, I threw something in there about kittens wearing sunglasses to see if you were listening and surprise! You weren't."

The boy looked at the man in mild disbelief before answering. "I'm pretty sure you didn't say anything like that. I would have definitely heard that."

"Oh, are you admitting that you weren't listening now?, the man laughed.

Peter was still grinning when he started to defend himself. "Um... Maybe? I mean, I wasn't 'not listening'. I might have gotten distracted... but that's not the same thing."

"Sure it isn't", Tony teased as he started to clear the table and place what little leftovers there were into the refrigerator of the small kitchenette.

"It's not", the boy happily insisted, jumping up to help with the mess.

"Whatever you say Spider-boy. Are you ready to go out?"

"Yeah.", Peter answered with slightly less enthusiasm. "...but, um, what if people take our picture
again? What will happen then?"

Unsurprised by the teenager's inquiry Tony answered him with ease. "Then, Pepper will handle. We've already informed the public that you're a family friend and my intern so there isn't really much else to do, other than to continue with that line of response. You don't need to worry about it, Kid. There's a PR team whose entire job is to cover up and smooth out all of the stupid shit I do. Keeping this story intact and your name under wraps is probably like a walk in the park."

"So, you're not worried at all?", Peter asked still shifting lightly from foot to foot.

With a comforting smile, Tony put a hand on the boy's shoulder. "Nope. Not even a little bit. Let's go."

Tony decided instantly that walking around outside had been a shit idea. All of the rain from earlier had caused the air to become thick with humidity. What was worse was the oppressive heat that was beating down on him despite the fact that the sun was already hanging low in the sky. He was already profusely sweating but the time they made it to lawn but the suffocating weather didn't seem to have any effect at all on Peter.

The kid was running from place to place with no effort at all, chattering and commenting on everything they ran into as if he were some sort of walking, more like skipping, encyclopedia. In fact, Tony was pretty sure that if he heard the words 'Hey, did you know...' one more time his head was going to explode, as such, he started to try to tune some of it out. That worked for a little while until the boy was tapping him on the shoulder. "Did you hear me?"

"Hmm?", Tony hummed in question as the boy looked at him with concern. "Oh, no, I was, uh, thinking about something. What did you say?", he asked somewhat guiltily. He had just given the kid a hard time for doing the same thing earlier.

However, Peter didn't seem to think about that, he just repeated what he'd said without criticism. "I said, it's really hot out here. Can we get some ice cream or something?"

Looking the boy over he could see that his face was a bright red and glistening. "Ice cream sounds like a great idea. Maybe somewhere inside."

With the teenager's eager agreement they eventually located an ice cream shop where Tony decided that he had never been more thankful for air conditioning in his entire life. At least the kid was in
shorts, he was still in the jeans and light dress shirt he'd put on that morning. *That* was not a mistake that he would be making again, he thought. Pulling himself out of his own head, he turned his attention to the boy sitting across from him. Smiling and nodded in all the right places as Peter spoke.

They stayed in the refuge of the cool shop until the sun had fully set and the only illumination came from the decorative street lamps and storefronts. It was after eight but the time they made it to the sidewalk, they had taken their time eating the large sundae Tony had purchased. "Maybe we should go back", Peter suggested as they stood under the colorful awning. It was still overly warm out and they had wandered rather far from the hotel at this point.

Tony watched Peter for a second or two after that to determine if that was what the kid really wanted before deciding that it probably was. He looked hot and tired. "I like that plan", he said as he unbuttoned his cuffs to roll up the sleeves. He wasn't sure why he hadn't done that already, really. It only took about twenty minutes of walking for Tony to insist on calling for a cab. He wasn't even picky about it. All he wanted was to get back to the air-conditioned room again. Peter agreed. Once there, the two parted ways and went to their respective bathrooms to shower.

By the time Tony ambled back into the sitting area feeling much cooler and infinitely cleaner, he wasn't the least bit shocked to find Peter in the kitchenette, standing in his pajamas, eating cold leftover pasta straight out of the container. "You could heat that up you know...", he said causing the boy to startle slightly.

Making a point to finish what he had in his mouth first, Peter turned around. "I know I could heat it up but it's fine like this."

Tony squinted his eyes as he watched the kid pop another bite of cold pasta into his mouth. "So, you're one of *those* people are you?"

Peter scrunched his face up in confusion. "*One of what people?* What does that even mean?"

Keeping as straight of a face as he possibly could Tony looked the kid over seriously. "One of those uncivilized people who have absolutely no respect for the artistry of Italian food. *You can't just eat it straight out of the refrigerator.*", he said while pointing an accusatory finger. "It's blasphemous and I'm also pretty sure it's illegal in most states."

"I'm pretty sure it's not.", Peter scoffed.
Not letting up with his serious tone, the man continued to tease the boy. "Nope. I think it's right up there with eating canned pasta actually."

"Are you still going on about that?", Peter laughed in an almost flustered manner. "It's good and you're just picky."

"Whatever.", Tony finally laughed. "Do you want to watch a movie or something? It's not even ten."

They ended up laying on the oversized couch and watching National Treasure at Peter's nagging insistence because, 'We're in Washington DC, Tony. That's the best time to watch it.' Tony hadn't particularly agreed but he wasn't about to argue. If it made the kid happy then it was fine with him. Besides, he'd gotten his teasing in during the beginning credits. Now, with the film buzzing in the background, his mind was wandering to the meeting he was going to be attending the next day. They were getting close to an agreement. So close that he didn't know whether to be anxious or relieved. There were still so many unanswered questions but before he could start to properly dwell on them, he felt a weight gradually start to fall onto his shoulder.

The move wasn't quite over yet but it was almost midnight so Tony paused it where it was and attempted to rouse the sleeping boy. "Kid. Pete. Wake up.", he prodded until the teenager came to life.

Yawning, Peter sat up. "Aw, man. I missed the end!"

"No, you didn't. I paused it. We can go back to it later. ...if we must.", he added with mock disdain. "Why don't you go ahead and get to bed."

"Mm-hmm", Peter sleepily acknowledged before bringing himself to his feet and carrying himself his room. The first thing he did was go over to the window and draw the heavy curtain back all the way back so that the ambient light of the city could flood through the gauzy curtains and cast a pale glow over the room. Wanting to sleep easily, he didn't try to fight it this time when his brain told him that darkness was crushing. Satisfied that it wasn't suffocatingly dark, he fell into bed not realizing that he'd left the door open.

Still sitting on the couch, Tony noticed right away that the boy had left the door ajar. Realizing how tired he'd been when he went to bed, he got up to ask the boy if he wanted him to close it. Peeking inside he saw the curtains drawn back and sighed and went to draw them closed. He hadn't slide the first curtain half way across the rail before Peter was sitting up. "I wanted them open!", he said sounding more alarmed than he'd meant to.
"Okay", Tony placated. "I'll fix it, chill out." He reopened the curtains, subsequently going towards the boy who was still sitting up in his bed. "Did you mean to leave the door open too?"

Peter shifted under the sheets. "No, I, uh, I just wanted the curtains open."

"You said that.", the man smiled. "Any reason in particular?"

"No.", Peter answered a little too quickly because his mentor was now raising an eyebrow at him.

"You wanna try that again?"

"Not really", he grumbled under his breath.

"Is this about the vault?", Tony asked bluntly. It was late and he wasn't in the mood to tiptoe around the subject like he knew he should. When the boy's eyes went wide he knew his theory had been on point. "Look, we don't have to talk about it right now, I know you're tired but we will need to talk about it. yeah?"

Peter nodded his head as he laid back on the pillows as Tony sat down on the edge of the bed. "Yeah. We, we can talk about it... later."

Sighing deeply, Tony started to run his fingers through the boy's hair. "You know, when things are bothering you, you can tell me. I want you to talk to me. I can't fix it if you don't talk to me."

"You can fix this?", Peter asked in such a perfect combination of hesitation and hope that it made Tony's heart skip a beat.

Giving the boy a half quirked smile he nudged the kid over so he could lay beside him. "I'm an engineer, Kid. Fixing things is kind of my whole shtick."

"...and what if you can't?", Peter asked quietly.
"Then I'll figure it out.", he sighed. "We'll figure it out."
Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

This may be one of the longest chapters I have done so far. I try to stick to around 3,000 words but I couldn't find a good stopping point... so... 3,500+ it is...

**Holy crap! Over 1000 kudos. That. Is. Insane.**

***Thank you, really. It means a lot. :)***

Tag adds" Tony Stark Hates Space, Museums

Tony had only meant to lay on the bed until Peter fell asleep but he ended up quickly drifting off himself. When morning arrived he found himself up waking long before his alarm was set to go off. The curtains being opened meant that the sun was relentlessly pouring brightly into the room. Meanwhile, the spiderling rested peacefully, having buried his face into the man's neck, thoroughly avoiding the offensive rays.

After half an hour of chasing sleep, Tony gave up and slowly rolled out of the boy's bed in an attempt to not disturb him. Thought, the effort went unrewarded because the second Peter's face was no longer hidden he was blinking awake. "Tony?", a groggy voice queried. "Did you stay here all night?"

"Yeah, I suppose I did.", the man exhaled.

Trying to sit up and blink away the drowsiness, Peter watched his mentor as he stretched. "Is it time to get up?"

"Nope", the man groaned as he continued to reach his arms over his head. "You can go back to sleep. I'll wake you up in an hour or so."

Already being awake the boy declined and the pair meandered into the sitting room. There was very little debate over the menu and room service was soon on its way. Peter sank down onto the couch and started the last twenty minutes of the movie from the night before to wait, while Tony went to put on a robe and brush his teeth.

It wasn't until they were part way through breakfast that Tony reminded Peter of the Accords
Committee Meeting he would be attending later that morning. They hadn't really discussed anything about it other than it was going to happen. He tried to quickly create some sort of guidelines in his head but decided that the boy had been left alone before. Going over guidelines seemed overkill. Instead, he showed him how to rent movies and only asked that he stay in the room. "I would assume I'd be back by twelve-thirty, I don't really know, but if I'm not I want you to go ahead and order yourself some lunch. Whatever you want, okay?"

"Okay.", Peter replied trying not to sound worried. He was fifteen and May had been allowing him to stay alone in the apartment for well over two years now. It wasn't like that was a foreign concept. Besides, the man was only going to a meeting. He would be gone for three hours and that would be just enough time to watch a lengthy movie.

It wasn't until an hour and a half later when the man started to walk out the door that Peter was starting to wonder what he was really worried about. He hesitated just a few seconds too long when the man had paused in the hall to tell him he would see him later bringing a look of concern to his mentor's face. "You'll be fine, kid. I'll get back as soon as I can.", he had told him before giving his shoulder one last gentle squeeze. It was right then that Peter realized that being alone wasn't actually the problem. It was that Tony was going to some unknown place without him and he didn't know exactly when or if he would be coming back. He took the next little while while shaking those thoughts from his head. Of course, he would be coming back. He was Iron Man, The Invincible Iron Man and there was literally nothing to worry about. He would be back for lunch.

Having calmed unease, for the time being, Peter settled on the couch to start a movie. He carefully selected one that would not only hold his interest but also had a minimum, three hours run time. He ended up settling on The Hobbit because it was on the list of free movies. Even if he had been given permission to rent as many movies or shows as he wanted, free sounded much better. Besides, he had only seen it once making it the perfect option.

He only paused it once to get a candy bar and a drink out of the minibar, never checking the time. It wasn't until the credits were rolling that he looked at the clock. It was after one in the afternoon. All of a sudden anxiety was running through his torso like waves of electric energy. He could feel it sparking and coiling within him making him feel momentarily nauseous. After the immediate feeling of dread had washed over him, he managed to locate his phone only to see no missed calls or messages. He considered messaging Tony himself but he didn't want to seem needy. The man had made it clear enough that twelve-thirty was a guess and that he could be longer.

Pacing the floor for no less than half an hour, his stomach began to clench and gargle with a lack of sustenance. He hadn't had anything except a candy bar since breakfast. Convincing himself that when his mentor returned and found out that he hadn't eaten he would be pissed, he forced himself to order from the room service menu. Though all he did was pick at it for the next hour.

With each ticking minute, Peter was becoming more and more unglued. Scenarios were running
through his head in flashes making his stomach drop with each new possibility. This meeting was about the Accords, what if Tony had been attacked or arrested. What if he didn't have a suit and someone had hurt him. It was easy enough to push most of those images to the side when remembered that Rhodes was there too but then his mind conjured a whole new unfavorable idea... What if he had been in a car wreck. He had to swallow down the sudden pressing urge to start calling hospitals. No one would talk to him anyway. He was just Peter Parker. Some random kid from Queens can't just start calling hospitals requesting information on Tony Stark and expect to get answers.

He finally opted to call Tony. His frazzled nervous system couldn't take it anymore. When the phone went to voice mail he hung up immediately and sank to his knees by the couch. It occurred to him that he could call Pepper but he soon realized he didn't have her number. Calling May would only worry her too and Happy, well, Happy only answered his calls when Tony told him he had to. He tried reminding himself that his mentor had said he didn't know how long he would be but it didn't seem to help. So there he sat, on the floor in the middle of the biggest most amazing hotel room he'd ever seen, fighting back tears instead of enjoying himself.

It felt overly dramatic even to him but he couldn't seem to help it. At some point, Tony's wellbeing had become just as much of a priority as May's and the idea of losing either one of them was overwhelming. Tony had become something more than a mentor, more than a role model... he'd become important, like a father. He knew people teased Tony about being his dad but the truth was he did see the man that way, he had from right about the same time Tony started calling him 'his kid'.

When the floor became too hard to kneel on any longer, he pushed himself up and into a chair at the table, facing the door. Laying his head on his arms, he was almost asleep when he heard the door open. "Hey, Kid! I hope you don't mind that Rhodey followed me ho-- Kid?"

Peter couldn't speak, he couldn't move. He was so relieved that all he could do was stare. He was trying to blink back his tears of relief when all at once he realized that both men were looking at him with unwavering solicitude. He didn't know whether to feel grateful or guilty. Before he could process it Tony was already across the room and pulling him out of the chair, while Rhodes made a weak excuse to run back to the car in order to give two some privacy.

Now in Tony's arms, Peter let out a sound that was something between a wet laugh and a contented sigh as the man held him close and murmured reassurances not yet questioning what had occurred while he was out. "I'm sorry", Peter breathed into the man's chest before chocking on a small sob, his breath catching on the snot in his nose and throat.

"Hey, hey, hey, It's alright. Calm down.", his whispered into the boy's ear, not caring that his suit was inevitably being covered in tears and mucus. This wouldn't be the first time he's coaxed the kid out of a breakdown so he let it happen. He had long since decided that he was more than willing to
be whatever the kid needed him to be and if what he needed him to be right now was to someone to hold onto, then so be it. He didn't question him until the wracking sobs turned into soft sniffles and hitching breaths. "What happened, Kiddo?"

"I don't know. I just... you were gone so long and I didn't know where you were. You didn't answer your phone and I guess I freaked out. I don't know. I thought something happened to you... and, and... I couldn't... I need you.", Peter babbled out as he tried to wipe his face and nose on his hands only to have the silky handkerchief from Tony's breast pocket handed to him.

"Oh, Kid. The meeting got tense and they decided they wanted everyone to go on radio silence to prevent leaked information. I should have messaged you... Why didn't you message me? I checked first thing when I turned my phone back on. I would have called you as soon as I could have"

"I don't know.", Peter answered miserably. "I did try to call you but I guess it was while your phone was off then I was going to call Pepper to see if she knew anything but I couldn't"

"Why not?", the man asked somewhat puzzled. Pepper would have known about the possibility of radio silence and could have explained it. She would have been more than capable of helping to ease the boy's mind.

"I, I don't have her number in my phone.", Peter replied, finally pulling out of Tony's arms so that the man could let Rhodey, who had returned from his nonexistent errand, back into the room.

"Bring me your phone, Kiddo.", the man said over his shoulder as he unlocked the door to allow his friend access. Then, together, both men sat themselves onto the couch. Rhodes on one end of the 'L' and While Tony took up the middle of the other half, Peter quickly joining him, close to his side. Looking through the boy's contacts, it seemed to be limited to his aunt, a handful of friends, his school, Happy and himself. How could he have failed to put Pepper's number in the kid's phone? A few swift movements later and he was handing the phone back. "There, Now you have her number too. Don't ever hesitate to call either one of us if you need anything, alright?"

Peter nodded and admired the addition to his contact list. It was incredible enough that he had Tony's personal number programmed into his phone. Now he had Pepper's too. Next thing he knew the phone was being removed from his hand and Rhodey was adding his own number to the list.

"...and...", Rhodes started as he was inputting the information, "...now you have my number also. Call me, text me, whatever.", the man added with a shrug of the shoulders. "...but definitely keep me in the loop on all of the ridiculous shit that Tony does. If you don't tell me I may never know and we can't have that."
Laughing for the first time since Tony had returned, Peter nodded his head. "Yes, sir. I'll keep you posted."

"Traitor", he heard the man grumble beside him but he knew he didn't mean it. So, rather than stress out as he would have several weeks ago, he just leaned more heavily into the man's side. Bringing the phone back up to his eye level he looked at his contacts list again before cutting quiet side-eyes towards Rhodes who had listed himself in the phone as 'Uncle Rhodey'. The man just grinned at him. Peter shook his head and put the phone back into his pocket. I would change it later... maybe...

For a little while, they all just sat there on the couch. Tony, holding Peter casually at his side, as he and Rhodey participated in idle banter. Then, before Peter could get too comfortable his mentor looked down at him. "I asked Rhodey if he wanted to go to dinner with us but when I told him you wanted to go to a museum he got all excited and I couldn't tell him no.", the man teased.

"You're cute Tony.", replied drily before looking at Peter. "He invited me and don't let him tell you otherwise."

Not really knowing how to respond to that, Peter just smiled and sat all the way up. "Are we going now?"

"Are you ready to go now?", Tony asked him, looking him over with the little bit of concern that was stubbornly staying with him despite the fact that the boy was now calm. In passing, he wondered if that's what parenthood felt like. Constant lingering concern.

"Mm-hmm. What museum are we going to?"

"Whichever one you want to go to. Keep in mind, it's getting late and we have dinner reservations at nine. That give us about three or four hours to do whatever you want before we have to get back here to change."

While Rhodes remained in his business attire, Tony changed into lighter more touristy clothes. He refused to have a repeat of the night before. It was too damn hot to be walking around in a three-piece suit. While he changed Peter talked to Rhodes about all of the museum choices, trying to pick one. Then, a short drive later they were filing into the Air and Space Museum. It wouldn't have been Tony's first choice but since it was the kid's he would go without complaint. Peter excitedly dragged him from exhibit to exhibit, as Rhodey followed behind smiling at the dynamics. Then
laughing loudly when Peter ended up grabbing Tony by the hand to pull him towards the newly installed Iron Man and Iron Patriot exhibit. "Oh my God! Did you know about this? How did I not know about this! This is awesome. Tony! Take my picture. Wait! Let's get someone to take a picture of all of us together! Please, Tony." He begged.

Tony wasn't sure if this was a good idea. He didn't want to draw attention to himself and the trip get ruined like that trip to the mall but a museum volunteer seemed to have overheard and stepped up to offer assistance. It was clear that the woman knew exactly who he was despite the casual attire and hat. She had very quietly referred to him 'Mr. Stark' though in the end, she had the good sense to not say anything out loud and cause a ruckus.

By the time they made it to the majority of the space-themed exhibits, Tony had decided to casually avoid them and the potential anxiety that could come with the imagery. He opted to excuse himself to go get Peter a snack, he would wait for them in the food court. His plan seemed to work because while Rhodey looked at him knowingly, Peter agreed without question, making a request for Nachos if they had them.

Thirty minutes and a quick text later they were all sitting in the naturally lit food court, Peter munching on chips and cheaply manufactured 'cheese sauce'. The kind the kid loved despite Tony's insistence that it wasn't actually cheese. Peter practically circular breathed as he told Tony about all of the exhibits he'd missed, occasionally pulling up a picture on his phone. Despite the subject, the man remained at ease throughout the exchange. Even Rhodes seemed to notice. He was smiling at them from across the table because the kid was good for Tony. Then again, he figured from what he had witnessed earlier that maybe they were good for each other.

From there, Rhodes took a cab back to his own apartment with the promise to rejoin the two for dinner. While Peter and Tony walked through one of the nearby gardens until it got dark and it was time to drive back to their hotel.

Peter went straight to the shower once they had gotten back. Returning to his room, he found his suit laying across the bed. Sighing he shook off the hotel robe and began to dress. Pants and dress shirt in place, he went in search of the tie he swore he's draped over the hanger. Unable to find it he went over to Tony's room and knocked on the door. Tony answered the door in slacks and a tank top, a dress shit tossed neatly over his shoulder. "Do you need help with your tie?", he asked after looking the kid over.

"No, well sort of... I can't find it", the boy grumbled. He was sure he was going to be in trouble for not packing it. Tony had specifically asked him to make sure he had a set of dress clothes. "I swear I hung the tie over the hanger before I brought it to you, but it's gone."

Tony seemed unperturbed by the situation and waved the boy into his room, pointing towards the
closet. "Go check the bottom of the garment bag. If you don't see it you can wear one of mine.", he said casually as he began to pull the shirt he had been holding onto his shoulders.

Peter stepped into the large closet and opened the garment bag only to find that his tie was still missing. Hanging his head, he came out and stood beside Tony who was dexterously doing up his buttons at the mirror. "It wasn't in there."

Tony pulled up the collar of his shirt and draped his tie around his neck before beckoning the child back into the closet. "Here, Come with me.", he said without judgment. Once inside he pulled out a travel rack of ties. There must have been twenty on it and Peter couldn't fathom why the man would need that many ties for a three-day trip. "Pick one. Whichever one you want but I suggest you stick with something in the blues or reds with that shirt and Jacket."

Peter ran his hands through the ties. They were Tony's ties and the small collection probably cost more than his entire wardrobe. The tie Pepper had bought him had cost only twenty dollars and he thought that was pricey for a piece of cloth. Taking a deep breath he grabbed a red one with small blue accents on it. When he showed up beside Tony, tie in hand the man smiled. "Hermes. You've got good taste, Kid... Put it on.", he urged and Peter hung it around his neck.

Rather than attempting to tie the tie, he watched in the mirror as his mentor stood at the dresser and made a watch selection. He didn't even realize the man had so many watches. There had to have been a dozen displayed in the small case he was looking through. Tony slowly ran his fingers over each of piece before gently pulling one out, examining it in the light and securing it to his wrist. It was then that he noticed Peter watching him through the mirror. "Do you want to wear one?", he asked. "It completes the look."

Peter adamantly shook his head in the negative. "Oh, um, no thank you. They look really nice. Like really, really, expensive nice. I wouldn't want to mess it up or anything."

Tony rolled his eyes. "Just come here, Kid. At least try one on. You might like it."

A few guarded steps later and Peter was by the dresser having an overpriced watch strapped to his wrist. He couldn't deny that he liked it. It was cool and heavy against his arm, the deep navy blue face had silver accents that seemed to scintillate in the light, and the second hand made a soothing, rhythmic tick in his ear when he held it up to admire it. "This, this is nice.", he said, a smile pulling at his lips.

"It looked like it would go well with your navy jacket and it suits you. You should wear it.", he said in reply, smiling proudly.
All Peter could do was nod his head. He was about to go to dinner wearing one of Tony's ties and watches. It felt unreal, almost like he was playing dress up. He was still staring at the watch when he felt a pull on his neck and realized the man was knotting up his tie for him. "I remember how to do it.", he said with mild indignation.

The man just smiled at him. "Yeah? Well, you keep looking at that watch so I'm guessing you know what time it is. We need to go.", he laughed. "Grab your shoes while I finished up in here."

Shortly after, they were at the restaurant where Rhodey was waiting for them.
Sitting in a sophisticated restaurant between Rhodes and Tony was slightly nerve-wracking. He watched as the two men beside him glanced at their menus and closed them back again within minutes. Meanwhile, he was still staring at his with absolutely no idea what to do with it. Everything seemed to be listed separately with no instructions. He was used to menus that said things like 'entree includes two sides' or 'all entrees come with your choice of side salad or fries.' He looked nervously over at his mentor who hadn't yet noticed his mild distress. "Um, T-Tony?", he whispered, obtaining the man's attention. "I don't know what to do with this. Will you please just order for me."

"I don't know what you want, Bud. Look there's a list of--"

"--but you know what I like. Please.", the boy begged.

Tony smiled at the boy. He wasn't terribly shocked that the kid was a little overwhelmed. He remembered when the boy had made himself sick worrying about going to a restaurant much like this one with Pepper and himself. He thought not talking about it too much would be the way to go but it had really been thinking he could have at least gone over the menu online before they left... Next time. "Hmm... I know you love your spaghetti and Macaroni and cheese... but they don't have those here.", he smiled, taking over the menu and pointing to the first column. "Look, go down the list here and--"

"--I can't. I don't know what any of it means and it's expensive."

Not wanting to stress the kid out any further than the already was, he attempted to pacify him. "Alright, alright, relax, will ya? I'll help. Do you want steak or chicken? I already know you don't want seafood."

"Chicken, I guess.", the boy grumbled under his breath. Looking slightly less tense with the guidance.

"Okay, do you want it in a salad or as an entree?"
"I don't know!", Peter strained while keeping his voice as low as possible aware that Rhodes was watching them.

"Yes, you do. Breathe.", The man said waving off the waiter who had come to take their order.

Rhodey watched the two interact with amusement. He wondered when Tony had ever been so patient with anyone before. He was pretty sure even Pepper couldn't possibly get this much self-control out of him. He knew for a fact that if he was the one being indecisive Tony would be giving him a hard time by now but instead, he watched as the man tried his hardest to explain the menu and get the kid to make a decision. He wondered how long it would be before he had to step in. Then, just as he was sure Tony was going to break down and start yelling, the boy started to cooperate. He could almost feel the alleviation that crossed the man's face when the boy finally picked something.

Tony was elated when he finally got Peter to settle on an entree because, if he was being honest, he wasn't sure how much longer he could've kept it together. "Look, Kid, we've got the entree figure out. That was the hard part, yeah? All you need to do it pick a few sides. I don't care which ones or how many... and stop looking at the prices. I'm a billionaire for Christ's sake. I could buy you the entire damned restaurant if you wanted it." Peter laughed nervously and settled on three sides without any prompting. By the time everything arrived at the table, he was feeling much more secure and was eagerly participating in the conversation. When the meal started to come to a close and Tony had offered him dessert he was quick to make a choice much to his mentor's satisfaction. Shortly thereafter, They drove back into the hotel, Peter still happily chattering as they walked all the way back up to the suite.

As the pair sat on the couch clad in their pajamas, watching reruns of some 90's sitcom, Tony looked at the clock in the corner of the room. It was nearing midnight and Tony still hadn't brought up the night before or the incident that had led up to it. Looking at the kid who was still smiling and rambling on about something or another, he found himself wanting to continue to ignore the subject. Taking a deep breath, he turned off the television, causing the boy to quiet and turn his body towards him so they were facing each other. "We need to talk, Kiddo."

"Do we have to?", the boy asked, scrunching up his face. He knew exactly where this was going.

Nodding and placing a hand on the teenager's knee he sighed. "We should."

Peter took in a deep breath and dropped his head onto the back of the couch. "Right now? It's late."
"Then let's take it to the bed.", Tony suggested with a shrug of his shoulders before standing up and offering a hand to pull the boy off the furniture.

Peter groaned as he stood. He knew he absolutely should talk to Tony. Just like the nightmares, the man had figured him out and this wasn't a secret anymore. It didn't make him any happier about it. Climbing into the large bed of the master bedroom, he dropped his head down heavily onto the pillows before rolling onto his side to face Tony. "So, what do you want to talk about", he grumbled once the man had gotten himself settled on his back beside him.

"I want to talk about you, Kid. What's going on in that head of yours... and don't you dare tell me 'nothing'."

Not knowing how to start Peter just lay there quietly in the semi-dark room. At some point, he felt some words appear on the tip of his tongue but they seemed to get stuck there and no amount of prying was getting them out of his mouth. It was like everything he wanted to say was there but he was unable to form the necessary sentences. After several minutes Tony was turning his head and meeting his eyes, demanding something, anything. He finally settled on the truth. "I don't know what to say."

Tony turned head so that he was back to facing the ceiling. "Okay, then I'll start... I know that you're scared.", Tony said, pausing for what he thought would be a rebuttal from the Peter. When none came, he continued, "It's okay that you're scared. Everybody gets scared.--"

"--You don't."

"You think I don't get scared? Jesus, Pete, How many times have I told you that you scared the shit out of me, in the last month alone? Of course, I get scared.", he scoffed.

"That's different.", Peter accused, still on his side, watching his mentor's facial expressions. "I cried when you were late coming back today, Tony. I cried. I can't stand tight spaces. I have nightmares about falling or being crushed or people dying...", Peter sputtered getting angrier and angrier the more he spoke. Then with a brief pause and a deep breath, he added the newest obstacle. "and now...now I'm flipping afraid of the dark. It's ridiculous!"

The man smiled at the kid beside him, more than willing to break the extremely heavy mood. "Did you just say 'flipping'?", he laughed.
"Well, yeah, I can't say... the other word.", Peter said as if it were obvious, now looking at his mentor directly in the eyes.

"So innocent..." Tony cooed before huffing a small laugh. "But not completely innocent, I've heard the word 'shit' come out of you more times that I should have."

"'Shit' is PG-13, Tony... and I only say it sometimes. You're exaggerating."

"Alright, fine, whatever you say.", he said mildly waving the hand that was resting on his abdomen. "Now, back to the serious stuff. All of those things you just said? They're part of the job, Kid. I had nightmares for a long ass time after the Battle of New York. Scared the Shit out of Pepper, summoning a suit in my sleep. Hell, I couldn't stand washing my hair in the shower for months after Afghanistan...and after Ultron?... well, we won't even get into that... Point is, things are going to happen and they're going to stick with you. Some of them, only for a little while, others might be in the very back of your mind forever... but you have to talk about it to someone. If you don't, it'll never go away. You can't bottle it up."

"I'm talking to you right now.", Peter defended.

"You are.", Tony conceded. "I'm glad you are. You can always talk to me, yeah?"

"I know.

"Good. Now, bedtime?"

"Mm-hmm. Bedtime.", Peter agreed. However, rather than getting up to go his own bed as Tony had assumed he would, he gathered up the corner of the blankets and pulled them back so he could get under them. "I'm staying here though. I'm tired."

Tony laughed. "This is my bed you brat. Go get in your own room." He considered adding that he had paid for the two bedroom suite for a reason but thought better of it.

"Hmm-mm, I'm good right here and you don't actually care.", Peter hummed easily.
"You're right I don't.", he admitted. "Go to sleep Spider-boy."

"It's Spider-man, Tony.", he yawned. "Good Night."

Tony waited a minute or so for the boy's breathing to even out before he responded. "Good Night, Pete. I Love you, Buddy.", he whispered to the sleeping boy. Only the boy wasn't as asleep as he thought, or the kid's enhanced hearing was working against him. Whatever it was, Peter's eyes fluttered open for a second, searching his eyes, maybe his soul, he wasn't sure but when the boy whispered back he thought the entire world might have stilled.

"I love you too.", Peter Whispered with a smile on his lips that made it look like he had just been let in on some sort of tight-lipped secret. Then just as quickly his eyes were closed again and he was soundly asleep within minutes.

The next morning, when they didn't wake up until after nine, Tony was incredibly thankful that he had arranged a late checkout. Now, they had until four instead of rushing to be out by eleven. "Alright, Kiddo", the man started over breakfast "We have until four to get out of here so, how about we pack up everything except a change of clothes and spend the day doing something."

"Like what?", the boy asked with a mouth full of crepes. Realizing what he had done a split second later, he smiled sheepishly and managed to cover his head with both arms before Tony could do anything other than glare.

"Whatever you want to do, you heathen.", he grumbled tossing the boy a napkin.

"Can we go to The National Zoo? That was on my list yesterday but it was too late."

Tony looked at the kid in disbelief because, oh my God, he really was a kid. "Really, Pete? The zoo? Don't they have three zoos in New York?"

"Four.", Peter corrected, as he continued to devour the food set before him.

"But you want to spend the day in this one... It's going to be ninety degrees today, Kid.", the man practically whined.
"Okay but hear me out.", the kid perked up preparing to go into an animated shpiel. "They have Giant Pandas. Did you know that only four zoos in the whole United States have those? ...and they have Black-Footed Ferrets. They're not like the pet store ones, these are different and they're super cute and did you know they're endangered? Oh! Here, You have to look at this.", Peter added as he started rapidly typing something into his phone before holding it a little too close to Tony's face. "It's a Clouded Leopard! How could you not want to see that? But did you know that they aren't really leopards? They have their own separate genus. It's kind of fascina--"

"--Kid!", the man almost shouted as he pushed the phone back away from his face by a few inches so he could actually see the picture the boy had pulled up. "I get it. We can go to the zoo. It's fine. Go get packed up like we talked about. We'll leave as soon as we're done."

"Yes!", Peter childishly shouted as he jumped up out of the chair. Tony just shook his head. It was going to be a long, long day.

They met back in the sitting room half an hour later where Peter looked at his mentor as if he had grown a second head. He thought his mentor had dressed down to play paintball, but this was a whole different level of casual. "What? It's hot!", the man had exclaimed at Peter's looks. Tony had changed into a pair of gray plaid cargo shorts, a black moisture-wicking polo and the same hat baseball cap from the day before but this time he had a pair of sunglasses resting on the bill.

"Nothing. Nothing. I didn't say anything!", Peter laughed holding his hands up in surrender. He wanted to say that the man looked like a dad, that the only thing that was missing was a pair of sandals, but he didn't think he should go there. "Let's go."

The trip to the zoo went just about as well as Tony had expected. He was dragged from one side of the sweltering park to the other with the kid filling him in on every single fact he brain could hold. It would have been impressive if he wasn't so damn hot. When he finally convinced the boy to sit down inside to get some lunch it was after twelve. That's when Tony figured out that the boy's cheeks weren't pink from being hot they were getting sunburnt. This lead to a twenty-minute wild goose chase, looking for sunscreen. Eventually, Tony gave up and just bought the boy a floppy safari style hat. It looked ridiculous but Peter loved it, so there was that.

Peter had been right, Black-Footed Ferrets were cute and the best part was that the exhibit was in the cool, climate controlled Small Mammal House. Adding to the excitement, while they were there, a zookeeper came out holding an armadillo and was letting people pet it. Tony refused because it was icky, but Peter got in line twice, asking the man to take his picture both times because the wanted a 'good shot' and May was going to love it.

Sometimes after that, they found themselves in a petting zoo, where Peter was brushing an alpaca and spouting off all the reason's why they would make excellent pets. Then out of nowhere, he was
dropping the brush back into the bin and started pulling a reluctant Tony up off the shady bench he'd just gotten comfortable on. "Did you see that carousel over there? We should ride it."

"Why?", the man groaned.

"Because it'll be fun. Plus you'll be able to officially say that you've ridden the carousel at the Smithsonian National Zoo."

"Why would I need to be able to officially say that?"

"Ugh, I don't know. Call it a personal accomplishment then. Come on, please?"

Tony rolled his eyes. "I'll watch you ride it. I'll even wave every time you come around.", he laughed as he watched some by-standing adults doing just that.

"No!", Peter laughed. "That's not the same. You have to ride it with me...but we have to ride an animal and not on a bench because that's cheating."

"How is that cheating? It's part of the ride."

"It just is.", Peter said as he followed Tony through the ticket line and into the ride's queue.

Once on the ride's platform, the boy declared that they would be riding the Cheetas and started to hurry towards them before any of the smaller children could get there first. Tony rolled his eyes with a fond smile, he decided that since he was already there, he may as well enjoy it. Watching the kid as he was climbing onto one of the cheetas he crossed the distance towards him and shoved him off. He knew the kid's abilities would allow him to actually fall. "Nope. If I'm riding I get the biggest one."

Peter laughed and let him have it but he didn't mount his own cheeta until he had at least a dozen pictures of Tony riding a carousel.

"If any of those pictures wind up on the internet I will end you. You know that right?", the man threatened with a quirked eyebrow. Peter just laughed and sent the best ones to Pepper, May and to Tony's sizable displeasure, Rhodey. He was never going to hear the end of this but he would just blame Peter. He had taken several pictures of the boy's giddy face riding the same ride... and getting Ned's number wouldn't be that hard.
It was almost time to go when Peter was rushing Tony over to the Panda exhibit. "We can't just leave without seeing the pandas!", he urged, eventually grabbing his hand to pull him along. "Oh, come on... it's an inside exhibit... with air-conditioning...", added in a sing-song voice for incentive.

"This better be worth it, Kid", Tony warned but there was no real threat in his tone and frankly listening to the kid 'oo', 'ah' and squeal when they got there was actually worth it. It was unfortunate that they couldn't spend more than a few minutes watching them. He was pretty sure the boy could have stood there all day. Which begged the question, of why didn't they start there. Maybe the kid would be less sunburnt, he thought before bribing him out of the Panda House with some ice cream. Soon after they were on their way out the front gates and back to the hotel to shower and check out.

During their ride to the airport, Tony remembered that they needed to stop and get some Dramamine for the kid. Peter had protested the entire time they were in the drug store that it probably wouldn't even work but he'd forced a dose in him anyway. If there was a chance to prevent a repeat of the last flight he wanted to take it. It wasn't until they were most of the way to the airport, and the kid was still complaining that he was going to get sick, that it dawned on him that the child was acting entirely too apprehensive about the pending travel. It was like he was trying to get out of it. This was confirmed when Peter grumpily reminded him that he'd previously suggested that they could possibly just drive back. "You really don't want to get on that plane, huh, Kiddo?"

"Not really. I'm sorry. I'll be quiet about it.", the boy mumbled beside him.

"No, Kid, it's fine. Look if we start driving now we won't get back to the compound until midnight, maybe later depending on how many stops we make. If we take the plane we can be eating dinner in our pajamas by seven. What do you want to do?" He knew the answer before he ever even asked and was already planning out the best route in his head.

"Can we drive? I really don't want to fly again."

"There may be places you want to go someday that require flying you know. Can't drive everywhere."

"I know but today can we just drive?"

"Of, course.", the man said with a sigh, wondering how much there was to this anti-flight attitude the kid had developed. He supposed there was six hours of driving to consider it, maybe even ask, goodness knows the kid would talk the whole time. Maybe the ride would even be fun.
Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

Tag adds: Road trip

Gah! I didn't mean to post this chapter!

I don't even remember doing it. I must have hit the wrong button when I was cleaning it up this morning. Ah well, it's here now so... Enjoy the bonus?

After getting to the airport, Tony took care of everything to reflect their change of plans. The plane would be flown back to New York without him and his car, that resided in Washington DC would be returned to it's locked garage at a later date. meanwhile, Peter stood by the fence watching the other small planes take off from the airfield. He knew Tony was right and he would have to get back on a plane at some point, he had always wanted to travel the world. The thing was, that at this point he didn't even actually know if he was afraid of the flight or if he was afraid of getting sick again. He never had sorted out if he had been panicking or simply airsick the first time around. He just wasn't eager to figure it out so soon.

Coming up behind the boy who seemed to be fixated on the comings and goings of the aircraft, Tony clapping a hand on Peter's shoulder causing him to jolt back as he startled. "Alright, Kid. It's already five o'clock let's get this show on the road."

"A road trip.", Peter said with a smile once he'd gotten his heart back out of his throat.

"Sure, a road trip. I don't think I've been on one of those since college.", the man mused.

"I used to go on them with my uncle Ben. He would go on business trips and sometimes I would go with him. The work part was boring but the ride in the car was always super fun. We would eat snacks, play games and sing with the radio and stuff."

The kid sounded way more excited about this than he was, but then again he was the one having to do all the driving. He didn't plan on spoiling the teenager's good time, though. "Yeah? Well, I guess we need some snacks then. We'll make a really fast gas station run and get going. It should only take us six or seven hours if we only stop once or twice... Oh and call your aunt and text Pepper about our change in plans, yeah?"
After their trip to the gas station, where they loaded up the car with several varieties of chips, cookies and at the boy's request, beef jerky, they were on their way. Tony was actually enjoying the drive, the traffic was light and Peter was good company. Tony kept glancing at the kid who was going back and forth between texting May or Ned and talking to Tony about whatever he'd just seen on Reddit. Tony pretended to not understand any of it just to keep the kid talking and laughing beside him.

At some point, the kid had set his phone down and was looking at Tony with glee. "Do you want to play the license plate game?"

"The what now?", the man asked chancing a peek at the boy before he changed lanes again.

"The license plate game.", he repeated as if that should have cleared it all up. "You don't know how to play it? Uncle Ben said it was how people used to entertain themselves in the car before cellphones and video games."

"Oh and so you think I should know all about it then, huh? Are you calling me old, Parker?"

Peter blushed a little and laughed. "I wasn't saying that! I'm not old and I know what it is so, I thought everyone knew or something."

"Nope never heard of it, do tell.", the man said with a smile.

Peter took a few moments explaining the simple rules and they were soon on the lookout for every letter of the alphabet in order on the passing cars. This went on for a quite a while until Peter was requesting 'real food'. It was nearly eight and they were almost half was home so, stopping for dinner seemed reasonable. After some debate, the kid won and they ended up at Cracker Barrel. Tony wasn't looking forward to this. A sit-down meal was not in his plan. "I'm only letting you win this because I made you go to the that Steak House last night. I want it to go on record that I'm being nice. yeah?"

"Okay, I get it.", the boy smiled. "...but you might like it. Have you ever been to a Cracker Barrel? I haven't been to one in a really long time, but I bet it's still good. You can get pancakes for dinner and they have this whole country store thing with all sorts of weird stuff in it. I think it's a rule that you have to eat at one when you're on a road trip."

"Hmm.", the man hummed noncommittally as they pulled into the surprisingly crowded parking lot.
"Are you sure you want to eat here? We could run in Burger King to grab something and keep driving.", the man tried but Peter wouldn't have it so inside they went. It took longer to get seated than Tony would have liked but Peter was hopping all over the store laughing at the random merchandise, so at least that was entertaining. He really wanted to get home before it got too late and just as he was about to go pay someone to call their name next, he didn't have to.

"Parker, Party of two", the intercom announced loudly over their heads.

Peter looked at his mentor with some confusion. "Is that us?"

"Yep, that's us, now let's go before they give our table away."

"Why would you put it under my name?", Peter asked as if the idea was completely absurd.

Tony rolled his eyes at the boy. "How do you think it would have gone over if they announced the name 'Stark' over the intercom in here?"

"I don't know.", peter replied, shrugging his shoulders. "Are you, like, the only Stark? Couldn't it have been another Stark?"

"Yeah... People don't exactly jump to 'oh, that's probably another Stark' when they hear the name. They start looking. I used your name so no one would notice I was here and they would leave us alone. You're welcome."

Peter just smiled and sat down at the table the waitress had led them to. The menu was large but at least he knew what everything was. It only took him a couple of minutes to decide exactly what he wanted. Once their order was placed they didn't have to wait long for it to arrive. Tony half-heartedly complained the whole time but eventually admitted that the food had been better than he'd expected. All in all, they were only in the restaurant for a little over an hour. It could have been less time but when Peter begged to get some candy for the ride, Tony let him.

The ride, after that stop, was decidedly less fun. They hit some traffic as soon as they made it back onto the highway. The could have been worse. At least he had Peter with him. The two of them were taking turns picking songs and purposefully singing louder than necessary as they played. It was an hour later when the marginally slow moving traffic became stand still Traffic that, Tony started to groan and complain. Between the table service dinner and bumper to bumper traffic jam, he felt like they were never going to get home. Then, after an hour of creeping along on the
highway, grumbling quietly to himself the as they did so, whatever the hold up was seemed to clear up and they were moving again. As all the tenseness left his body, Tony whispered under his breath. "Finally." Allowing his eyes to drift towards Peter, he could see what he interpreted as relief wash over the boy's face and was expecting to hear him utter similar sentiments but instead, the teenager abruptly blurted out that he needed to pee...immediately.

Tony huffed a small laugh at the absurdity of the outburst and shook his head fondly. Though, he supposed that it was sort of a testament of how comfortable the kid had become around him. There were no questions involved and there wasn't a hesitant, 'if it's okay' attached. Just a straight forward, nearly demanded, request for a break.

He had really wanted to keep driving for at least another hour and he tried not to get too annoyed about the sudden need to stop. Not because of the delay it would cause, they were inevitably going to need to stop at some point. He just thought they would have made it a little further along before that needed to happen. He'd really hoped they would be crossing into New York by now. Sighing, he made his way over towards the nearest exit. Glancing beside him, he wasn't sure how he'd missed it before but it was obvious now the kid had been keeping quiet about it for a while. More than likely waiting for the traffic to let up before bothering to say anything. It was fine. He needed to put some gas in the car anyway. As he was pulling onto the off-ramp he quickly cut his eyes towards a very tense Peter. "Alright, Kid, this is stop number two. I'm not stopping again until we get home. Capiche?"

"Mm-hmm, Capiche", the teenager readily agreed, without moving a singular muscle.

Once they had pulled into the first decent gas station they'd come across, Tony proceeded to fill up the car while Peter went ahead inside. Within ten minutes they had both used the restroom, Tony had a cup of coffee, they had a full tank of gas and were back on the road. A glance at the GPS showed that their arrival time was now after one in the morning. Three more hours. It didn't sound that bad until Peter stopped goofing around and was sound asleep on the windows by eleven-thirty.

This left Tony completely alone with his thoughts. Those thoughts mostly involved dwelling on the Accords meeting from the day before. They had nearly come to an agreement. They were so close to fixing everything. The only disagreement left was timing. The committee wanted the rouges to come forward and give statements with the promise of pardons in exchange for their cooperation. Tony knew that sounded too much like a trap for any of them to be stupid enough to actually come out of hiding. At least that's what he would hope. As much as their betrayal had cut him to the core, he didn't want to see them locked up, well, maybe Rogers and Barns, but he could stew on that later. Right now he needed to figure out some sort of a proposal that he and Rhodes could present to the committee that sounded agreeable even to the bureaucratic dicks. Of course, there were bound to be even more details to iron out even after this was settled. It seemed to be becoming an unending process.
What ended up pulling him from his thoughts was the small grunt and yawn coming from the seat beside him. "Hey there, Kiddo. Have a nice nap?"

"Mm-hmm", the boy said still stretching out his limbs as best he could while being restrained by a seatbelt.

"Need anything?" Despite the fact that he'd told the kid he wouldn't make any more stops, if the boy legitimately needed something he would do so without question.

"Not really. How close are we?"

"Thirty minutes or so. Almost there.", the man smiled as he reached over to pat the boy on the knee.

Peter nodded as he sat up a little taller in the seat. "Oh, Okay. That's cool."

"Ready to be out of the car?", the man asked with a smirk. "We could be in bed already if we'd taken the plane, you know."

"Yeah, I know. ...but this was fun and we wouldn't have gotten to get that taffy at Cracker Barrel and you would still be the only person in the world who doesn't know how to play the license plate game."

"Such a loss", the man mocked as he started to unwrap another piece of taffy.

"You say that but you have definitely eaten more of that taffy than I have.", the boy added with one eyebrow quirked.

Tony glanced at the kid and frowned slightly. "You're the one who picked it. You don't like it?"

"Only some of it and it's hard to see what's what in the dark. It may not have been the best choice."

"Hmm.", the man hummed. "So you're probably hungry then."
"Only a little", the boy admitted with a slight blush. "I can wait until we get back. It's just a little bit longer."

"Nope. I want coffee, we're stopping."

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They rolled into the garage just after two in the morning. Peter was dragging his feet and even Tony, who was notorious for staying awake for days at a time, was ready to crawl into bed for a week. When FRIDAY greeted them as they stepped into the elevator neither of them managed to reply with anything more than a grunt. In the penthouse, they started to part ways in the hall. Tony paused at the door as Peter reluctantly went into his own room, making a point of turning on the bathroom light and leaving the door cracked. After he had flopped face first onto the bed, still in his basketball shorts and t-shirt, Tony took a half step in the door. "G'night, Kid."

"Mm-hmm, 'night, Tony."

"Love you, Kiddo.", he breathed out before closing the door. It was funny how things had worked out. When he'd set out to find the vigilante that was all over YouTube he didn't expect to find a teenager. Let alone a teenager who would one day have his own room in his house and he certainly never imagined that he would eventually be telling him that he loved him. As he laid his head down and was just starting to drift to sleep he thought to himself that he wouldn't change any of it for anything in the world.

Both Tony and Peter slept right through the morning and into the afternoon, not stepping one foot out of their respective rooms until noon. Tony being up first made his way into the kitchen and started his coffee. He really needed to call Pepper but he wasn't sure he could manage that feat at the moment. Despite, the fact that he'd gotten at least nine hours of sleep he still felt groggy.

Peter must have been feeling the same way because when he wandered into the kitchen just a short while later he looked like he hadn't slept at all. "You good, Kid?"

"Yeah", Peter mumbled as he dug in the pantry and refrigerator. Finding nothing that interested him, he sat beside Tony with just a glass of milk.

Tony raised an eyebrow at the lack of breakfast, lunch, whatever, in front of the boy. "You feeling
okay?"

"Mm-hmm", the boy mumbled into his cup.

"Then why aren't you actually eating?"

Peter set the glass down and crossed his arms on the bar. "There's nothing I want."

"How is that even possible, Kid? This place is stocked with all kinds of weird shit that you add to the list."

Peter huffed where he sat. "I don't order anything weird and I just don't feel like making anything. ", he whined as he dropped his head onto his arms.

"Hmm. You want to order something instead?"

"Sure.", he mumbled into his still crossed arms and Tony had FRIDAY take care of it.

Not long after FRIDAY’s voice rang out announcing that Pepper was on the line. Not feeling up to tracking down his phone or leaving to go to the office, Tony simply had the phone call pushed through right where he sat. He trusted that the AI would make sure Pepper knew that the kid was present and listening. Within seconds her pleasant voice was ringing throughout the room. "Hi there you two. How was the trip?"

"It was good.", Tony started. "The meeting was... enlightening... and the rest of the trip was good. Hot... but good."

Peter who had perked up the second the woman's voice came through eagerly added a few details about their trip before Pepper questioned them about the choice to drive home.

Tony answered. "Kid got airsick on the way out so we decided not to risk it on the way back."

"Poor baby", Pepper cooed causing Peter to blush and hide his face in his arms. May was the only
one who had ever called him 'baby' and never in front of Tony. The man already thought of him as a kid so hearing his finance call him *that* right in front of the man was somewhat mortifying. The worst part was that Tony must have noticed because he laughed and gave him a quick pat on the shoulder.

He was just grateful that the subject passed quickly and soon enough Pepper was talking to his mentor about her plans for return. "I plan on spending the weekend in Manhattan but how about I come there on Monday? I'm not needed in the office until Thursday." When Tony agreed she changed the subject. "Peter, why don't you see if Ned can come over Tuesday night to try out the new pool with us. You're alright with that aren't you Tony?"

"Of course, dear.", the man replied but really he was trying to imagine another entire evening with Peter and Ned together. The idea alone had him pinching the bridge of his nose. Peter seemed happy about the development so he didn't complain too much. "...but don't you think you're going to get to take off for Manhattan and leave me alone with them. We're in this *together* this time."

"It's two teenage boys, Tony. How hard can that actually be."

That had Tony laughing to the point that Peter was sure he was going to fall off his stool. "You have *no idea*..."

Peter at this point was rolling his eyes indignantly. He was sure he and Ned weren't that much extra work. Tony hadn't even spent that much time with them last time he'd spent the night there. "I don't think it was that bad. You're exaggerating, Tony."

"Maybe", the man said through his laughter. "We'll just have to wait and see what Pepper thinks."

About that time, lunch arrived and the call with Pepper ended leaving Tony and Peter to eat in near silence.
Chapter 40

As soon as he was done with lunch, Peter hopped off the stool and bounded into his room to change clothes so he could go see May. Meanwhile Tony, unwillingly trudged off towards his office to call Rhodes. They had a lot to talk about.

When he went barreling into May's apartment, the last thing he expected was for her to stand up off of the couch to greet him. He took a few wide-eyed steps towards her while she took a few slow steps towards him. They met in the middle with a gentle embrace, Peter not wanting to hurt her. "Aunt May.," he whispered in awe. "You're up. You're walking. This, this is amazing."

"It is", she agreed. "Don't get too excited, though. I can't go too far yet. In fact, I should go sit back down now, Sweetie. You can tell me all about your time in Washington."

Peter nodded and helped his aunt back to the chair where she had been sitting. "I thought you said it would be at least three weeks.," Peter mused.

"It'll still take some time. I'm not getting terribly far on my own.", she smiled. "Now, tell me more about this trip. I want to hear everything."

Peter smiled widely because there was one part he had been eagerly waiting to tell her about. "He said he loves me. Can you believe that?..." May wanted to interject that she absolutely could but she didn't. "I think he thought I was asleep but I wasn't really. I heard him."

"Oh?", May questioned, not looking at all surprised. "How did that make you feel? You look happy about it"

"It was nice. Like, really nice.", Peter sighed before going slightly tense. "I, uh, I said it back. I'm not sure if I should have..."

May looked at Peter with patience and affection because he was struggling again. "Peter, we already talked about this. It's okay. You have more than enough love to go around.--"

"--I know!", Peter interrupted. "It's just, what if something happens to him. What if I love him and something happens..." He had started talking and now it was all spilling out in one wild rush. "...When he was at his meeting, he was late coming back, like really, really late. I freaked out. I
completely freaked out and cried. I cried May. I can't, what if...", he stuttered as he tried to place the right words.

"Breathe, sweetie. Take your time.", May soothed.

"Things keep happening May.", he finally got out. "Things keep happening and I can't stop them. Even when you got hurt, I couldn't do anything about it. I already worry that something else will happen to you, just like things have happened to everyone else. I don't know if I can handle worrying about anyone else, like, like that. It hurts." The tears had started and he tried his best to wipe them away but they kept coming.

May wanted nothing more than to hold him but she didn't think she could manage to get up again just yet. "Shh, Peter, listen. You don't have to worry about me... or Tony. Honey, we're the ones who are supposed to be worrying about you."

Peter had continued to snuffle and wipe away tears as May spoke. As soon as he could speak clearly again, he did. "I can't, not worry, May."

"Worrying about the people you care about is normal. I worry about you all the time but you shouldn't be this worried."

"I'm not this worried all the time", he argued. "Only sometimes but sometimes it's more than worry and I hate it."

May looked at Peter sadly as she thought about everything he had lost, they had lost. "I think that's justified.", she finally gave in. "Just, please don't stop loving people because you're scared."

"I won't. I'm not. I never said that I would. ...I love you." He tried to smile but he wasn't sure it looked genuine. "I love Tony too, like a lot.", he added quietly. "...and maybe even Pepper", he nearly whispered because that for some reason felt like an awkward confession.

May was absolutely at ease with her nephew's addition of Pepper to the list. Pepper had become a good friend. If she was being honest, Tony had to and it was obvious that they both very much cared about Peter. Knowing that had only brought them closer. Peter was her life now and being surrounded by friends who loved his nearly as much as she did was comforting. "Me too. We're really lucky to have them, huh?" When Peter nodded and gave a genuine smile she urged him to tell her more about his time in Washington with Tony.
Peter, instantly latched onto the idea of a change in subject and happily opened up. He excitedly went over the highlights, pulling up pictures he hadn't sent her already. She eagerly listened to him describe the hotel suite in detail and laughed as he told her about their evening walk the ended in Tony practically demanding a cab ride because it was so hot outside. He showed her every picture he had taken at the museum and at the zoo. He rambled on all about the expensive dinner at the steak house and the garden walk that followed it. The entire exchange was so affable that when May asked him about how the road trip came about he froze. He'd already avoided that explanation once today. Then to make matters worse, Tony, who had been unable to connect with Rhodey, walked in at that exact moment.

"You know, I was wondering the same thing, Kid.", the man said as he wandered in the front door.

May greeted the man kindly and then turned her attention back to her nephew who looked as though he were on the verge of bolting out of the room. "I just wondered because it seems like flying would have been infinitely easier. It's not that serious Peter."

"Exactly.", the man stated as he sat down beside Peter on the couch. "Relax will ya?", he added when the boy continued to remain tense.

Peter began to fidget his hands in his lap, prompting Tony to grab ahold of them. "I... I didn't want to be sick again."

May looked at the boy with concern and affection. "Peter, I thought we decided that you were only sick because of the turbulence. It wasn't raining when you were leaving."

"I know.", Peter said, meeting eyes with May. "I was still nervous about it, though." He glanced at his mentor who was sitting beside him and pried his hands out from under his so that he could run them through his hair.

"I guess that's fair. I'm sorry you had such a rough time.", May sighed.

Letting go of Peter's hands when he's pulled away, Tony watched him closely. It was obvious to him that the boy was leaving something out. "Pete, that couldn't have been it. I had already bought you some Dramamine and we had already talked about doubling or even tripling the dose if we needed to. This wasn't about being sick, Kiddo."
May looked over at the man and raised her eyebrows. Tony looked back at her with an expression that seemed to be conveying a message of 'There's something we don't know and I'm going to figure it out'. She sighed as she moved her attention to Peter. "What's going on Peter?"

"I don't know.", he whispered honestly. Looking between both adults he sighed. "I'm not even sure I was actually airsick.", he mumbled.

Tony nearly laughed but mostly held it together. "Kid, I was right there. I'm pretty sure I watched you throw up things you ate last year. I think it's safe to say you were airsick."

"Okay, maybe I didn't say that right.", Peter surrendered. "I, I think it might have been, like, more than that. M-maybe I was panicking too. I don't know. Maybe, maybe I was sick from that."

Tony cocked his head to the side, contemplating the boy's words. "That's something that's possible, I suppose but why would you have been so worked up that it would make you that sick?" Peter stayed quiet for a moment too long and then it hit Tony like a ton of bricks. The beach. The Vulture. The Plane. "Shit, Kid.", said, running a hand down his face. He sounding irritated but it was clear that it was with himself and not anyone else in the room. "Why didn't you say something?"

Glancing at May who was looking at him with the same look of realization Peter shrunk down on the couch and shrugged his shoulders. After doing so, he braced himself for the chastising that he knew would come from that but Tony didn't say anything. Rather both adults continue to look at him with expressions he wasn't sure how to interpret. "I'm sorry", he mumbled.

"No, I'm sorry.", Tony said firmly, surprising even himself with his choice in words. "I should have thought of that. I should have asked you. I could have done something or said something--"

"--It's alright, Tony", Peter insisted. "I, I didn't know either. I'm still not sure. I just know that I was, well, sort of scared and my stomach was hurting. I remembered that night with the crash and after that, I couldn't stop thinking about it. Especially when the plane was doing that thing where it felt like it was going to fall that's when I thought I might be panicking Then, I asked you if that was normal and you said it was so and then, then I... threw up."

May was next to speak up. "Honey, we need to know if you're panicking.", she said softly

Peter groaned as he went back to running his hands through his hair. "I told you already. I don't
even know if I was."

Tony looked over at Peter with his mouth slightly agape. The more the boy talked the more it sounded like he had been having a serious panic attack on the plane and the worst part was he hadn't even been paying close enough attention to notice. His mind rapidly went back to the night that he had read through all of the books and articles on trauma and remembered that it had crossed his mind then that the kid was already displaying some of the red flags. It seemed that the more he got to know the boy the more evident it was that he had been correct with his assessment and *God did he hate being correct about that.* He needed to say something, to sort this out, to fix it. At the very least help the kid figure out what had happened.

"Pete", Tony said earning eye contact from the boy. "Listen, do you want to know what I think happened?", he asked not really pausing for an answer. "I think you were already nervous about flying in the rain and I didn't do a very good job of making you feel any better about it." Peter tried to interrupt him but Tony shushed him quickly. "Nope. The adult is talking. This is where you listen.", he said not unkindly. "You were already nervous and then when things got rough you got scared and started not feeling so hot. Then the whole plane crash ordeal popped into your head, yeah?"

"Mm-hmm", Peter nodded, slightly turning his back to the man so that he could lean up against him. They both ignored the affectionate looks that May was sending their way as Tony repositioned himself so that they could both be more comfortable. "Well, I think you were already scared and then, all of those memories sent you into a tailspin. Triggering a panic attack of sorts. Then panicking made you feel even more sick and then, well, we know what happened after that.", he smiled. "I wasn't paying attention. I could have helped you."

"It's not your fault, Tony. I didn't say anything.", Peter said as he mindlessly started to fidget with the ring on his mentor's finger. Tony glanced down at the kid's hand as it touched his and smiled. He let it go on for a moment or two before quietly pulling his fingers away, leading the boy to begin fidgeting with his own hands instead.

"It would have been nice if you had said something but I was the adult there. I should have been watching you."

"I don't need a babysitter", Peter smiled.

Tony hummed in acknowledgment as May laughed lightly in the background. "Sure you don't."

Peter rolled his eyes and smiled. "I'm not a little kid. I'm almost sixteen."
Tony scoffed. "Adding the word 'almost' before your age is basically the universal sign that you are most definitely a kid, Kid."

"Whatever", Peter grumbled at the same time May spoke up and defended him by saying that he was actually almost sixteen.

"His birthday *is* in just about two weeks.", May mused.

Tony was slightly taken aback. He knew the kid's birthday, only he hadn't realized how close it was. Trying to stay casual he asked, "Big sixteen, huh? What do you think you want to do? To celebrate I mean."

"Oh", Peter said just as casually. "Not much. I never really do much. I usually have Ned spend the night and we go to the movies or something."

"No Party?"

Peter blushed. "Um, no. I haven't had a party since I was, I don't know, seven? Eight? I, uh, I don't really have that many friends. Just Ned and MJ... and MJ isn't going to be back until school starts. Besides, We'll, probably still be here.", Peter added, looking up at the man with a small smile.

Tony nudged the kid to get him to let him up. Once standing he looked at May. "So, no party then, huh?"

"No party", she confirmed.

"You could come with me and Ned to the movies...and we could go out for ice cream", Peter grinned. "That would be kind of like a party."

"Nah, I think we can come up with something better than that.", Tony said with a wink, already running scenarios in his head.
Peter swallowed. "N-nothing crazy, alright? No party and nothing crazy?", he said hands up in defense.

"Fine.", Tony conceded. "Nothing Crazy. I won't plan anything without May's approval. Yeah?"

"What about my approval?", Peter asked, crossing his arms over his chest. "It's my birthday... are you at least going to tell Ned?"

"I like surprises.", Tony said with a shrug of his shoulders. "May can keep a secret. Ned? Not so much. Whatever it is can be a surprise for both of you." Then he turned and towards the door. "I'm going to the lab."

As soon as he walked out the door, Peter dropped back down onto the couch and leaned onto his elbows, face in his hands. "Oh my God, May. Please, please, don't let him do anything crazy."

May looked at the boy with sympathy. "No promises, you know how he is. He'll work around whatever I say." When Peter groaned she laughed. "Oh stop it, I'm sure it will be great."

Unconvinced, Peter went ahead and said his good-byes and went back up to his room to call Ned. He hadn't talked to him properly in days. Just a few texts here and there. As expected his friend was in complete awe over everything he had to say. By the time Peter got around to asking him if he could spend the night on Tuesday he was nearly speechless. "...and Pepper Potts will be there?", Ned asked in breathy excitement.

"Well, yeah, Ned. She kind of lives here and this whole thing was her idea.", Peter explained before smiling to himself because he couldn't believe it either sometimes.

"When are you going to go you know...Spider-man, again?", Ned whispered.

Peter didn't hesitate, "I'm hoping tomorrow. Hey! Do you think I could stay at your's tomorrow night?"

"My mom says you can stay anytime. She thinks you're a good influence on me." They both laughed and went back to talking about all the random things they needed to catch up on from the last couple of days. He would have to ask Tony... or May about spending the night with Ned later. He was almost certain that neither of them would say no.
What was left of the day was pretty ordinary. He spent the majority of his time in the lab, where
Tony started feeling out his coding skills by having him mess with a few old projects of his. After an
hour or so, Tony was hovering behind Peter go over his work. "Kid, this is good work. There seem
to be a few gaps in your knowledge but the fact that you're able to work around those is sort of
amazing." The man said before highlighting a small section in the middle. "Like, this here.", He
pointed out. "You could have accomplished the same result with far fewer commands. We can
simplify it, leaving less room for mistakes. Let me show you..."

Soon after, FRIDAY announced that they had been working for two hours without halt and Tony
decided they may as well break for dinner. At Peter's insistence, they ended up eating with May and
when they were just about to start cleaning up, he asked about staying with Ned. "So, Ned said I
can spend the night at his, tomorrow. That's okay right?"

Both adults looked at each other before May spoke up. "I don't see why not...", she started before
looking over at Tony. "Do you have a problem with it?"

Tony shook his head. "Nope. You going to go do your Spider thing while you're there?", he asked
the boy.

"Yes?", Peter wavered. "That was part of the plan anyway. That's okay?"

Again both adults looked at each other and Peter suddenly realized that there was some sort of non-
verbal communication going on between the two of them and it seemed strange because it was the
same kind of thing he'd watched Ned's parents do when he was there visiting. He didn't have
terribly long to contemplate it before May was gesturing towards Tony and the man started talking
again. "No, that's fine. I was only asking."

Peter smiled, "Awesome. When we're done cleaning up I'm going to go call him."

Tony looked at him and swatted his hip with a hand towel causing the boy to yelp in surprise. "Go
ahead and go. I've got this here."

"Okay! Thank you! Good-night May!", he shouted cheerfully as he ran out the door leaving the
two adults alone in the apartment.
Chapter 41

With the kid out of the room, Tony looked at May with a scheming grin. "Alright May. The kid's birthday. Give me the parameters.", he said rubbing his hands together in anticipations. "Go ahead. Hit me."

May shook her head at him. It took a moment for her to decide how she really wanted to respond. With very little deliberation, she began to smile herself. "Well, you heard him. No party and nothing crazy. Other than that... make our boy happy."

"Yeah, alright, sure.", Tony stated, leaning forwards on the edge of the couch as if he were waiting for more. For the time being, he was going to ignore the feeling that rose up in his chest when May had said 'our boy' in favor of getting more information. "How about we define 'crazy'. ...for clarification's sake."

Rolling her eyes May laughed. "How about, you go make me some tea and tell you what I'm thinking."

Despite the fact that Tony Stark was not used to being ordered around by anyone but Pepper, he hopped right up and started to fill the kettle on the stove. "Which tea?", he asked as he started to pull a mug out of the cabinet.

"Chamomile, Please.", May called from across the room. "With honey."

Tony made a noise to indicate that he was listening as he gathered the things he needed to prepare a decent cup of tea. As soon as he was handing the mug over to May, he was back to sitting on the edge of the couch, working to appear cooler and more collected that he actually felt. For some reason giving the kid, a perfect birthday was suddenly a priority.

May took a long sip from the cup on her hand, watching the man over the rim as she did so. She was kind of enjoying having Tony hang on her every word. She could see through the casual front he was putting up to hide his excitement. "So.", she began, not wanting to make him wait too long. "What I'm thinking is... that you can figure this out without my help. You know Peter. You know how he is and what he likes and dislikes. If you stick to that then it shouldn't get 'too crazy'."

Underwhelmed by the advice May had given him, Tony scoffed. "That's it. That's all you have for me?"
"That's it.", she replied casually. "What else do you really need to know?"

"I don't know! That's why I'm asking you.", Tony grumbled.

"Whatever, don't sit there and try to tell me that you can't think of one thing that he would be excited about."

"Pepper already built him a pool", the man answered drily.

That had May laughing. "Okay, so something else he would be excited about."

"A car?", Tony asked hopefully.

"Oh, Please. I think you know good and well, that he would never accept a car. I think the only way you got away with the pool is because he's allowing himself to believe that you're doing it for yourselves and he's just reaping the benefits."

That was probably true, Tony thought with a laugh. The kid had been antsy about him buying a hat for him to wear at the zoo to keep the sun off his face. Something so big as a car wasn't likely to go over well. Thinking about the zoo sparked a thought and the idea of taking the boy on a trip with his friend crossed his mind. The whole 'not ready to fly again yet' would put a damper on that, though. He needed to think a little more local. Just as he was starting to wrack his brain for a more provincial resort or activity, May started talking to him again.

"Come again?", he mumbled as he tried to pull himself out of his head.

"I said, He already suggested a movie and ice cream with Ned. You're a genius, can't you build off of that?"

Then an idea hit him so hard that he was blinking back at her in surprise. Why hadn't he thought of that before? It was so obvious. "I need to go make a phone call.", he suddenly announced as he jumped off the couch. May giggling as he shot out the door.
The remainder of the day passed in short order. Tony stayed locked in his office for the rest of the day on Friday making undisclosed phone calls. He only came out to join Peter and May for dinner before subsequently disappearing back into his office after. Peter wasn't the least bit bothered by it. He'd spent his time with May or just lounging in his room with a book before knocking on his mentor's office door at midnight when he was ready to go to bed.

The weekend was everything Peter had hoped it would be. Happy drove him to Ned's house first thing Saturday morning. The man had been pleasant and carried on a conversation with him the whole way there. Tony, after some persuasion, picked him up just before curfew on Sunday. Patrolling had gone really well and his time with his friend had been without a doubt, amazing. He was just generally in a good mood when he finally rolled into bed on what, after the drive home, was technically the wee hours of Monday morning.

When he finally pulled himself back out of bed later that day it was more or less lunchtime. Tony was already in the kitchen spreading peanut butter onto a slice of bread. "Hey, Kid. Welcome back to the land of the living.", he greeted as he slapped the two pieces of dressed bread together to make a sandwich. "I didn't think you were going to come out of your room today."

As Peter ambled past his mentor, towards the cabinets, he grumbled. "I had to get up. I'm hungry."

"You're not going back to bed after you eat... just so you know.", Tony nonchalantly informed.

Pausing as he rummaged through the pantry, Peter turned towards his mentor and whined. "Why not? I had a long weekend and I'm tired. You always tell me if I'm tired I should sleep. Now you're telling me not to?"

Popping the last bite of sandwich into his mouth, Tony went to pour himself a glass of water. "Yeah, well, seeing as you've been asleep for...", he peeked at his watch, "going on eleven hours, I think you'll be fine. Pepper's going to be here soon."

Putting the bowl of Spaghetti-O's into the microwave, he paused again. "I wasn't actually asleep that whole time. The bed was just too comfortable to get out of...but I do want to see Pepper. She texted me some pictures of Hong Kong, a lot of really neat buildings and stuff." Then after another few
seconds of tapping his foot, the microwave dinged and he was carrying the hot bowl over to the bar to be near Tony. "She said she would show me more when she got back."

"Yeah?", Tony asked in amusement. It wasn't typically Peppers style to sightseeing while on a business trip. He wondered if the pictures were from near the office and hotel she stayed in or if she had actually gone on some sort of tour just to be able to send the kid pictures. He'd find out soon enough.

"Mm-hmm.", he hummed around his spoon, not daring to actually speak until he's swallowed. "She didn't send you any?"

"Nope. I've been there before, she probably didn't think she needed to. You want to show me what you got?" His interest was piqued and really wanted to know what she had sent.

The boy hopped off the barstool without much explanation and returned moments later with his phone. "Here, you can look", he said, sliding the phone over towards where Tony sat before returning to his bowl.

Tony picked up the phone, looking at the boy, waiting for him to change his mind. Going through Peter's text messages seemed personal. Like he really didn't have any right to be doing it but the kid seemed completely at ease with his decision. With no clear objections, he started looking through the texts and it was instantly clear that Pepper had gone out of her way to find some touristy places nearby to visit. Scrolling up he was able to see why. Peter had asked her if she had taken any cool pictures. He smiled because of course his finance would find the time to squeeze in some kind of expedition just to make the boy happy. He would have too and that's was just something else to add to the list of reasons why she was the one.

As soon as Peter had finished eating the slice of bread he'd used to soak up the excess sauce, Pepper walked in the door. "Hey! You're back!", he called out as he put his bowl in the dishwasher. "We were just talking about you and looking at the pictures you sent me. You have more right? Did you do the cable car thing? That sounded awesome. Oh, and I was reading about some really crazy island tour you can take, there's this giant statue of B--"

"--Kid!", Tony called out from across the room where he was standing directly in front of Pepper with his hands on her waist. He was looking over his shoulder smiling. "Can you shut it for five seconds so I can kiss my wife please?"

"Oh.", Peter gasped, snapping his mouth shut so fast you could hear his teeth clash together in his mouth.
Tony laughed and tried to pull Pepper in but she shoved him away with a smirk. "Leave him alone, Tony.", she playfully reprimanded. "There will be plenty of time for you later. I have some pictures to show the kid."

The man actually pouted as he followed her across the way into the living room, waving an accusatory finger. "Hold on just a minute there.--"

"--Oh, and by the way...", Pepper cut in, not looking up from her phone, "I'm technically not your wife until we set a date and actually plan a wedding." He could tell she was smiling but it still stung the tiniest bit.

Sighing, Tony sat at Pepper's other side. He knew she was right but things had been so hectic. With SI expanding, the accords not settling out the way he'd hoped and now having Peter to think about there hadn't seemed to be any time to discuss it. If he was being honest with himself, there probably had been time... but part of him really wanted to wait it out and see what would become of the team. Most of them were in hiding, including vision who had gone completely off the grid. He could only assume he was underground with Wanda. Barton and the pain in the ass, whose name he'd later figured out was Lang, were under house arrest. He still had no idea where Bruce was or how to locate him and Thor had been MIA for quite a while himself. The entire situation was a pipping, hot, mess but for some reason, he continued to hold out hope.

Shaking himself free of the dreary thoughts and memories, Tony leaned over and snuck a kiss onto Pepper's cheek. She gave him a look as though she were going to scold him again but after turning around her features rapidly morphed into something more like sympathy. She knew him better than anyone else, save for maybe Rhodey. He was sure she had spotted a glimpse of the sadness in his eyes even though the corners of his mouth were currently turned up in a small smile.

The rest of the afternoon was perfectly casual. No one had any big plans or anywhere to be. Tony didn't even make a shred of effort to sneak down into the lab or garage. It was actually kind of nice to just lounge around the penthouse for once. Peter had eventually flopped onto the couch with a book and ended up asleep within half of an hour leaving Pepper and Tony to themselves. They'd talked and laughed together as the boy snored lightly in the background and everything felt right.

Eventually, the natural light in the room began to grow dim and it was time to wake the kid up and start thinking about dinner. Tony already had a pretty good idea of what that would look like but he would wait and see what Peter said. Nudging him awake took some effort, it usually did, but eventually, the boy was sitting up on the couch rubbing his eyes. "I can't believe you actually went back to sleep.", Tony chided. "Did you get any rest at all over the weekend?"
"Not really.", Peter admitted sheepishly. "Me and Ned stayed up until almost four watching all of the Star Wars movies in order. Well, sort of, We only actually finished two.", he yawned. "We're going to start where we left off on Tuesday."

"You stayed up to watch movies after you patrolled until eleven?". Tony asked with an eyebrow quirked.

"Mm-hmm. Then his mom woke us up early to tell us she was going to church and I was hungry so we got up. We were going to take a nap later but Ned's other grandma, the one who lives here, came over to make this really big lunch and it was really good. After that, Ned's mom thought it was time for me to get picked up like we planned so I left to go on patrol until you came and we went home."

"So you're telling me that between Saturday morning and the time we arrived back here at one AM, you slept a grand total of four hours?"

Peter squinted his eyes at the man. "Well, when you put it that way it sounds way worse than it is."

"I can assure you that it is just as bad as it sounds. Pete, you can't do that. You need to sleep.", the man strained. Not that he was a great example.

Pepper seemed to have walked back into the room just in time to hear the last part of their conversation and laughed. "Did I hear you, Tony 'I don't need to sleep' Stark telling someone else that they do need to sleep?"

Tony rolled his eyes as he looked over the back of the couch where he'd sat down beside Peter. "Are you mocking me for being responsible?"

"Of course, not.", she scoffed "I was making sure I heard you correctly. Why would I mock you?"

The two continued to exchange playful banter, while Peter turned his head back and forth between with a smile. He was glad Pepper was home. He loved watching her and Tony interact. It was comfortable. It reminded him of how things used to be between Ben and May. They were always, teasing, laughing and acting goofy together. He was lost in his thoughts when Pepper walked up in front of him and rested her hand on the side of his face, he unintentionally leaned into her palm.

"Hey, Peter?", she asked, not pulling her hand away. "Tony was saying that you would probably want us to all eat with May tonight. Is that what you want?"
Bringing himself back to the present, Peter responded quickly. "Yeah, I think that would be nice. I've been waiting for you to get back so that we could all have dinner together again... and May can walk a little bit now so we can all be in the living room and not squished in the bedroom. Can we order in? I don't want anybody to have to cook."

"I think that sounds wonderful.", Pepper replied before proposing that Tony order from the Greek place that they had all liked before.

It was during dinner that Peter got a text from Ned reminding him of the next day's plans. "Um, Tony or, um, I guess... Pepper? I, I don't know who I'm supposed to ask..." His words trailed off uncomfortably as he looked back and forth between the two. "... but, um, Ned's mom wants to, uh, know when he's coming over tomorrow."

"He's staying the night, right?", Pepper asked happily.

"Oh, yes, ma'am, I mean, if that's still okay!" Peter couldn't fathom why he was so uncomfortable right now. Maybe it's because it was Pepper but that didn't seem right. He loved being around Pepper. Then again, it was worth considering that up until this point, all questions and permissions had gone through Tony or May. He'd never had to ask Pepper about anything before. He was just starting to bring his hands up to his hair with Tony reached over and tapped him on the elbow.

"It's fine Pete, Relax will ya? He can stay the night, we already told you that.", Tony placated. He had felt the kid tensing up from where he sat across the table.

"I am relaxed!", Peter said with maybe a little too much force if the look May was giving him was anything to go by. "Sorry. I didn't mean it like that."

"It's fine. You're fine.", Tony repeated before looking over towards Pepper. "What time do I need to go get the other kid?"

"Whatever Peter wants is fine, really.", she answered from across the room where she rinsing her plate to add it to the dishwasher.

This brought all eyes back on Peter who was now staring pleadingly at May who was remaining unhelpfully quiet. "I, um... Whatever is convenient for you?"
Tony rolled his eyes. "Kid. I've got nowhere to be tomorrow... except beside a pool at some point.--"

"--and at a grill. You're making us some steaks and hamburgers for dinner.", Pepper chirped in.

"Okay...", Tony drawled. "I'm also scheduled to play Grill Master in the evening. So when do you want-- Wait... Why do we need steaks and burgers? How many people are coming? I thought it was only going to be us and the two knuckleheads.", Tony added interrupting himself.

"It was", Pepper smiled. "Then I asked Happy and Rhodey if they wanted to join us for dinner at least."

"Happy agreed to this? Does he know there will be two motor-mouths there?"

Laughing Pepper confirmed that, that information had in fact been shared and that the two men would be arriving for dinner at six. This led back to Peter being required to pick a time to go get Ned. Pepper reminding him that they would more than likely want some time in the water before they ate, he finally settled on leaving after an early lunch to try and be back by three or four. With the pressure off of him, he was able to start getting excited about the plans. In fact, as soon as they were done cleaning up he was up in his room to call Ned.
Chapter 42

Peter was still on the phone with Ned after eleven-thirty when Tony stuck his head in the door. "Don't think that just because you spent the whole day sleeping that you get to stay up all night.", he began, ignoring the indignant glare Peter was sending his way. "Get off the phone and get your Spider butt to bed", he added before raising his voice so that the boy on the other end of the video call could hear him. "Good-night Ned!"

A satisfied grin found it's way onto the man's mouth as he listened to the other kid sputter in awe while his kid continued to silently glare over his shoulder. "Dude, Iron Man just told me good-night. ...and oh my God, I didn't answer him. Um... Good-night Mr. Stark! ... good-night Peter. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Yeah", Peter sighed, his good mood having left him. "Good-night. Just don't forget what we talked about."

"I won't! I promise! Bye.", Ned called out as he quickly ended the chat.

Crossing his way into the room, Tony smiled with absolute glee. "What did you make him promise this time?"

Peter rolled over onto his back to get a better look at his mentor before answering. "To not embarrass me in front of Pepper and Mr. Rhodes.", he groaned.

This had the man falling into a fit of laughter. "Yeah? How do you think that's going to work out?", he finally managed to get out. He already knew that Ned had a tendency to get all star struck and that for whatever reason, it seemed to annoy the crap out of Peter.

"Like shit.", Peter declared drily, obtaining him a reprimanding glare from his mentor. He was already in a bad mood and now the man was laughing at him.

"Watch your mouth, Kid.", the man scolded mildly. He didn't actually care, he just felt the need to say it.

Peter ignored the comment and proceeded to bring himself into a sitting position on the edge of the bed. "Did you really just, like, send me to bed?", he questioned.
"Uh, yeah. I believe my exact words were, 'Get your spider butt to bed.' We have a lot planned for tomorrow."

Groaning Peter stood and went to collect his bedclothes from the dresser. He wasn't sure what exactly had sent his mood in such a sour direction. Probably, Tony barging in to interrupt his call so that he could lecture him before demanding that he go to bed... all of that right in front of his best friend. Of course, it hadn't exactly helped when he'd laughed at him for asking Ned to not do anything that would make him want to crawl in a hole. The entire encounter was kind of humiliating when he thought about it and now irritation was setting in. Feeling provoked, he let his next words escape his mouth before he'd had time to analyze them. "Are you going to bed too or are you just forcing me?", he lashed out.

Glowering at the boy's belligerence, Tony crossed his arms over his chest where he stood leaning on the doorframe. "Not that it matters, but yes. Pepper and I are going to bed shortly.", he snapped. His temper was starting to flare in a way that it hadn't done in weeks. "What the Hell is up with your attitude?"

Peter hadn't really meant to start an argument but that's where they were now and he didn't feel like he could back down. Pure obstinacy was coursing through his veins when he bit back. "I don't have an attitude!", he shouted before walking into the bathroom with his pajamas, willfully slamming the door behind him. He instantly felt guilty but his stubbornness wasn't currently outweighing his regret.

The door crashing into the frame seemed to be enough to send Tony's temper into overdrive. "That's not an attitude? You yelling and slamming the fucking door. That's not an attitude?", he shouted back, meeting the boy's volume.

"Just get out of my room!", Peter growled. "Oh my God! I thought you wanted me to go to bed!"

Taking a few deep breaths, Tony walked out, closing the door behind him. He considered going to Pepper or May about it but he couldn't quite get past the seething, so instead, he stormed down into the lab. He could sort this all out later. Right now, he needed to cool off and think.

A few minutes later when there was a knock on Peter's door he didn't hesitate or ask questions he just yelled. "I thought I said to leave me alone!" When the door cracked open to reveal Pepper instead of Tony his eyes grew wide as he gulped back his next words, replacing them with stuttered apologies. "I-I'm sorry! I, I didn't know it was you! I thought, I thought, I ... I'm sorry.", he sputtered as he flew up off the mattress so that he was standing, pacing in front of her.
Rather than looking angry, she looked confused, concerned, maybe even hurt. Peter wasn't sure because he couldn't bring himself to face her long enough to decide. "Peter, What happened? Did you and Tony get into a fight?"

Still looking solidly at the floor Peter shrugged his shoulders. "Kind of? Well, yes. I'm sorry."

"Do you want to talk about it?", she asked kindly.

He wasn't sure if he should open up to Pepper or not, he knew he had been in the wrong. At the very least, he knew he'd overreacted. He was sure that Tony wasn't trying to make him feel bad purpose, he was just emotional. His mentor had taken him by surprise getting onto him like that and he'd acted out on a flustered impulse, prompting an argument he'd never meant to start.

After a while, Pepper took his drawn-out silence as a 'no' and gave him a sweet smile before reminding him that, should he change his mind, he could come to find her and that he should probably get some sleep. Left with no other options, Peter did just that. He laid down in his bed brooding over his and his mentor's latest quarrel. Eventually, he fell asleep.

Down in the lab, Tony was continuing to mope, trying to sort out what had happened in the kid's room. He wasn't even concentrating on the project before him. He was simply leaned back in a chair, tossing a screwdriver up in the air and catching it in a repetitive motion. He hadn't been paying attention when the lab door slid open and startled when Pepper spoke. "Tony? What happened with you and Peter?"

"You scared the shit out of me.", he huffed as he awkwardly bent down to pick up the tool that had clattered to the floor.

Placing a gentle hand on his shoulder Pepper looked him in the eye. "He's pretty upset but he didn't want to talk to me. What happened with you and Peter?"

Tony flicked his eyes upwards to meet her's and sighed. "I'm not sure. I came in to tell him to go to bed and somehow we ended up arguing. We both lost our temper and he started slamming doors. There was a lot of yelling.", he mumbled. "I fucked up.", he added, breaking the eye-contact.

"He raised his voice at me too, if it makes you feel any better... of course I think he thought I was you...", she smirked. "I knocked on his door and he yelled through it to leave him alone. It wasn't
until I opened it up to check on him that he realized it was me. You should have seen his face. Poor kid looked guilty, yet absolutely terrified at the same time."

Tony huffed a laugh because if there was one thing he knew, it was that Peter would never yell at Pepper. He sort of questioned whether or not the kid ever yelled at May or if that particular reaction was something reserved only for him. It would be no surprise if it was. "Yeah, I think he only yells at me. I probably deserve it, though."

"Oh stop it", Pepper exhaled. "What are you going to do? Are you going to try and talk to him again tonight?"

Going back to fidgeting with the screwdriver, Tony tried to remember the last heated fight they'd had. There had been a few petty arguments here and there but the actual fighting? It had been weeks he was sure of it. "I guess I should. I don't want him going to bed upset.", he finally decided. The kid was already prone to nightmares. Sending him to sleep unsettled was just begging for one to appear.

However, by the time he made it to the boy's room, he was already asleep. Tony contemplated waking him up but instead, he decided to go with the 'wait and see' approach. If he did wake up, hopefully, he would call him. "FRIDAY?", he whispered. "If the kid wakes up in any kind of distress, remind him that he can ask for me. I won't be mad... even if thinks I will be" When the AI confirmed the instructions he walked out of the room, noting that the kid was still sleeping with the bathroom light on. He considered how that would go over Ned, but in the end, he was sure the other boy would be more than understanding. Peter had found himself a good friend. Ned was like his Rhodey, he thought with a meager smile.

Clicking the door shut, Tony found his way into his own bed beside Pepper. Closing his eyes he wondered how much sleep he was going to get before FRIDAY was alerting him. He was nearly certain it was going to happen even though he hoped it wouldn't.

Peter, predictably woke up to tousled sheets and an elevated heart rate that was pounding in his ears. Looking around the room, he focused on the light. Taking several deep breaths before making a move to get out of bed. Shaking his head, he couldn't quite figure out why that particular dream and reoccurred. He hadn't dreamed about his parents in years. Before he'd had a chance to make it into the bathroom or even change his shirt the AI was talking to him. "The boss wanted me to remind you that you can request his presence at any time and that he is there to offer assistance."

"Yeah, alright. I got it.", Peter whispered.
"Would you like for me to get him for you?", the AI inquired.

"No.", Peter mumbled. He was absolutely certain that the man was still mad at him. Admittedly, there was a small part of him that wanted to wake Tony up if for nothing else but to apologize. He didn't like it when they fought. Checking the clock it was four in the morning. He knew he should try to go back to sleep so he made himself comfortable and got back into bed.

In his own bed, Tony had easily fallen asleep with Pepper by his side. However, the unresolved argument between himself and Peter was weighing heavily on his mind and it managed to seep its way into his dreams. He woke suddenly in the wee hours of the morning with his eyes darting around the room searching for the source of his sudden wakefulness. It took only a few seconds for it to register that the threat had only been inside his head and he was able to let out the breath he hadn't realized he was holding. Turning his head to his right, he could see Pepper's chest rising and falling in a soothing rhythm and he allowed the sight to calm him but his mind eventually drifted to Peter. Making a quick decision, he stood up and began to quietly creep towards the boy's room. He could have easily asked the AI about Peter's current status but he wanted to check on him himself.

When Peter heard his door crack open he immediately closed his eyes and steadied his breathing to feign sleep. He could hear the man's steps as he carefully tread into the room and soon felt Tony's calloused hands gently card through his hair. His breath hitched a little at the unexpected affection. He could have remained still and quiet but believing that the man was no longer angry, he didn't. "I'm sorry, Tony", he whispered almost inaudibly.

Tony stilled in his actions when he heard Peter speak, however, his hand remained lightly atop his head. "I'm sorry to Buddy.", he whispered as he began scratching his nails along the kid's scalp.

"Did FRIDAY tell you I was awake?", he asked quietly as he leaned into the man's steady movements.

"Nope. I woke up and wanted to check on you.", he smiled, untangling his fingers from the boy's hair. "I tried to come to see you earlier but you were already asleep. I didn't want you to go to bed upset. I guess I took too long.", he sighed, sitting on the edge of the bed.

"I overreacted.", Peter admitted softly. "I shouldn't have yelled or slammed the door."

"Overreacted?"
"Yeah, when you came in and told me off for sleeping all day and then told me I had to go to bed right that second even though I was on the phone with Ned... It, well, it made... n-nevermind...", Peter explained, though his speech became more mumbled the longer he spoke.

"It what, Buddy?", Tony asked curiously. He felt like they were five seconds from a huge revelation. One that would more than likely explain what the hell had happened.

"It was embarrassing", the boy finally grumbled into his pillow. "I don't like getting in trouble in front of people... and then you laughed at me."

Tony was shocked. It had never been his intention to belittle the kid. He was merely trying to get a point across, He hadn't taken into account that Peter tended to be on the sensitive side. Apparently, he came off sounding harsher than he'd meant to and made Peter feel like he was being scolded in front of his friend. "I didn't mean for that to happen. I would never do that to you on purpose."

"I know", Peter said honestly before rolling onto his back.

"I love you, you know that?", the man smiled, placing a hand in the middle of Peter's chest.

"Yeah, I know.", Peter replied with a small smile. "I love you too.", he whispered.

Tony's heart clenched at those words. He was pretty sure it would every time he heard the kid say it because he was just as sure that he didn't deserve it. "We should get back to sleep. Big day tomorrow."

"Okay", Peter agreed as he rolled back to his side, pulling his favorite blanket up his body and tucking it under his chin. He smiled a satisfied smile when Tony leaned over and placed a small kiss right on his temple. He was glad the kid was feeling good enough to go back to sleep on his own. "Good-night, Tony."

"Good-night, Pete.", he whispered, walking out the door.

Tony slipped back into his own room as quietly as possible in an effort to not disturb his sleeping fiancee. It didn't matter, though. She was already awake and propping herself up on her side with an elbow when he made eye contact with her. "I didn't mean to wake you up", he murmured.
"You didn't.", she said, shaking her head. "I woke up early and noticed you had stepped out that's all. FRIDAY said you were with Peter. How is he?"

Tony's lips nearly curved into a smile at the question. He loved how much she cared about his kid. Not that he would have expected it to be any other way. Pepper had a kind heart and Peter was more than likable. "He's alright now. We talked and everything is fine. It's fixed.", was all he said. He didn't want to go into too much detail about his unintentional screw-up. Not that Pepper would hang it over his head or anything, he just didn't feel like getting into it at the moment. The whole incident made him feel like shit as it was. All that mattered was that things were okay now. Everything was fine and Peter still loved him. He hadn't ruined it. He hoped and prayed he never would.

"So, you're going back to sleep?", she yawned as she watched Tony hover in the doorway in thought, before coming towards her.

"I think so.", he exhaled, smiling in her direction as he climbed up beside her. Happy to find that the bed was just as comfortable as it had been when he left.

Once he was settled, Pepper snuggled up around his back she sighed in his neck. "Good. ...because tomorrow you have two teenagers to deal with."

Already feeling sleep pull him, Tony, turned his head slightly to try and meet her eyes. "We, Dear. You meant 'we'."

Pepper laughed a small laugh and pulled herself in more closely. "Of, course.", she whispered after a moment or two but Tony was already back to sleep. As she closed her eyes she thought about what rarity it was for Tony to wake up in the middle of the night and actually go back to sleep. The kid was good for him. That was for certain. She smiled at the way Tony had basically become Peter's father and she loved that look on him. He was genuinely happy and that made her happy in return.
Chapter 43

Chapter Summary

Tag adds: Swimming Pools, Lessons on Physics

At breakfast the next morning, nobody mentioned anything that pertained to the previous evening's fight or the early morning confessions. This was something that both Peter and Tony were immensely grateful for. As such the morning was smooth, comfortable and just generally enjoyable. The conversation around the breakfast table was favorable and it was clear that both Tony and Pepper were looking forward to celebrating the opening of their new pool as much as Peter was. It was when the topic of guest came up that the boy finally decided to ask the question that had been on his mind for more than a day. "Do you think that May's doctor would let her come? I mean she can walk some now so it doesn't seem completely unreasonable for her to like, ride in a wheelchair or something to the pool... right? Just for a little while! I know she couldn't be there the whole time or anything like that but, maybe? Do you think?"

Both Tony and Pepper looked at each other from across the bar. It hadn't occurred to either of them that was something that they could ask. What Peter had said made sense. Pepper, always the reasonable one, answered first. "That is certainly something we can ask. I'll see what I can find out after we're done here."

"Thank you, Pepper.", he replied genuinely and smiled through the rest of the meal. The idea that May could potentially join them at the pool for dinner was exciting all on it's own.

Later that morning when it came time to go and fetch Ned, Peter was thrown for a loop when he found out that Pepper was going to be the one driving him. It wasn't that he had a problem with it, he'd just assumed that Tony or Happy would drive him as usual. On the plus side, this meant that he could probably pick the car. Ginning from ear to ear he decided to feel that possibility out. "Can... we take a convertible... the red Audi? That one had a back seat.", he asked her with cautious eagerness.

Peter could hear Tony laughing in the background as Pepper agreed that they could do just that. It was the perfect day and the perfect occasion for it. Walking out the door, she asked him if had any sunglasses. When he shook his head no, Tony disappeared and was back in a flash carrying a pair of mirrored aviators. "Here, try these." When Peter tried to refuse the man rolled his eyes and continued. "Look, Kid, you're going to want to be wearing sunglasses if you guys are going to take the top down. Keep's the sun and the wind out of your eyes. Just take them, will ya?"
Relenting, Peter accepted the glasses that were being thrust into his hands and slid them onto his face. It seemed to make Tony smile which seemingly forced him to smile in return. After that, they were quick to get out the door.

The ride to Ned's house was quiet but not uncomfortably so. Peter looked out the window and listened to music. Pepper asked him a question here and there and at some point, he was pretty sure he dozed off. The ride back with Ned was completely different. Just like the time before Peter had to practically tackle Ned in the yard to prevent him from saying anything stupid but Pepper didn't even seem to notice beckoning both boys to hurry up and get in the car so they could get back.

Unlike, Tony and Happy, Pepper enjoyed listening to the cheerful banter between the two friends. She would occasionally join in the conversation, mostly when Ned would draw her in with a comment or a question. "Ms. Potts! I can't believe that you guys built a pool for Peter! That is so awesome!", Ned piped up at one point. Peter didn't say anything, he just froze waited for Pepper to correct him. The pool was for the compound. For everyone. Peter getting sick from the indoor pool had just sort of triggered the idea. It wasn't for him. He'd been telling himself that for nearly two weeks.

Pepper grinned at them through the rearview mirror. "Well, I'm glad you approve.", she laughed before turning her eyes to Peter. "I think Tony would do just about anything for Peter."

With those words, Peter's delusions were shattered. Deep down he knew that the pool was being built specifically for him but he wanted to pretend it wasn't. He wanted to be able to be excited about it and the easiest way to do that was to tell himself that Tony had not spent God only knows how much on building a leisure pool with a water slide in his backyard because he wanted Peter to have it.

Now that Pepper had said out loud that the pool was essentially his, the excitement he'd been feeling started to swirl with guilt it made him feel uneasy and Pepper must have sensed. "Peter. It's okay. He wanted to do this. He wanted you to have it. It's what he does for the people he cares about. He buys them things. I could tell you some stories.", she laughed. "Imagine a ten-foot tall stuffed rabbit..."

A few ridiculous stories later, Ned was laughing and Peter was feeling slightly better about the situation. He'd managed to quell the majority of the guilt anyway. Though it was still tingling slightly in the back of his mind. He tried not to let it spoil the fun. Pepper said that this made Tony happy and if that was true then he didn't want to mess that up.

As soon as they got back to the compound Peter and Ned were tearing down the hall and into Peter's room to change into swimwear. By the time they got out to the living room, Tony was standing there in his swim trunks and a t-shirt, tossing a bottle of sunscreen up in the air and catching as he
waited for them. "You two knuckle head's ready to go? Pepper's coming out in a little while, apparently, it's my turn to babysit you two." The man tried to sound annoyed and disinterested but his posture and smile said otherwise. "Here," he added tossing the bottle over to Peter. "Put this on your face. I don't want to see any more sunburn on you for the rest of the summer."

Peter rolled his eyes and took the bottle so that he could smear the pina colada scented lotion across his nose and ears as instructed. "You know it just heals right up right?"

"That doesn't mean it doesn't hurt.", the man argued, gesturing for him to pass the bottle over to Ned once he was done.

"I was fine, Tony."

"I know you were.", the man admitted. "...but we're going to be out there for a while and I would just feel better if I knew you weren't going to come inside later with a blistered face. Yeah? Humor me, alright?"

Peter couldn't help but smile at his mentor's concern. "Tony. I already put it on. Relax, will ya?"

Tony quirked an eyebrow and pointed a finger right in Peters' face. "Did you just tell me to relax?"

"Um... yes?"

Before anyone else could get a word in Pepper stepped out into the hall laughing. "Tony. Please. You two have been spending way to much time together. He sounds just like you."

"I do not sound like that.", the man said trying to defend himself.

Pepper still laughing looked towards the ceiling. "FRIDAY?"

As soon as Pepper called on the AI a holographic image popped up playing multiple instances of Tony using the same exact phrase that Peter had used in various tones to various people around the compound. The man squinted his eyes at his future wife before looking vaguely towards the ceiling. "Traitors.", he grumbled good-naturedly leaving everyone in the room laughing even harder.
Rolling his eyes, Tony led the two, still giggling, boys out of the penthouse.

A short walk later they were entering the new leisure area and Peter was stunned. What he’d been expecting when they talked about building a pool was something akin to what he was used to seeing at the public pool. A fenced in cement area with a rectangular pool cut into the middle of it, a bright red and yellow slide and a green diving board on the side. That was definitely not what he saw when he walked out the double doors flanked by Tony and Ned. "You like it?", Tony asked as they entered the new pool area.

Peter was tongue-tied while Ned was talking a mile a minute about having never seen anything so awesome in his whole life. Peter's silence was not exactly what Tony had expected and it made his heart drop a little. Maybe this was too much. Once he was able to send the other boy off to get some towels he was able to focus on his kid alone. "Talk to me, Pete.", he smiled, having bent down slightly so that they could be eye to eye.

"It's, it's awesome.", Peter whispered... and it was. It was just more than he'd ever expected and he was finding it very difficult to place words. Instead of cement, there was natural stone tile and the pool itself was curved and sprawling. There wasn't a diving board at all. Instead, there were two, brown slides set side by side. The turns in the middle opposing as if they were mirrored. Lining the pool was more than a dozen wooden lounge chairs and earth-toned umbrellas. To the far right was a collection of picnic tables and a small kitchenette-like area under a wooden awning. Just outside of that sat a large grill. The whole thing looked like it was set up to have several plants added at a later date to make the entire expanse look as if it were a jungle oasis rather than privacy fenced leisure area. Finally having taken it all in, Peter blinked back at Tony. "It's perfect. Thank you."

Tony was grinning like a cat as he placed his hand on Peter's shoulder. "You know the best part? It's a saline pool. No crazy chemicals. Well, technically there are but not the traditional-- you know what, we can talk about that later. The point is, it shouldn't be a problem. You can just enjoy yourself."

About that time Ned returned carrying an abundance of huge, fluffy, cream-colored towels and was dropping them onto the cushion of the closest lounge chair. The second they were out of his hands he was looking right at Peter smiling broadly and gesturing towards the slides. "Wanna race?" Peter was quick to join him.

Comfortably sitting on the sides lines, Tony watched the two boys 'raced' down the sides at least twenty times. He wasn't exactly sure, he stopped counting somewhere around eleven. Every round was a tie but who won didn't seem to actually matter. They would pop up out of the water at the bottom, laugh hysterically and playfully argue over who landed first. On the last go, Peter had tried to drag Tony into the argument. "Come on Tony, tell him I was first. I know you were watching.", he'd begged.
Tony rolled his eyes fondly. "Kid... It was a tie. It's a tie, every time. That's how gravity works. It's physics."

Still, out of breath from laughing so much, Peter smiled back at him. "Do you want to race?"

"It's not a race, Kid. It's literally just physics. We would tie.", the man scoffed.

"Yeah. This is like the only race you could match me in, Tony. You should take advantage of it.", Peter reasoned with a smirk.

Tony half-heartedly glared int he boy's direction. "What did you just say?"

"Nothing! I didn't say anything.", Peter laughed as he held his hands up in front of him himself.

"Uh-huh. Look here, Spider-boy, can you fly?", he asked not pausing for an answer. "I didn't think so. I could loop the city three times before you got to the other side."

"You think so? I'm pretty good at webbing around and I'm fast."

Tony looked at the boy and squinted his eyes. "Is that a challenge, Parker?"

"No!", Peter howled. "Oh my God. I just wanted you to go down the slide with me. Come on, it's fun!"

Getting up out of the chair as if it were the hardest thing he was going to have to do all day, Tony huffed. "Fine. Move over Ned, my turn to tie with the Spider-kid."

This went on for a little over an hour until Pepper showed up with both Happy and Rhodey with her. Hopping out of the pool, Tony grabbed a towel and greeted his friends, who had helped carry down everything they would need for dinner. This left the two boys happily splashing around in the pool. Neither of them seemed to have noticed the additional adults who had entered the area. Then he heard it. Ned squealing so loudly that he was sure his eardrums would have spilt had he been
anywhere near him. "Oh my God! Peter! That's War Machine."

Tony and the Rhodes exchanged amused looks as Peter began to sink himself under the water and swim towards the edge. Clearly, Ned had not kept his promise about not embarrassing him but Tony wouldn't have expected it to go any other way. He was sure Peter didn't either. Shaking his head pointed towards Ned. "That's Ned, Pete's 'Guy in the Chair'"

"His what?", Rhodey asked.

"Guy in the Chair!", Ned pipped up, leaning over the edge of the pool. "When Peter goes out and does his... you know, Spider-man stuff, I help him out."

Peter who had now emerged from the water and was dripping all the way over towards where the men were standing smiled and shook his head. "Yeah, he helps me out.", Peter agreed even though the truth was, Karen could assist him faster and better than Ned could but he liked having his friend on the line with him and sometimes it was nice to know that he had the backup if anything ever happened.

"Sounds like you've got yourself a good friend there, Peter", Rhodey smiled.

"Mm-hmm.", Peter hummed as he ran his hands through his wet hair in an attempt to get it to stop dripping the cold water down his back. It was making him shiver. Happy must have noticed because a second later the boy's hand shot out to catch the fluffy towel that the man had thrown at his head.

"Jesus, Kid. You're dripping everywhere. Dry it off.", Happy grumbled in the direction of the practically vibrating teenager.

Tony rolled his eyes. "It's a pool Happy.", he said gesturing vaguely towards the water. "It's going to be wet."

Looking down to examine the tile, Happy retorted, "Yeah, well, he looked cold and I didn't want you to get your panties all in a twist."
A little ashamed that he hadn't noticed that himself, Tony looked Peter over. He did look cold. He was still shivering despite the fact that he now had a huge thick towel wrapped around his shoulders, and his lips were ever so slightly tinted purple. "Kid? Are you really that cold? It's almost eight-six degrees out here."

"I know, I'll be okay in a minute.", Peter promised. "I'm always f-freezing when I Get out of the water."

"Huh. Well, go sit in the sun for a while and since your drying off, put on some more sunscreen.", he said waving his hand towards a nearby chair. "You too, Ned!", he shouted across the water. "I'm not sending you home with sunburn!"

"Yes, sir!", Ned shouted as he swam towards the ladder so he could get out and go sit beside his friend. "Dude, he's worse than my dad...", Ned whispered into Peter's ear causing him to grin ever so slightly.

Just as Peter was starting to dry off enough to warm up and conversations were starting to pick up, Peter's acute hearing picked up on the doors opening up again. Not sure who else should be expecting he looked up. It was May, she was being pushed through the doors by her evening nurse. They both looked pleased to be there. "Aunt May!", Peter shouted causing everyone else to quiet down. "Aunt May! They let you come! That's awesome!" He shouted as he ran over to greet her. "Thank you for helping her", he said politely to the nurse who was, of course, nothing but gracious in telling him that it was her pleasure.

Tony positioned a large comfortable chair just under the awning in the shade and offered May his arm as she stood to walk the few steps it would take to get there. The nurse was following closely behind. It was everything Peter could have hoped for out of the evening.

Everyone sort of gathered together and enjoyed each others company. Peter and Ned would go back and forth between playing in the water and joining the conversations. Each time Peter climbed out of the pool for anything other than to climb the steps to the slide, Tony was quick to wrap him up in a fresh dry towel. He wanted to find the mother-henning annoying but really, appreciated the gesture.

The sun was starting to get low when Tony approached the edge of the pool and kicked some water in Peter's direction to get his attention. "Pete! Come on, get out and dry off. I want you to help me with the grill."

"Really?", Peter asked with delight.
"Yes, really", the man reiterated, before holding out yet another dry towel for Peter to cocoon himself in once he finally managed to pull himself out of the water. "Get warmed up join me at the grill. Yeah?"

"Yeah! I'll be right there!", he answered, smiling despite his chattering teeth. The man ran his hands up and down the boys shivering form before giving him a quick pat on the shoulder and going to get things started.
Chapter 44

As Tony started digging the hamburger patties and steaks out of the small refrigerator Rhodes and Happy wandered over, each with a beer in hand. Neither of them had offered Tony one. They already knew what he answer would be. The man hadn't had a drop of alcohol since the morning he's picked Peter up from the hospital. Granted, even before that it was only one or two beers on the occasional Friday night. Instead, they stood around and began to jest in good-natured fun. "You're going to be cooking tonight?", Rhodes had laughed. "No one told me that."

Then Happy had his turn, of course. "Yeah. I don't know about this. Do you actually know what you're doing?"

"Of course, he doesn't.", Rhodey chimed in with a smile. "Have you seen how much shit he blows up? This can not possibly end well."

"Both of you stop it!", Tony finally half-shouted over the playful insults. "You both know damn well that I know what I'm doing. Now, hush." He was smiling despite the rise in his voice. Before either of them could get another word in Tony turned his attention to Peter who was just starting to shuck off the towel to stand. "Hurry up and get over here, Kid. I need some back up before these two start insulting me again."

Smiling, Peter slipped on a dry t-shirt and walked towards where the men were all standing still feeling slightly chilled. "What do you need me to do?"

Before Tony could give a single instruction, Rhodes was talking. "Oh, Thank god, you're here. I thought Pepper was actually going to leave Tony alone with a fire... this makes so much more sense."

"Does it?", Happy questioned. "I'm not sure this one's going to be much better--"

"--He's already better.", Tony cut him off, handing Peter a plate of steaks. "Here, carry that over to the grill, we'll start with those." When he turned to follow behind the boy, he glared over his shoulder and mouthed, 'Leave him alone.' to the two still laughing men. He knew they would never intentionally hurt Peter's feelings but he just wanted to eliminate the risk altogether. Tony had been looking forward to this day and so far everything had been damn near perfect. He wanted to keep it that way.
"Fine, we'll leave you two alone but only because I'd hate to interrupt the precious father-son bonding session.", Rhodes called after them with glee. Tony half-glared at them again before joining Peter.

Standing by the grill, Peter held his hands out towards the heat and Tony laughed. "What!?", he asked defensively before dropping into a more sheepish tone. "...I'm still cold."

Dropping the steaks onto the grill, he smiled. "Yeah? Well, you'll be hot here in a minute. This is going to take a little while."

"Hmm", Peter nodded as he watched Tony. "Good thing there's a pool then."

Tony's mouth fell open in mock horror. "Are you planning on abandoning me the second you break a sweat?"

Peter grinned back mischievously. "Would you jump in after me?"

"Are you about to make a run for it?", Tony asked, cutting his eyes at the boy. He was only half paying attention to the steaks at this point.

Peter considered taking off and flipping into the pool but thought better of it. He'd just managed to shake off the last of the lingering chill. "Nah. I want to help you."

"Uh-huh. You just don't want to have to dry off again.", the man deadpanned.

His wide smile faltered into more of a self-conscious grin. "Maybe.", Peter laughed lightly.

Tony just smiled and ruffled the boy's hair before poking at the cooking steaks. Later on, once the steaks were flipped, he sent Peter to get the tray of hamburgers. "Alright, I did the steaks, you're in charge of the hamburgers. Just drop them on there nice and even."

Peter did as he was told and stood back a little. Sometime later, Tony was handing him a spatula and telling him it was time to start flipping. Hesitating, he just started at the half cooked patties and shifted on his bare feet. "I don't know how.", he complained.
Tony rolled his eyes and flipped the first one in one smooth motion. "See, not complicated. They pay sixteen-year-olds minimum wage to do this shit."

"I'm not sixteen yet, Tony... and no one is paying me anything. They get training!", Peter stated nervously. For some reason, he felt like he needed to do well, to impress his mentor. He didn't want to jump right in and mess it up.

The man couldn't see what the big deal was. "Pete, I've seen you do literal rocket science. You can flip a burger. Just slide it under and turn it.", he said, hand over hand taking Peter through the motions.

Feeling more confident after having done it once, even if it was with assistance, Peter went in for his first real try. He did as he was shown and it went perfectly. He started going through the motions and was quickly finishing the task. Tony was murmuring words of praise every few minutes and that seemed to keep him going. Then when he got down to the last few he hit a snag. The spatula didn't slide under the next patty quite so easily and he was worried it was going to make a mistake. "Tony? This one's stuck. What do I do?"

Tony who had been chatting lightly with Pepper turned around. "Hmm? Oh. No biggie, just force it under in one quick motion. Give it a little upward push if you need to pry it off." He could see Peter's brain at work. "Stop it. If it breaks or whatever, it's not a big deal. We have plenty."

Nodding his head, Peter started to force the spatula under the patty as Tony has said. As he did so, he started to give what he thought was some light upward force but in his nervousness, it must have been more than that. As soon as he did the top portion of the patty broke off and went flying over his shoulder and hit Happy squarely in the chest before falling to the ground with an audible splat. Slowly turning around he could see all eyes on him and he really, really wanted to be embarrassed but the look of shock on Happy's face was so hilarious that he couldn't help but laugh.

"Did you just throw and half-cooked hamburger at me?", Happy asked in disbelief.

Tony was ready to step in but Peter was quick to reply. "No!", he laughed. "I was trying to flip it over but it was stuck. Tony told me to use a little force to get it off and I guess I kind of messed up. I'm so sorry!" At this point Peter was hardly getting a breath in between fits of laughter, causing everyone around them to start laughing as well.

"That is definitely your kid, Tony.", Happy said without humor but the smile on his face when he
turned around gave him away. As did the snort of laughter that came out of him seconds later as he was trying to wipe the residual grease off of his shirt with a damp towel. "Like father - like son."

Tony, himself was having trouble keeping his snickering to himself as he shook his head and directed the boy to finish the job before they burnt.

Once Peter had finished flipping all of the burgers he backed up away from the grill, wiping his brow with the hem of his shirt. Tony had been right. He was hot from standing over there for so long. He figured he could get away with sitting by the pool with his feet in the water until it was time to do anything else so that's what he did. Ned swam over and rested his arms on the side of the pool and the two of them talked until Peter heard his name being called. As he was getting up into a standing position, the hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. Not knowing what sort of danger he could possibly expect at a pool party he ignored it until he felt two hands on his back giving a forceful shove. Being unprepared and on a slick wet surface, Peter easily toppled over straight into the water but not before his quick reflexes kicked in and allowed him to grab ahold of the shirt belonging to his unknown assailant.

Unexpectedly hitting the cool water after being so warm sent a shock through his system and he came up gasping for air, still holding onto whoever had pushed him in. The sense of danger had passed but his heart was still rapidly pounding in his chest. He continued to use all of his strength to hold onto the cloth in his hands as he tried to orient himself. It wasn't until he heard Tony's familiar voice yelling 'Pete! You need to let go. Let go, let go, let go.' that he was able to somewhat snap out of the stupor he'd been in and do just that. Upon letting go of the cloth, he heard a harsh breath come up beside him, followed by some words but his brain wasn't registering them as he continued to stare at Tony. He could see his mouth moving as he gestured in his direction but nothing was computing. Still not having his own panic completely under control he wasn't able to calculate who it was in the water with him but he could feel the water ripple by his sides as they moved closer but there was no warning of danger. Then hands were on him again, at least two pairs, but this time they were gentle and urging him over towards the steps where Tony was calf deep in the water waiting for him with an open towel.

As soon as the towel was wound around his body, Tony was in his face. "Are you alright? Calm down, Kiddo--"

"--I'm so sorry, Tony. I didn't mean for--"


... and Peter did breathe as he melted into Tony's embrace. He was fine. Everything was fine and he could take in his surroundings again.

The first thing his eyes fell on was a soaking wet Happy who appeared to be somewhere
between terrified and remorseful. Peter wanted to say something to make him feel better but no words came. Instead, the man spoke to him. "Kid, I didn't mean to scare you like that. I was just messing around with you. I'm sorry. I really am." Peter nodded in response and continued to snuggle into Tony's warmth. When he turned his head, May was looking at him with concern and he wanted to go to her but he also didn't want to leave the comfortable position he was in. Pepper, as always, seemed to read his mind and helped his aunt to her feet so she could come to him with her support. Soon he was enveloped by all three of them.

In less than five minutes he was back to himself enough to remember what he'd been doing before landing in the water. "Shit! The hamburgers!", he shouted nearly hitting Tony in the chin as he snapped his head up.

"Hey, language.", Tony said with a small glare before letting his face fall back into neutral. "They're fine. Rhodey and Ned took over. In fact, I bet it's ready. Hungry?"

"Yeah.", Peter replied with a sigh as he wriggled his way out of the grasps of the worried adults. "Thanks for, uh, yeah... uh. Just thanks...and sorry.", he said looking between them.

"Nothing to be sorry for. We just wanted to make sure you were okay.", May said before looking over at Happy who was still looking sort of anxious about everything despite the fact that the entire ordeal and recovery had lasted less than fifteen minutes. "No harm done.", she said before her eyes crinkled up in mirth. "Just, maybe don't do it again."

"Never again, ma'am.", Happy sighed. "I thought it would be fun to knock him into the water after the whole hamburger thing. I didn't know he would freak out. I really am sorry about that."

Peter looked at him with a wavering smile. "It's okay Happy. I'm sorry I dragged you under the water."

"Mr. Stark thought you were going to drown him!", Ned unhelpfully provided. "I was going to try to save him but he told me not to go near you yet. I thought was going to call a suit and that would have been both terrifying and awesome but then you let go and we sort of pushed you out of the water."

Looking hot with shame, Peter collapsed onto a bench between Pepper and the chair where May was sitting. "Yeah.", was all he could get out because he didn't want to admit to his friend that he was sort of fuzzy on what was going on for a few minutes there and could have easily clocked him right in the mouth. Possibly breaking his jaw. Even Tony hadn't approached him, though he was sure that if it had been much longer he would have. From there, Pepper changed the subject and things
quickly became light again.

Next thing he knew, Tony was plopping down across from him and handing him a plate. "Eat.", he commanded before cutting up his own steak. Peter didn't have to be told twice and was quickly devouring a well-dressed hamburger that he declared to be the best one he'd ever eaten. Tony huffed a laugh. "Modest much?", he teased.

"I didn't really think about that part.", Peter said with his mouth full.

Tony, pointed at him with the knife he was holding. "Don't be gross. I'm over here, trying to enjoy this perfect steak that I cooked, and I can't do that with you spitting all over the table."

"Perfection, huh. Now, who's the modest one.", Pepper lovingly mocked from across the way.

"Textbook narcissist", Tony pointed out while gesturing towards himself.

"Tony, Nothing about you is 'textbook'", Rhodey added from the background.

Much to Tony's relief, Peter hopped right back into the pool after dinner and continued to mess around with Ned until well after dark. Only coming out to tell May 'good-night' and later to see Happy and Rhodey off. In fact, the two friends stayed in the pool until Tony dragged them out at ten. Partially because he was just done and ready to go inside and partially because the temperature was dropping and the kid was cold enough getting out of the pool when it was in the mid-eighties. "Alright, alright, time to get out. I'm ready to go inside and I don't want Spider-boy freezing to death."

"Oh come on, Tony!", Peter called out across the way. "Five more minutes! Can we go down the slide one more time? Please?"

"Yeah! Please, Mr. Stark? Just one more. That's it I swear.", Ned pleaded alongside his friend.

Rubbing his hands down his face, Tony gave in and told them it was fine. This lead to cheering and
splashing as the two jumped out of the pool and ran full speed towards the slides. Tony shouting after them to slow down before waiting for them to climb back out of the water. He tossed a towel at Ned before tightly wrapping one around Peter himself. "Let's get inside so you can dry off and change into something more comfortable.", he mumbled towards the boy as he started using a second towel to rub down his hair.

"I'm hungry.", Peter said through his chattering teeth. "Are there any more hamburgers?"

"Yep. I'll warm one up for you while you get dry. You want one Ned?"

"Yes please!", the other boy quickly returned.

About the time Tony had two warm hamburgers ready, the boys emerged from Peter's room. Ned was comfortably dressed in shorts and a baggy t-shirt, while Peter was snuggly dressed in sweatpants, the sweatshirt Tony had given him and had a blanket around his shoulders. Tony smiled at the bundled up teenager. "How do you survive the winter, Kid?"

"I don't, Tony. Snow is going to kill me and I should just to move to Hawaii. Then I can be the 'Friendly Island Spider-man'. It'll be awesome... and warm."

Tony scrunched up his face in concern. "Is it really that bad?"

"Yes. Thank God there's a heater in the suit. That was like the best idea you ever had. I swear.", Peter praised before biting into the warm burger.

"I'm rather fond of the parachute... you know, now that we have the whole directional censoring thing figured out.", Tony replied flippantly.

Peter looked at the man beside him and snarked, "I won't need a parachute if I freeze to death."

Tony sighed as he rubbed his hand up and down the boy's back. "We'll see what we can work out before fall hits. For the time being, you want some hot tea or cocoa or something?"

"We have cocoa?", Peter asked with raised eyebrows.
"No... but I can probably make some. Pretty sure we have everything we would need for that. FRIDAY?" When the AI confirmed that they, did, in fact, have everything they needed to make a pot of cocoa he got to work. While the first batch burnt slightly, the second came out perfectly and all three of them sat on the couch with three mugs lined up on the coffee table as they turned on the game system.

Pepper walked out of the bedroom shortly after, curled up in the chair with some tea and watched them for a while before taking her leave and going to bed. Tony following close behind. "No staying up all night.", Tony said before he made it all the way to the hallway. "I mean it. It's eleven-thirty now. Be in bed by one. Yeah?"

"Yes, sir", both boys mumbled in unison, never taking their eyes off the screen.
Chapter 45

While Ned needed no prompting to be asleep by one, Peter remained stubbornly awake. He knew he was going to get in trouble for it later but he didn't care. This was how he handled sleepovers. By not sleeping. If he didn't sleep then be didn't wake up with nightmares. Not that Ned didn't know about them. They had been friends for almost as long as he could remember. The problem was, he wasn't ten anymore. That was when Peter had decided that he was too old to be having his best friend coddle him during the night. So, the natural solution was to stop sleeping.

Taking a deep breath, he got out of bed and left Ned who was sound asleep with a bunch of pillows on the floor to go to the living room. They hadn't made nearly as big of a mess this time but Peter proceeded to clean it up all the same. When the clock struck two, he was just starting to settle into some youtube videos on one of Tony's tablets, when he heard footsteps in the hall. *Shit.* "I thought I told you to be in bed by one.", Tony's voice boomed into the quiet room causing Peter to flinch a little.

Peter turned around on the couch to find his pajama-clad mentor standing behind him, arms crossed over his chest. "How did you know I was awake?"

The man rolled his eyes, a fond smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. "I asked FRIDAY."

When all the boy did was blink back at him he sighed. "Why are you still up, Bud? You must be tired after all that running around and swimming."

"I, I, um...", Peter floundered. He felt put on the spot and he didn't know how mad the man actually was because he was giving mixed signals. While his posture was hostile his words were soft and he wasn't great at reading other people's intentions on the best of days. Hell, he'd webbed up a guy for breaking into his own car once. "I don't, I... I mean..."

Tony continued to look at the boy expectantly but as usual, when he started to stutter he backed down some. He really hated seeing the kid get out of sorts. "Shh, it's alright. You don't have to explain, right now. Let's just get you in bed. ... or are you taking the couch tonight?"

"Ned's on the floor. I can sleep in my bed.", he whispered as he turned the tablet off and stood up to walk towards the hall. Tony met him in the middle and put his arm around his shoulders but before they could take more than three steps, Peter paused. "A-actually. Maybe the couch isn't a bad idea."

Scrunching up his eyebrows with concern, Tony took hold of Peter's arm turned him so that they were face to face. "Is that what you really want? Your bed is probably far more comfortable..."
"The couch is fine!", Peter quickly retorted. "Besides, it's after two. It's not like I'll sleep that long anyway."

That was probably the wrong answer based on the look he was now receiving from his mentor. "What's going on, Pete?"

"I, uh...It's nothing really. I just..." He paused to take a deep breath. He had learned by now that there was no avoiding Tony's questions. The man would know if he lied and while he could tell him he didn't want to talk about it right then, he would still have to eventually because Tony never let anything go. Besides, he actually found himself wanting to talk to him about it. "I don't like to sleep when I'm with Ned. I don't want him to know that I still have nightmares. I'm not a little kid anymore. It's embarrassing."

"Oh, Kid... You've been through so much... you're still going through so much... I think he would understand.", Tony murmured.

"I know! I've been having them since I was... well as long as I can remember. He would sit with me in the middle of the night and let me cry and talk to me and then when I was ten, well, it was bad...", he blushed. "...and, and that's when I stopped sleeping at our sleepovers."

"Alright, I get it.", the man placated. "...but listen, Ned's a good friend. I don't think do anything you didn't want him to do and I am positive that he's not going to think of you as a little kid for having nightmares... Look, if you wake up and you need some time alone, tell him, if you need to go see May or come into my room for a few, you can do that too."

Peter tensed at the thought. "What about Pepper?"

"She won't mind. FRIDAY will let us know you're coming."

Peter nodded and quietly agreed. He knew Tony was right. Ned was his best friend and all he would want to do would be to help. That's all he'd ever wanted to do, really. It suddenly felt silly to have ever thought that staying awake to hide his bad dreams from his friend was a good idea but he supposed to ten-year-old Peter it made sense, especially after that one night... "You're right.", he whispered. "I'm sorry."

Tony smiled and gave the boy's shoulders a squeeze. "Don't be sorry. You're fine. Let's get you to
bed though. Yeah?"

"Yeah... I am tired.", he yawned before dropping his gaze to the hallway's hardwood flooring. "Will, you come in and tell me good-night?"

Tony was quick to agree, tucking Peter in had become one of his favorite things, though he would never tell anyone that. He followed Peter into his room, laughing as they had to step over the other boy who was stretched out across a pile of pillows and blankets snoring loudly. "Maybe the couch isn't such a bad idea.", Tony laughed, still staring at the larger boy sprawled across the floor. "It sounds like there's some sort of a goose-bear hybrid hiding in here. Are you sure that's not why you're awake?"

"I'm used to it.", Peter assured as he got into his bed and pulled up the blankets. "Can you maybe stay for a few minutes. I mean it if you can't it's okay. I don't, like, need you to stay but it, it would be nice... for a little while... You can say no--"

"--It's fine. Relax.", Tony said with a smile. "I'll stay for a little bit." Then, he gently lowered himself to lay on top of the comforter, careful not to dislodge the blankets that were tightly tucked under the boy's chin. The second he'd settled into a reclined position, shoulders leaning against the headboard, Peter sighed and scootched further in so that his head could be closer to the man's bicep. Tony turned to look at him before dropping a hand heavily onto the boy's head. "Go to sleep."

"Mm-hmm", Peter hummed as he pulled Tony's arm off of his head and under the blankets to hold. Unsurprised by the clinginess of the boy, he smiled and allowed it to happen. "You know, if you stick to me then I have to stay all night. Right? Because I'm not waking you up before nine."

"I'm not going to stick to you. That was, like, one time...", the sleepy boy mumbled. "Now, shh and let me sleep."

"Did you just shush me?", the man laughed.

Peter didn't even crack an eye at his mentor's question. "Mm-hmm, Good-night, Tony."

"G'night, Buddy.", he whispered as he tucked his free arm behind his head and stared up at the ceiling. He wondered when all of this clinging and touching became something he was comfortable
with. With someone other than Pepper anyway. That was different, he'd loved her for longer than he could admit... She had always been the one, he'd just been too caught up in himself to see it before. Fate had known that long before he did. Even though their relationship had once or twice, faltered it had slowly grown into something he couldn't live without. As it grew so did he, as a person, into a better person. She made him a better person. In fact, maybe it was his relationship with her that prepared him for the relationship he would later build with Peter. She had taught him that it was okay to have a heart, to care and to love, to have people close to him. It was her who had taught him that he couldn't always save everyone even if there were times he chose to ignore that... He looked down at Peter and thought about Pepper... and Rhodey and Happy and Bruce, where ever he was... and the team. God, he thought about the team... Closing his eyes, he couldn't help but think to himself that while saving the world was noble, keeping safe what he had was always going to be his priority.

Not even fifteen minutes later, he felt the boy's grip on his arm loosen ever so slightly. He carefully extracted his trapped limb and stood up before leaning back in to kiss the sleeping spiderling on the temple. When he didn't so much as twitch a muscle, he knew he was out like a light and could return to Pepper's side without guilt. With so much on his mind, he just wanted to be with her. Silently gliding back into his own bed he was happy to see Pepper was still asleep. Her features were soft and neutral in sleep and he fell asleep counting her breaths.

The next morning, when Tony and Pepper exited the bedroom sometime around nine-thirty, there were already two boys sitting at the breakfast bar eating cereal and laughing like it was going out of style. As the two adults watched the two teenagers from a distance, Pepper grabbed Tony's hand and looked at him with a genuine smile. "You ready for this?"

Tony gave a dramatic sigh. "As ready as I'll ever be... Let's go tend to the Hyenas... but coffee first. They're all yours until at least my second cup."

The rest of the day wasn't as loud and chaotic as Tony assumed it would be. It was the opposite actually. After breakfast, the two friends settled on the couch to continue the movie marathon that they'd started over the weekend. Tony waited until they were finished with their second movie of the day before offering for Happy to drive Ned home. He and Pepper needed to talk to Peter about the meeting that was scheduled for the next day.

After a few reluctant good-byes the door to the penthouse closed and Peter was left alone with Tony and Pepper. He knew they wanted to talk to him but he wasn't sure about what. It was making him anxious and for whatever reason Tony telling him to relax only proved to make him even more tense. "I can't relax!", he snapped. "I don't know what you want to talk to me about and it's making me all nervous."

"Oh, Peter.", Pepper smiled. "Don't take it out on Tony.", she added making Peter feel sort of bad for losing control in front of her. He grumbled a quiet 'I'm sorry' before she continued. "I told him
"Oh. That's tomorrow?", he asked in hesitation. He hadn't been keeping track but it was the end of
the month so that made sense.

"Yep.", Tony answered, Popping the 'p' at the end. "I've got the proposal ready to go but Pepper
thinks it would be a good idea if you presented it--"

"--No!", Peter cut him off. "I, I can't do that! No way, nuh-uh. Nope. That, that's a bad idea, a
really bad idea. You should do it."

"Peter, sweetheart, it was your idea. You should take credit for it.", Pepper tried to insist but Peter
was not having it. "No matter who presents it, you're getting the credit, I think you should take hold
of your idea and run with it though, Peter. This is a huge opportunity for you."

"She's right you know.", Tony said in earnest. "This is a good experience. What are you worried
about? ...because I assure you they're going to go for the idea. I'm backing it, therefore they kind of
have to..."

"They will have a chance to give input", Pepper corrected with a slight glare in Tony's direction.
"You don't just get whatever you want because your name is on the building but Peter, this is a great
idea. I know I skeptical at first but after looking everything over... this is exactly what we need as
part of our expansion."

Peter continued to waffle over the decision. "Maybe, maybe, can I talk to Aunt May first?"

"Of course, Pete.", Tony smiled. "We just need to know by tonight so we can update the agenda as
necessary."

"Okay, Can I go now? To talk to May I mean?"

"Sure.", Tony replied. "Tell her we'd love for her to come up here for dinner tonight if she feels up
to it, alright?"
Already taking off towards the door, Peter shouted over his shoulder, "I will!"

Once he was out the door, Pepper sat down on the couch with a sigh. "That didn't go how I thought it would..."

"Really?", Tony questioned as he sat down beside her. "That went pretty much exactly how I thought that would go."

"He's such a smart kid and you said he does academic decathlon so I guess I thought he would be fine with talking to the board about his ideas.", Peper mused.

Tony wrapped his arm around Peppers shoulders. "He'll come around. He's anxious. It's sort of par for his course. Let him talk it through with his aunt and he'll be up here tonight ready to go."

"Are you sure? I don't want him to feel pressured into doing something he's not ready to do."

"I'm sure. Trust me, I know my kid.", Tony said before making an excuse to pull her into the bedroom.

As anticipated, Peter came back into the Penthouse with an answer. Only, he came back much quicker than expected. "Tony? Pepper?", he called as he walked in the front door. He'd only been gone for half an hour. "Tony!?", he called a bit louder, checking the man's office first. "FRIDAY? Where are they?", he finally asked.

"The boss and Ms. Potts are currently the master bedroom." Peter cheeks heated up at the implication. "Would you like for me to inform them that you've inquired about whereabouts?"

"No! God, no!", Peter nearly shouted before going to hide in his own room. He would have gone back to May's but she had a therapy session. Besides, he had a book to read and a report to write. The sooner he got it done the better.

He didn't know how much time had past but it felt like forever. He was only a quarter of the way through the book when Tony walked into his room. Peter's cheeks turned slightly pink as he avoided eye contact with his mentor. "Hey, Kid. FRIDAY told me you were in here reading. When did you get back?"
Slightly flustered Peter stuttered through his response. "I, got back, um, pr-prett--y, um, quickly ac-
actually. You and Pepper were, um... busy? So, so I came in here to read." He had rushed through the middle part just to get it out of the way.

It took Tony a moment to figure out why the kid looked so out of sorts. Oh, God. "Did you ask FRIDAY where we were?"

"Mm-hmm.", Peter answered, still not really looking up from the book.

This had never come up before. Shit. What the hell did the AI say? Did she actually tell him what they were doing? God, he hoped not... "What, uh, what did she say?"

"Just that you were together... in the bedroom. She, um wanted to tell you that I was asking where you were but, but I said not to.", then with his cheeks turning impossibly redder, he mumbled. "I didn't want to interrupt."

Thank god for that Tony thought. It wasn't so bad. They could have been doing anything in the bedroom, though it seemed that the teenager had already come to his own conclusions. There was no reason to lie... or discuss it at all really... ever. So, he dropped it. "Yeah, well, we're out here now. Come on out when you're ready to talk."

"Yep.", Peter answered, happy that the man had neither confirmed or denied his assumptions. "I'll be out there in a minute. I want to finish this chapter."

Back out in the living room, Tony had shifted from embarrassment to amusement as he looked at his finance standing in the kitchen. "We got caught", he laughed. "I mean, not literally, he knows though. He knows."

Pepper's eyes went wide. "What do you mean 'he knows'", she asked.

"He came right back and asked FRIDAY where we were. She told him we were in the bedroom and he's not stupid.", the man continued to laugh.

"That poor kid...", Pepper laughed. "You didn't embarrass him did you?"
Tony took a deep breath to try and get a hold of himself. "I didn't have to say a word. He did it all by himself. If anything, he embarrassed me. The way he was acting I thought FRIDAY had told him more than where we were. -- Which reminds me, FRIDAY? Never, tell the kid what we're doing when we're...doing that. Yeah?"

Not two seconds after the AI confirmed his instructions, Peter rounded the corner into the kitchen as if nothing had happened. He had already thoroughly buried that all of that in the back of his mind never to be thought of again. "I talked to May for a minute before she had to go to therapy.", he said as he walked into the kitchen. "She thinks I should do it... So, I'll try. ...but only if you promise to help me if I start to mess up."

Tony gave Pepper his best 'I told you so grin' and promised to help him out. After running through the presentation a few times with Tony, Peter felt much more confident. "I think I can do this."

Tony gave him a pat on the shoulder. "Of course you can. This is all stuff you already know. You're just passing along the information. You've got this."

"Yeah", Peter smiled with confidence. "I think I do."
Chapter 46

Chapter Summary

Poor Peter's going to have a rough time and Tony's parenting skills are about to be seriously tested. Paragraphs highlighted by a bold letter at the beginning have descriptive depictions of illness.

Tag adds: illness, sick character

By the time Peter got up the next morning to eat breakfast and was putting on his suit, all of the confidence from the night before had left him. He hadn't gotten a great nights sleep and to make matters worse his actual tie was still missing and he was going to have to tell Tony that he'd lost it completely. Slowly walking to the man's door, he was glad to see the door was cracked open. "Tony?", he asked through the opening.

"Yeah?" What's up, Kid. Where's your tie? Did you not find it?" When Peter hung his head he smiled. "It's fine. Come in here and get one. Or do you want the one you wore last time?"

"The one I wore last time is fine. I'm sorry. I swear I'll keep looking for it. It has to be here somewhere."

Since both he and Pepper were both dressed and nearly ready to go, he went ahead and pulled Peter into the room by the shoulder. "It's not a big deal. Come on in, I'll get the tie."

"Thank you.", Peter muttered as he watched Pepper putting on her makeup at the dresser while Tony disappeared into the oversized closet.

When Tony returned he had more than the tie in his hand. "Here, I grabbed that watch you liked too.", he smiled. "Today's your big day. You gotta look the part."

Peter couldn't help it when one corner of his mouth actually started to twitch up into a smile. Even though he was anxious, to the core, the idea that he was going to be allowed to wear one of Tony's watches again was exciting. It made him feel weirdly important. "Thank you so much, Tony.", he said honestly.
"Not a problem, Kiddo. Now, are you going to do up that tie or am I?", he questioned.

"I think I've got it.", Peter answered as he placed the tie loosely around his neck.

Tony looked at him skeptically. He'd only seen the kid tie it himself once and that had been after going through it with him a few times. "You want me to do it with you?", Tony asked dropping his own loose tie in place.

"Um... yeah, that might be a good idea.", Peter admitted with a slight blush. He was pretty sure he remembered all of the steps but following his mentors lead would be so much easier.

So, together they stood in front on the floor length mirror by the closet and Tony slowly knotted up his tie as Peter mimicked his movements. Pepper watched from the background and smiled at the pair as she ever so quietly had FRIDAY snap a picture.

Alone in the back of the car, Peter was sure his anxiety was starting to get the best of him because his stomach was starting to hurt. "I can't do this. I'm going to throw up."

"No, you're not.", Tony said looking back at him through the rearview mirror, once they had reached the stop light. "Relax, will ya? It's all fine. I'll be right there... and so will Pepper. You've got this."

Peter tried to do as he was told and took a few steady breaths but it didn't seem to calm him much, his stomach was still doing flips. He didn't say anything else about it and continued to look out the window. Eventually, he closed his eyes and like a blessing, he managed to fall asleep. He stayed that way until Pepper was gently calling him awake and they all walked into the building together.

In the meeting room, just like before, Peter sat at the head of the table beside Tony except for this time he had Pepper on his other side. He was grateful to be sat between the two familiar adults but he was still nervous. Just before the meeting was about to start he leaned over to ask Tony for permission to use the bathroom. The man looked him over, seemingly unconvinced but he didn't say 'no'. He only requested that he 'be quick about it'.

Inside the bathroom, Peter was able to properly freak out for the first time that morning. 'Pull yourself together, Parker', he thought to himself as he paced rapidly back and forth. Then he caught a glimpse of the watch his mentor had allowed him to borrow. He held it up and listened to the steady ticking as he came to a still before leaning over the sink to get a good look at himself in the mirror. Splashing some water on his seemingly flushed cheeks he took one more deep breath before
figuring he should do what he'd actually come in there to do and get back to the meeting.

He must have spent more time in there than he thought because when he got back Pepper was already speaking. He was relieved that she didn't draw attention to the fact that he'd walked back into the room. As he quietly sat back down into the chair, Tony seemed to be looking him over again. "You alright, Kid?" Peter nodded his head, not wanting to draw attention to himself. Tony let the matter go but Peter could feel his eyes periodically fall on him.

When it was time for him to speak, his first two or three sentences came out as quiet, stuttering nonsense and he sounded nothing like he had when he'd practiced with Tony. He stopped mid-sentence to look pleadingly at the man so that he would save him but all he got was a gentle smile and a quiet, 'Relax... just like we practiced.'

Deciding that it would be best to start from the top, he took a deep breath and peered down at the shiny watch on his wrist, focusing on the soothing sounds it made. Then he fell into his speech again. This time it went much better. While it started out quieter than necessary, the more he spoke the more confidence he felt and by the end, he was almost smiling. As he invited the board members to ask questions he turned his head to face Pepper and Tony who were both watching him with pride. He had no problems answering most of the questions that the men and women had for him. The few that the didn't have an answer for, Tony or Pepper jumped in to resolve.

When the meeting was over, Peter was surprised to find that he still felt mildly anxious. There was no real reason for it. The board had liked the idea and it had been sent down to the appropriate departments for further design concepts and marketing research. At lunch, he ate quietly with Pepper and Tony as they continued to discuss business. Apparently, Pepper was going to be staying the weekend and part of the following week in her own apartment, she had some sort of gala to attend and a lot of work to catch up on. Peter vaguely wondered why Tony wasn't going with her to the gala but decided against asking, in favor of staying silent. He figured Tony simply didn't want to go and that Pepper would have it more than covered so there was no need.

The ride home was mostly quiet as well. Tony spent the first little while, telling him what a great job he had done. Peter disagreed but Tony insisted. Eventually, the idle chatter started to drift off and so did Peter. He didn't know why he was so tired. Sure, he'd had more late nights than early ones recently and he'd woken up with a nightmare the night before, probably from all the pending stress but it still felt excessive. However, when Tony didn't seem to mind, he allowed himself to fall into a deep sleep.

Back at the compound, Tony went into his office and Peter went into his room. He still had that book to read, though, he didn't get very far before his stomach was bothering him again. He took a deep breath and rolled from his belly onto his back so that he could drop his head onto his pillows. It was then that he realized that it wasn't just his stomach. He felt utterly exhausted and somewhat achy all over. He couldn't come up with a good reason for him to feel so... bad. He hadn't really been
sick, sick since the whole spider incident. He figured it was a possibility since he'd had a few headaches and managed to get a short-lived cold here and there but he wanted to believe that his healing factor was enough to ward off anything substantial. After a few minutes of staring at the ceiling, he decided that maybe he was just hungry and left his room to go to the kitchen.

He hadn't expected Tony to be in there but he was and before he could stop himself, he was approaching the man's side and complaining. "I don't feel so great.", he murmured towards the man once he'd come to a stop.

"Oh yeah? What's up?", Tony asked in concern. Usually, if the kid didn't feel well it was due to anxiety or an adrenalin crash. He couldn't sort out how either of those things could be going on at the moment and it was causing him to worry, probably more than was warranted for the situation.

"Maybe, maybe I just need to eat."

"Well, you didn't really eat much lunch.", Tony reasoned.

Peter looked up at the man with uncertainty. "I ate as much as you did."

"exactly.", Tony said with a small smile, as he patted the boy on the back. "You normally eat circles around me."

Peter just hummed in response and went to get a roll of crackers out of the pantry. The more he spoke the more his stomach seemed to ache.

Tony watched the kid pick crackers and that only seemed to add to his worry. Typically the kid went for chips or asked for cookies. It also came to mind that the child had threatened to throw up on the way to the meeting and then disappeared into the bathroom for a good twenty minutes once they got there. "Is it your stomach that's bothering you?", he finally decided to ask.

"Mm-hmm", Peter replied around the cracker he had placed in his mouth.

"You think you're sick?", Tony asked with trepidation. He had no idea what he was supposed to do with a sick kid. He did alright when Peter had been sick from the flight but legitimately sick? He wasn't sure he was prepared for that. After Peter indicated that he wasn't sure, he watched him carefully as he nibbled his way through a fourth cracker before setting the roll down. He looked
After polishing off a few of the crackers, Peter decided a snack that was defiantly not what he needed. His stomach had gone from aching to rolling as he started to sip on a bottle of water he'd taken from the fridge. Then before he knew what was going on he found himself on the verge of throwing up right there in the middle of Tony Starks Kitchen. Clapping his hand tightly over his mouth, he darted out of the room towards the hall bathroom before disaster could strike. 'Not here, not here, not here', he thought as he willed his stomach to cooperate. Though it seemed that his body had already come to the conclusion that 'here' would do just fine because by the time he made it into the hallway he lost the battle and without much warning, he threw up mid-stride. He was suddenly grateful that Tony had already taken the expensive watch off of his wrist and placed it safely back into its the case because, with no time to retract his hand, the vomit ended up running through his fingers and down his arm straight onto his shirt and the hardwood flooring. He didn't even have time to feel duly disgusted or ashamed before the next wave hit him and he had to freeze in his tracks.

It was bad enough that he had thrown up in front of the man on the airplane. At least that had been in an appropriate place and not in the middle of the hall. It was then that he realized that, Tony had followed him and was currently standing behind him. He'd heard him mutter under his breath. It sounded something like 'Well shit, Kid.' but he was far too miserable to be sure. He was just about to utter a quick apology for making a mess when he gagged for the third and fourth time. At this point, his nose was running and his eyes were watering, that only seemed to add to his misery. When he finally felt like he could catch his breath for a moment, he took a few deep breaths and without turning around, he addressed his mentor who was still standing a short distance behind him. "I'm sorry. I'll clean it up. Just, just give me a minute.", he promised between the compulsive swallows that were now accompanying his rapid breathing. Despite feeling like absolute garbage, he knew he needed to take care of the mess. Usually, May would take care of it but she wasn't here and he didn't think Tony wasn't likely to do it.

"Like Hell you are.", the man said in disbelief. "You are going to go get yourself cleaned up and get in your bed.", he added before softening his voice. "I've got the mess, Kid. Don't worry about it."

Still not chancing to look behind himself, Peter tried not to whine, though it was slipping through. He already felt like crap and now he felt guilty too. "Y-you always tell me you aren't going to clean up my messes. I can do it. I just, I need a second."

Despite the fact that what Tony was thinking was, 'You look so sick and pathetic right now that I desperately need to take care of you.' all that came out of his mouth was, "Yeah, well, I'm giving you this one because you look like shit. Go clean yourself up. I've got this here. It's fine." ...and it was fine. Some strange parental instinct seemed to take over causing his feelings of unpreparedness to dissolve, replaced by a strong urge to do whatever it took to make his kid feel better and apparently, that included wiping up the floor in the hall. Something he couldn't picture himself doing for anyone else in the world.
Peter finally relented. Mostly because he wasn't sure how much longer he could stand, let alone stand over the mess he'd made. He tried but couldn't bring himself to open his mouth up again to say 'thank you' because, at this point, he was afraid he would cry. Instead, he just nodded his head and carefully walked to his bedroom where he showered and changed clothes before dropping into his bed, shivering.

He must have fallen asleep because the next thing he knew, Tony was carefully willing him awake. "Hey, Pete. Wake up for a second.", he'd murmured softly.

"I'm sorry", was the first thing out of Peter's mouth when his eyes opened.

"Shh, It's fine. Don't apologize for being sick... I just wanted you to know that I put a trashcan by the bed and got you some ginger ale. Small sips though, okay?"

Peter nodded his head and tried to sit up. He shouldn't have been surprised when the man reached behind him and wordlessly helped him get upright but he was. He took a few sips of the fizzy beverage before laying back down. Then, when Tony placed his cool hand over his forehead he almost whined at the touch. "You're hot, Kiddo. I'm gonna go a washcloth okay?"

After delicately placing the damp cloth onto the boy's head he pulled the top couple of blankets off of him. Peter whined and shivered in response but he really needed the boy to cool off. Tylenol wasn't a viable option and he was now kicking himself for not having already figured that sort of thing out.

When Peter seemed to be content to rest again, he left the room to go call May. He figured she needed to know what was going on but he didn't know if he should leave the kid alone long enough to talk to her in person. "Hey, May. Just wanted to let you know that the SI stuff went great but when we got home... well, the kid's sick."

"Poor thing, he hasn't been sick in a while.", May practically cooed. "Is he okay? How sick are we talking?"

"All over the floor kind of sick.", he stated bluntly.

May laughed lightly. "I bet he's mortified."
"I don't know.", Tony sighed. "He seemed too miserable to be embarrassed at the moment. ...I didn't even know he could get sick...."

"He doesn't typically. Not like this anyway.", she started. "well, not since... you know... Since then it's never been more than a cold and even that never lasted more than a couple of days... I assume this will resolve it's self just as quickly."

"God I hope so.", he said sounding defeated.

"I'm sorry he's so sick... Do you want me to try to come up there for a little while and help look after him?"

"Nah, I got it. I mean, unless you just want to see him. You're always welcome here, May."

"Thank you, Tony.", she said with a small sigh. "I might try to get up there later but you can call me if you need anything... and tell him I love him, okay?"

"Will do, May. I'm was about to go check on him anyway. Talk to you later." The call ended on that note and he returned to Peter's room to let him know he'd called May and to pass her love along. Only when he walked into the room, Peter wasn't in his bed. It only took him a few seconds to find him. The poor kid was shivering on the cold bathroom floor leaning up against the bathtub. "Hey, Buddy. Did you get sick again?"

Peter shook his head and slowly turned his head towards his mentor. "Not yet."

Cringing a little at the word 'yet', Tony sighed at the sickly sight before him. "You didn't have to get up, you know. I put the trashcan by your bed remember?"

"Yeah, but this is easier to clean up.", Peter croaked tears springing back into his eyes. He was tired and emotional from fever.

Would you stop worrying about the cleanup?", he said with mild irritation. He didn't understand why the kid was so against his help at the moment. "You're sick. I've got it. You think you'll puke before I can get you back in bed?" Peter shook his head and allowed the man to lead him back to his bed. Then, after a few more cautious sips of Gingerale, he was back to sleep. Tony, not knowing what else to do, pulled the desk chair over towards the bed and sat down. 'Whatever he needs me to
be.', ran through his head as he watched Peter's chest steadily rise and fall in sleep.
Tony sat by Peter's bed for hours, only really leaving in short bursts. Like going to get a tablet so that he could try to get some work done, grab himself a drink and change into pajamas or to replace the cloth on the overheated child's head. At some point, the kid had started lethargically trying to get out of the bed and he was sure the boy was about to be sick again but he'd only needed to use the bathroom. Once, back in the bed, the man had him take a few more sips of the clear soda before allowing him to lay back down. He continued to help him sit up to drink from the glass little by little every time he woke up. The last thing he wanted was for the boy to become dehydrated on top of everything else.

At some point, late in the evening, while Peter was solidly sleeping, Tony stepped out to make himself a sandwich. He couldn't have been gone for more than twenty minutes before FRIDAY was alerting him that Peter was awake and in distress. Without asking any questions, he dropped the last two or three bites of the sandwich down onto his plate and returned to the boy's room. He wasn't sure what he'd expected to find but it wasn't a very disoriented teenager throwing up, what little bit fluid he'd taken in over the last few hours, all over his blanket covered lap. "Oh, Kid.", he sighed in sympathy.

"I think I threw up", Peter stated incoherently as he went from examining the mess to looking in Tony's direction, eyes completely glazed over.

"Yeah, Kiddo. I think you did. Let's get cleaned up.", he said softly. Peter was quivering and continued to blankly stare past him as he made his way towards the bed. Scrunching his brow up in apprehension he questioned the AI. "FRIDAY? How hot is he?"

"Peter's temperature is currently at one-hundred-and-five point one degrees. It has been steadily rising for the last hour and a half."

"Shit", he whispered under his breath as he grimaced at the number being read off to him. This lead to a slight change in plans. "Alright, Kiddo, bathtime. I'm going to go get that ready and help you get settled. Then I'll get some new sheets on your bed so it can be nice and clean when you get out. Yeah?", when Peter didn't argue or even acknowledge that he'd said anything, he knew exactly how out of it the boy really was. Hurrying into the bathroom he gave May a hasty update as he started to adjust the temperature setting on the tub.

Once he had the tub half filled with water of the appropriate temperature, he attempted to guide his frighteningly listless kid into the bathroom. It quickly became evident that the child was going to require more help that he'd originally thought. After the boy had tried and failed to get his t-shirt
over his head, he began to assist him. Shirt off, he knelt on the floor in front of where Peter was sitting on the closed toilet lid and helped him to stand, bracing himself so the teenager could lean heavily onto his shoulders. Taking a deep breath and tightly closing his eyes, he started trying to get the boy's damp pajama pants off of his uncooperative legs. For Peter's sake, he opted to leave the boxers in place. They could deal with that later. Hopefully, after the bath, the kid would be more coherent and able to handle that on his own.

As he helped the boy sit back down so that he could pull himself up off the floor, he couldn't help but feel bad for him. He knew that when all of this was over, the kid was going to be completely embarrassed but it couldn't be helped. Getting the fever under control was a priority. "Alright, Pete.", he spoke quietly as he allowed Peter to steady himself with his outstretched arms. "Let's get you in."

Peter tried to get his suddenly uncoordinated legs to do as his mentor had requested but they felt as though lead had been attached to them and it took several tries to get his right foot into the water. "It's f-freezing.", he cried out the second his toes hit the water.

"It's not, Buddy. You're just way too hot. We need to cool you down.", he said as he tried to force the issue with a few insistent nudges. "Come on, Pete. I need you to cooperate. FRIDAY, Where's he at now?", he said all in one breath. When the AI responded with the same elevated number he was content that at least it hadn't gone up any further as he was trying to get everything situated.

It took careful maneuvering, a lot of work and Tony getting into the tub himself to finally get the boy submerged far enough into the water that it would do any good. He'd been relieved when the boy made no further effort to get away from him once they were both sitting and Peter was laying back, shivering against his chest. Getting him there had been exhausting. Though the fact that he'd been able to force the kid down at all was concerning, he shouldn't have been able to overpower him. This fever was kicking the poor kid's ass.

As they sat there waiting for Peter's fever go down, Tony started to hum and rub his hands up and down the kids shivering arms, occasionally bringing them up to run his fingers through his hair. It was right after FRIDAY had announced that his fever had dropped below one-hundred-and-four that Peter spoke again. It was weak and shivery but Tony could understand him. "I, l-like it w-when you do th-that."

"Do what, Buddy?", Tony asked curiously.

"R-rub my head a-and arms and st-stuff.", he stuttered through the chill. "It's n-nice."

Tony smiled at that knowledge and wondered if the boy would have ever divulged such information
without the high fever. "Yeah? Well, I'll try to remember to do that more often then.", replied softly, kissing the boy on the top of his head. "I think you've cooled off enough to get out. You ready?" Peter nodded in the affirmative. "Alright, can you sit up so I can get out and help you?" Peter did as he was asked and Tony stepped out of the cool bath, removing his sopping shirt and tossing it into the sink before toweling off his own Pajama pants as best he could. After that, he was able to help Peter to his feet. Wrapping a towel around his shoulders, he offered a small half smiled as he ran his hands along the kid's goosebumped arms. "I'm gonna go get you some clothes. You okay to stand there like that, Kid? Maybe you should sit..."

"N-no. I, I'm fine h-here. I need to pee anyway.", he muttered as he leaned wearily against the wall beside the bathtub. He was still shivering lightly but his head felt less fuzzy and disconnected than it had before. At this point, the embarrassment of the situation was just starting to try to creep in but his general misery was keeping it at bay for the time being. He hurt from head to toe.

"Alright, I'm going to close the door for you then, let me know when you're finished so I can bring you your stuff.", Tony said as he walked towards the door. Peter nodded and he left to acquire the dry clothing. Once outside of the bathroom he was reminded of the state of the blankets on the bed and cursed to no one in particular. It was fine, he would just move the kid to his own bed. He could keep a better eye on him in there anyway. By the time he had located all of the necessary clothing, Peter was calling him. He deposited the dry items on the counter, confirmed that the boy could handle it all himself and stepped out again. After fifteen minutes had passed and Peter hadn't emerged, he tapped on the door. "You alright, Kiddo? Dressed?"

Leaning in closely, he could hear the sniffling behind the door. "I think I need help.", he heard the boy say quietly through the door.

Concerned about the answer to his next question he tried not to allow any of the trepidation he felt make its way into his tone. "What exactly do you need help with, Bud?"

"The shirt.", Peter answered in tired defeat, followed by what sounded like a small sob that the kid hadn't quite been able to hold back.

Tony let out the breath he'd been holding. He could handle that. "Alright, I gotcha. Can I come in?"

Peter had to take a moment to compose himself before he could answer. "Yeah. I'm sorry.", he said, voice still wavering with feverish emotion.

Once inside, Tony was relieved to see that the boy had been able to get everything else taken care of.
without assistance. Though the process of doing so must have taken everything out of him because he was currently slumped on the toilet lid, gripping the contrary t-shirt in his fist. "Let me see it.", Tony murmured as he tried to remove the clothing from the boy's grip. When Peter let go he was able to slip it over the teenager's head and help guide his arms in the right direction. Finally dressed, Peter made way towards his bed but Tony stopped him before he could get too far. "You're bed's still a mess so we're going to go to mine. No arguments."

Peter didn't have the energy to argue anyway, so he allowed himself to be led to his mentor's bed where he climbed in without any protest. All he wanted to do was to go back to sleep. "I'm sorry you had to do that.", he whispered as he watched Tony dig through his own drawers in search of new pajamas.

"Nope. We're still not apologizing for being sick.", he said with a smile before going to change. By the time he got out, Peter was asleep again and his fever was holding steady at just below one-hundred-and-three. That gave him time to take care of the kid's sheets and move the supplies from Peter's bedside to his own but not before instructing FRIDAY to alert him if the kid's temperature spiked again. By the time he had done all of that and made a quick phone call to keep May posted it was well after midnight. He really hoped they were past the worst of it.

Sighing, he went to look in on the kid one more time before cleaning up the kitchen and calling Pepper. He knew it was late but he figured she would want to know what had been going on since they'd parted ways. He really should have called her earlier but it just didn't cross his mind until right then. As expected she was compassionate and completely supportive. When she requested that Tony give him a hug for her, he remembered that he's never actually had the chance to tell the boy that he'd called his aunt. That in mind, he went back into his room. After some debate, he decided to wake the kid up and try to get him to drink something before he tried to get a few hours of sleep himself.

Peter woke up easily and Tony had to slow him down as he started trying to gulp down the fresh glass of ginger ale he'd brought him. "Easy, there, Kiddo. I know you're thirsty but let's not push it. I want you to keep this down." Once he'd finished half of the glass, Tony declared him done for the moment and promised he could have more later. As he was placing the glass back on the table told him about his conversations with both May and Pepper, earning him a small smile.

When the kid didn't fall straight back to sleep, Tony laid down beside him on the bed and propped himself up on his elbow. With his free hand, he started to comb the boy's hair back with his fingers. Peter hummed in contentment as positioned himself to make it easier for the man to reach his head and Tony smiled. "You really do like that, huh?", he said with a small laugh. "I thought you were part spider, not part cat."

"Maybe I'm both.", Peter mumbled into the pillow. "Like, maybe I was scratched by a radioactive cat and didn't know it."
Hearing that made Tony laugh a little. Mostly because his kid was starting to sound like himself again. "Maybe.", he breathed out tiredly. His body was begging for sleep but his brain was still solely focused on Peter's well being. "You feeling okay right now, Pete?", he asked hoping to get some solace.

"Mm-hmm. Just sore.", the boy mumbled

"But not sick to your stomach or anything?", Tony asked, just to clarify. When Peter hummed in the negative he placed his hand on the boy's forehead, running it down his face to the back of his neck. He still felt warm. "FRIDAY, how's his temp?"

"Holding steady at one-hundred-and-two point eight degrees, boss."

"Alert me if goes up more than half of a degree.", he whispered before relaxing onto his back and turning his head towards Peter. "Alright, Kid. I'm going to close my eyes for a bit. You'll wake me up if you need anything, right?"

"Mm-hmm.", Peter replied, sleepiness finally starting to take over again. "I'm gonna sleep too. 'night, love you.", he uttered easily as he tucked the one blanket he'd been allotted under his chin.

"I love you too.", Tony smiled as warmth spread through his chest and he was asleep within minutes. When he woke up next, it was with a start. He'd gone from sound asleep to bolting upright in a fraction of a second as a loud clattering noise rang through the room. Heart racing, he began to quickly scan the room for any immediate threats and failed to hear the terrified child, who was currently stinging together a long cluster of panicked apologies. It took a few moments for him to remember that Peter was in the bed with him but once he did, he locked eyes on him and took a few deep, clarifying breaths. Realizing that they were safe, Tony forced his panic to take a step back. "You okay, Pete?", he breathed out between his still slowing breaths.

"Yes, sir.", Peter said staring at his mentor with concern. He'd never seen him like that before. "Are you... okay?"

"Yeah, Pete. I'm okay... What happened? Did you get sick again?", he asked, completely prepared to clean up another mess.

"N-no. I woke up and I was thirsty so I tried to reach the cup on the table but I knocked it over by
accident and it was really loud. I didn't mean to wake you up. I'm sorry. I'll clean it up--"

"--It's fine, Kid. I can get it.", he said as he took in the boy's appearance for the first time since waking up. He was sweating and there was color in his cheeks again. It seemed that the fever was blessedly stating to drop. A check with the AI revealed that Peter's temperature had reduced over the last hour to a manageable one-hundred point seven. "Take that shirt off, I'll get you a new one."

After grabbing the boy a new shirt, he started mopping up the spilled liquid from the table and floor as Peter continued to apologize. As soon as the sticky mess was resolved he remembered that the kid had said he was thirsty. "How about some Gatorade this time? Orange or blue?", he asked as he started out the door.

When he returned to the room he handed Peter the drink with instructions to drink it slowly and laid back down on the bed. It was five in the morning and he'd only gotten three hours of sleep. He was almost sure that he had an R&D meeting scheduled for eleven but he didn't care. Besides he was almost positive that Pepper couldn't get mad at him for missing it. His kid was sick. That's something people missed work for... he was sure of it. He thought a little more on that before turning to Peter, who had against his advice had drunk the entire bottle down. "How's your stomach?"

Peter took a moment to think before answering the question. His stomach didn't feel great but it also didn't feel as horrible as it had the day before. "I think it's okay. I'm not going to be sick or anything."

The man nodded in response before continuing his line of questioning. "What about the rest of you. Feeling any better?"

"Mm-hmm. My head hurts a little and I'm tired, Mostly.", he sighed out as he laid his head back down onto the pillows.

"It's really early. If you're still tired you should sleep, Kiddo.", Tony encouraged. "I might try to get some more sleep too."

"I'll sleep if you do.", Peter yawned as he scooted closer to his mentor, laying so that his head was by the man's shoulder while one hand was laying across his chest as the other held onto the arm closest to him.

"Is this some sort of a trap?", Tony asked with a smile.
"Mm-hmm.", Peter sighed. "Now you have to sleep."

Turning slightly over onto his side, Tony used the hand that wasn't currently being held hostage by the spiderling to scratch his fingers along the boy's scalp. "Yeah. You win, Kid. I'll stay here and go to sleep."

"Or you could keep doing that.", Peter practically purred. "That would also be acceptable."

Tony huffed a laugh. "Would it now... How about this, I'll keep doing this until you fall asleep--"

"--Then you'll sleep too?", Peter murmured softly.

"Sure, Kid. I'll sleep too."

After yawning into the man's shoulder, Peter looked Tony in the eye with a weak smile. "Deal."

Peter only managed to stay awake for another five minutes and true to his word, Tony rested comfortably on his back and fell asleep shortly after him.
When May woke up early the next morning, the first thing she did was try to call Tony. The last she'd heard from the man, he was that he had successfully wrestled Peter into a bath to reduce his fever and it has gone down some. She could only assume that everything was still okay but the concern was there. When Tony didn't answer she lay there for a moment and considered having the nurse escort her up to Tony's private quarters before she remembered that she could probably just ask the AI. "FRIDAY?", she asked, hoping she remembered the name correctly. She was glad to hear the AI respond. "How's Peter doing?"

"Mr. Parker is resting comfortably. His fever has remained within two-tenths of a degree of one-hundred-and-one for the last three and a half hours."

May let out a sigh of relief. That was much better than the one-hundred-and-five degrees it had been late the night before. "Can I see him?", she asked hesitantly. She wasn't sure what the AI was capable of or what she was allowed to ask, really. Her replay was a holographic still of Peter still sound asleep, clinging to Tony and she smiled, happy tears coming to her eyes. She didn't need to know the back story of how the boy ended up in the same bed as his mentor. She could see everything she needed to know in that picture. The empty Gatorade bottle, the trash can by the bedside and her nephew curled into the man's side as he slept beside him with a hand protectively laying atop Peter's on his chest.

She stared at the picture for a while, thinking back on all of the times that Peter had snuck into the bed nestling himself between Ben and herself. Despite being between them, he always leaned heavily into Ben's side as if his uncle could protect him from anything. Even after Ben's death, when Peter would climb into her bed, he would stay near Ben's side, though he would always allow her to hold him as he did so. All of a sudden her happy tears morphed into sad ones as she realized that she would never have that same feeling of warm, loving, safety again. It was different for her, Ben had been her husband, the love of her life but to Peter, he'd been a loving parent. His comfort and security, someone to teach him what it was to be a man of good standing and honor. While she knew she would never be able to bring herself to lay beside another man, that didn't stop her from being completely content and comforted at the knowledge that Peter had found exactly what he needed in Tony, a mentor... a surrogate father... a caring refuge.

As that unquestionable realization hit her, she all of a sudden worried about what was going to happen when the time came to return to Queens. She had an apartment and a job to get back to. It wasn't like this arrangement was set up to be permanent and she didn't really want it to be. She missed her home and her independence. She even missed the commute to and from work. At the same time, she was worried about Peter's feelings when it came time to leave. He and Tony had been practically inseparable since the accident. It was also worth considering that Peter, himself had expressed that he didn't like not being around the man.
When the nurse walked in to ask her about breakfast, she brushed the thoughts away. Something was clearly going to have to be worked out but there would be time for that later. Peter's birthday was approaching quickly and she chose to focus on that alone for the time being.

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In the penthouse, Peter woke up first. It was not quite eleven and he was actually a little hungry. He considered waking Tony up but opted to let him sleep. He was sure the man had been up with him all night long. Rolling over onto his back he stared at the ceiling and tried to piece together the events of the last twenty-four hours. He clearly remembered being sick in the hallway and Tony staying close by while he slept off and on throughout the remainder of the afternoon and early evening. From there, things got a bit fuzzy. Thinking back he remembered waking up and being forced into a cold bathtub, with Tony, wearing nothing but his underwear. He supposed he should be appreciative for that one little nugget of modesty but he could feel himself blushing all the same. The next fuzzy memory that came to mind was him changing into pajamas and having to ask Tony for help getting his shirt on. The reason for the entire series of events was a little foggy but he assumed it had to do with his fever. He wasn't sure what had led Tony to bring him into his own room but he did remember that he'd rubbed his head the way he liked until he fell asleep again. He smiled at the thought and wondered if this was what it was like to have a dad.

Beyond that, the next palpable thought he had, was when he'd knocked over the cup and Tony had practically catapulted into an upright position beside him. At the time, he'd thought he had merely startled the man awake. Looking back, he could register the wild look in his mentor's eyes as he rapidly searched the room. He could also remember the way Tony's eyes had eventually landed on him and how right after that the man's breathing had started to slow as he took a few deep breaths. From there it was now obvious that the man had been trying to hide the lingering panic as he talked to him and asked him if he was okay. Feeling suddenly guilty, Peter closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths of his own as he did so Tony woke up as well. "Hey, Kiddo. You feeling any better?", the man croaked, sleep still clinging to his voice.

Peter tensed up when the man spoke. Guilt and embarrassment coursing through him. "Yeah. Mostly. I'm sorry I scared you last night. I didn't mean to--"

"--Hey. Relax will ya?", the man smiled. "I know you didn't mean to startle me." He really wanted to emphasize the word startle because the last thing he wanted was for Peter to think he'd been responsible for his brief panic attack. That would only serve to make the kid feel even more guilty despite the fact that none of it was his fault.

"I'm still sorry, Tony.", Peter mumbled, dropping the subject. Before he could say anything else his stomach started to grumble, making Tony laugh.
"You ready to try and eat something?", Tony asked with glee.

"mm-hmm", Peter sheepishly replied. "I am kind of hungry."

"I bet you are. You haven't really eaten anything substantial since lunch-time yesterday and it's getting close to eleven now. How about a couple of crackers?"

Peter scrunched up his face as he remembered what had happened the last time he'd eaten crackers. "Not that."

Chuckling as he stood, Tony looked at Peter before running a hand through the boy's hair. "Fair enough. How about some toast then, hmm? Or some applesauce..."

Standing up himself, Peter accepted the offer for both toast and applesauce. Tony shook his head but agreed and soon they were both sitting in the kitchen together. As Peter took a few tentative bites of the applesauce that had been set before him, he watched his mentor move about the kitchen preparing to make some toast. He couldn't get the image of Tony's panic-stricken eyes out of his head. He was going to ask him about it, just not right now. Right now he only wanted to focus on eating and keeping it down.

A cup of applesauce and two and a half pieces of toast later, his stomach was feeling less empty but decidedly not well enough to continue. Not wanting to push it, he moved the plate slightly away from himself. Tony silently took the cue and removed it before looking him over. "Doing okay?", he asked with slight apprehension. As much as he was willing to do so, he really didn't want to have to clean up any more messes like that for a while... maybe ever.

Peter's mouth twitched up at the nervous look on the man's face. It was clear that he was worried he was about to be sick again. "I'm fine, Tony. Just... full."

All the tension left his body at those words and he smiled back at the boy. "Hmm... yeah, it might take a little bit to get your appetite back."

Peter nodded in agreement and continued to watch his mentor's every move before finally giving in and asking. Resting his elbow in the table and setting his cheek on his hand he sighed. "Can, can I ask you a question?"
Looking at Peter with a quirked eyebrow and a smirk across his face Tony tried to assess what the boy might want to ask him about but he came up blank. "You just did, Kiddo.\text{"}, he sassed.

"Ugh. I mean, can I talk to you about something, then... ?"

"Sure, Kid. What's on your mind.\text{"}, Tony asked as he dumped and rinsed both plates to place them in the dishwasher.

Peter sighed in annoyance, he was already getting tired again. "Can we talk on the couch? I'm still ti--", he asked softly before almost admitting that he wasn't quite back up to par. Tony didn't acknowledge his near slip of the tongue and simply placed an arm around his shoulders, guiding him to the couch. Once there, Tony sat so that his body was tucked into the corner allowing a place for Peter to lean up against him. Accepting the non-verbal invitation, Peter leaned back onto his mentor and melted into him as Tony started rubbing his hand up and down the arm not pressed into the back of the couch.

"What's up, Kiddo?\text{"}, the man asked softly. He could still feel a slightly unnatural heat coming off of the kid's back but now didn't seem like the right time to check his temperature. It obviously wasn't too high at the moment or FRIDAY would have alerted him, he made sure of that last night.

"You said I startled you this morning but that's not true... is it, Tony.\text{"}, he said simply. When the man paused his hand midstroke he looked up at him. "I'm sorry.\text{"}, he mumbled, thinking he's crossed the line by insinuating that him mentor had lied.

"No, no. Don't be sorry.\text{"}, Tony said as he pulled himself out of the stupor. He'd not expected the kid to call him out on that. His first instinct was to avoid the conversation altogether, to deflect. Then it crossed his mind that he'd seen the boy break down enough times in the past several weeks, that it would be kind of unfair to hide it from him or pretend that nothing had happened. Besides, the kid already knew and lying to him would only tear apart some of the trust and communication they had been carefully building. "You're right, Buddy. The noise didn't just startle me. It may have actually scared the shit out of me.\text{"}, he smiled down at the boy's upturned face. "I didn't want you to worry."

"You panicked.\text{"}, Peter said not ever looking away from his mentors face. "I saw you. I heard you, like your heart. I could hear it beating really fast. That was panic, right?"

"You can hear my heart?\text{"}, Tony asked somewhat astounded. He knew the kid had enhanced senses but hearing his heartbeat from across the bed was nothing short of amazing.
"Mm-hmm. If the room is quiet and I try really hard I can hear it from a few feet away. I know what your's sounds like and it's never that fast."

Unintentionally, ignoring the kid’s query, Tony had a realization that led to an interesting question of his own. Before he could stop and consider how personal the question was it was out of his mouth. "Is that why you like to sit and lay so close to me?"

"Well, Yes.", Peter murmured quietly before, trying again to focus his mentor's attention to what he wanted to know. "Tony... are you going to answer me?"

He really wanted to keep talking about the kid deliberately placing himself in close enough proximity to hear his heart but decided that could be put on hold until after he'd come clean about his reaction that morning. "Yeah, Pete. I panicked. The sound woke me up and I didn't know what it was so my brain went haywire on me for a moment."

"Did I help?", Peter asked quietly. "When you looked at me, you calmed down."

Tony smiled towards the ceiling. This kid... "Yeah, Kiddo. You helped.", he replied softly. "When I saw that you were safe, I focused on that and it made me feel better." The admission felt odd. He was generally never that open with anyone aside from Pepper... and for the most part, his two best friends but even they didn't always get as honest of answers out of him as Pepper did... or Peter, apparently.

Peter sat quietly for several seconds while he decided if his next question was appropriate or not. Tony was an adult and he was a kid. The man didn't really owe him any kind of explanation. "How come you never told me?"

"That I have panic attacks? Buddy, I didn't want that to be something you worried about. Besides, they don't happen near as often as they used to. It's getting better.", he smiled. "I'm getting better."

More silence followed and Peter was struggling to keep his eyes open. Eventually, he sat up, admitting that he wanted to go lay down again and started towards his room. He stopped abruptly in the doorway. "You changed my sheets?"

"Of course, they were a mess," Tony called from the living room. "Do you not remember or did you actually think I would make you do it?"
Cheeks turning pink at the parts that he did remember he answered truthfully. "I guess I don't remember everything."

"Well, it was a rough night, Kiddo. If you want, I can fill you in later but right now you should take a nap. Maybe call May really quickly first. I bet she's worried."

After a quick phone call with May, Peter slept for an hour and a half. When he woke up, he felt almost as good as new. He hoped that the feeling lasted because he was tired of sleeping. When he came out of his bedroom, he didn't see Tony in the living room so he checked the kitchen before going back down the hall to see if the man's bedroom door was open. It was but Tony was nowhere in sight. When he turned around he saw his mentor's office door cracked open and considered asking FRIDAY if he was allowed to go in. Then he remembered when Tony had told him that he'd left the door open for a reason.

As he cracked the door open further he saw Tony sitting behind the desk on the phone. He considered, bolting at that point but the man had already spotted him and was waving him into the room with a smile. "Yeah, yeah-- of course.-- yep. I'll see you then --I know. Look, I need to go alright.-- No that's not it.-- the kid's been sick and he just walked in.-- Yes, he's fine now... I know... I know-- oh, my god I gotta go. Talk to you later.", Tony rushed into the phone before getting the chance to properly acknowledge Peter's entrance. "Hey, Pete. You look better. How do you feel?"

"Fine. Was tha--"

"--FRIDAY? What's his temperature?", he asked halfway cutting the boy off in his answer. When the AI confirmed that Peter's fever was nearly diminished he smiled at the boy. "That's much better, Kiddo. What were you about to say?"

"I wanted to ask if that was Mr. Rhodes you were talking to.", Peter asked with a small smile. He hoped that the man was going to be coming back to visit soon.

Tony looked at him knowingly. "Yep. That was Rhodey.", he said emphasizing the man's name. It was weird hearing Peter call him 'Mr. Rhodes'. "He'll come to visit again soon enough, we've got a meeting coming up. There were a few things we needed to go over and discuss."

"Like, the accords?", Peter asked out of curiosity. Tony rarely mentioned the government proceedings that he was currently negotiating through but he asked anyway.
"Exactly, the accords.", the man sighed.

Peter sighed in return. He wasn't sure if he should pry any further but so far, his mentor was being really open with him about it so he decided to give it a try. "Do you think they're ever going to be fixed?"

Giving a small half smiled, Tony looked the kid in the eye. "It's getting a little bit closer every time we meet.", he answered gently.

Peter sat down on the couch, elbows placed his lap, bent over with his chin in his hands. "Will the other Avengers ever come back here?"

"Maybe... I hope so...", Tony mused in honesty. He may not have completely forgiven all of them but he certainly missed them... and the world needed them. Even he could admit that.

Peter wasn't expecting such a simple answer causing his face to twist into something that looked like confusion. "Even Captain America?"

It took Tony several minutes of silent thought to come up with an answer to that. Sure, he hadn't completely forgiven Steve or his brainwashed buddy for that matter, but he didn't wish them any harm. Not anymore. He'd mostly come to terms with the situation. Should he ever be face to face with Rogers again, there would be some tension and plenty of things to work through, but he was willing to try if Steve was...probably. Taking a deep breath he looked right at Peter and replied, "Yeah, even Captain America."
Chapter 49

Chapter Summary

Tag Adds: Dad Tony

Peter spent the remainder of the day alternating between laying on the couch in the living room watching movies and sitting on the couch in Tony's office reading while the man worked. By dinner time he was able to eat nearly a whole meal and afterward he went down to see May who cooed and coddled him until he was ready to go to bed. All in all the day had been blissfully uneventful.

Back in the penthouse, he was unsurprised to see that Tony was back in his office however when he stepped into the doorway the man didn't say anything. Peter watched with interest as his mentor rolled, what appeared to be a flip phone around in his hands for several minutes. When he finally cleared his throat to announce his presence the man just about jumped out of his skin, dropping the phone onto his desk with a loud thunk. "Didn't see you there."

"I'm sorry. I only wanted to tell you that I was going to bed, that's all. I didn't mean to interrupt, the door was open I thought it would be okay--"

"--it's fine."

"I just wasn't paying attention and didn't see you standing there."

"Well, I guess I already told you why I came in... so, um, good-night..." Peter mumbled and started to turn away from the office but Tony stopped him.

"Pete."

"I'm not upset with you, Buddy."

"Well, I guess I already told you why I came in... so, um, good-night...", Peter mumbled and started to turn away from the office but Tony stopped him.

"I didn't mean it like that, come here. It's fine." He'd had to work hard to keep the persistent stress out of his voice and he wasn't sure how successful he'd been based on the look on Peter's face when he'd turned back to look over his shoulder. It looked like he five seconds from crying and all at once, Tony's aggravation slipped away and was replaced by remorse. He knew the child was overly sensitive on a good day and today had not been great. He was still getting over being sick and was probably still sporting a low-grade fever, he had been for the majority of the day.

When Peter paused at his request but made no move to come towards him, Tony stood up and started to cross the distance towards the doorway. Once there he took the boy by the shoulders and pulled him into a hug. "I'm not upset with you, Buddy."

"When"
you walked in I was thinking about some pretty shitty stuff and I took it out on you. I didn't mean to upset you."

"I'm not upset.", Peter tried but the sound of his voice said otherwise.

Tony quirked a smile but didn't call the boy out on the obvious mistruth. He'd let him have that one. Then rubbing his hands across Peter's back he couldn't help but notice the warmth that was still radiating off of his body. "What's his temp FRIDAY?", he asked quietly. When the AI announced that it had gone up a half of a degree over the last hour, Tony sighed. It still wasn't anywhere close to high but he was wary after the events of the night before. "Why don't you go take a quick shower. Not too hot, though. I want to get that temperature down some before you go to sleep. I'll come to tuck you in when you're done if you want.", he smiled knowing the kid would accept the offer.

As expected, Peter back up in the office doorway not even thirty minutes later with damp hair and fresh pajamas. "I'm ready for bed." Tony didn't say anything in return, he just looked at the way the kid's hair ruffled and curled up on the ends when it was wet. Between that and the Mickey Mouse pajama pants, the boy looked... young and vulnerable and Tony couldn't help but smile as he walked the kid back to his room to kiss him good night.

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The next morning, Tony woke up early. Pepper had kindly rescheduled the R&D meeting for him and this time he had no reason to miss it. Peter's temperature was back to normal and he was currently sitting at the bar eating a third bowl of cereal. "I have a meeting today, Kiddo. Since it's Saturday I only have the one, I should be home by five."

"Oh... I can't come with you?", Peter asked hesitantly.

Tony looked at the boy as if he'd lost his mind. "Kid, you were sick all day yesterday. I don't think Spidering all over the city is a great idea--"

Realizing that the man had misunderstood, Peter tried to correct him. He had no intentions of trying to patrol today. While he felt worlds better he didn't want to risk it. He could press for extra Spiderman time later. "--no, to the meeting. Can't I come with you to the meeting?"

Thinking back on the last time he'd left the kid alone to go to a meeting, Tony softened his features
and smiled. The desire to remain unseparated was probably a habit that needed to be broken on both of their parts anyway. After all, the kid would be returning to the city in a couple of weeks and school started not terribly long after that. "I think you should stay here and rest. It's just one boring meeting. You can hang out with May." When it looked like Peter was going to protest he continued. "Look, it'll be fine. I'm only going to the SI building and back. You can text me the whole time. In fact, I want you to text me the whole time. It'll give me something to do."

Peter stayed nearby for the remainder of the morning and walked Tony down to the garage when it was time for him to leave. With one last 'see you later', the two parted and Peter went to go to May's. Being the weekend she wouldn't have any therapy and given her progress, the nurse was no longer a constant presence in the small apartment. That meant that he would be able to talk openly and that in its self was freeing. That was one of the things he missed most. Not having to look over his shoulder to see who else was in the room when he wanted to talk to her about anything in regards to his vigilante alter-ego or personal things in general.

When he first entered her apartment it was like she was already waiting from him. "Peter, You look so much better today! What have you been up to?"

"Not much, Just laying around. Then Tony had a meeting and he said I couldn't go with him because I was sick yesterday so I came here.", he replied with a shrug of his shoulders.

May hummed in response. "When will he be back?"

"He said by five.", Peter replied with slight hesitation. Five o'clock seemed like a long ways away at the moment.

Smiling and nodding her head in support May tried to give Peter a reassuring smile. "What do you want to do until he gets back?"

Grinning widely, Peter came closer to where his aunt was sitting and picked up the remote control. "Can we watch some movies? I could go get some of the good popcorn that Tony hides in the back of the pantry."

"That sounds like an excellent plan.", May laughed. "I'll start up a movie while you go track down the goods."

Then, like a flash, Peter was out of the room and running towards the elevator. Maybe this wasn't
going to be so bad after all.

By the time May and Peter had gotten halfway through their first movie, Peter's phone was buzzing. Peter smiled when he ready the message. 'Hey, Kid. Wanted you to know that I made it to SI. I'm heading into the meeting in a few. Talk to me.' Peter texted him back and went back to the movie. Only a few minutes passed before his phone was buzzing again. 'I'm bored already. What are you doing?' Still smiling, Peter told him that he was watching a movie with May and had hijacked all the good popcorn from the kitchen, so they needed more. Tony replied with horror accusing him of 'grand theft popcorn.' That made Peter smile, even more, prompting May to ask him who he was talking to.

"Tony. He's bored so he asked me what I was doing and now I'm being accused of stealing popcorn.", he laughed. May laughed in return and the rest of the afternoon went well. Tony let Peter know when he was leaving the building and when he'd arrived back in the garage and Peter was grateful. He never felt the need to worry and when the man made his way into the apartment Peter was nothing but happy to see him.

"Hey, Kiddo, what have you two been up to?", Tony asked as the boy jumped up off the couch to greet him. As he hugged him tightly he nodded a greeting towards May who was watching them with a grin of her own.

"We watched some really old movie that May wanted to watch and now we're watching The Matrix. Do you want to stay and finish it with us?", Peter asked with enthusiastic anticipation.

"Nah, I'm gonna go get out of this suit. I just wanted to come to see you first. You two want to come up after for some dinner? I can order from that sandwich place we all like.", Tony suggested. He didn't miss it when the kid's face fell and considered changing his mind but in the end, he figured that Peter should spend the extra time with his aunt. As soon as they agreed to join him for dinner and Peter was back to sitting on the couch beside May, he made his exit. As he closed the door behind him, his mind was once again wandering towards the realization that May was getting better soon Peter would go home with her. Not wanting to stew in that line of thought, he brushed it aside as best he could. He had much more pleasant things to look forward to before that would happen. He'd focus on that, he thought with a smile.

As soon as the movie ended, Peter was hopping up off the couch and completely ready to go back up to the suite with May in tow. It took longer to get there it would have if he was going alone but Peter didn't mind. May was up and getting around nearly independently, with the use of a cane and was nearly ready to be released from Physical Therapy. Peter had mixed feelings about that. While he was elated that May was recovering, he wasn't sure he was ready to leave the compound. He
chose to stay quiet about it though. It's not like bringing it up would change anything. Either way, he would have to return home when May did. That was the plan. This was meant to be temporary. Wiping the frown off of his face, he opened the door to the familiar penthouse that he now called home. Tony was on the couch waiting for them.

"Hey Kid!... May... I ordered dinner. It should be here in the next thirty minutes. I hope you're hungry tonight Spider-kid because I got extra orzo salad just for you."

Peter smiled because he loved the way Tony knew all of his favorite things. "I'm definitely hungry.", he replied because he was. He'd not eaten very much while recovering from being sick and as such, now that he was well, he'd been practically starving all day long.

Once sandwiches had arrived and were being eaten at the table Tony looked over at Peter with a sly grin. "So... you're birthday is less than a week away. You ready to celebrate."

Giving the man a measuring look, he squinted at him. "I'm not sure... that depends on what you've done..."

That only seemed to make the man's grin grow wider. "You'll see", he singsonged. "...and you're going to love it."

Peter turned to look at May for some sort of support but all she did was smile at him. "great... you two are conspiring now, huh?" When both adults nodded emphatically all he could do was groan.

By the time they were done with dinner and had sat and chatted for a while, May was ready to go back to her own apartment. Peter, on the other hand, was currently feeling restless. He'd been laying around for days now. "Tony? Can we go to the gym... or pool... or track? Can we do something?"

Tony clicked his tongue a few times in thought before answering. "I'm not so sure about the gym---"

"--I'm fine, Tony.", Peter cut him off, feeling thoroughly annoyed by the man's overly-protective stance. He wasn't a child. He knew when to take it easy and right now he was perfectly fine. He'd been resting for nearly three days!

A concerned look crossed Tony's face. He wanted to trust that the kid knew what he was up for an
what he wasn't but after seeing him so miserable he just wanted to make sure he was completely well before allowing him to exert himself. *He was trying to help.* "Yeah, but yesterday--"

"It's not yesterday anymore!", He said in annoyance. He'd invited Tony because he'd wanted his company, now he sort of wished he'd just snuck off. He could have probably gotten in a good half of an hour in before FRIDAY ratted him out.

Tony dropped his look of concern into one of fondness before offering a compromise. "How about the garage, Pete. We still have a lot of work to do on that car anyway. Besides, I feel like you should keep it kind of low-key for just one more day. No need to push it."

"Fine, Dad... Whatever you say.", Peter groused, crossing his arms over his chest. It only took half a second for Peter to realize what had come out of his mouth and he froze. He could hear Tony's heart speed up alongside his own. When he quickly peeked towards his mentor's face he found it to be unreadable. All he could recognize was that he didn't seem to be upset but if Peter had bothered to look long enough he would have seen the ever so slight smile starting to tug at the man's lips.

"N-never mind. I'm, I'm going to, uh, to go read... outside. I'm going to go read outside!", Peter hurried out in a panic. Then, he darted towards his room not stopping even when Tony called out his name.

Book in hand, Peter considered climbing out his window so that he didn't have to walk past his mentor to get out the door but he decided that FRIDAY would more than likely stop him. Taking a deep breath, he exited the room only to find that Tony was nowhere in the great room. Sighing in relief he took off towards the elevator that led to the roof.

For his part, Tony was taking it all rather well. He knew the kid hadn't meant it *like that* but the words were there all the same. He needed to talk to someone. Looking at his watch, Pepper was already at the Gala she had to attend for the evening, Happy would be utterly useless in this situation and Rhodey was on a mission. That left May and honestly, she was probably the right choice anyway.

He considered rushing down to her apartment but decided to give her a call instead. He was both relieved and nervous when she picked up on the first ring. "Tony? Is everything okay?", she asked with hesitation, she had left the man's home not even an hour ago.

"Yeah, everything's fine. Peter's fine. Do you maybe have a minute, though?"
"Of course, I have a minute. What's up?"

"Peter, he, uh, he may have accidentally called me 'dad'."

"Oh. That's it? That's why you called me? Tony, please, that is hardly a shocking news development.", she laughed lightly.

"You're not upset?", Tony asked, confusion clear in his voice.

"Why would I be upset? We already agreed that he's 'your kid'. This is just the next natural step, right? Hell, I'm surprised it didn't slip out sooner as many times as everyone else had referred to you as his father. Are you upset about it?"

"No... I actually found it kind of... I don't know... sweet or something.", he rushed out. "... but I do think he's upset about it. It took me a minute for everything to click and then he sort of took off before I had a chance to say anything."

"Hmm... He's probably worried that he upset you. You know he's going to over think it. You should probably go to talk to him.", May suggested, with wisdom.

"Why does everyone always suggest that?", he whined, pinching the bridge of his nose.

May laughed at his reaction. "Because that's how normal people sort things out. Now, go talk to our kid."

"Fine.", Tony and the call ended just like that. Now, he had to figure out what he was going to say to the kid... God, he was bad at these kinds of emotional talks but he knew May was right and Pepper or Rhodey would have told him the same thing. He needed to go talk to Peter before the boy worked himself up.  This was not how he'd planned on spending his Saturday night. With a deep inhale and a long sigh, he asked FRIDAY where he could find the kid.
Tony exited the elevator and climbed the final stretch of stairs to the gravel rooftop where he found a quiet spiderling sitting with his legs crisscrossed, way too close to the edge for his comfort. He was going to announce his presence but he didn't have to. Without ever turning around, Peter spoke first. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that."

Taking a deep breath and several steps forward, Tony placed a hand on the boy's shoulder. "You didn't do anything wrong, Kid.", he said before shifting slightly, causing the gravel to crunch beneath his feet. "Do you really have to sit this close to the edge?"

Making a small noise that could have been a laugh, Peter backed up a little for the man's benefit. It's not like he was going to fall or anything. Neither of them said anything else for several minutes. Peter continued to look up at the sky and Tony continued to look down at Peter. Eventually, Tony sighed and knelt down to sit beside the kid, grunting slightly when his protesting knees popped and cracked at the effort. "Do you come up here often?", he finally asked the boy for lack of anything else to say.

Peter shrugged his shoulders still choosing to remain silent. He knew Tony would hate it but his mouth had caused enough problems already.

"Are you not talking to me at all now?", Tony asked in defeat while trying to decide how he was actually supposed to handle this.

"I'm not, not talking to you.", Peter said quietly. "I just, I guess I don't know what I'm supposed to say."

"I get that.", Tony hummed. "I don't guess I really know what I'm supposed to say either... but I think we should probably say something. Don't you?"
Peter nodded in agreement and pulled his knees up to his chest with a deep inhale. "I wasn't trying to freak you out. You, you were just being so... so suffocating and then that popped into my head and just sort of... came out before I had time to think about it."

"First of all... I didn't freak out--", Tony countered with a scoff.

"--Yes, you did. I can hear your heart remember?", Peter bit back as he turned his head ever so slightly to peer in Tony's direction without making any real eye-contact.

He hadn't remembered that. Not right that second anyway. That was a weird bit of trivia that was going to take some time to get used to. "Okay, fine. I freaked out a little bit... but not in a bad way. It took me by surprise is all. I--"

"--I won't do it again.", Peter promised, cutting Tony off mid-thought as he went back to gazing towards the sky.

Tony's heart sank ever so slightly at those words and he wasn't even sure why. It's not like this had been an expected development in their relationship but he actually kind of liked it. Sighing, he placed a hand on the boy's back. "You know, if you did I wouldn't upse--"

"--Holy shit! What is that?", Peter shouted cutting Tony off right in the middle of his rare emotional remark.

Slightly irritated at the interruption, Tony looked up to see what the fuss was about and his anxiety went through the roof. "Get inside, Pete.", he called.

"What? Why?", the boy protested indignantly as he tried to create a solid stance as if to prove he was ready for whatever Tony thought was coming. Though he found it odd that the man looked so on edge while his spider senses were decidedly quiet.

"Just do as I say and go inside! Now! I mean it! Go!", he frantically shouted. "FRIDAY? What is that?", he asked as he watched the boy angrily march back inside the building.

"It seems that an unknown ship has entered the Earths atmosphere. It's projected to land within fifty yards of the compound on the north-eastern lawn."
"What sort of ship are we talking about?", Tony asked in hurried concern. With no team, he wasn't sure how much he could take on by himself. He didn't even have Rhodes nearby for back up and he wasn't about to let Peter anywhere near any kind aliens.

"I'm not sure, boss. Its origin is unknown.", the AI informed.

"Shit. Fuck. FRIDAY, tell Peter to stay with May... and don't you dare let him out of that building even if he says fucking 'pretty please.' In fact, activate lockdown. Seal it up, dear and get me a suit."

Within seconds he was encased in a suit and against every fiber of his being, he was heading towards the unknown ship. "Give me a heat reading. How many are on board?" Looking at the information he cringed. There seemed to me more than a hundred heat signatures all bunched together. "Scan the skies, are there any more?" He half expected to hear that there was a minimum of a dozen more ships heading their way but this seemed to be a lone vessel. "You got any specs on the incoming? What are we dealing with here?", he asked wondering what he could possibly be up against if whoever it was only felt the need to send the one ship.

About the time that FRIDAY had finished the scan and declared it to be a cargo vessel with no significant weaponry, Tony had it well within his view. Squinting his eyes he zoomed in on the most prominent being through the aircraft's large front window. "FRIDAY? Who's piloting that hunk of junk? Is that... is that Thor?" Upon closer inspection... it appeared it was. The god was beaming at him through the front window and he could see the hundreds of people behind him. The fear of attack, now dissipated he was filled with confusion. The man had gone off-world to gather intel but here he was, years later, with a ship full of unknown individuals, looking like a goddamned space pirate.

As soon as the ship landed, Thor exited, flanked by an armor-clad woman and an intimidating looking man with a sword. "Stark! Nice of you to come out to greet us. Though I'm afraid we shan't be staying long, we're only here to drop off a friend.", Thor greeted.

"What friend would that be?", Tony asked dubiously but before anyone could answer, Bruce Banner himself was barreling down the ramp and at right into Tony, pulling the man into a loose hug.

"Tony!", Bruce happily cried out. "Oh, thank God I'm back on Earth... What's been going on? Where is everyone?"

"Where have you been?", Tony nearly shouted, ignoring every single one of Bruce's questions. "It's
been two years!"

"I was in space.", the man said as if that were the most obvious answer in the world. "Seriously, where is everyone. Where's Natasha?"

"Ah... well, you see, a few things went down while you were gone... I'll have to fill you in later.", Tony said with a smile as he patted his friend firmly on the back before turning his attention back to Thor. "What's with the junk ship, all the stowaways and, well, you in general...?", he asked waving his hand vaguely in the larger man's direction.

"They aren't stowaways, they are my people. I'm afraid our home may have been... destroyed.", he said with a cringe. "It's a long...and complicated story but I assure you that they mean no harm."

Tony looked at him with confusion. "Are you planning on staying here? On Earth I mean?"

"I believe so but don't worry, Stark, I have a place in mind.", Thor said with a smile.

Sighing Tony made a quick decision. He figured it would probably come back to bite him in the ass later but he was going to do it anyway. "Why don't you stay here for a day or so, let me help you get some supplies together."

Thor's grin faded into a look of gratitude. Having to evacuate so quickly let them in desperate need of supplies. "That would be very kind of you. My people would be grateful."

"Kind is not, generally, word people associate with me, but sure. We'll go with that.", Tony replied with a shrug of his shoulders. "Why don't you come with me. We can start by grabbing some first-aid supplies and food. Tell your people they're free to wander around the property but for safety's sake, I suggest they stay close by" Thor nodded his head towards the two individuals who had followed him out, sending them back inside to relay the message, leaving Tony, Bruce and Thor alone on the lawn for a moment.

"So.", Tony started with a clap of his hands before warily continuing. "There's, uh, someone you're going to need to meet if you plan on staying here for any amount of time."

"I don't know, Tony--", Bruce hesitated while Thor simultaneously boomed 'wonderful!'
"--Maybe one at a time though.", he said giving his friend a small reassuring smile. Bruce didn't really sound up to it at the moment and the last thing he wanted to do was break the kid who was likely to be beside himself in the presence of just one of them.

Bruce sighed. "I'd just kind of like some time to figure out what all I've missed in the last two years before we start adding new people into the mix."

"Fair enough. You're welcome to stay here as long as you want. I've had an apartment set up for you from the beginning hoping that you'd come back", he admitted. "There's a common Kitchen that I tend to keep lightly stocked but you can have FRIDAY get you whatever you want. Once you go inside, she'll guide you...and you shouldn't have to worry about running into anyone. It's fairly empty."

Bruce nodded and walked towards the compound with a soft 'thanks' while Tony stood outside for another minute or so watching the people mill out of the spaceship that was now occupying a large portion of his lawn. "Well, John Silvers... let's go get those supplies, yeah?"

"Of course. I'm right behind you.", Thor replied kindly as the began to follow Tony through the doors and down the halls into a large storage unit. Tony began rapidly pointing out which crates would be filled with useful items, such as blankets, foldable cots, shelf-stable meals, and basic first-aid supplies. As the two of them began unloading them FRIDAY’s voice echoed off of the metal walls.

"Boss, Mr. Parker is inquiring about the situation as well as your whereabouts. What would you like for me to tell him?"

"Oh... yeah, tell him, everything's fine and that I'm on my way there.", he replied to the AI before setting down the box he'd been carrying. "You got this for a minute? I'm going to go grab us another set of hands." When Thor concurred that he had it under control, Tony hurried to May's apartment. The kid was going to love this... maybe more than his birthday surprise, he thought with slight disappointment before laughing at himself for even entertaining that idea.

The second he walked into May's apartment he realized it had been a mistake to not fill the kid in more quickly on what was taking place. He was standing there protectively near May in his Spider-Man suit, sans mask at this point. Tony smiled at the sight. He really was a good kid. "So, turns out what you saw was a huge ass cargo ship filled with a bunch of recently world-less Asgardians... Speaking of Asgardians...", he smirked. "There's someone here for you to meet."
Tony continued to watch Peter with rapt attention as his eyes slowly grew wide with understanding. "Thor? Like, the Thor. God of Thunder Thor? Please tell me you're serious because if this is a joke I swear I will end you... Oh my God, what about Loki is he here too?"

"Jesus Christ I hope not.", Tony grumbled, somewhat mad at himself for not asking that in the first place. "Go get your clothes back on and come with me. We need your help carrying some shit."

Peter didn’t need to be told twice as he ran out the door towards the penthouse to get his clothes. Tony followed loosely behind. Soon they were hurrying back to the lawn. Well, Peter was hurrying. Tony was more or less casually keeping in step smiling as Peter rambled.

As soon as they exited the building, Thor was walking towards them with a smile across his face. "Stark! You never told me you had a child!"

Tony rolled his eyes but didn't say anything. Mostly because Peter had already started into a disjointed speech of a greeting. "Oh my God, you're Thor. It's so nice to meet you, sir. Oh, I didn't tell you my name! I'm Peter, Peter Parker. I've read so much about you, sir. This, this is amazing. Wait, what, what happened to your hair?", the kid stuttered as he vigorously shook the man's hand the entire time and continuing to hold on long after, much to Tony's amusement.

"Can he have his hand back now, Pete?", Tony asked with humor once the boy went silent. Peter flinched and let go with a string of apologies while Tony laughed and Thor continued to smile.

"It's very nice to meet you as well, Peter Parker. Stark, here said you would be helpful in carrying a few things. Is that so?"

Peter enthusiastically agreed and was soon carrying armloads of supplies towards the newly landed group of intergalactic refugees. Tony had already put in a phone call to the appropriate authorities and with some monetary encouragement, it seemed that they would be more than willing to work with them. That was a relief to Tony because he wasn't sure he could take on any more bureaucratic bullshit at the moment. There was plenty of that to go around as it was.

With the Asgardians fed and comfortably settled, Tony retired to the penthouse dragging Peter unwillingly along with him. "Kid, it's late, they'll still be here in the morning."

"Are you sure?", Peter asked dubiously. "Because they seem to be in an awfully big hurry to get going and I didn't get to ask about Loki."
Tony huffed a laugh because he had asked about Loki and already knew that the other god was there. He had made a point of issuing numerous threats demanding that the God of Mischief stay out of his sight and well away from his kid. "They'll be out of here as soon as the supplies I ordered arrive. Probably late afternoon. Plenty of time for you ask your eight bazillion questions."

"I don't ask that many questions.", Peter huffed while glaring in his mentor's direction.

"Sure, you don't.", Tony smiled in jest because honestly, the kid's incessant questions were one of the things he loved most about him.

"Whatever.", Peter grumbled under his breath before ducking out of the arm that his mentor had tossed over his shoulders. Tony gave him a sideways look as he did so. "What? I need to go back to the roof to get my book!"

"I'll go with you.", Tony said, replacing his arm across the teenager's back. Peter didn't seem thrilled but he didn't protest either so Tony went with it.

After the misplaced book was collected they walked back into the penthouse together. Entirely too wide awake to even think about sleep, Peter went to the living room and started to turn on the game system. He was about to invite Tony to join him when the man spoke up. "What do you think you're doing?", Tony asked with an eyebrow quirked.

"Playing a game? ...I'm not tired.", Peter answered with a shrug of the shoulders.

Tony looked at the boy as if he'd said something incredibly stupid, leaving Peter a little irritable. "It's after midnight, Kiddo."

"I know how to tell time, Tony. I've been doing it since I was three.", he stated sounding slightly exasperated. Again he was regretting his decision to include Tony in his plans. He could have snuck back out of his room and played alone for a while if he'd kept his mouth shut.

"Watch it, Kid.", the man lightly chided with a slight smirk.

"Ugh. Why do you care if I go to bed or not?", Peter whined as he dropped the controller back onto
Tony's first instinct was to yell but he found himself easily able to fight it back this time. Instead, he sighed and looked at the boy sitting before him. "Because I care about you and you need sleep."

"You don't ever sleep", Peter grumbled under his breath but Tony heard him anyway.

"Yeah, well, I'm not exactly the best example.", Tony replied flatly.

Peter half-heartedly glared at the man from the couch as he stood up and crossed his arms over his chest. "So, you admit that you're sending me to bed but you're going to stay up?"

Throwing his hands up in a frustrated gesture, Tony stressed his reply, "I'm an adult."

"I have superpowers.", Peter retorted, casually dropping his arms loosely by his sides.

Tony was already tired of this discussion but he continued to calmly play along, "Yeah, but none of them are you being able to stay awake without consequences. A tired Spider-boy is a whiny Spider-boy... I would know."

"Ugh... I've st--", Peter started, having every intention of continuing into a detailed explanation of how he'd managed to stay awake all night before and he wasn't whiny, but Tony cut him off.

"--Look, Kid. I don't want to fight. If you don't want to sleep then don't sleep but you're not playing video games all night.", he stated gently. Because he really didn't want to fight. After the talk, they started earlier that evening that was the last thing he wanted to do.

"Fine.", Peter conceded with a sigh. Mostly because it sounded like a compromise but also because he didn't really have it in him to argue with the man any further. He had plenty on his mind already.

"Do you want me to come read for a while in my bed? I know you're not done with that assignment yet."
Not even questioning how the man knew about the assignment, Peter nodded his head in the positive.

"Great, go get ready for bed and bring your book.", Tony smiled. He could lay there and read a book of his own until the kid was tired enough to go back to his own bed and still have plenty of time to dwell on how having Thor and Bruce back on Earth was going to affect the accords. He was sure it was going to be a long ass night.

Chapter End Notes

Tag Adds: Bruce Banner, Thor, Space ships, intergalactic refugees, excitable Peter
As Tony looked beside him for the tenth time in the last hour he sighed heavily. He has severely underestimated Peter's current energy level despite the late, well, early, hour. "You're not tired?"

"Nope", Peter said, not ever looking up from his book. Though he was a little tired at this point, he just couldn't seem to get his mind to be quiet enough to actually allow himself to rest. Between the discussion with Tony on the rooftop and the fact that Thor was right outside was more than enough to keep him distracted from sleep... and the book he was trying to read.

"Not even a little bit?", Tony nearly whined. It wasn't that he was planning on going to sleep, he had entirely too much on his mind, but he'd thought the kid would. In fact, he'd been completely and totally confident that if he was able to get the kid to settle down in a dimly lit room, just reading a book that he would give in and relax pretty quickly. However, that didn't seem to be the case and he hated being wrong.

Sighing and closing his book Peter looked towards his mentor. "I can go read in my own room if you want me to."

"No, no. You're fine here.", Tony replied defensively. He wasn't trying to run the kid off or anything. "I just don't understand why you aren't tired."

"I slept all day yesterday, then I got to meet Thor and now I'm excited about tomorrow... Why aren't you sleeping?"

Choosing to completely ignore the kid's question he moved on. "So you're, what, up for the day?", he inquired dryly.

"Maybe.", Peter said with a shrug of his shoulders. That wasn't really true, he knew he'd fall asleep from pure exhaustion at some point but the look on the man's face when he'd said that made the small mistruth totally worth it.
"What if I do that thing that you like, where I rub your head?", Tony begged in a last-ditch effort to get the kid to go to sleep. He half expecting the boy to throw a hissy fit at the offer but he didn't.

Peter rolled his eyes, put the book on the bedside table and laid his head down on the pillow, well within Tony's reach. "Fine.", he grunted as if he was making some sort of sacrifice, eliciting a small laugh from Tony. "You never said why you're not sleeping, Peter mumbled quietly as the man started to massage his scalp.

"Got a lot on my mind, Buddy. I'll sleep later.", he whispered as he motioned for FRIDAY to lower the lights just a bit more. "Is that too dark or are you okay?" Seeing as he was trying to get the kid to go to sleep, it felt like a fair question but Peter sort of half glared at him from where he lay.

"It's fine, Tony.", he finally acknowledged. "You can turn them all the way off or whatever if you want to."

Tony sighed. He hadn't meant for the boy to think that he was trying to pick another fight. "I want you to be comfortable enough to actually sleep, Kid. I'm not going to turn the lights all the way out."

"You're in here with me, so I'd be fine.", Peter promised as he leaned in a little closer to his mentor's hand.

So the kid didn't think he was trying to pick a fight, Tony thought with a small grin, unintentionally stopping his ministrations at the thought. "You're that sure that I'll keep the boogeyman away, huh?"

"Don't be stupid, Tony... but yes, if you must know, I completely trust that you would keep me safe from the boogeyman or whatever."

"Did you just call me stupid?", Tony asked, playfully thumping the boy gently on the head where his hand had been resting.

Peter looked at the man and smiled a goofy smile. "No, I said don't be stupid. That's different." Then, he butted his head up against Tony's still hand. "Why did you stop? I thought you wanted me to go to sleep.", Peter huffed.
"I wanted you to go to sleep in your bed. I didn't realize that when I asked you in here to read that you'd end up staying.\textit{"}, the man said as he started running his fingers through the boy's hair once again. \textit{God, he loved this kid. }\textit{"... but I don't mind you being here.}" \\

Peter's only response was to move just a little closer to where Tony lay. He was quiet for several minutes but even as his body relaxed he couldn't seem to shut his brain down. It kept replaying the events that had taken place earlier, Which led to his next question. "Tony?"

"Hmm?\textit{"}, the man casually hummed, not ceasing in his movements.

"What were you going to say tonight?\textit{"}, he asked sleepily.

Tony tried to think back to what the kid was referring to. Once he had it figured out he stilled but only for a second. "You mean when we were up on the roof?\textit{"}, he asked just to be sure. He didn't want to misinterpret the question and get into anything that didn't need to be gotten into right that second.

"Mm-hmm. You were about to say something and then I saw the ship. You never finished."

No longer in the moment, Tony was somewhat anxious about this conversation. It was personal and those kinds of conversations still made him feel antsy, despite the fact that he found himself having them more and more often. He made a point of taking a deep breath. The last thing he wanted was for the kid to hear his heart rate shoot up again. It didn't seem to help too much. The boy was tensing beside him. "Are you listening to my heart?\textit{"}, he asked casually.

"Yeah. I can't help it.\textit{"}, he mumbled. "It's a habit.\textit{"}, then he sighed, "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

"It's not that. I do want to tell you. I admit it makes me a little \textit{apprehensive} but not for the reasons you're thinking, okay? So hear me out.\textit{"}, he said softly. "What I was saying on the roof was that if you did call me... 'Dad' ...again, I wouldn't be upset. When you said that tonight, it surprised me but not in a bad way. Pete, I've been calling your kid for a while now. If you want to call me that, I, I don't mind. I might even like it... I've already told you that you can call me whatever you're comfortable with."

Peter, taking a card out of his mentor's deck, decided to try and lighten the mood that had settled in the room. Grinning and barely able to hold back the laugh that wanted to escape him, he
looked Tony right in the face. "So... it's okay if I call you Mr. Stank?"

Gasping, Tony sat halfway up to look down at the boy laughing beside him. "You little shit.", he said with a genuine smile. "Did Rhodey tell you about that?"

Unable to stop laughing Peter nodded his head.

"I'm going to kill him", he said seriously before bursting out laughing himself. Once the laughter had died down Tony looked over at Peter. "Should we both sleep?" Peter nodded in the affirmative and repositioned himself so that his back was against Tony's side. In turn, Tony shifted so that he was on his side as well, and able to wrap an arm protectively over the boy's thin frame. "FRIDAY? Lower the lights to ten percent"

Holding his child close he was able to fall asleep even with so many uncertainties on his mind. They both slept soundly through the night.

As soon as Peter's eyes fluttered open late the next morning, he was filled with excitement. Stretching his limbs that had stayed tightly interwound with Tony throughout the night, he hesitated for only a moment before waking the man up. "Tony... Tony..." The only reaction he got was the man groaning and rolling back over onto his back, covering his eyes with his forearm. An impish smile crossed his face as he tried again. "Tony. Hey, Dad.", he called, laughing when the man's eyes shot open.

"What? What is it?", Tony asked groggily, rubbing his hands up and down his face. "What happened?"

"Nothing happened.", Peter said as he smiled and rolled his eyes. "Can I go see Thor now?"

"Eat your breakfast first." Then it hit him that the God of Thunder couldn't actually be trusted not to tell Peter the Bruce was in the compound as well. "Actually, eat your breakfast and hang out here for a minute while I go talk to him. FRIDAY will tell you when you can go, alright?"

"Yep! I got it!", he half shouted, causing Tony to flinch. Then he darted out of the room and into the kitchen.

"Kid is going to be the death of me", Tony whined out loud towards the ceiling before pulling
himself out of bed and into the shower.

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A quick chat with Thor and his cronies about not telling the kid that Bruce was back he notified Peter, that he could go and visit with the Asgardians and help with the supplies when they arrived. With that under control, he went to go visit a certain scientist that he’d had been desperately missing for the last two years.

Walking up to the door of the apartment he’d set aside specifically for his friend, he started to knock on the door but then thought better of it. He didn't want him to think some random person was knocking at his door. "FRIDAY? Be a dear and let Banner know I'm here"

Less than a minute later, the door slid open and Bruce appeared smiling in the entrance. "I was just making some tea. Do you want some?"

"I'm more of a coffee drinker myself but, sure. Why not.", he said with a look of genuine happiness. He'd missed his friend's company.

Sitting down on the sofa, Bruce spoke briefly about his time on Sakaar before elaborating on the following adventure to Asgard. During which Tony's facial expression changed from interest to utter confusion before he settled on a neutral look for the remainder of the story. Once caught up, the room grew quiet and Tony smirked. "So, let me get this straight. The Pirate of Thunder out there, not only has a clinically insane brother but also a murderous sister?"

Bruce smiled in amusement. "Had a murderous sister but, Uh, yeah. That seems to just about cover it..."

"...and you're telling me that said insane brother helped?", Tony added with mild concern. His only experience with the man had been less than ideal.

"I don't think he's all bad, Tony. Maybe, maybe he's just... an opportunist. He doesn't seem to be a threat at the moment."

"Yet you felt the need to add the phrase 'at the moment'", Tony clarified out loud.
"Well, I don't know, Tony.", Bruce replied running his hands through his hair. Tony smiled at that. It reminded him of Peter. "Maybe just give him a chance or something...", his friend stressed before changing the subject. "What about here. You never told me where everyone else is."

Taking a deep breath, Tony began to fill the other man in on everything that had happened from the entire accords debacle and the following betrayal. Before he could get much further, Bruce stopped him. "So... you just broke up... Like the Beatles?"

"Uh, sure, something like that, you know, if the Beatles had tried to kill each before turning into fugitives and disappearing to God knows where."

Seeing through Tony's attempts at humor, he tread carefully as he pushed for more information. "So, what happens now?"

Tony's expression changing from sorrow to mild irritation as he tried to explain. "I don't even know, Rhodey and I have been working to get the other pardoned with some adjustments to the accords but it's been a daunting process and to be honest I'm not sure how you and Thor being back on Earth is going to affect the process.", he explained morosely.

Bruce, still having trouble taking this all in sighed and looked at his friend with sympathy. "Geez, I'm sorry, Tony."

After a few silent moments of contemplation, Tony couldn't help himself. "So, who's side would you have been on?", he asked eyeing his friend with something between curiosity and hope.

Scrunching up his face in a conflicted manner, Bruce attempted to draw away from the question. "That's not really fair, Tony..."

Agervation slipping into his tone, Tony immediately came back at him, raising his voice slightly. "Isn't it, though? You're supposed to be my friend too, you know."

"I wasn't here, Tony. I wasn't involved in it like everyone else was. I have no information other than what you've told me--", Bruce tried to hesitantly justify. This entire conversation had gone in a direction that was making him feel more than uncomfortable.
"--isn't that enough?", demanded with obvious sorrow. He really wanted to believe that he had someone else on his side. Just, one more person backing him up. A sign that something could be normal again.

More silence followed before Bruce sighed and set his mug down. "If it makes any difference at all... I'm on your side now. I'd like to help you fix this."

That was enough for Tony at the moment. Bruce was back and wasn't going to turn his back on him as well. He stayed in his thoughts for a little longer before Bruce was trying to get his attention again.

"What about you and Pepper. Whatever happened with that?"

Happy to switch to a more pleasant subject, Tony smiled and went into an animated explanation of everything else that had taken place since Bruce's disappearance. Including everything to do with Peter. Well, almost everything. He was leaving out the part about his kid having a vigilante alter-ego for the moment. "He's a really good kid, Banner, and I want you to meet him."

"I don't know, Tony. He's a kid and I'm, well, I'm dangerous."

Tony rolled his eyes. "You're not dangerous."

"Tony, I spent two years as the other guy. I, just, I'm not sure... what if I hurt him."

Having nothing but faith in Bruce, Tony sat back on the couch and looked him in the eyes. "You won't."

"You seem awfully sure.", Bruce hesitated. "You weren't there..."

Unable to suppress the smirk that was pulling at the corner of his mouth, he shook his head. "Trust me, he can hold his own."

Bruce looked at Tony in confusion as he attempted to decode what that meant. After a moment, he was starting to get irritated that rather than explain his friend continued to look at him with a smile
playing at his lips. "What are you talking about?", he finally relented and asked.

"I'll tell you later.", Tony said as he abruptly stood up and held out a hand to pull his friend off of the couch as well. "Let's go down to my lab. I'm gonna have the kid meet us there."

Bruce reluctantly followed but even he could admit that it felt amazing to be in a lab again. "Wow... this is really something, Tony.", he said as he ran his hand over the equipment, examining each piece as if it were a work of art.

Tony decided he should probably give his friend a few moments to enjoy the workspace before having FRIDAY call Peter. Because once he was in the room it would no longer be tranquil with the hum of the machinery. Instead, they would be surrounded by his unyielding energy and an endless stream of consciousness. For now, he was content to watch his friend admire his work.

Several minutes later, when it seemed that Bruce had had enough time to examine every inch of the room, Tony waved his hand widely across the room. "What do you think?"

"It's amazing, Tony.", Bruce replied in awe as he turned in a slow circle taking it all in once more.

Tony joined his friend by his side and patted him on the shoulder. "I'm glad you like it. After you meet the kid, I'll show you your lab."

"My lab?", he asked in surprise.

"Of course. ...and when you're ready, I've got a job waiting for you at SI. We could use a guy like you in our bioengineering department.", Tony said as if it were obvious. "Did you really think I was going to build a huge ass compound and not have a personal lab for you? I knew you'd be back."

"Tony... I don't know what to say.", he said and he didn't. He'd expected his return to Earth to be much more complicated but Tony seemed to have already thought of everything. He had a comfortable place to stay and had already been offered a steady income. "Thank you, it's, this is great."

"Not a problem. Are you ready to meet the kid?"
"As I'll ever be."

"Great and just so you know he can be a bit... enthusiastic so be prepared for stuttered rambling and some rapid-fire questions.", Tony laughed. "He's a good kid though, really. You'll like him. He's really smart... ridiculous sometimes but really crazy smart... and probably hungry. I should order some lunch first. He eats all the time, I swear. It's a good thing I'm a billionaire. I don't think anyone else could afford to feed him...", Tony continued to ramble and Bruce listened with fascination.

Bruce figured that if this kid meant that much to his friend then he would make an effort to get to know him despite his reservations. There was also the mystery of what Tony had meant by 'he can hold his own' and the only way to sort that out was to meet him. "I'm sure I will.", Bruce said with a sigh.

"FRIDAY? Tell the kid to come and meet me in the lab for lunch."
Fifteen minutes passed and Peter was just starting to round the corner towards the lab entrance. Tony watched as he giddily jogged down the hall and burst through the doors already talking and he wouldn't have expected it to be any other way at this point. "Hey, Tony! FRIDAY said that you wanted me to come in here for lunch, which I thought was weird because we never eat, like, lunch or anything in the lab, just snacks and stuff... but anyway, I need to hurry because the supplies just arrived and I want to help load everything onto the ship. Oh! Thor showed me the controls it was crazy. I don't--"

"--Pete! Chill out and come here. I want you to meet somebody.", Tony shouted over the excited babble with a smile. He could hear Bruce chuckling in the background. How the kid hadn't seen him standing there at the side of the room was beyond him.

"Oh. Sorry, I didn't realize there was anyone else here.", Peter said as he started scanning the room, looking for whoever the person was that Tony wanted him to meet. It didn't take long for him to spot Bruce leaning on a wall near the entrance. As soon as their eyes met Bruce started to close the distance between them and Peter's mouth gaped open at a loss of words.

"You must be Peter. Tony's told me a lot about you.", Bruce said kindly as he walked towards him.

"You, you're Dr. Bruce Banner.", Peter quickly announced.

Tony laughed. "I'm pretty sure he knows his own name, kiddo. Why don't you try shaking his hand or saying 'hi' or something."

"Oh, yeah, um. Hi, I, I'm Peter... but I guess you already knew that, because, because you said it... I'm sorry, It's just, it's, I, I've read, like, all of your papers. Well, maybe, maybe not all of them, but, but, your work on anti-electron collisions is, well, it's amazing. My science teacher keeps one of your books on his desk and... and I should probably let go of your hand now... sorry."

"It's very nice to meet you, Peter.", Bruce grinned as the animated teenager abruptly let go of his hand.

"I told you he was enthusiastic.", Tony said as he walked towards Peter, resting an arm across his shoulders and leaning in to speak to him. "What do you think, Kid. Ready to go eat some lunch? Don't worry, he's coming too. You can fanboy all you want when we get upstairs."
"I, I don't fanboy.", Peter said haughtily as he glared at his mentor. "I'm simply passionate--"

"--like a golden retriever puppy--"

"--about science", Peter stressed before grumbling, "... and don't call me a puppy."

"I didn't call you a puppy. I said you were acting like a puppy. You get all excited and started bouncing around, it's cute... like a puppy."

"Oh my God, don't call me cute either!", he cried out as he looked over his shoulder at the snickering man behind them. "Dr. Banner can hear you. You're embarrassing me.", he hissed through his teeth.

"I'm sorry, buddy. I wasn't trying to embarrass you", Tony said softly giving his shoulder a gentle squeeze.

Bruce watched from behind, laughing quietly as the two bantered back and forth. Clearly Tony had more than just a soft spot for the boy. They almost acted like they were related. That would be another mystery to sort out. Clearly more had happened in the past two years than he was currently able to comprehend. 'No team, no tower, government entanglement... Tony, is engaged to Pepper and... has a kid?'; he was listing off to himself when Peter pulled him from his thoughts.

"... and my teacher said that you have like, a ton of Ph.D.'s. I can't remember how many he said. It was like, six or something, right, Dr. Banner?"

"seven.", Bruce gently corrected. Though, honestly, he was pleasantly surprised that the kid knew he had more than one. That was more than most people he met realized.

Peter's eyes lit up to the point that the man almost found it comical. "Seven!? That's so awesome. What are they in? I mean, I know nuclear and radiophysics, obviously, and probably some kind of chemistry? I've mostly read about your work in radiophysics but I heard about some chemical studies in class last year."

Bruce smiled at the boy's eager curiosity. He'd never met someone so young that seemed to know so
much about science in general, let alone enough to read and understand his papers. "Well, I started with nuclear and Radiophysics. Eventually, I added chemical engineering, biochemistry, organic chemistry, bioorganic chemistry, and biology to the list. Then all of those, sort of, naturally led into an MD, so there's that too."

"That is absolutely incredible.", Peter said with admiration. "Chemistry was my favorite subject last year."

"You like chemistry, huh? ...but you work with Tony so you must like engineering too. Have you given any thought to college?"

"Of course he has!", Tony cut in, with a proud look about him. "I have some pull at MIT and he's going to fit right into their electrical engineering and computer program, right Pete?"

"A-actually... I've been thinking about, um, maybe, chemical engineering...", he considered adding that he also wasn't really sure about attending MIT because it felt sort of far away but it didn't really feel like the right time to bring that up.

When Tony shot him a somewhat disappointed look, Peter's heart sank a little. "Really, Kid? ... but you would do so well--"

"I haven't totally decided, Tony. I still have three years of high school. Maybe I'll do both.", Peter cut him off, trying to awkwardly backtrack from his original statement. He couldn't stand the idea of Tony being disappointed in him and the truth was he could do both. Probably at the same time if he worked hard and took a step back from Spider-manning for a while.

"Maybe you will.", Tony replied softly with a small reassuring smile. He could tell he'd struck a chord with the kid. "You're certainly smart enough. I'd be proud of you no matter what, though."

"I, um... yeah...", Peter blushed before changing the subject. "Wh-what did you get for lunch?"

"Gyros. They should be here any minute. You want to go down and collect it?", Tony asked, knowing that the kid probably wanted to escape the room for a few minutes. He looked flustered.

"Sure!", Peter shouted before hopping up off of the common room couch and running to the elevator to go down to the lobby.
Bruce studied Tony for a few minutes before he spoke. "How old did you say he was?"

"Fifteen. Sixteen in a few days.", Tony mused.

Bruce scrunched up his brow in thought. Knowing Tony's past, the math made sense. "Is he... yours?"

"Mine? Like... biologically?", Tony half laughed. "No." '...but I wish he was', he added only to himself.

"So you adopted him, then?", the other man asked in mild confusion because clearly there was a parental connection there.

"No. He lives with his aunt.", Tony clarified. "I sort of mentor him and he's been staying with me over the summer. I thought I told you that already."

"No... All you told me was that you met a really smart kid, made him your intern and indicated that he was living with you. I didn't know... You certainly act like he's yours.", Bruce defended.

"Yeah, well, he kinda is", Tony said with a small smile huffing a laugh when that seemed to throw his friend off even more. "I know, I know. It's weird. I don't even know how it happened. One day he was my intern and then the next thing I knew I was giving him his own room in my house... but he's a good kid."

"So I've heard.", Bruce replied with a laugh. "It suits you."

"What does?", Tony asked casually. He was pretty sure he knew what his friend was referring to, he'd already heard it from everyone else in his life but one more validation couldn't hurt.

"Fatherhood.", Bruce said with a smile. "I knew you had it in you. I just never thought you would figure out that you had it in you."
"Yeah, I--", he started but was cut off by a certain spiderling who was boisterously re-entering the room.

"I've got food! I hope you tipped her because this is a lot of bags. *What did you order?"*

"Enough food to feed you and have a few scraps left over for us.", Tony teased gesturing between himself and Bruce. "I got four gyros, greek salad, some rice, hummus. -- and I know you don't like the hummus. That's for me and Lean Green over there, now come sit down. I'll go get some plates and drinks." 

Peter was about halfway through his second gyro when he remembered that he was supposed to be helping Thor. "Oh my God!", he suddenly shouted, causing both men to startle.

"Jesus Christ, Kid. What is it?", Tony cursed. "You scared the shit out of me, damn it."

"I'm sorry! I didn't mean to... I remember that I told Thor I would be right back. I'm supposed to be helping him load the ship and I got distracted. Is it okay if I go back out there now?"

"Finish your lunch first, Kid.", Tony instantly replied before giving it some more thought. "Actually, I'll be out there shortly myself. You coming, Banner?"

Bruce looked up from his lunch and sighed. "Yeah, I'd like to see them off."

"Excellent.", Tony returned as he looked from Bruce to Peter. "Why don't you sit tight for a few minutes, Pete. We can all go down together."

"Mm-hmm", Peter hummed as he stuffed another bite of the wrap into his mouth. He would rather go right this minute but he knew better than to push it any further.

It didn't take long for them to clean up and make their way out towards the large ship. The majority of the supplies were already being taken care and Thor seemed to be talking to, what looked like a pile of rocks he must have picked up and, no doubt befriended, on Sakaar. "Stark!", the man greeted as he saw them crossing the lawn. "Thank you for your generosity. It will all go to good use."
"Don't mention it.", Tony said with a wave of his hand. "Alright Pete, go help finish up and ask around to see if they need anything else."

Once Peter had acknowledged him and run off in the direction of the unpacked supplies, Tony was able to get Thor's full attention. "Look, We need to talk before you take off."

"Of course. I'd love to chat with you. What is it you wish to discuss?"

"I would prefer to talk without the added company if you don't mind.", he grumbled gesturing towards the larger being who was unexpectedly polite as he made his exit.

Tony didn't question it when the woman who had originally exited the ship with him stepped up closely to Thor's side. Tony considered sending her off as well but didn't, especially when Thor introduced her as a 'sworn protector of the throne' and the woman rolled her eyes. He liked her.

They ended up standing there for quite a while as Tony attempted to go over the contacts that Thor would need to communicate with once in Norway. He was suddenly thankful that the young woman had joined them because she seemed entirely more reasonable especially when she was able to take over after what had to have been the fifteenth explanation of why a cell phone was going to be necessary. While Bruce found the entire exchange comical Tony was about ready throw the phone at the man's head by the time everything was sorted out. "My contact is in here also, if you have any questions or anything else comes up."

"Right, we'll be in touch.", Thor replied with zeal. "Now that all of that's taken care of... what of your son? I wasn't aware the Earth children grew so quickly. It's only been a few years since I saw you last and you made no mention of a child."

"Because he's not my kid. Not like that anyway. ...and he's fifteen not three for Christ's sake."

"So, he isn't your son? The child made no denial when I inquired if you were his father last night"

Tony was positive that he didn't want to get into this with the man. It was complicated and he'd had a hard enough time explaining a damned cell phone to the man. "You know what? He is mine.", he granted "Adopted.", he added for clarification's sake.

"Oh! That makes so much more sense! Of course, he's adopted. Very well, congratulations.", Thor
said patting Tony strongly on the back as he spoke. "I'm afraid I need to get back to my people. We should be off by the time the sun sets."

Not long after, Peter returned covered in grass stains and a head full of flowers. "What on Earth have you been doing, Kid? I thought you were helping not rolling in the dirt."

"I was helping. I taught all the little kids how to play tag and then the girls were picking the flowers out of the garden and making necklaces and stuff out of them. One of them made me this.", he proclaimed as he pulled a crown of colorful flowers off of his head. Tony laughed and Peter pouted. "Hey! Don't laugh. I didn't want to be rude. Besides, she did a really good job. Maybe I should ask her to make you one!"

"Yeah, I don't think so. You look good though. Should definitely take a picture for your Instagram whatever.", the man laughed.

"I should!", the boy shouted as he pulled out his phone.

"Just don't get the ship in the background ...and be careful what you say. We don't need the whole world to know about universal refugees just yet."

"Yep. I know.", Peter said distractedly as he started taking pictures of the crown both in his hands and on his head.

"You're a goofball you know that?", Tony replied affectionately after watching the boy take several photographs.

Much to Tony's enjoyment, Peter was entirely unfazed by the comment. "Mm-hmm. If you say so."

"Oh, I definitely do.", he laughed. "Listen, I'm going to go inside with Dr. Banner and show him around his lab, alright. I'll be back before they take off."

"Sure.", Peter responded, still somewhat distracted by his current task. "Wait. Is Dr. Banner staying?"
"Well, yeah, Kid. I thought you knew that."

"This is. The Greatest day. Of my life.", Peter proclaimed without reservation.

Tony looked him up and down skeptically. "Hmmm, let's see what you say come this Friday." He'd been hoping to hear those words during his meticulously planned birthday surprise. Now he was left feeling slightly concerned that his plans wouldn't live up to the same level of hype as, exploring a spaceship, playing with Asgardian children and meeting Thor and Bruce all in a two-day span.

"Why? What's Friday?", Peter uttered in legitimate confusion.

Tony looked at him like he had lost his mind. "Your birthday, Kiddo. Did you actually forget?", he laughed.

"Um... Sort of?", Peter grinned widely. "It's been an exciting few days!", he said trying to justify his oversight but Tony only shook his head.

"That's Peter.", Bruce said with shock written all over his face.
Tony stilled, then panicked. "I never said that."

"You didn't have to.", Bruce strained. "That's Peter. Tony... What, what were you thinking?"

"I don't know!", Tony began. "I was thinking that Cap wasn't going to go insane and try to kill me. It was supposed to be a meeting of the sides, an opportunity for a truce. I didn't know they were going to be out for blood. I needed another guy. He fit the bill at the time. Filled a slot. He was never supposed to be a part of a fight like that."

Bruce ran his hands down his face and back up into his hair. "Tony...", he groaned. "I don't, I don't even know how to process this."

"So don't.", Tony unhelpfully suggested. "Just hear me out because I could use some help and I would rather it be yours."

Bruce slowly sat down on the cushy couch in the provided sitting area of his new lab taking a deep breath. "Is that, lavender?"

"Huh?", Tony asked quizzically at the man's random question before it clicked what he was talking about. "Oh. Yeah. The pillows on the couch are infused with lavender. That was Pepper's idea. Supposedly it's calming. ...can we get back on track here? Are you going to hear me out or not?"

"Sure, why not. What exactly do you want me to help you with."

"The kid. He has enhanced metabolism. There isn't a medication, anesthesia or antibiotic on the market that will work for him. He needs his own class of drugs. Kind of like the ones we researched for Rogers but I think that with his healing factor, the kid's might need to be that much stronger. Look, before you say 'no', he had a virus just the other day and his immune system went haywire. His body temperature shot up to one-hundred-and-five.", he stressed. "I need, I need you to help me to be able to help him. I can't keep doing this. Watching him get sick or hurt and not being able to do a damn thing about it."

"One-hundred-and-five? How did you get it down?"
Tony sighed and sat on the couch beside his friend. "I pulled him into a tepid bath... basically tortured him until it dropped under one-hundred-and-four. It's not like I could just rush him to the ER. They wouldn't know what to do with his unique DNA and besides, his identity is still a secret. He wants to keep it that way."

Dropping his head back into his hands, Bruce relented. "Fine. I'll help you but I'm going to need to know more about him. Run some tests and what-not." At the end of the day, he did like the kid and didn't want him to come to any harm. Not when he was somewhat qualified to get the job done. "I'm not going to become his pediatrician though.", he added with a smirk, knowing full well, that he probably was.

Tony's body sagged with relief. "You have no idea what this means to me... Maybe we can wait until next week, though. Kid's birthday is Friday and I have plans."

"Sounds reasonable. That gives me some time to do some research and order some metabolic testing equipment.", Bruce said before carefully adding that he used to know a guy who specialized in metabolic medicine and could maybe be able to run some theoretical questions by him without too much suspicion. "I'll see what I can do, Tony."
Chapter 53

By the time Tony and Bruce made it back outside, the ship was stocked and everyone was preparing for departure. Tony went over everything with Thor once more just to be sure but that man was entirely too unpredictable and he just prayed that the other two, more reasonable, adults with him would be able to keep it under control. He really didn't want to have to step in. He had enough on his plate.

Peter was sad to see them go but happy to hear that Thor had promised to return periodically to visit. Tony sort of wondered if Peter would ever ask to go to visit the new settlement but that would require a flight. A long one. They would have to work their way up to that he supposed. Another flight to DC at some point might be in order or maybe Toronto just for a change of pace. 'Hell, they have a zoo', he thought to himself with a laugh.

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The next few days were not nearly as exciting but they certainly weren't boring. Peter patrolled when Tony had meetings and when he didn't they continued to work on the car or in the lab. One afternoon was spent sparred in the gym and most evenings were spent eating dinner together with May.

On Thursday evening Pepper came home and they all had dinner together in the penthouse. Tony and Peter cooked together while the two women chatted on the couch. Soon they were all sitting together at the kitchen table engaged in good-natured small talk. When things grew quiet for a moment, Peter took the opportunity to ask something he'd been curious about all day. "So... My birthday is tomorrow. Are you ever going to tell me what we're doing?", he asked cautiously.

"Yep. Tomorrow evening. We're having an early dinner and then picking up Ned. After that, you'll have to wait and see.", Tony replied, grinning the whole time.

"Not even a tiny hint?", Peter whined. He was excited to see what the man had in store but he also couldn't help but be a little nervous that he may have gone overboard.

"Nope."

Sighing, Peter tried again. "Fine. What about dinner, can you tell me that? Where are we going?"
"Hmm... I don't know if I want to tell you that either.", Tony said mockingly. He was enjoying the kid being at the edge of his seat not knowing what he was going to do next.

"Ugh! Come on Tony! Please?", he cried out but there was no real frustration there. He was just excited.

Relenting with an exaggerated sigh, Tony decided he could at least give him that. It wasn't the real surprise anyway. "Fine. We're just going to a nearby Italian restaurant. May's coming. ... and Pepper, of course. Then, I invited Happy and Rhodey to join us and they said they wouldn't miss it. Bruce said he might come too."

"Really!? That's awesome!", Peter shouted. "If that was all we did it would be the best birthday ever.", he mused as he looked around the table at all of the smiling adults.

"I would have had Ned come too but I needed to keep the restaurant kind of close so May could join us.", Tony added when the boy's excitement died down some. "Don't worry though, you and your 'Guy in the Chair' will have plenty of time together after. I suppose he's spending the night."

"Mm-hmm. His mom said that was fine.", Peter acknowledged as he started clearing the table

"That's good because I'm assuming it's going to be a very late night.", Pepper reasoned.

Tony looked at her in horror. "Shush! Before you give something away.", but that only caused everyone else in the room to laugh.

"I'm sorry.", Pepper laughed before pulling herself together. "Your super secret plans are safe with us.", she added gesturing between herself and a still giggling May.

Tony grumbled and started helping Peter with the cleanup, only for them both to be run off by Pepper a few moments later, "You guys did all of the cooking, I can take care of the dishes. I'm sure you two have extremely important things to do in the garage or lab or where ever it is you disappear to all day."

Peter did not need any further prompting. "What are we going to do, Tony?", he asked happily. Normally he would insist on at least helping with the cleanup but for some reason, he was excited to have been let off the hook.
"Whatever you want, Kiddo."

It was rare for Peter to be put in charge of what they would be doing. Usually Tony had some sort of idea of what he wanted to work on and that's what they did. Considering all of the options was a bit dizzying but he finally settled on something fun. "Can we go swimming?"

That wasn't what he expected the kid to pick but then again they hadn't had the chance to go back to the pool since the night they'd everyone over so it made sense that Peter would suggest it. "Sure. Let's go get ready. I'll meet you out here in ten."

By the time they made it to the pool, the sky was starting to change from a brilliant mixture of orange and pink into swirls of deep blues and purple but the lamps both in and out of the water offered a soft glow to the area. While Peter had been there at night with Ned, he hadn't really been paying attention to how the ambiance of the area changed when the lights got low. "It's so quiet", Peter whispered as they walked across the tiles toward the closest lounge chairs.

"That's what happens when there's nobody else here and you're being quiet.", Tony said softly, matching Peter's volume. "Why are we whispering?"

"Because it feels like we should...", Peter said with a shrug of his shoulders. "Like, it's so quiet and peaceful and if we get too loud we'll ruin it."

Tony nodded his head in understanding even though he wasn't really sure he understood. He watched Peter for a moment as the boy just looked up at the sky and sat down on the chair. "I thought you wanted to swim.", he said, maintaining the hushed tone.

"I will in a minute. This, this is good too.", he said. "Sometimes it's good to sit where it's quiet. I never thought to come here. I usually go to the roof."

Tony nodded again. When he'd asked Peter the other night if that was a place he had gone to before, the boy had remained non-committal. "What do you do when you go up there? Do you just read?"

"Sometimes. Sometimes I just sit and look at the stars and stuff. You can see more of them here than you can from on top of the apartment.", Peter mused as he looked up at the sky from where he sat.
"Yeah, I suppose you could. A little less light pollution here. I haven't actually looked up at the stars quite like that since, well, since the Battle of New York. That sort of ruined them for me, I guess. Now, when I look up, all I can see is the possibility of something big and unknown and...", he paused to take a breath before continuing, he wasn't sure if he should or not. Then again, after he'd been accused of never being afraid of anything when they were in Washington, he had told himself he would try to be more open and honest with the kid. It was only fair and he deserved that much. Communication should go both ways... or that's what Pepper always said, anyway. He supposed she was right. She always was. "...I don't like not knowing that there might be another threat out there, one that we can't see or predict, one that we can't really prepare for. That, that scares me more than anything else."

Peter pulled his knees up to his chest, switching his gaze from the sky to the man beside him. "You know, maybe, maybe there are good things out there too. Like, Thor is really nice and that guy he brought with him, Korg, he's really nice too. Maybe, maybe there are more good things than bad things out there but we haven't found them yet."

"Maybe you're right, Pete. I sure hope so, anyway.", Tony said quietly before turning to look at the boy beside him. He suddenly felt bad for having that discussion right then, they were meant to be having fun. He had to admit that the boy's words gave him hope and he smiled. Pushing all of those thoughts aside he tried to steer the conversation back to more pleasant things. "Well, we came all the way out here, Buddy. Should we get in? Race down the slides?"

"It's not a race, Tony. It's literally just physics.", Peter mocked with a smirk but jumped up off the chair, all the same, taking off towards the closest slide. "Except, if I get there first the physics won't matter!", he called out as he ran.

"That's cheating you little shit!", Tony shouted as he bolted out of his own seat.

"It's not cheating. It's skilled planning.", Peter protested with a laugh as he climbed the steps.

Tony scoffed as he nearly caught up and started up his own set of steps. "That is not skilled planning, that's violating the agreed upon terms of engagement. We were supposed to race down the slides, not to them, you brat.", Tony playfully argued but Peter didn't answer because he was already under the water.

When Peter popped back up, Tony was landing in the pool beside him. "I won and there's nothing you can do about!", he teased once the man came up for air.
"Oh, yeah? How about I do this?", Tony said as he jumped towards Peter and used a leg to knock the boy’s feet out from under him. This led to a lot of shouting, splashing and several more trips down the slides. Tony finally called a truce, once he’d been dunked several times and was unable to recreate the element of surprise that allowed him to down the boy the first time. Climbing out of the pool, Peter was close behind because it wouldn't be any fun to swim by himself. Looking at his watch, he hadn't realized how long they'd been at out there.

Wrapping himself up tightly in the towel Tony handed him, Peter smiled. "Th-thanks for p-playing with me. That was fun."

Having mostly dried himself off, Tony reached over and took the shivering kid into his arms. "Enough fun to be worth feeling this cold when you get out?", he laughed.

"Yep", Peter answered quickly as he snuggled into Tony's warm grip. "It didn't use to be this b-bad. It got worse a-after the whole sp-spider thing."

"You think it's related to your spider DNA?"

"I don't know.", Peter answered. He'd never actually given it much thought.

"Huh, maybe we can get Dr. Banner to look into it sometime".

"Sure. Can we go in now, Tony? I'm hungry.", Peter proclaimed before pulling out of Tony's arms.

The man just laughed. "You're always hungry."

Peter grinned back at the man. "That's probably true."

"Uh-huh. What do you want to eat?", he asked as they started the trek back to the penthouse. When the boy requested grilled cheese, Tony couldn't help but smile. He remembered the first time he's made grilled cheese sandwiches for the kid. It had been awkward, uncomfortable and in the middle of the night. Tony had offered to make them just to keep Peter from darting back into what was, at the time, the guest room so they could talk. That felt like years ago at this point. "Sure, Kiddo. Whatever you like."
Having gone back inside and changed clothes, Peter sat at the bar, while Tony threw together a few sandwiches. Pepper wandered through at one point, to make herself a mug of tea, ruffling Peter's damp hair as she made her way back to the bedroom. "I'm going to go to bed you two. Tony don't forget you have that meeting in the morning. No excuses, you don't have any plans until evening.", she stated with persistence before turning towards Peter and softening her voice. "You should get some sleep. Big day tomorrow.", she offered with a smile.

Peter agreed and went back to the sandwich he'd been eating. He was sort of glad that Tony then took a seat at his side rather than following Pepper to bed. "Can I go with you guys tomorrow?", he asked between bites.

Tony looked at Peter in thought before making an unreadable face. "I think I'd rather you didn't patrol tomorrow. With your luck, you would end up stabbed or something and then all of my careful planning would go to waste. You can patrol on Saturday when we take Ned home if you'd like.", he reasoned.

"Can I go to the meeting then? Please, Tony?", Peter pleaded. He knew he was going to be too excited about the evening's plans to sit around the house all day. Een a boring meeting would be better than hanging around the compound in anticipation.

"I don't know, Buddy. This one's going to be pretty boring and wouldn't you rather spend your birthday doing something fun? Maybe May will make you pancakes or something.", he teased, knowing the boy wasn't a fan of his aunts cooking.

Scrunching up his nose, Peter replied easily, "That's just mean, Tony. Why would you even suggest that?"

"We'll see how you feel in the morning. If you still want to come, we can talk about it, yeah?"

Peter hummed in the positive and finished up the last few bites of his sandwich and cleaning up his plate. A quick look at the clock on the wall had it after eleven o'clock. He was sort of baffled that Tony hadn't sent him off to bed yet. He wasn't going to point it out though. Instead, he wandered towards the couch. "Can we play a game or something?"

"Kinda late, don't you think?", Tony said with an eyebrow quirked.
"Um...", Peter replied with a wide smile. He was pretty sure that that particular question was something of a trap. There was no good answer. If he said yes then the man would send him to bed and if he said no he would get called out for lying and still sent to bed.

"I have something I need to take care of in the lab. I think you should go to bed but if you want to play for a little while, I don't guess I really mind.", he sighed. He was hoping the boy would go to sleep so he could get this little side project done without interruption. It wouldn't take long but he guessed this would work too. Let the kid play games until he was done. Send him to bed when he got back.

"I could come to the lab with you.", Peter offered but Tony told him no, reasoning that this was going to be quick and he wanted to get it done. That had Peter thrown off a bit. Tony had never indicated that he wasn't allowed to go with him to the lab before. "O-oh. Um, Okay. Maybe I'll, uh, go to bed then...", he responded, trying to keep the hurt out of his tone.

Distracted by his own thoughts Tony didn't catch the change in the boy's attitude. "It's up to you, Kid. I'll be back up here by midnight.", he said as he walked down the hall to his bedroom for a moment and then out the front door.

Sighing, Peter shuffled his way to his own room and got ready for bed. He wasn't even sure he could sleep but the idea of games no longer sounded fun. His brain had already been going wild with anticipation and now there was concern mixed in there too. It was all churning together causing his whole body to tingle with anxiety, both good and bad. He tried to read or play games on his phone but nothing was really holding his attention.

When he heard the front door open, he stepped out into the hallway. "Tony?", he asked causing the man to jump and rapidly shove something down into his pocket.

"I thought you were in bed, Kid.", he said, his voice tight from being startled.

"I can't sleep.", he said with a shrug of his shoulders. "Are, are you mad at me?"

Tony raised his eyebrows. "Should I be?", he smiled. He had no idea what the kid was getting at. They had basically spent the entire evening together doing fun things. Not once had he raised his voice or given the impression that he was unhappy, or, he didn't think he had.

"It's not funny, Tony.", Peter whined. He was tired and anxious and not in the mood to be teased.
"I'm sorry, Buddy.", he soothed, wondering when those words became so easy to say. "I wasn't trying to frustrate you. Why do you think I'm mad, hmm?"

Dropping his eyes to the floor, Peter all of a sudden felt silly for thinking his mentor was upset with him. All he had done was go to the lab. "I don't know. It was stupid I guess.", he conceded.

"If it made you think I was upset with you then it's not stupid. What happened?"

Peter took a deep breath. "You've never told me no when I offered to go with you to the lab before."

This made Tony smile despite the fact that he felt bad for hurting the boy's feelings. "I didn't mean to make you feel bad, Kiddo. I knew I wouldn't be there long and figured you would be better off staying here. I'm definitely not mad." When Peter nodded, he smiled. "Think you can sleep now?"

"Probably not.", Peter answered honestly. "I keep thinking about tomorrow. Maybe if you told me what we were doing I could sleep better...", Peter said with a sly smile. He knew it wouldn't work but it seemed like a good time to attempt it.

"Nice try.", he deadpanned before sighing with a smile. "How about I go get a little bit more comfortable and come lay with you in your room for a bit." When Peter agreed he sauntered off towards the master bedroom to change out of his jeans and was had a spiderling comfortably curled into his side within minutes.
Tony had managed to slip out of the kid’s room and back into his shortly after the boy had fallen asleep. Then, the next morning, when he got up to get ready for the meeting that Pepper had scheduled for stupid o’clock in the morning, Tony was unsurprised that Peter was still asleep. He didn’t plan on waking him. He knew Peter had asked to tag along and normally he would be completely on board for that but they had plans that would keep them up late. He would rather the boy sleep in now than be tired later. So, right before he and Pepper were about to run out the door her jotted down a note and left it on the counter:

Happy Birthday, Pete!

Left for that meeting really early and didn't want to wake you up.

We'll be back by four. Text me when you get this.

-Tony

Pepper smiled as she read the note over Tony’s shoulder and almost laughed when the man drew a little heart in the corner. Tony didn't even notice she was watching him. He was fully focused on making sure he worded the note in such a way that the boy would know he wasn't skipping out on him. Once he was satisfied, he started towards the door, Pepper right behind him, still smiling.

~o~o~o~o~o~

When Peter did wake up, he was disappointed that he'd forgotten to set an alarm and annoyed that Tony hadn't woken him up. However, once he found the note the majority of his discontent left him and he smiled, texting the man right away. 'Got your note. Have a good meeting.', he typed making sure to add a heart emoji after. He wasn't sure what he was going to do with the rest of his morning but he figured he might as well eat breakfast and go see May.

He ended up spending the majority of the day with her while staying in contact with Tony via text. They played some card games and later she had insisted that he allow her to order them a special lunch. After that, he went back up to his room for a while and talked to Ned. They spent a large
amount of time speculating what Tony could have possibly arranged for the evening. The more they talked the more ridiculous their guesses became until they were falling into fits of laughter. "What do you think he got you?", Ned eventually asked.

"What do you mean?", he wasn't sure who his friend was referring to.

"Mr. Stark.", Ned strained as if Peter were being intentionally daft.

"Well, he's getting me whatever it is that we're doing tonight... and buying everybody dinner. You don't think he'd do anything else do you?"

"Uh, yeah. I do. It's not like he isn't going to get you a present. Oh my God, what if it's a car! Dude, do you think it's a car?"

Peter cringed. "I really hope not.", he grumbled in response.

After several more minutes or light debate and entertaining predictions, Peter heard Tony calling from the door that he was home. Quickly ending his phone call, he walked out of his room trying to suppress the smile that was trying to cross his face at the man's arrival. "Hey, Kid.", Tony greeted with a smile. "We need to leave here in about thirty minutes to get to the restaurant. You showered already right?"

Peter rolled his eyes. "Yes, Tony. You told me to do that like two hours ago."

"Oh, and like you always listen to me.", the man teased as he started down the hall to meet Peter by his doorway. "I need you to wear your suit tonight, alright? I'll go grab you a tie. I'm guessing you never found yours."

"No... I really don't know what happened to it! It's like it disappeared."

"Not a big deal. I have plenty.", he said as he started to walk past towards his own room.

Peter didn’t say anything else and just went back into his room to start changing into his dress pants and shirt. When the returned moments later carrying only a tie, he found himself slightly
disappointed. He sort of wanted to wear the watch that he was sometimes allowed to borrow for special events. Not wanting to ask, he thanked the man and proceeded to attempt to knot the tie under Tony's watchful eye. "Good job, Buddy.", the man praised when he was done. Only taking a second to straighten the knot ever so slightly. Peter felt something like pride swell up inside of him at the praise.

The ride out to the restaurant was fairly short. Happy had driven one of Tony's larger cars so that the majority of the group could ride together, however, Tony drove a car as well, so that he and Peter could leave straight from the restaurant to go and pick up Ned. They would be cutting it close as it was.

It turned out that Tony had rented out the entire back half of the restaurant, leaving them mostly undisturbed. It felt intimate and Peter couldn't imagine the night getting nay better than it was right at that moment. Everyone was talking and laughing together. Even Bruce who enjoyed spending the majority of his time alone was joining in on the multiple conversations going on all at once.

Eventually Tony announced that he and Peter would have to get going soon and suddenly he started having packages handed to him. He was taken aback. He hadn't expected anything from anyone aside from maybe May. With all eyes on him, he slowly started going through them. He decided to start with May's, he already knew it would be clothes, it always was.

The next one was from Happy, which surprised him. He was never certain how the man felt about him. Sometimes he seemed to like him a lot and other times he seemed to be annoyed by his presence alone. What surprised him the most was the thoughtfulness that had gone into the gift. It was a lego set. "Yeah, I noticed how much you liked to do those, so I thought maybe having a new one would keep you out of trouble for an hour or so, at least.", the man had groused as Peter thanked him.

Rhodes had gotten him a tie, no doubt because Tony had told him about the missing one and book about military aircraft that he's bought in Washington. Pepper gave him a journal and a new dress shirt while Bruce handed him an unwrapped book about chemical engineering because he remembered Peter saying he was interested in it. He was overwhelmingly grateful and was just starting to go around the table to hug everyone when Tony stopped him. "Wait a minute, Kid. You didn't open mine yet.", he said with a smile.

"You didn't have to get me anything, Tony. You've already done so much and then this dinner and whatever else we're doing--"

"--It's nothing big, Kiddo. In fact, I didn't even go out and buy it.", he smirked as he handed the handed him a small neatly wrapped package.
Peter hesitantly took it from his hand and started to peel back the bright red paper. Inside it was a small case of some sort. He continued to hesitate, looking up at Tony who urged him to go on. He slowly lifted the lid and what was inside made him gasp slightly. "This, this is for me? Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure.", the man said confidently. "It was meant to be yours." Peter smiled and started to pull the familiar watch out of the box. He held it in his hand for only a moment before the man was taking it from him and strapping it to his wrist. "I may have tinkered with it a bit...", he said thoughtfully.

Peter's face dropped into a neutral expression. "You put a tracker in it didn't you.--"

"--No.", Tony defended. "I put an emergency call button in it.", he explained with a smile before continuing at a whisper. "That way if anything ever happens when you're not in the suit or you don't have your phone, you have a way to reach me. I don't ever want you to have no way to reach me again."

Peter knew he was referring to homecoming night. He also knew that no matter what he said, the man was never going to stop feeling guilty about not being there to help him. Smiling, he gave Tony a hug and thanked him. "Thank you for the watch and dinner and well, everything.", he said with some emotion.

"I would do anything for you, Bud. You know that."

"I know. I love you Da-Tony. Dad.", he added hesitantly.

Tony smiled. "You know you don't have to call me that unless you want to. I want you to call me whatever you're most comfortable with."

"I know... but I like it", Peter said with a blush. "It, it just still feels a little, I don't know, weird. You know, to say out loud."

Tony didn't say anything and just pulled the boy in a little tighter. He could surmise that just like Peter had been 'his kid' long before it ever escaped his lips, Peter had been thinking of his as his dad for longer than he knew. "I love you too, kid." Then right after kissing the very top of his head, he maneuvered them so that Peter was at his side with his arm wrapped around his shoulders so he
could address the group. "Alright, everyone. Thank you for coming and all that but my kid and I have a schedule to keep." He winked at Peter as he said the words 'my kid'. No one questioned it. It was just a fact at this point. "Go finish saying good-bye or giving hugs or whatever.", he smiled at Peter before pushing him towards Happy, who unexpectedly allowed the teenager to pull him into a brief embrace, grumbling something about 'only because it's your birthday'.

The ride out to pick up Ned felt longer than usual with his excitement. When they arrived, Ned wasn't waiting outside, as usual, so Peter hopped out to go to the door. He was met by Ned's mother who gave him a hug and handed him a card. A few moments later, his friend came down the hall looking just as excited as he was. "Dude! Do you know where we're going yet? Has he told you anything?"

"Not a thing.", Peter said with a smile as he waved good-bye to Ned's mom and the two of them walked out the door to where Tony was waiting for them.

After a while, Peter no longer recognized where they were. He had sort of thought he would be able to sort out where they were heading based on the geography but either Tony was intentionally taking the obscure route or he really didn't know what neighborhood they were in now. "How much further, Tony?", he asked from the back seat. He was eager to find out what they were going to be doing. They had to be getting close.

"About ten more minutes.", Tony smiled into the rear view mirror. He was just as eager to get there as the boys were. He couldn't wait to see the look on Peter's face. He was pretty sure he had this nailed. Both Peter and Ned had eagerly nodded and gone back to looking out the windows still trying to guess where they would end up.

Several minutes later, they started to drive down a well lit and populated street. Tony started to slow down in front of an elegant looking theatre and pointed to it through the front window. "That.", he said with a genuine smile. "...is where we're going." Glancing back and forth between Peter's face in the mirror and the road before him, he managed to see the boy's eyes slowly light up as everything clicked into place.

"We're going to see The Lion King the musical!", he said with surprise. The man not only remembered that he liked that movie but also put it together that he would enjoy the Broadway version as well. Then out of nowhere, he decided the timing was maybe just a little too perfect. "Wait did you.--"

"--I lucked out. Just happened to be here on tour", he said honestly. "Don't worry, I didn't do anything crazy."
He allowed the boys to have their giddy moment in the backseat as they excitedly squealed and started looking up every fact they could find about the show and cast before cutting them off. "Alright, guys here's the deal. I bought out a few extra seats to give us a little space but people are going to probably try to stop and talk to me, probably going to take pictures too, maybe even ask some questions. I'll handle all of it. Yeah?"

"Yes, sir.", Ned dutifully replied while Peter just nodded his head in understanding. He was starting to get used to the idea even if he still hated it when it happened. Tony was usually really careful about preventing it but he supposed it would be a little more difficult here where he was dressed in a suit than it was in Washington with him in shorts and hat.

Finding his pre-paid parking spot, Tony got out of the car and made a point of placing a hand firmly between Peter's shoulder blades and requesting the Ned stay close, as they walked the short distance towards the theatre. He kind of wished he'd had Happy drive them. Walking down the sidewalk felt open and exposed. He needed to stay constantly vigilant to keep the boys he had with him safe. Peter noticed the tense look on the man's face and turned towards him. "Tony, we're fine. If we weren't my spider sense would be going off or something."

Tony looked at the boy who he wanted to protect and gave a small smile. "It's my job to look out for you. Not the other way around. Now zip it and keep walking."

Leaning a little further into the man as they walked, Peter laughed. "Thank you for this and thank you for letting Ned come. This is way better than going to a movie. I've never done anything like this before."

"I know. I talked to May about going to see a show and she thought it was a good idea. Then when I found out what was playing... well, that just sealed the deal.", he laughed as they walked through the entrance, tickets in hand. "We have a little while until we have to be seated. You two want to get a drink or anything?"

Both boys eagerly agreed and they went together to the concessions area where people kept watching their every move. Peter was thankful no one approached them but he knew it was bound to happen sooner or later. At the counter, Tony ordered two mocktails and a bottle of water before wandering over towards a quiet corner of the area where they joked and talked until it was time for the show to start.

The entire performance was more than Peter could have ever hoped for the music was amazing and he was completely enthralled by the entire production. Tony spent more time watching Peter hum and tap his fingers to the music than he did watching the stage. He loved seeing the two boys exchange looks throughout the show.
Then when Mufasa's death came about, Peter grabbed Tony's hand and leaned in close. Peter's reaction to that scene hadn't been expected. The kid seemed to know this story forwards and backward and hadn't seemed fazed by it when they'd watched the movie. Regardless, Tony gave the boy's hand a reassuring squeeze and kept his eyes on the stage. He supposed there was something more immersive about being in a theater watching live actors versus sitting in the living room watching a cartoon on the television.

When it was over, they sat in their seats for a while, waiting for the rest of the crowd to start filing out. So far they hadn't been bothered much and Tony wanted to keep it that was as much as possible. This was Peter's night. However, luck was not on their side and soon he was spotted by several people who then started towards them. Rising from his seat he moved to stand between the two teenagers, placing a protective hand on each of their shoulders as he started to address the group. "While I appreciate your interest, I'm only here to enjoy the show with my kid and his friend. So if you'll excuse us, we need to get going.", he smiled as the camera's clicked away in their direction, noting that Peter had immediately pulled away from him and ducked behind his back.

At that moment Tony was glad he'd called ahead to speak to the theatre about his attendance because both the manager and security quickly showed up and escorted them backstage where they were invited to meet the cast while waiting out the crowd. Peter and Ned were beside themselves as they walked through the doors and could see the costumes and props and were soon giddily shaking hands while asking a million questions as Tony stood back and watched.

A little while later, Tony looked down at his watch and cringed before grabbing both boys attention. "We still have one more stop to make and we're running late. We need to head out.", he said before smiling at the few cast members who were still mingling around with them. "Thank you for humoring the knuckleheads. They get excited.", causing Peter to look extremely flustered much to his amusement. Not wanting to embarrass the kid too much he leaned in to whisper the last part directly into Peter's ear for only him to hear. "Like puppies"

"Dad!", Peter loudly whined, causing the entire small room to grow quiet as Peter quickly covered his mouth. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry...", he muttered into his hand while Tony just smiled affectionately at him.

"It's fine, Buddy. Don't worry about it. Let's just get going.", he said softly as he eyed the group of people they were currently surrounded by. He knew that there was no getting out of this. He could only hope that they stayed quiet but if not he could handle it... well, Pepper could handle it. He knew from experience that she could handle just about anything.
Chapter 55

Once they were back to the car, Tony had the boys wait inside while he made two quick phone calls. One to their next destination to ensure them that they were still coming and one to Pepper to give her a heads up about Peter's outburst backstage. She already knew that Peter had called him that once or twice and was fairly sure May had mentioned it to her as well. He could only assume she already had a plan for if anything like that ever happened and it got out. A quick conversation later revealed that she did have a plan but he didn't really like it so he hoped nothing came of it. Surely they were professional enough to keep their mouths shut.

It didn't take long to get to their next stop, which was good because it looked like both boys were already starting to run out of steam and it was only eleven-fifteen. When they got out of the car, Peter was confused. "It's almost midnight... where are we going? Everything's closed."

Tony gave Peter a smug look before answering. "Not for me it isn't. Look who you're talking to."

he said as he led the boys towards what should have been a closed ice cream parlor. But despite the fact that it was well after hours two adults, who must have been the owners of the small classy looking shop came to unlock the door and let them in.

Ned stood there with his mouth wide open as Tony told them to order whatever they wanted. Insisting that they could have every flavor if they wanted it. "Peter! Did you hear that? We can eat ice cream until out insides freeze."

"I don't know if we need that much ice cream, Ned."

Peter laughed.

Ned looked at Peter as if he weren't human before replying in mock horror. "Of course we do! It's your birthday..."

At those words, Tony perked up and stepped towards the counter. "That reminds me, we'll need these."

Tony said handing a set of numerical candles to one of the owners with a smile.

Peter looked pleadingly towards the man who was still smiling in his direction. "Please don't sing."

"Oh, we're singing... and it's going to be on video so May and Pepper can watch."

Resigning himself to his fate, Peter ordered the biggest sundae on the menu. He figured since Tony
had already arranged it and had probably paid a small fortune to do so, he may as well enjoy it. So sitting down with his four scoops of ice cream decorated with more toppings that he thought possible, he sat back and watched as Tony lit the candles had been placed on top and handed his phone over for one of the owners to record.

When they started to sing, Peter ducked his head and started to glare at them. Though, to be honest he actually had to force himself not to smile. Then for emphasis, he faked a good-natured eye roll as he positioned himself to blow out the candles at Ned's insistence.

"What did you wish for?", Ned eagerly asked once they had started eating their treats.

Peter smirked. "Mostly that you two would never sing to me again."

"Yeah? Well, Jokes on you, Kid, because now that you told us your wish won't come true.", Tony said in the most serious tone he could muster. "What song should we sing next, Ned?"

Peter dropped his head onto the table as the two of them started into a horrible rendition of Despacito and sighed. "Thank God it's after hours and no one else is here", he grumbled into his arms but really he was smiling. The fact that Tony cared, no loved him enough to not only convince a shop to stay open and serve him a birthday sundae but then proceed to sing and act silly with his best friend was nothing sort of amazing. He really couldn't ask for a better ending to the night.

By the time they had reached the point that none of them could possibly force another spoonful of ice cream into their mouths, it was almost one in the morning. "Well, Pete. You're birthday's over. Think we should head back to the compound?"

"Mm-hmm. It's been awesome but I am so tired.", Peter said contentedly.

Tony smiled at him and patted him on the shoulder. "Let's get going then.", he said before walking over to talk to the shop owners one more time. Then as he waited for the boys to clean up and use the restroom he decided to check his phone. So far, no major accusations had been made. Nothing new anyway. A few pictures and videos had popped up but neither Peter nor Ned were clearly visible in any of them so far. Thank goodness for the theater's dim lighting and Peter's forethought to hide behind him. He knew the boy wasn't ready to be recognized though he still didn't understand what the big deterrent was. He would have thought it would be a good thing. Boost the kid's popularity, but then again, Peter as Peter wasn't into being the center of attention. He was pulled out of his head when Peter swiftly appeared and dropped his head onto his shoulder.
"We're ready now.", Peter muttered tiredly into the man's collar.

"Alright, sleepy head. Let's get you home.", Tony said softly as he led the two tired teenagers back to his car. He wasn't shocked in the slightest when both of them were sound asleep in the backseat within a few miles. Ned's head was resting on the window, while Peter's was resting on Ned. He huffed a laugh at the scene and took several pictures as soon as he made it to a red light. The rest of the ride was quiet aside from the music and Ned's persistent snoring.

The real challenge came when he pulled into the garage at three in the morning and neither boy wanted to wake up. "Hey! Come on you two knuckleheads, it's time to get up. You can sleep inside." When nothing but a few grumbles came out of them he changed tactics with a grin. "I have pictures of you two all cute and snuggled up in the backseat together. It would be tragic if those ended up being sent to Rhodey...", he mused causing both boy's eyes to shoot open.

"I'm up, sir! I'm up. Please don't send pictures of me sleeping to War Machine.", Ned whined in near dread.

"Get out of my car and I won't. You too Spider-boy, let's go."

"Fine. I'm coming.", Peter groaned as he practically fell out of the car and followed the other two to the elevator.

Once up in the Penthouse, Tony deposited the boy's into Peter's room to change and sort out sleeping arrangements while he got into something more comfortable himself. When he returned, Ned was already asleep on the floor with an assortment of pillows and blankets from the closet and Peter was sitting at the edge of the bed waiting for him. "Thank you for everything you did tonight.", Peter yawned out. "This really was the best birthday I've ever had."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it. Now, you should sleep.", he said as he gently prodded the boy into laying on his pillows.

"Mm-hmm. I will.", Peter assured the man as if there was any doubt. Tony ran his fingers through the boy's hair and without thinking went to turn out the boy's bathroom light. As soon as it flickered off, Peter was sitting up in his bed again. "I wanted it on!", he said adamantly and Tony took no time correcting his mistake.

"Sorry, Pete. I guess I forgot for a minute."
"It's okay.", Peter said as he dropped his head back down onto his bed. "I know it's stupid."

"It's not stupid. We've been over this... I'd go over it with you again but I think you'd fall asleep before I got through the first half.", Tony laughed. "Good night, Buddy."

"Night, Love you."

"You too, Kid.", Tony whispered as he closed the door with a quiet click.

Peter fell asleep nearly the instant the door closed. Unfortunately, he didn't stay that way. He hadn't had a nightmare since the night before his presentation to the SI board of directors. He'd assumed that one had been triggered by stress so when he woke up with a start he had no idea what to think. The first thing he did was meet eyes with Ned, who he'd clearly woken up. "I'm sorry", he whispered between slightly panted breaths.

"Don't be sorry", Ned said quietly. "What can I do to help?"

"N-nothing.", Peter said as he started to untangle himself from the sweaty sheets. It wasn't that he didn't think Ned could help, it was just that he still wasn't ready to let him help. What he really wanted was Tony. Mostly to see that he was okay being as he'd been the star of the terror that just woken him. in this one, he'd been forced to watch helplessly as Tony, not Iron Man, fell from the sky and crashed into the Earth in a lifeless heap. "I'll, I'll be right back."

"Do you want me to come with you?", Ned asked seriously.

Peter took a deep breath, as he continued to try and keep up a casual front. He didn't want to hurt his friend's feelings but he really didn't think he could help him at the moment. All he wanted to do was get out of that room so he could deal with the aftermath of the nightmare without feeling like he was acting like a baby in front of his friend. "No, just go back to sleep. I'm fine. I'll be right back."

"Okay...", Ned replied softly before laying his head back down on his makeshift bed. "If you change your mind... I want to help. You're my best friend."

"I know.", Peter placated. "I promise I'm fine. I'll be back." After that he slid out the door and into
the hallway, shutting the door behind him. Then he stood outside Tony's door for what felt like several minutes but time rarely passed correctly when he was as panicked as he was at this moment. He wasn't sure how he'd managed to keep it together with Ned. "F-Friday?", he whispered but never continued his query. He didn't have to because the door opened and Tony was frowning at him with worry.

"Hey, Kiddo. Bad night?", Tony finally whispered when Peter didn't say anything. Peter nodded his head as his eyes filled with tears. He was relieved to see the man standing before him unharmed. Rationally he knew that Tony had been fine the entire time but his brain wasn't going let go of those gruesome images so easily, not without seeing him alive and well with his own eyes. "Oh, Kid. Come here."

Peter readily took the invitation and fell into Tony's arms, trying to hold back the tears that wear burning the back his throat. "I'm sorry.", he breathed out quietly into the man's chest but Tony just shushed him and held him close. "Can we go to the couch?"

Tony sighed. It must have been a doozy if he wasn't willing to go back to bed. "You want to lay on the couch or do you want to come in here?", he offered. He wasn't sure how Peter would feel about laying in the bed with Pepper there but the mattress was large enough to accommodate all three of them without even rubbing elbows.

"What about Pepper?", Peter shakily asked not daring to let go yet.

"She won't mind.", Tony assured. In fact, he was nearly certain that she was currently awake and listening to their conversation as they spoke. What he didn't tell Peter was that he's had this discussion with both May and Pepper before. Everyone was on the same page at this point. Whatever Peter needed to feel safe and secure was more than okay with all of them. This was about Peter's wellbeing and none of them wanted anything more than for Peter to feel protected and loved.

Peter relented with a nod of his head and started to slowly and hesitantly follow, Tony towards the large bed. As they approached, Peter stopped at the side and Tony nudged him forward. "Inside or outside", he whispered, giving Peter the choice to be between himself and Pepper or by his side alone on the edge.

He remained silent as his eyes had adjusted to the low levels of light enough at this point that he could see that Pepper was awake. He very much liked the idea of being between them. That was how it used to be whenever he was scared when he was little. He would cuddle up between May and Ben in their big bed and it made him feel like nothing could ever harm him again. The thing was, he wasn't six anymore and while Tony was more or less felt like a father to him at this point, Pepper was still... just Pepper. He was comfortable with her and loved her of course, but not in the
same way that he loved Tony, so he remained slightly reluctant even after both adults assured him that it would be fine, whatever he needed.

Eventually, with Tony's persistent nudging he climbed into the bed first, positioning himself close to Tony's side of the bed. Then as soon as the man had gotten himself settled under the covers he pulled himself close enough to be touching. Close enough to easily hear his heart. He was alive. He was safe. Just as he was starting to settle down Tony started questioning him. "What happened, Pete?"

"I don't want to say it", Peter whispered and that was clue enough for Tony to know that it was a nightmare about someone dying. The kid never wanted to outright talk about those. He would tiptoe and deflect until asked the right questions to get it out of him.

"Everyone's safe, Pete.", Tony assured. He didn't feel like tonight was a good night to press for more. They hadn't gotten to bed until the wee hours of the morning and not much time had passed since then. Maybe an hour and a half at best.

Peter paused and took a long shaky breath. "I know. I just, I just needed to make sure"

"So it was me this time, huh?", Tony asked softly. He wasn't going to push it but after that remark, he felt obligated to confirm it.

"Mm-hmm", Peter replied with a slight shiver as he curled up on himself a little more at the man's side.

Tony sighed. He hated it that the boy had dreams like that all, even more so that they were sometimes about him. Mostly because he had a tendency to put his life on the line and he couldn't ever in good conscience be able to tell Peter that whatever he saw would never happen. All he could do was assure him that he was there now and would do everything he could to stay there. "I'm right here. I'm alright... and so are you."

"I'm sorry I woke you guys up.", Peter croaked, his voice tired and full of emotional voice. He felt terrible. Here he was, sixteen years old, in the bed with his dad and his dad's fiance... trying not to cry.

Pepper, took that as he cue to step in and say something. She tended to try and step back and let Tony take over. She knew that Peter had become very attracted to him and that she just wasn't at
that same level. She knew she may never be and that was okay with her as long as Peter knew that she cared about him. "Oh, Peter, we don't mind at all. You're important to us."

Tony smiled at her before looking back down at the tearful child beside him. "Why don't you try to go back to sleep, yeah?"

"Okay.", Peter said quietly, sighing in contentment as Tony leaned down and pressed a kiss onto the top of his head. Shortly after that, he was able to fall asleep to the steady rhythm of Tony's beating heart.

Having gone to bed at a somewhat reasonable hour, Pepper was up by nine leaving Tony and Peter to continue to sleep in. Grabbing her robe, she walked quietly into the kitchen to start some coffee. She didn't expect to see anyone else up for hours, which is why when Ned came creeping out of the hallway half an hour later, she was a little taken aback. "Good Morning, Ned. You're up early.", she said kindly.

"Um, Good morning Ms. Potts. I was just, um, looking for Peter.", he floundered. He had no idea where Peter had gone and he didn't want to get him in trouble if he's snuck off somewhere he wasn't supposed to be. "I thought he might be on the couch. Sometimes he sleeps there when I come over."

Pepper smiled at the other boy. She could tell that he was trying to choose his words carefully, most likely to protect his friend and Pepper could appreciate that. "He's with Tony. They're still asleep.", she said softly.

"Oh.", Ned said while blinking back in surprise. He should have guessed that was where Peter had gone after waking up as he did. While he'd assumed that Peter still had nightmares, hadn't seen him have one in years. Not since they were ten and Peter had woken up hysterical... and wet. He'd been mortified and refused to let Ned or his mom help him with anything. That was the only time he'd ever called home to be picked up in the middle of the night.

After that incident, their sleepovers had stopped for a while and then when they started again, he noticed that Peter would do whatever it took to sleep as little as possible. Presumably to prevent a repeat of the previous event. It used to worry him but over time he got used to Peter spending the nights wandering the house and doing things without him until morning. He hated that his best friend still so worried about something that had happened nearly six years ago that he didn't feel like he could talk to him about it. He'd never judged him for any of it.

Pepper watched the wheels in the boy's head turn for a few moments before speaking again. "Since
you're up, do you want some breakfast?”, she sighed and when Ned nodded and wandered into the kitchen she set to work throwing together a decent morning meal. Maybe the other two would be up in time to enjoy some leftovers.
Chapter 56

Peter woke up first, some times around ten-thirty. He tried to extract himself from the blankets without waking Tony but his attempts were unsuccessful. "You alright, Pete?", the man asked groggily in his direction. He had no idea what time it was or how long they'd been asleep.

"Mm-hmm. Just... awake.", Peter said with sincerity as he started towards the bathroom door. "I should go find Ned soon. He's probably worried. I told him I would be right back."

"Yeah, sounds like you should probably go find him.", Tony said as he laid his head back down on a pillow. "I'll get up in a minute." It had been a long night and he hadn't had the luxury of a two-hour nap in the car. In fact, he was back to sleep before Peter made it out of the bathroom.

Walking to the kitchen he was sort of bothered that Ned was already up. He'd been secretly hoping that his friend would still be asleep so that he didn't have to explain where he'd spent the night. He stood there in the hallway for a moment waiting for Ned to question him but all he got was an invitation to sit beside him and have some of the french toast that Pepper had made. Sighing in relief, Peter smiled and crossed the way towards the breakfast bat.

Once he was halfway through his second serving, Peter turned towards Ned for a half a second and attempted a weak apology. "Sorry, I didn't come back. I--"

"--It's fine Peter I get it. I always have. I just wish you didn't feel like you had to hide that kind of stuff from me. I know when we were little things got sort of embarrassing or whatever but I never thought anything of it, really. You're my friend. I only want to help you."

"I know you do.", Peter sighed out as he finished up his plate. Then once Pepper had walked out of the room he felt like he could say a bit more. "I didn't mean to not come back. I, I needed to see, Tony. The dream... it was about him and, and I--"

"I get it, dude. You don't have to explain it to me, now.", Ned said with a weak smile. "You could have said that last night though."

"I'm trying, Ned.", Peter said with a little more force than he meant to and he half expected for Ned to get mad at him for but he didn't.
"I know you are... and I'm glad you have Mr. Stark just don't forget that you have me too."

"I could never.", Peter said with a smile. "Besides it's not like you would never let me.", he laughed. Then after a few minutes of comfortable silence, he put his plate away and asked Pepper if they were allowed to go to the pool. With her confirmation, they were dressed and outside in no time at all.

They hadn't even realized how much time had passed until Tony strode outside carrying a bottle of sunscreen and plate stacked high with sandwiches. "Oh, look. If it isn't the two knuckleheads who didn't bother to put on any sunscreen before they came outside. Luckily I thought to ask FRIDAY about it... though I'm afraid it's a little late for you, Mr. Parker. Mild erythema has already been detected on your face and shoulders.", Tony said as he crossed the tile, laughing at Peter's indignant pout. "Come on now, out time. I brought lunch."

As the three of them sat in the shade eating sandwiches Tony ask if Peter still had intentions to patrol after they dropped Ned off. Confirming that was still the plan he then asked Peter if he wanted to drive. He knew the boy had his permit and assumed that since he was sixteen now he would be gunning to get his license soon but Peter and Ned both laughed at the offer.

"I don't think that's such a good idea, Mr. Stark.", Ned laughed as thought about the last time Peter had driven a car.

Peter smiled, having the same thoughts going through his own head. "Yeah. I'm good. I don't need to drive anyway. I can swing where ever I want to go... or take a bus. Whichever works."

"You don't want to get your license? You're sixteen, Kid. It's time."

"Nope. I've only driven a few times in parking lots with May. The only other time I drove a car... well, I sort of totaled it. Remember? I told you about that."

"That's the last time you drove? Kid, that was months ago."

"I know. It's not a big deal, Tony.", Peter assured him. "I live in New York. There's public transportation. I'm not in a hurry."

Then all of a sudden Tony got this grande idea in his head and it was out of his mouth before he had
time to think it through. "Do you want me to teach you?", he asked. His father hadn't paid someone else to teach him how to drive and he always felt like he'd missed out on something. Most of his friends were taught by their parents. While he could afford to send Peter to the best drivers education course New York had to offer, for some reason he had an undeniable desire to do it himself.

"Are you sure you want to do that?", Ned laughed out loud.

Tony just glared at him. "Of course I'm sure!", he somewhat snapped cutting the other boy off in his laughter. When he saw Ned cringe he tried to backtrack a little by rolling his eyes. "I don't offer things unless I'm sure."

"I'm not very good at it...", Peter equivocated. He wasn't sure if he really wanted anyone to teach him. There were plenty of people out there who never learned to drive a car. Even in college, he could get around by scooter. Having a car was more of a convenience than a necessity.

"That's why you need me to teach you.", Tony smirked. "Then you'll be very good at it because you'll have learned from the absolute best."

Peter scoffed. "Modest much?"

"Textbook Narsasitst.", he pointed out without hesitation as he leaned back in his chair and gestured vaguely towards himself.

Sighing, Peter relented. "Whatever. I guess I could let you teach me sometime. Maybe not today, though."

"Fair enough.", Tony said with finality. "We should leave by three. Then you can have a little bit of Spider-man time before I drag your spider-butt to dinner and back to the compound."

This gave them another hour or so to swim but not until after they had slathered themselves in what Tony decided was an adequate amount of sunscreen.
Once they had returned Ned home, Tony went into the office, he figured that he could catch up on some work while Peter did his spider thing. He was sitting at his desk reading over another boring proposal when his phone rang. Seeing as it was May he answered without hesitation. "Hey, May. To what do I owe this pleasure?"

"Pleasure huh?", May returned with sarcasm.

"Always, May.", the man quipped before getting to the point. "Now what's on your mind. I know you didn't just call me to chat. You have Pepper for that.", he laughed. The two of them seemed to have hit it off and whenever Pepper was at the compound she spent a good bit of time with May.

"I wanted to talk to you about Peter. Well, talk to you about talking to you about Peter.", she laughed lightly. The conversation she needed to have with the man was going to be a hard one. Not just for her but for him too and she wasn't eager to do it by phone.

Worried by the woman's implications, Tony wondered if Peter had even talked to her since the previous evening's events. Though he couldn't come up with anything that might need discussing. "Everything okay? He seemed okay this morning."

"Everything is fine, Tony.", May affirmed. "We just have things we need to discuss and, well, Pepper should be there too. I suppose this concerns her as well."

"I gotta be honest, you're scaring me a little bit over here, May."

"It's not a big deal, it just, well, you know I'm being released from physical therapy next week and... we just need to talk.", she wavered as she tried to explain what she could without delving too deeply into it before they had a chance to sit face to face.

"Right. Okay. I told Peter he could patrol for a couple of hours and that I'd take him to dinner. We should be home by ten-thirty or so. Do you want to talk then? I'm sure spider-boy will be knocked out before we get back."

"That sounds good, Tony.", she said before disconnecting the call. The sooner they got this talk out of the way, the better. It had been starting to weigh heavily on her. She'd been putting it off for a while but time was running short and they needed a plan to make a smooth transition. For Peter's sake.
Tony spent the remainder of his time in the office spending more time thinking about the pending conversation that on the work he'd set out to complete. Thoughts were pouring into his head from every angle. On one hand, he knew without a doubt that May would never prevent Peter and himself from seeing each other. On the other hand, he was contemplating any way he could guarantee it... especially if something else ever happened to May. Of course, the most obvious solution wasn't one he could obtain alone. May would have to initiate it.

There was also Pepper to consider. She was to his wife and his relationship with Peter was going to affect that in one way or another. Though she seemed nothing but supportive from the very beginning. He knew Pepper was more than fine with Peter coming to visit, giving him his own room had been her idea. Still, he wondered how she would feel if it became more. Then again, it wouldn't really matter if May was against it, which he wouldn't hold against her in the least. She was Peter's aunt, his parent as appointed by law and he was nothing more than a man who had become entangled in their lived by chance.

Sighing, he gave up on work completed and made a few educational phone calls. That way, if the subject came up, he would have some answers.

By the time he was done with his phone calls and had been, given more than enough advice for one night, Peter was calling him. "Hey, Tony? I'm back a tiny bit early and I can't get in. I tried to get the guard to open the door but he said no because 'if you don't have a card, then you don't need to be here.' I'm sorry. I didn't want to interrupt you or anything but he wouldn't even ask FRIDAY "

Already standing up to meet him in the lobby, Tony sighed. "It's alright. I'll be right there, Kiddo. We should probably talk to Pepper about getting you an SI-ID, though." While it was annoying to have to go explain everything to the guard, it did make sense. Thinking about it, he really wasn't sure how the boy had gotten by without one up to this point. He supposed it was because he was always with himself or Happy. At this point, a good bit of the day, staff recognized him by association. The night and weekend staff wouldn't know him by face, an ID would be a good idea.

Soon enough, they were out the door and on their way to dinner. Peter chattering the entire time. Tony just smiled. He was happy for the distraction. Then on the way back to the compound, Peter was Predictably asleep by the second hour, leaving Tony alone with his thoughts.

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By eleven, they were back, Peter was sound asleep in his bed and Tony was heading down to May's apartment where Pepper was already waiting. "What took you so long?", Pepper asked with a smile when he arrived. "FRIDAY said you two got back forty-five minutes ago."
"Yeah.", Tony smiled back. ", but the spider-kid wanted me to sit with him while he went back to sleep and I couldn't tell him no."

"Of course you couldn't", Pepper teased from across the room. "That boy could ask you to put on a bunny suit and hop across the yard and you'd do it...without hesitation"

"I would not. Now, hush you.", Tony said as he glared at both of the laughing women. He actually appreciated that they got along so well. He loved to hear them laughing together, even when it was at his expense. "I'm going to go make some coffee, you two giggling schoolgirls want anything while I'm up?"

"Tea Please.", they answered in unison, leading to Tony rolling his eyes.

Once they were all settled into their drinks, May hesitantly opened up the intended conversation by explaining her progress with Physical therapy and her pending release date. She went on to express her desire to return home and to her job as soon as she was given the go ahead. Both Pepper and Tony nodding along as they heard her out. "The only thing I'm worried about it Peter. He's, well, he's become really comfortable being here. Having everyone within reach all the time. I'm worried about how he's going to take moving back to the apartment. Don't get me wrong, I know he'll be fine. He's a tough kid. It's just... Well, I feel like he's going to, you know... miss you guys."

"We'll miss him too.", Pepper said honestly while Tony seemed to be searching for the right words. She could see his jaw clenched with emotion and knew better than to press him.

After what was maybe a few seconds too long, Tony finally opened his mouth to reply. "Pepper's right. We're going to miss him too. I've really gotten used to having him around. You'll, you'll let him visit though, right? Overnight, I mean.", asked sounding almost like a child begging for a sleepover.

"That's what I want to talk about.", May said seriously making Tony's heart skip a beat. "I don't want him to occasionally come to visit. I was hoping I could get you to agree to let him stay with you on a regular basis."

"That would be more than okay, May. That actually sounds, ideal."

You understand that what I want to do is to set up some sort of rotation or arrangement, right? Something so that there's no question about who he staying with when."
"I want that too.", Tony unquestionably confirmed.

May continued to hesitate as she tried to feel out how this conversation was going to continue. "I know you travel a lot..."

"We'll work it out", Pepper interjected. Peter was important to Tony and she could try to work their business trips around whatever time he and May settled on.

"We'll work it out. Seeing him on a regular basis is important.", Tony assured before dropping his voice to near whisper as he worked to solidify his promise. "... to me. It's important to me"

May smiled. She knew how much Peter meant to him but it was nice to hear it. "I know. It's important to Peter too. That's why I want to do this."

Deciding that it was now or never, Tony attempted to bring up some of the thoughts he'd been having since their phone conversation. "Actually, I've been thinking the same thing but, uh, on another level, I guess."

"Go on...", May prompted with curiosity.

Tony hesitated and started to wring his hands together in a way that was reminiscent of Peter when he became too anxious to sit still. "I was thinking, well, not to be presumptuous or anything but, uh, I, I talked to my lawyer--"

"--Tony what are you getting at.", Pepper cut him off in almost a warning tone. The word 'lawyer' having set her off her 'what is this man thinking now' radar.

"Hear, hear me out.", he said, holding up a placating hand in his future wife's direction. He knew it might have been wise to discuss this with her first but the time to bring it up was now and he didn't want to miss the window. "I think it might be a good idea to, you know, maybe--"

Before Tony could finish his thought, May had it figured out and was cutting him off not sounding one bit surprised. "--You want to be his secondary guardian--"
"--Tony! You can't just ask something like that!--", Pepper shouted, prompting an argument between herself and Tony.

"-It's not like that!--", the man tried to explain before being cut off by his fiance once again.

"--It's completely inappropriate! You can't get whatever you--", Pepper spat from the couch.

"--This isn't just about what I want. There's more to it, Pepper!", Tony tried to justify as calmly as the situation would allow but his aggravation was still there.

Sighing in near defeat, Pepper lowered her voice and attempted to soften her tone. "Tony, this isn't how people handle these things..."

"You don't even know what I was going to say!", Tony irritably pointed out as he raised his hands in frustration. "Relax about it!--"

Raising her voice, May cut them both off before their argument could degrees any further. "--Would you two please stop! I didn't ask you here to argue!" At those words both Pepper and Tony grew quiet as they turned their heads towards her. "This is about Peter.", she added softly. "... and I'm willing to discuss any option that has his best interest at heart."
When May said she wanted to discuss every option, she meant every option. As such, it was well past one in the morning when their conversation started to wrap up with all of them now leaning towards Tony taking on a more stable role in Peter's life. Of course, everything would have to be discussed with Peter, his opinion would be heavily considered before taking any further steps towards anything permanent. Though, Tony wasn't worried about that. The boy had called him dad more than once at this point. Any judicial steps they ended up taking would only legally validate a relationship that already existed.

"So, we're all in agreement?", May asked tiredly.

"Yeah, I think so. Pepper, you're okay with this, right? Because I need you to be okay with this. If, if anything, God forbid, ever happens to May, and maybe, maybe just in general, this would make you, his, well, his mother of sorts. I need to--"

"--Tony.", Pepper said patiently as she gently took his hand. "I'm sorry I was so short with you when it first came up. It took me by surprise and I was worried that you were going to offend May and ruin any chance we had of being able to continue to spend time with him."

May laughed. "I know, Tony pretty well at this point. He can try to offend me... but it won't work. I fight back."

Pepper smiled at her as she squeezed her future husbands hand. "I'm glad to hear it.", she laughed.
"I'll call the lawyer in the morning but we won't do anything until we talk to the kid.", Tony said with a weary smile. It had been a long couple of days and the rest of the week didn't look like it was going to be any less hectic. "In the meantime, why don't you let him stay here for the rest of the summer. There are only two and a half weeks left anyway."

"I'll need him to come home at some point. I'll need to take him school shopping. At least get the minimum school supplies. I'm going to have to see how everything looks when I get back. The Short Term Disability didn't leave much after the rent.", she sighed out.

"I can get his school supplies.", Tony said with a small smile. "I assume there's a list somewhere. We can have FRIDAY order it. Is there anything else he'll need? It's been a while since I've done the whole first day of school thing."

"A backpack and probably a new pair of shoes. Other than that he's probably good to go.", May replied. "Thank you for taking care of it."

"Anything you need May.", Pepper added. "Since your only being signed off for a light workload is that going to affect your paycheck?", she asked before slightly backtracking. "I'm not trying to pry, I just want to make sure you guys will have everything covered." Tony quickly agreed, offering to cover anything that needed to be covered to keep her from falling into debt.

May felt overwhelmingly grateful to the two of them. Not only for being her friend but for being so willing to help her and love Peter. She really couldn't ask for a better family. "I promise I'll let you know, though you guys have really done more than enough."

"You're family.", Tony said with a soft smile. "...and you're my kid's aunt, I think I'm justified in thinking about your wellbeing."

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Later that morning when Tony finally woke up, it was to a phone call from Rhodes. Apparently, the accords committee wanted to meet the next day, in Washington at the Pentagon. This time Rhodes had no say in it. It was set up without his approval and was read as mandatory. There was no missing this. If the committee was going to such lengths as to throw them off with the date and location then there was something big brewing. All Tony could think about was how this week was turning into a cluster-fuck. *Talking with Peter, meeting with accords, seeing a lawyer, SI meetings...and shoot, he'd almost forgotten about working with Bruce on creating medication for Peter...he was going to be lucky to survive the next week.*
Crawling out of bed he figured his first order of business was telling Pepper he needed to leave. "Hey, Pepper...", he said hesitantly as he entered the kitchen where she was making herself and Peter some breakfast. "I, uh, I'm going to have to leave for Washington this evening. The accords want to meet tomorrow morning. It's nonoptional and it's looking pretty serious. I know we have so much going on but--"

"It's fine, Tony.", Pepper said from the stove. "We've got it here, right Peter?"

"Mm-hmm. I guess I can't come this time.", Peter said from the kitchen Table.

"Not this time, Buddy.", Tony said sadly, meeting the boy's eyes from across the room. "I'll tell you what though, as soon as I get back we're going to go do something fun, just to two of us, alright?"

"Okay", Peter answered hesitantly. "You'll, like call me and stuff while you're gone tough, right Tony?"

"Of course, Kiddo.", Tony smiled. "Hey, after breakfast there's something that me, May and Pepper need to talk to you about so don't run off, yeah?"

Tony ended up grabbing a cup of coffee before disappearing back into his bedroom to get ready for the day and start packing for the trip that was being forced upon him. By the time he made it back out, Pepper was dressed and sitting on the couch reading while Peter sat beside her playing a game on the Switch. "Hey! That's mine.", Tony teased as he sat down beside the boy on the couch.

"You share.", Peter replied never breaking his concentration.

"Hmm.", the man hummed noncommittally. "Why don't you go get dressed. We really need to go. I already talked to May this morning, she waiting for us."

Dropping the controller down into his lap, Peter made eye contact with the man for the first time since he'd entered the room. "What do we need to talk about that's so important it can't wait until later?"

"Nothing bad, I promise.", Tony said as he placed a hand on the boy's knee.
Peter nodded and proceeded to put away the games. Then as soon as he was ready, they walked out the door and into May's apartment. Just like the night before, Tony and Pepper sat on the couch while May remained in the recliner. Peter ended up nudging Tony so that he could sit wedged between him and the armrest closest to May.

"Calm down, Sweetie.", May spoke gently seeing how nervous Peter was looking between all of the adults in the room. "You're not in trouble. In fact, it's all good stuff, okay?" Peter nodded and she continued. "First of all, I want you to know that I'm going to be released from physical therapy on Friday. Monday I'm going to start going back to work for some. Short shifts at first."

Peter wasn't sure how he felt about that. He was thrilled that May was all but better, however, he really sort of... sad about the idea of moving away from the compound. They must have all sensed it because Tony stepped in. "You have the option to stay here until a few days before school starts if you want to."

Not ready to commit himself to anything, Peter nodded his head and turned back to May who was speaking again. "I know how much you love it here and how much you love being with Tony--"

"--I love being with you too, May!", Peter interjected, fearing that his aunt was insinuating that he preferred him over her now.

"Oh, I know that Sweetheart.", she reassured. "You don't have to worry about that. We just all wanted to talk to you about some of the things we've been discussing--"

"--I'm still going to get to come here sometimes for training and stuff like that, right Tony?", Peter asked, cutting off his aunt completely.

"Let, May finish, Pete. We've got a lot to talk about.", Tony said with a gentle smile. Peter blushed slightly as he nodded his head and waited for May to keep talking.

"Anyway, as was trying to say. We've been talking about how we want to handle you visiting here in the future. We all agree that you should come here often. We even discussed making something of a rotating schedule or routine."

Peter continued to look back and forth between the two adults in wonder as they described some of the things they had talked about as far as weekends and holidays. What they were describing
sounded a lot like what he remembered some of his friends at school talking about when he was little. "So... it's like you're getting some sort of weird divorce and sharing custody?"

"Sort of...", May laughed because what they were actually talking about was almost the opposite of that. "Are you okay with this plan so far?" When he expressed that he was, May nodded towards Tony who started carefully proposing the idea of guardianship and even further, adoption. May cut in a few times to make sure Peter knew that she was completely on board with either plan. Even Pepper took a turn here and there reassuring that she too was perfectly okay with all of the options that had been placed on the table.

"Those are the things we've been talking about, Kiddo. Now, just so you know, whatever you choose, you're still going to be listed as the heir to Stark Industries. Even if Pepper and I end up having another child one day" He really wanted to emphasize that Peter was going to always be his first child no matter what. "...you will still be first in line to take over as CEO but all assets would, of course be shared with any future siblings you may or may not have."

Peter smiled at the idea of having siblings though he couldn't imagine Pepper and Tony holding something so tiny as a newborn baby. Then a thought occurred to him. "What about my last name?"

"What about it, Buddy?", Tony asked, unsure if the boy was asking if it would be changed or if it was okay to be the heir to the Stark fortune as a Parker.

"If you became my guardian or whatever. Would it change?"

"As your guardian? No. You would still be a Parker because May would still be your parent. A guardianship would ensure that if anything happened to May before you turned eighteen, that you would come to me, no questions asked. Or, if anything happened to you and May wasn't available I could make medical decision on your behalf. That kind of stuff. Nothing else would change."

"And if you adopted me?"

"That would be different. May and I would share custody of you. I would be a second parent to you. Then you would have the choice if you wanted to be a Stark or a Parker... or hyphenate it... Either way, everything we already talked about would stay the exact same. You would live primarily with May. We would still both be responsible for you and take care of you. Even after you turned eighteen"
Peter swallowed. This was a lot to take in. He'd been given the choice to become a Stark. "What, um, what about school and stuff?"

This time it was May who stepped in to answer. "If we proceed with any of the legal actions, then your paperwork would be updated to reflect that."

"If, if Tony adopted me, could keep going to my school? I won't have to go to some boarding school or something like he did, right?", Peter asked, looking between all three adults.

"Of course not, Peter. We would never send you away.", Tony said with a small smile. He didn't comment on whether or not Peter could stay where he was because he didn't know and he hoped the kid wouldn't continue to press. If that's what Peter wanted then they would try but if it ever became a safety risk, they would have to look into something else.

Peter nodded. "...and, and the, uh, the media?"

"Press conference would be a must either way.", Pepper added with a sympathetic smile. This led into several discussions based around safety, privacy and basically all of the pros and cons of each option he had to consider. In the end, Peter decided it was too big of a decision to make in one day and all of the adults agreed. It had never been their intention for him to have a decision at the ready.

"Look, Pete, I'm so sorry that we had to drop this on you right as I have to leave for this trip but we want to get any paperwork we need to do started as soon as possible. Not that I'm trying to rush you! We didn't want to put off talking to you about it until I got back, yeah?", Tony explained and when Peter nodded he finished his thought. "If you need to talk to me or have any questions, I'll try to answer them. May and Pepper are here for that too.", Tony smiled. He would be lying if he said he didn't hope that the boy would pick adoption. Nothing would make him more proud than to be able to call Peter his literal son.

"I know... um, can, can I go now? Maybe to the lab or something?", Peter asked quietly. He needed time to think about all of this and maybe the lab was a good place to do that.

Tony looked at May who nodded in approval. "Sure, Kiddo.", Tony said with a sigh. "Why don't you eat some lunch first, it's already eleven."
After a very quiet lunch, everyone seemed to part ways. Peter shuffled down to the lab where he'd been disassembling one of the boots from an old Iron Man suit. As he sat at his work station carefully pulling out a few wires he heard the doors slide open. Not giving it a second thought he never even turned around before he spoke. "I'm fine, Dad. You didn't have to come to check on me."

Bruce froze in his tracks. Tony had indicated that he wasn't the child's father. Yet he'd just heard the boy clearly call him dad. "Uh... So, Tony's not in here?", he asked rather than once again question the status of the relationship between Tony and the teenager at the moment.

Peter's head whipped around so fast it was amazing that he didn't hurt himself. "Dr. Banner!?"

"Yeah, Sorry, Peter. I was looking for Tony, I saw you and just sort of assumed that he was in here too.", the doctor explained somewhat sheepishly.

Peter stared at the other man from across the room for a moment before thinking to answer. "No, he's upstairs. He has to go to Washington tonight. I can down by myself. Mostly for a distraction.", he explained honestly.

"I can certainly understand that.", Bruce smiled. "I suppose I'll leave you to it then."

"Wait!", Peter half shouted. He was suddenly struck by the urge to have some company. Dr. Banner was already there so he seemed like an obvious choice. "Did you need something? I might be able to help..."

"I was mostly looking for an extra set of hands. You're welcome to come help if you'd like." Having only spent a small amount of time with the boy Bruce was eager to see exactly how smart Peter really was. He knew from talking to him over the occasional lunch that the kid was intelligent but this would give him a chance to see it for himself. It was intriguing.

They ended up working in Bruce's lab together for quite a while. The man found himself enjoying the constant chatter that filled the room and he could completely understand Tony's affinity for the kid. At some point, the constant rambling died down and Bruce decided to take that as a chance to ask Peter more about himself. He started with really basic things like, what's your favorite kind of music and What school do you go to. Then once the kid got comfortable he slipped in a real question. "So, Tony said that you've been living with him over the summer. That must be fun."
"Yeah, it's been fun but I'll have to go back to my apartment soon. School starts in a couple of weeks.", Peter said as he continued to sketch out some formulas on a piece of paper.

Bruce nodded his head in understanding, as he looked the kid's work from over his shoulder. "Oh, will you be back after?"

"Yes, sir.", Peter murmured as he continued to concentrate on the work, Br. Banner had assigned him to. "My aunt May wants me to come and stay here on the weekends and stuff."

"That sounds nice.", Bruce happily replied. He was glad to hear the boy would still be around some. For Tony's sake of course...

At this point Peter had dropped the pencil he was using down onto the desk. While he hadn't talked to Bruce a whole lot, he seemed to be really good at listening and Peter needed that right now. He couldn't possibly go to Ned but he wanted to discuss everything with someone. The problem was, what he needed to talk about were the very adults he typically went to when he needed to talk... He took a deep breath decided to feel out whether or not the scientist would be a good choice. "I guess but it sort of feels like I'm being tossed around and, well... can, can you keep a secret, Dr. Banner?"

Bruce paused and hesitated before answering the boy's question. This was Tony's kid, maybe his son, he still wasn't clear. Either way, he wasn't sure he should be promising to keep secrets for his friend's kid. "That depends on what kind of a secret we're talking about Peter.", he answered worriedly.

"Not a bad one!", Peter assured. "I, I just don't know if I'm supposed to be telling anybody about this, yet I mean. It's not a bad secret, sir, I promise."

Still unsure about what he might be getting himself into Bruce followed up with a few more questions to clarify. When it sounded like the kid wanted to talk about things Tony already knew he all of a sudden felt more comfortable. He wasn't being asked to keep secrets from the other man, the boy just wanted someone to talk things out with. He figured he could do that. "Alright, Peter.", the man smiled. "I'm listening."

This led Peter into a rapid and detailed explanation of everything that had been presented to him that morning. How he was a little stressed out by how much of the decision-making process was falling on him and how he didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings. Bruce, with his arms crossed casually over his chest, nodded along as he listened to the boy decompress. Then when it seemed he'd made it to a
stopping point he sighed as he chose his words very carefully. "Well, Peter, it sounds like you have three choices then, huh?"

"Yes, sir. But no matter what I pick, I hurt someone's feelings. If I choose nothing it looks like I don't care. If I choose adoption then May might think that I didn't think she was good enough and if I choose the guardianship, Tony would probably be disappointed. Then again if--"

"--What if you wouldn't be hurting anyone's feelings. Let's say for a second that no one involved would be upset no matter what you picked. What would you lean towards."

"Well, Dr. Banner, I actually kind of like the idea of Tony being my dad.", Peter said with a blush. 
"I don't remember my actual parents and when I went to go live with Aunt May and Uncle Ben, they were already my aunt and uncle so I never, really thought of them as anything but that."

"But with Tony it's different."

"Yes, sir. With Tony it-- I can't explain it.", Peter said with a sigh because he couldn't. There was something special between himself and Tony and he couldn't quite put into words what it was.

"You don't have to.", Bruce insisted as he placed a tentative hand on the boy's shoulder. "It sounds to me like you've already made up your mind."

Peter scrunched up his face with something between confusion and discontent. "What about Aunt May?"

"She'll still be your aunt right? And still, have custody over you?", he felt like he was stating the obvious but when Peter glanced at him with hopeful anticipation he knew he'd said the right thing.

Peter rested his head on his arms as he crossed them on the table. "Yes, sir. I would still, mostly live with her too."

"But you're worried about her feelings.", The man inferred based on the kid's body language alone.

"Yes, sir.", Peter mumbled into his arms. "I don't want her to think she's not enough, or that I'm
replacing my uncle Ben.

Taking a deep breath, Bruce sat down on the stool beside Peter. He wasn't sure if how much he should be getting into the middle of this but for some reason talking the kid through his feelings felt natural. "I don't think she would have offered it as an option if her feelings were going to get hurt, Peter. She's an adult, I'm sure she's already thought that through."

"Do you really think so?", Peter asked, the hope in his eyes now seeping into his tone.

"I do.", Bruce certified. "Maybe you should talk to her about it." While he felt like he was an okay soundboard, he knew that Peter really needed to be talking this through with his parent.

Sitting back up on the stool and grabbing the pencil he'd set down, Peter looked back and forth between his math and the doctor sitting beside him. "I will but right now can we finish this going through this formula. I think I've about got it."

"Sure, Peter. Let me have a look.", Bruce said with a smile.
Chapter 58

While Peter was in the lab, Tony went into his office. Just as Rhodey had promised there was an email from an unfamiliar address hiding amongst his regular business notices. Clicking it open he found the same information that he's already been given as well as a copy of the proposal they would be discussing. Reading through it he froze. It sounded... realistic, save for a few misguided assumptions and gaps in details. After nearly a year, his world was about to get turned upside down in every way possible. Not that any of it was bad but it was a lot at once. Leaving him to hope that he could live up to everyone expectations.

Sighing, he went to find his family. He and Rhodes had decided to meet up early to talk in person. That meant he was going to need to head out as soon as possible. It was easy enough to find Pepper. He spotted her in the living room the second he walked out of the office. "Hey, Pepper.", he sighed out tiredly.

"Well, there you are. I didn't think we were going to see much more of you today.", Pepper said, looking up from her table with a smile.

Tony just sighed. It didn't feel like the right time to be going anywhere but at the same time, this felt unimaginably important. "Unfortunately you're not. I need to go ahead and leave in a little bit. Rhodes and I need to talk."

"Makes sense. When do you think you'll be back?", Pepper questioned, already pulling her feet in so that Tony could sit beside her.

"I'm not sure, to be honest. This is so close. It's so close, Pepper. I want to stay until it's settled if I can.", he admitted with regret.

Not realizing the turmoil the next question would cause, Pepper set her tablet down and placed her hand on her fiance's knee. "What about Peter?"

Tony scrunched his face up in guilt. "You'll stay here in the suite, right? Just so he has someone here at night?", he asked as he searched Pepper's face for understanding. "I mean, I realize he isn't a baby but I hate the idea of him being up here alone. I suppose he could sleep on May's couch if he wanted too. He's done it before."

"I can stay here. It's fine.", she reassured causing Tony's whole body to relax.
"Thanks, Pepper.", he said as he leaned in to give her a quick kiss before walking towards the door. "I hope to be back soon. I'd like to see May off. Which reminds me, will you get a cleaning crew in their apartment before she gets home? ...and stock the fridge?", he asked as he started to pick up his luggage.

"Of course, Tony.", Pepper promised before crossing the room to embrace him one more time before he left.

"Alright, I'm going to go find my kid.", he said quietly as he leaned into her hold and kissed her once more. God, he didn't want to leave. "I'll see you soon. I love you."

"I love you too.", she said softly as she watched him walk out the door.

After dropping his things off in the back of his car, Tony's next mission was to locate Peter. "Where's the Kid, FRIDAY?"

"Mr. Parker is currently located in Dr. Banner's personal lab.", the AI quickly responded.

Tony quirked an eyebrow towards the ceiling. What the hell was the kid doing in there? "Alone?", he asked knowing the Bruce has been antsy to be alone with Peter in the past.

"Mr. Parker does not have access to enter Dr. Banner's lab without expressed permission."

Still confused, by the AI's imprecise answer, he continued to press. "So... Banner's with him?"

"Of Course.", FRIDAY retorted with something of an attitude.

While unsure of how his kid ended up in the lab with Bruce, it did sort of simplify things for him. He'd had every intention of talking to the man before he left, anyway. "Hey, Pete." "What are you two up to?"

"Working on a few formulas.", Peter replied simply, leaving room for Bruce to elaborate.
"We think we may have come up with a solution that slows the absorption rate of specific chemicals, both organic and synthetic using a form of biological imprinting. Obviously, it will need testing and tweaking but it's a good start."

So the man had his kid working his own medication without letting anything on. Interesting. "Sounds useful. I'll definitely want to talk to you about that when I get back. I assume, Pete told you I was heading out to Washington."

"He did. Are you going to tell them that I'm back?", Bruce asked, mostly out of curiosity.

"I already did.", Tony sighed out. "They were really interested in how that was working out. I actually think knowing you were here is what got them to start moving things along. This meeting might be it."

Bruce nodded in confirmation. He was glad his appearance hadn't caused a problem. "Let me know if I can do anything."

At that question, Tony perked up, smiling at his friend. That's exactly what he wanted to talk to the man about. "What you can do it make sure my kid doesn't do anything stupid until I get back--"

"--Tony!", Peter interrupted, elongating the last syllable in a childish whine.

Bruce just laughed. "I'll do my best. He seems like a pretty good kid though. That's what I've heard anyway."

"Uh-huh.", Tony said as he looked with amusement between his friend and his kid, before settling his eyes on Peter. "Come out here with me, Kiddo.", he added gesturing towards the door. "I want to talk to you for a second."

Once they were out of earshot, Tony placed a hand gently on his boy's shoulder. "I'm leaving now so I can talk to Rhodey tonight. I'll call you when I land and again before bed. Text me as much as you want."

Peter shifted on his feet and started chewing on his lip. "What if they make you turn your phone
off?", he asked quietly.

"Then I'll call you as soon as I can.", Tony reassured, moving his hand from Peter's shoulder to the back of his neck. "...and just so you know, Pepper is going to stay here until I get back so you can sleep in your room or on May's couch. Whichever one you're more comfortable with. Just make sure they know."

"Mm-hmm.", Peter agreed still feeling ill at ease.

Seeing how nervous the boy looked, Tony gave Peter's neck a gentle squeeze. "I love you. You know that, right?"

"I know.", Peter said with a legitimate smile as started to take a step closer to the man in order to hug him. "I love you too."

With Peter wrapped in his arms, he hesitantly brought up the conversation from earlier that morning. "What we talked about today... you're not stressing out about it are you?"

"A little bit.", Peter admitted. "I'm fine though." He really was feeling much better about it now that he'd talked it through with someone who wasn't involved. He wasn't ready to make any clear decisions yet, he still wanted to talk more with May.

Tony tugged him in a little closer to his body. "Please don't let all of that worry you too much. If you have any questions--"

"--I know. You and May and Pepper can answer them.", Peter helpfully recited as he pulled away from Tony's embrace to study his face. He looked concerned and Peter didn't know if it was about him or about the impending meeting but decided it was probably both.

"Right.", Tony breathed out before checking his watch. "Okay, I need to go. Can I get one last hug?"

"Yeah.", Peter said already reaching his arms around the man's middle. "I love you... Dad.", he whispered as he rested his head on Tony's shoulder.
"Love you too.", Tony returned with a small hitch in his breath. He wondered if he would ever get
tired of the boy calling him that. "I'll call you soon."

After that, Tony was out the door and Peter was returning to the lab to continue his work with
Bruce. They stayed there together for a while. Up until the clock struck three and Peter realized he
was hungry. "Dr. Banner? I'm going to go have a snack or something. If you're still here when I'm
done, can I come back?" Bruce turned to acknowledged him and conceded that he too should
probably go eat something seeing as he'd skipped lunch altogether. They decided that they would
meet back there in an hour or so. They both seemed to be enjoying the distraction that the new
project was offering.

Up in the penthouse, Peter hadn't expected to run into anyone but pepper was there in the kitchen
greeting him as he walked in the door. "Peter! Did you come back to eat? I could make you
something."

"Oh, um, I can get it myself. Thank you though.", Peter said as he started towards the pantry. He
had already decided that he was just going to heat up some Spaghetti-O's. There was no need to
inconvenience Pepper.

"Are you sure? I don't mind.", Pepper said, already prepared to make the boy whatever he wanted.

"I'm sure.", Peter confirmed. "I was just going to heat up some pasta so I can get back to the lab
with Dr. Banner."

"Alright.", Pepper said as she took a seat that the kitchen table. "Maybe you should take some
snacks down there with you for later.", she offered after some thought.

"That's not really necessary.", Peter replied easily. "I have a lot in Tony's lab. I can go over there to
get something if I want it. I only came up here to eat because I had an early lunch and wanted
something besides chips or peanuts or whatever." He could see what Pepper was trying to do but the
truth was, he really did have sort of a stockpile of snacks hidden around Tony's lab. That way when
the man would insist that they take a break, he already had something there to eat.

"I'm only trying to help.", Pepper admitted in defeat. Tony's comment about her being something of
a mother to Peter if anything ever happened to May had struck a chord with her. Making her realize
that her relationship with Peter was lacking in comparison to the relationship Tony had with him. It
wasn't a jealous sort of thing. Just a realization that Peter was an intricate part of Tony's life and that
it would be wise for her to be more than supportive and accepting of it. She needed to make an
effort to become a part of it.
"I know.", Peter replied with a smile. "...and I appreciate it" He did understand where she was coming from. He had already surmised that Tony had asked her to stay there rather than returning to her apartment so that she could look after him. Not that he needed looking after, but he welcomed the sentiment all the same.

After that, things grew quiet as Peter heated up his second lunch. Once he had seated himself across from her at the table, Pepper decided to get a few things off her chest. "While you're here... I wanted to talk to you about this morning."

"Oh yeah?", Peter asked never looking up from his bowl. He'd wasn't sure he was ready to have yet another conversation about that. "Um, what, what about?"

Pepper hesitated for only a moment before she began. "I want to make sure you know that we all love you--"

"--I know--", Peter inserted as Pepper continued to talk.

"--and that we want what's best for you. That's why we wanted to get your opinion--", Pepper elaborated only to be cut off once again.

"--I get it. I--"

"--Peter.", she said to quiet him and regain his attention. "Can I finish please?", she added not unkindly. In fact, it was said with so much gentleness and ease that it made Peter feel instantly guilty for talking over her.

"Oh. Sorry, Pepper.", he said, hanging his head.

"It's okay.", she promised with nothing but honest care. "What I want you to know is that we weren't trying to put a lot of pressure on you by asking you what you wanted. It's just that you're nearly an adult and you should have some say in all of this. May was adamant that every possible solution was placed on the table for you to choose from. We all want what's best for you and for us to know what that is you have to tell us."
"I understand.", he whispered, taking a brief pause before making his confessions. "It's kind of hard to sort it all out, though. I don't want to make the wrong decision."

"The only wrong decision here would be one you're unhappy with. That's all we care about. Whatever you choose is fine with every single one of us."

"Thank you, Pepper.", Peter said with a small smile. "I, I think I might have an idea about what I want but, but I want to talk to May first."

Nodding her head in perfect understanding, Pepper smiled at the boy across from her. "That sounds like a very good idea."

Surprised by how much Pepper had actually made him feel better, he smiled and went back to his bowl but not without offering one more grateful 'Thank you'.

~o~o~o~o~o~

By the time dinner came around, Peter had already talked to Tony once and they had exchanged no less than fifteen texts. With the amount of communication they had, Peter wasn't feeling the least bit anxious that the man was hours away. The lack of unease was a relief really. He'd expected it to be much worse.

As he wandered into May's apartment still typing a reply to the latest message, he received from Tony, he was surprised to see that Pepper wasn't there yet. He assumed that she would be joining May and himself for dinner each night. "May?", he called out as he entered the apartment.

"Hmm? Peter, Is that you?", May shouted from the bedroom. "I'm in the bedroom, sweetie, I'll be right out."

Sitting down to wait for his aunt's return, Peter glanced around the apartment. Part of him wondered why May couldn't just stay where she was. There was nothing wrong with it. He had a room with Tony and May was right there. It seemed perfect and the more the thought about it the more changing it felt... ridiculous and the second she entered the hall he decided to confront her about it. "Why can't we both just live here? This apartment is nice enough. I could keep staying in Tony's suite and come visit you every day just like we've been doing. This has been working right?", he rambled out quickly.
Crossing the room, still drying her hair with a towel, May sat down directly beside Peter on the couch. "I thought you might ask that at some point.", she smiled. Setting the towel down on the coffee table she looked over at Peter. "For one thing, I like my job. I look forward to going back. I can't exactly commute from here--"

"--There are other jobs! Maybe, maybe you could work from home or something.", Peter cut in, trying desperately to get his aunt to see things his way.

"Yes. ...but I like my job, Peter. I miss my co-workers. I'm ready to go back.", she replied gently, as she placed her hand on Peter's knee for reassurance. "I also miss our apartment. Don't you? Won't it be so much easier to be Spider-man from Queens?"

"Well, yeah", Peter faltered "but, but it's been working out okay from here." There was a time where he wanted nothing more than to get back to Queens, now all he wanted to do was stay where he was. It was all very confusing.

"It has. Tony has made an effort to make sure you have time to do those things. I know you prefer going out in the evenings, though. Once we get home you'll be able to get out at night more.", May tried to reasoned, hoping that, the incentive of being able to go back to his old vigilante habits would sound rewarding.

"That will be nice, I suppose but I like it here.", Peter emphasized, leaning carefully into May as she sat beside him. "I know you like your job and all but we can work that out too right?"

Choosing not to go over the fact that a commute wasn't reasonable she moved on to the next valid point. "Peter, you have school starting soon. You can't possibly be here and at school every day. I know you don't want to start over at a new school. Ned would be beside himself."

"That's probably true.", Peter laughed. Ned would, in fact, lose his mind if Peter ever had to change schools. "I just wish things could stay like this."

"I know, baby.", May sighed out, relieved that Peter seemed to be having an easier time accepting that they would have to move back. "That's why we wanted to make sure you had the option to spend as much time as possible with Tony. That's also why we started talking about him being listed as your guardian. So, if anything ever happened to me there would be no delay, you would come straight here." That was really the priority, even if Peter ended up choosing to forgo any legal changes to his guardianship or parentage, Tony and Pepper would be added to her will.
Peter fidgeted as he sat, thinking about everything May had just said. He still had one more question but the thought of asking it made him feel anxious for some reason. Finally taking a deep breath he spat it out. "I, just, well, how did, how did the idea of adoption come up?"

May nodded in understanding as she watched his hands fidgetting in his lap. Take a page from Tony's book, she grabbed ahold of his hands and held them. "I asked Tony for every possible scenario. Every single way we could work together to take care of you. We talked about keeping things as they are. Just friends who all love the same kid. Then we talked about the guardianship to protect you in case anything happened to either one of us.", she answered before pausing to casually brush Peter's hair of off his forehead. "Then, from there, the talk progressed to adoption.", she supplied, smiling when Peter leaned into her touch. "Sweetie, I know you call him dad sometimes. I'm not, jealous or upset or even surprised. It's just an option."

Taking a deep breath, Peter leaned further into May. He didn't want to see her reaction when he asked his next question. "What about my real dad... and Uncle Ben?"

"They would still be your biological father and your Uncle Ben.", May instantly replied. She was so proud of Peter for being such a kind and considerate person. She just wished that he didn't take it all so much to heart. It seemed as though he often based his own level of happiness on the happiness of those around him. "Peter, nothing changes about that. You aren't erasing them by allowing someone else to step up in their absence. I think Ben did an okay job of stepping into your father's shoes. I don't have a problem with Tony stepping up into his. You deserve two parents. Hell, if anything ever happens to me I hope you'll let Pepper step up into mine." She meant that too. She couldn't imagine another couple taking better care of her child than Tony and Pepper.

"I think, I think I want Tony to adopt me.", Peter finally admitted while still avoiding eye contact with May. "Only if you're sure, though!", he hastily added. "Like, one-hundred-percent sure that you are okay with it because I love you so much, so much that I don't want you to feel bad--"

"--Peter, I promise. I'll be nothing but happy for the both of you, all of us really.", she said seriously before letting out a laugh. "You're sort of a two-man job, Pete. With the whole vigilante thing going on, I would love someone else to take responsibility for you once in a while. You, sir, are a handful."

"May!", Peter whined just in time for Pepper to walk in the door carrying some take out.
Chapter 59

That night, Peter slept surprisingly well. Tony had called him at nearly eleven and told him about the dinner he’d had with Rhodey and how the man had asked about him. He talked about some of the more vague parts of the accords proposal they would be discussing and how he couldn’t wait to get back home. Peter, in turn, talked to him all about his time with Bruce and dinner with Pepper and May. They talked and talked until Peter was nearly falling asleep while holding his phone. After he’s dropped it for the third time in ten minutes, Tony had softly suggested that they hang up so Peter could go to bed. A few quick I love you's later Peter was asleep for the night.

The next day, Pepper canceled all of her meetings in order to join Peter and May in an impromptu movie and boardgame day. Tony had called right before he left for the meeting and Peter felt completely at ease. He didn't know if it was because the man had reassured him that everything was fine or if it was the distraction of having May and Pepper continually asking him what they should do next but the day went by quickly.

Tony, on the other hand, had an extremely long and stressful day. After his phone call with Peter, he’d had to rush out the door. The meeting had been scheduled for ten but at the last minute, they changed it to nine. That didn't leave a whole lot of time for him to meet up with Rhodes, get there and get cleared to enter. He had managed to do it but it was tight.

When they walked in, the committee was waiting for them and the atmosphere in the room was thick. It wasn't hard to spot the new face in the room. Not that it was a new face, so much as it was an unexpected one. "Fury? What's he doing here?", Tony couldn't help but ask out loud as they entered the room, Rhodes smacking him in the arm for his outburst.

"Oh, you'll find out more as the meeting progresses, Stark.", one of the older members drawled out. "Now, please, take a seat. Unless you have somewhere else to be today?"

"I'm here and you have my full attention.", Tony tightly replied. It seemed that the fact, that he'd walked out of a meeting to keep his promise to Peter hadn't yet been forgotten.

From there the meeting when fairly well. The concerns that both Tony and Rhodes had were addressed but two and a half hours later, Fury was still sitting silently in the corner of the room. It wasn't until after the lunch break that things started to get heated.

"So, let me get this straight...", Rhodes said as he examined the papers before him with confusion. "You want to reinitiate the Avenger's Initiative with the supervision of a higher officer who reports back to this committee."
"That's what we're saying, Colonel.", the man at the head of the committee stated as he folded on hands on the table.

"...and you want that man to be Fury...", Rhodes clarified while trying to keep the rising contempt out of his voice. Not that he had one thing against Fury, it just seemed out of the blue. They'd never expected the committee to want to piece a team back together, let alone try to take control of it. The idea had been to amend the accords to allow the team to reform at its own pace. If at all.

"Exactly. ...With our supervision... You would answer to him, through a liaison and he would answer to us. A chain of command if you will."

At this point, Tony was fuming. The proposal they had been sent brushed over what was currently being presented. Not being able to prepare for the discussion left him tense. This wasn't just about pardons and the potential to build a team at will. What they wanted was to put the team back together by force. "...but you want me to continue to pay for it all.", he spat.

Speaking casually, as if Tony wasn't standing up leaning threateningly over the table, the committee leader replied, "We want to continue to use the facility you so graciously provided in the past. I believe its still say's Avengers on the side if I'm not mistaking."

"So you're going to supplement the newly established team with what? Food, uniforms, weaponry?", Tony shot back without missing a beat. It wasn't that he didn't want the team back together, he'd just expected it to be on his own terms, well, everyone's own terms. A choice. ...and in reality, he didn't mind funding it, he mostly had in the past. It was the idea of being forced together at his expense that was making him feel defensive.

"We will provide what we think you need!", the man said, finally raising his voice to match Tony's. "Anything else you choose to donate is up to you, Stark. Any more questions!?"

"Yeah, actually. I have a few.", Tony sarcastically cut in. "Like, when were you planning on asking me if I even wanted them to come back to the compound. Signage on the building aside, it's still in my name on the deed. All I asked was that they get pardoned and the accords to be amended to give any government sanctioned initiatives the ability to act based on n their own judgment when necessary. I didn't ask to have the Avenger's glued back together. If that happens it should be a choice, not a requirement"

"You can't tell me you didn't want this. Besides, you have heard the best part.", the man at the head
of the table said, lowing his voice to a more inviting tone.

Dropping back down into his chair out of sheer exhaustion, Tony leaned back and closed his eyes. "I'm listening."

"In appreciation of your support, we would like for you to be the liaison between the team and Fury when he can't be present."

Snapping his eyes back open, Tony replied flatly, "You want me to babysit."

Rising to his feet the committee leader began to raise his voice once again. "We want you to be responsible! Isn't that what you wanted. Accountability? Well, now you have it. Your team can move about at will with the support of Fury. He'll tell you how and when to act, keeping us posted on the progress. The team will live at the Avenger's Compound so that they can be monitored. If everything goes well, then we can start loosening the reins so to speak."

"So, probation.", Rhodes questioned, trying to wrap his head around what was happening.

"If that's what you wish to call it.", the man droned on.

Tony, Still frustrated with the entire ordeal, leaned back in his chair, pinching the bridge of his nose. "And if they don't listen to me? Then what?"

"Then they go back to be on the most wanted list.", the man easily replied.

"...and me?", Tony asked not willing to accept such a vague answer. He wasn't willing to set himself up for failure. Not with so much on the line.

"As long as you're acting in the best interest of the committee? Nothing."

"Who gets to decide if he's acting in the best interest of the committee?", Rhodes piped up in defense of his friend. They had reason to be wary, even with Ross well out of the picture at this point, it was easy to spot his influence at times.
"I do.", Fury said, speaking for the first time since they'd all enter the room that morning.

Feeling less than impressed and somewhat defeated, Tony sighed. "I need time to think. It's getting late anyway. How about we meet again tomorrow"

As if he'd expected such an answer, the head of the table started tapping his pen on the paper in front of him. "No contacts with anyone outside of this room until a decision is made. As such you'll be staying in a bunk near here, just to keep you honest.", he said casually

Tony's eyes went wide. They'd never had radio silence overnight before. He wasn't sure how Pepper would react and ...oh God, Peter. "I, wait now, I need to call--"

"--It can wait." The man snapped back. "You don't have an answer for us? You don't have a phone."

Unable to do anything about it, Tony gritted his teeth. "Fine.", he grunted. Then as he rose from his chair, he looked towards one of the more, easy to get along with committee members. "Can someone at least contact my fiance about the radio silence. She worries.", he easily lied. He knew Pepper would never immediately jump to the conclusion that something was wrong. Peter, on the other hand, he worried about.

When after some discussion it was decided that no one would be sending out any messages of any kind to anyone Tony's heart completely sank. He'd promised Peter that he would stay in touch the whole time. That he would call him before bed and text him frequently. The last time he'd messaged him was at lunch.

Walking out of the meeting he was filled with so much nervous energy that he knew sleep was never going to happen that night.

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By the time seven o'clock rolled around, Peter was constantly checking his phone. He hadn't received one word from Tony since one. Pepper had continually reminded him that in all likelihood, Tony'd had his phone confiscated for strict confidentiality purposes. Once it hit midnight, no amount of reassurances that she could offer keep his anxiety at bay. Not even May's fingers in his hair or the distraction of a good movie had any effect on him. Eventually, both women decided that Peter might
be better off trying to get some sleep.

They had left May's apartment around midnight and Peter was alone in the suite with Pepper. At first, they had gone their separate ways. Then when the unease got to be too much, he found himself lightly knocking on the master bedroom door. When Pepper called for him to come in, it felt odd seeing her there and not Tony. It was yet another painful reminder. Sighing he hovered in the doorway shifting on his feet for a few moments before speaking. Pepper was nothing but patient. "Has he called you?", he asked hesitantly. While it would hurt to know that he called her and not him, he would accept any communication at all at this point.

Sitting up and taller in the bed and setting her book aside, Pepper gave Peter a sympathetic look. "Peter, I'm sure he's fine. You know, yourself that they stop all outside communications sometimes during those meetings."

"Yeah, but it's really late now.", nervously replied, still shifting on his feet. "They can't possibly still be in the meeting... right?"

Remembering what Tony had told her about Peter's reaction to radio silence in Washington, she continued to try and pacify him. "Tony would have messaged you the second he got his phone back. If he hasn't messaged you, then they still have it.", she promised.

"After midnight?", Peter questioned. He couldn't understand how Pepper could be so calm about this. Surely the meeting was over. He had no experience with anything like this and he couldn't come up with any reason why they would still be forced to keep their phones off.

Pepper patted the edge of the bed beside her and beckoning Peter to join her. "Yes, Peter. Maybe all night, I just don't know. I wish I did but I don't."

"Has it happened like that before?", Peter asked as he acquiesced and slowly crossed the room to Tony's side of the bed. It felt odd. He was usually on the opposite side whenever he lay there.

"No. ...but it could. I suppose if they ended the meeting with something serious unresolved then they would do what the could to keep the information on lock-down.", she consoled. She wished there was something else she could say but there wasn't. Tony going to a government meeting and falling off the map was something she was used to. While it hadn't ever been for this long. She had no doubt, If Tony was able to call, he would have done so by now. "You should try to get some sleep."
Peter apprehensively laid his head down on his mentor's pillows. Taking a deep breath, he was filled with every smell that reminded him of Tony, his shampoo, his cologne, the soap that he used to remove the grease from his hands all mingled together with the scent of him in general. His eyes began to water. "I don't want to miss a call...", he whispered, trying to keep the sadness out of his voice. He didn't want to cry. He'd only cried in front of Pepper a handful of times and he didn't really want to keep adding to the list. He was sixteen now. He was Spider-man. He shouldn't be crying because his dad didn't call to tell him good night.

"You won't. FRIDAY won't let you.", Pepper confidently promised. She reached over to brush a small tear off of Peter's face and smiled. "Look, why don't you close your eyes? Try to sleep, okay?"

Rolling onto his back Peter insisted that he wasn't tired. Though in truth he really was. He just knew that sleep wasn't a good idea with the way he was feeling. Waking up to a nightmare sounded awful and even though he trusted FRIDAY completely he didn't want to have to rely on the AI to make sure he woke up in time, should Tony call him.

"Alright, well, why don't you settle down for a while, anyway. If you sleep, great. If not, that's okay too."

"Mm-hmm.", Peter replied as he rolled back onto his side facing Pepper. When she clicked the light out he hesitated. The room was dark and Tony wasn't there. The man must have never told her about any of that and at the moment he didn't know whether to be grateful or not. However, rather than childishly begging to have the light turned back on he sat up. "A-actually. I think I might go back to my room."

"Are you sure?", Pepper asked skeptically. She had halfway expected Peter to spend the night there. It wouldn't be the first time he'd slept in their bed. Though Tony was always the one in it with him and maybe he just wasn't comfortable with her alone. She was willing to be okay with that. She didn't want to push anything. He'd already come to her and that was enough.

When Pepper turned the lights back on, Peter relaxed. Then an idea hit him. He wasn't sure how to go about it though so he stumbled over his words. "Yeah, I'm sure. Can, can I maybe, um, get something out of Tony's drawer? I think maybe left--"

Knowing exactly what Peter was alluding to Pepper cut him off. "--go ahead, Peter.", she said softly. Then as she watched the boy quickly pull a t-shirt out of Tony's drawer, she offered him something else as well. Though, she worded it carefully so as not to embarrass the boy completely. "Why don't you take an extra pillow too. It seems like a good night to sleep with extra pillows. With Tony out of town, we can each have one more."
Smiling because he knew exactly what she was doing, Peter clutched both, Tony's T-shirt and his pillow to his chest. "That's a good idea, thank you, Pepper.", he quietly uttered as he slipped out the door.

Once he'd settled into his own room, Peter changed his shirt and held the pillow that smelled of Tony in his lap. Since he had no plans to allow sleep to take him over, Peter left all of his lights on. Sitting criss-cross in the middle of his bed, he tried to decide what to do next. Eventually, he opted to pull out his phone. If he was holding it, he wouldn't miss anything.

It was a quarter past three when he finally passed out still sitting up on the bed. He was leaned over with his head resting on the pillow in his lap. If Tony had been there he would have complained about it not being good for his neck and maneuvered him to a horizontal position on under the covers. The problem was that Tony wasn't there and so that's how Peter remained for the next three and a half hours.

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That night had been just as painfully slow for Tony as it was for Peter. He and Rhodes spent the entire night discussing the proposal from every angle. It was a lot to take in, a lot to consider. The biggest consideration being the repercussions such an arrangement would have on his family. Though he supposed that if they bothered to take the bait and come back with the promise of a pardon, a job and a place to stay, then that would be a good sign that it was something they wanted to make work. The question was for how long. What kind of obligation would they have to make? How long was the committee planning on handcuffing them all together? It was a question to add to the list he supposed.

Rhodes had his own set of concerns. He was more of a free agent. He acted within the military's interest already. Anything he did with the Avengers was on his own time. There had been no mention of where he was going to fall within the new forced dynamic. There had also been no mention of how Barton would be handled. He'd been placed on house arrest, doing his time. Did that mean he had a choice or did it mean he was out? Lang also came up in discussion under the same pretense. He too had been placed under house arrest. More so he'd never been a part of the team to begin with. He was picked up by Roger's and Wilson the same way Peter was picked up by Tony. If they forced the addition of Lang would they then require recruitment of Spider-man? So far Tony had been able to avoid that situation altogether.

While Rhodes went to bed by four in the morning, Tony remained awake for the rest of the night. His thought drifted between home and the upcoming meeting. The moment the alarm went off in the tiny room he'd been allotted, he was nearly ready to agree to anything just to not have to sit there for another night.
My head does what it does and I can't tell it 'no' so... I apologize.

...but here's my explanation... I tried to think this all through and I do realize I am creating a cluster-fuck. I just... I wanted to fix everything but I also wanted it to be not all prim, perfect and packaged with a pretty little bow on it so this is where we ended up.

I promise it's all going to come together nicely though. No crazy over the top drama or anything like that. Just a slightly less than perfect coming together. It'll get better... bare with me. xD

Peter woke up early with a crick in his neck and what felt like a rock in his stomach. He still hadn't heard from Tony. While he was still extremely anxious he'd been able to keep himself from panicking with deep practiced breaths and reminders that Pepper was right. Tony was fine, he just didn't have his phone on him.

He lay down flat on his bed in an attempt to pacify the ache in his neck and back for a few minutes before getting up for the day. He was exhausted but sleep could wait for a little while. He needed to eat, even if his stomach was trying to protest.

Shuffling into the kitchen he made himself some toast and then spent the remainder of the morning seeking out any distraction he could come up with. He played video games for a while but they didn't hold his interest. He then moved on to a book but when he ended up reading the same line three times in a row he slammed the book shut. Looking at the clock it was only eight. He wondered if anyone else was up. A quick check with the AI and it seemed that the only other person awake was Bruce. Not knowing where in the compound Bruce stayed or whether or not he was allowed to go knock on his door, Peter asked FRIDAY to see if it was okay for him to visit. When FRIDAY confirmed that Bruce would be happy to meet him in the common room he sighed. This might be just the distraction he needed.

Once he entered the common room he was surprised to see Bruce lounging in a recliner reading a book. It seemed so... normal. Not that he thought of him as abnormal, he'd just only really seen him at the occasional meal or working in the lab. Seeing him in his socks and reading a fiction novel was different. "Hi, Dr. Banner. What are you reading?", he said with as much enthusiasm as he could muster.

"I'm rereading some of the classics. I just finished Grapes of Wrath, this is Great Expectations.",
Bruce explained, holding up the book he'd been reading to show the cover.

Peter scrunched up his nose and sat down on the couch near where Bruce was currently reclined. "I had to read Grapes of Wrath for school. I didn't really like it that much."

"Oh yeah? What sort of books do you like?", Bruce asked out of pure curiosity.

Giving it only a moment's thought, Peter replied, "I like science fiction mostly. Some fantasy. I really liked The Time Machine."

"That's a good one. Maybe I'll read it next.", Bruce said with a smile, as he readjusted himself in order to go back to his book.

Peter sat quietly for a minute or two opening his mouth again. "Tony hasn't called.", he blurted out without really thinking.

Looking up from his book, Bruce smiled softly. "I'm not surprised. You're not worried are you?"

"A little.", Peter admitted.

Bruce, Laughed and set his book on the table beside him. Clearly, the boy was in the mood to chat. "Don't be. He can take care of himself."

"I know that.", Peter stressed. He did know that. He knew that Tony was more than capable of looking after himself and even if he wasn't Rhodes was there with him. That didn't seem to stop his brain from periodically dwelling on it before providing unhelpful suggestions as to why there was a lack of contact.

"Good.", Bruce said with a smile. "Do you want to watch a movie? Maybe something from the last two years that I missed?" The kid looked like he could use a distraction and he did have a lot of catching up to do.

"Sure!", Peter chirped happily before settling on one of the more recent science fiction movies on the list though he didn't even get through the opening credits before he was sleeping soundly on the
couch. Bruce didn't bother to try and wake him. It was obvious that the kid hadn't slept much the night before.

Just as the movie was ending, Peter woke up. The nap didn't do much more than making the morning go by slightly more quickly. Shaking himself awake he looked over at Bruce who was going back to reading his book. Not wanting to disturb him, Peter lay back down until his nagging bladder forced him to sit up. "I guess, I'll go back upstairs.", he mumbled slightly after stretching himself up off the couch.

"I might go down to the lab later. Feel free to join me if you're up for it.", Bruce called out as Peter made his way towards the elevator.

"I might do that.", Peter said before the doors to the lift could close. He would see how he felt then. Right now he just wanted to get back to the penthouse. "Hey Pepper.", Peter said as he entered the front door. She was making tea. He decided that she must not have heard from Tony either or she would have said so but he decided to ask anyway. "Have you heard from him?"

"Not yet.", she said with a slight smile. "I'm pretty sure he'll call you first anyway."

"Maybe.", Peter said, shifting slightly in his feet. "Think he'll call by lunch?"

Pepper sighed because she wished she had a good answer for that but she just didn't. "I wish I knew, Peter. I hope so.", she said as she watched Peter start to walk down the hall. "You know you're welcome to stay out here with me. I don't mind. We could watch a movie or read or something."

"Sure. Peter replied. "I need to go do something in my room first really quick, then maybe I'll get a book."

"I'll be out here. Could make you some tea or something?"

"I'll make some chocolate milk when I get back.", Peter answered before closing the bedroom door. Pepper went ahead an pulled out a cup and the milk so it would be ready when he got back and then took her place on the couch.

Peter spent the remainder of the day going between the Penthouse, May's apartment, and Bruce's lab
as he chased an adequate distraction. The longer the day went on the more knotted his stomach became.

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Back in Washington, Tony was still wide awake when the alarm went off and easily readied himself for the second day of stressful negotiations. If they could get decent answers to their questions then maybe they could all be on their way home by the next morning. At very least maybe he could get his damn phone back.

Walking into the conference room from the day before things felt just as tense as ever. No one seemed to have gotten much sleep. The meeting started by recapping the previous day's discussions as if no one would remember and then fell into a steady stream of questions and answers. Questions mostly coming from Tony and Rhodes thought Fury would occasionally toss one out there as well.

After hours of debate, everything seemed clear enough to consider making a decision. Any of the rogues who chose to come back would be forced into a probationary position in the ranks of the newly reformed Avengers initiative. Lang and Barton would have the option to come on board as well but they would be under the same probationary regulations. The only difference would be that they could come and go as they pleased. The committee seemed completely uninterested in Spider-man, much to Tony's relief. Informing him that he'd turned out to be a minor seemed to get them off his back about it. The new accords wouldn't affect anyone under the age of twenty unless they became a danger to the public.

The procedures that had been insisted upon, for when they felt the need to act outside of the committee's orders seemed fairly simple if not slightly more time consuming than anyone would have liked. It would mean getting in touch with Fury via a written report and waiting for his approval. If he was on the fence or felt that it wasn't life-threatening then it would mean waiting for the committee's approval.

The biggest concern Tony had left was one he couldn't voice. If he couldn't act under his own free will as Ironman what was going to happen if Peter ever needed back up. He wasn't sure he would be able to wait for the go-ahead to come to his kid's side if he was in danger. Though he supposed if he was careful and didn't cause any damage it could be easily explained. He was going to have to talk to the kid about not taking on more than he could handle. Not that he had done so in a long time but this was going to make it clear how the accords now affected him as well.

It all seemed doable. So much so that it was frightening. "So that's it then, you just, what... invite them to come home? Do you even know how to reach them?"
"A press conference will be held with any luck, the news will spread to where ever it is that they're so keen on hiding."

Raising a mocking eyebrow, Tony scoffed. "...and if they never show up?"

"Then we start from scratch", the man snapped before sneering and going back to a more neutral tone. "...but let's be honest, at minimum, Rogers is going to show up."

This time it was Rhodes who cut in. "What about his psycho friend?"

"We think he can be freed from his troubles.", the man grinned almost maliciously. "In fact, we've heard some rumors that he's currently back under the ice. We can only assume that Rogers has some idea of his whereabouts. We have no intention of harming him at this point in time. If he can be rehabilitated he could be an asset."

Tony leaned back in his chair and glared towards the head of the table. "I won't have him under my roof.", he replied much more calmly than he felt.

"You won't have any say in it. It may be your building but it's still ours contractually. If the soldier located, rehabilitated and deemed trustworthy, you won't be given an option.", the older man taunted.

"I thought it was my team now--", Tony spat sarcastically.

"--They are yours to command but ours to control.", the man shouted as he slammed his fists onto the table.

Raising to his feet, Tony raised his own voice to meet the other man's volume. "So we're under your control now, are we?"

"You are under our supervision!", the man spat. "We decide who comes and goes."

"My family lives there!", Tony snarled. He had no plans to allow a brainwashed soldier anywhere near his wife or his child. "That building may still be under your contract but it's also my home."
The man at the head of the table smiled and sat himself comfortably back in his chair. "We don't plan on putting your precious family at risk. Don't think we don't already know about the boy."

"Shit," Tony thought. If they had figured out Peter's identity he wasn't sure what he would do next. "What do you think you know. ", he asked glaring around the room.

"That you say he's nothing more than a family friend. ...but we know better.", another member of the committee provided.

"Know better how?", Tony growled. He didn't appreciate the vague answers not when it came to his kid's safety.

"We've seen the news, Stark. He'd clearly more to you than some random friend's kid. What was it you used to call yourself? Genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist?", yet another member supplied. Tony glared around the room waiting for any other accusations but none came. It seemed they hadn't actually figured anything out. The leader was probably only looking to get a rise out of him and he'd met the challenge more than likely confirming whatever suspicions he had about their familiarity.

"Who he is to me is none of your concern.", he finally said after a few moments of uncomfortable silence.

"We don't actually care Stark.", the older man said with a roll of his eyes. "If we did, we'd have already gone to the trouble of sorting out who exactly he is."

That was probably true and the idea was slightly terrifying. They had so many resources at their fingertips that a single slip up would reveal Peter's alter-ego before they ever had a chance to do any damage control. They were going to have to be so very careful. Eventually, he was pulled from his thoughts when the woman sitting across from him spoke. "If that's all of your questions then, I suggest we break for lunch and sign paperwork when we recommence."

"No more questions, from me but I'd rather go ahead and sign off. I want my phone back. I have calls to make.", Tony sighed out. he hadn't realized how late it was. It was already after one. He really wanted to get his phone back. These set of agreements weren't perfect by any means but he wasn't being forced to pay for anything and they were right, the building, while in his name was still under their contract with the Avenger Initiative. He'd have thought that contract would have fallen apart with the team but it seemed solid. That had been a mistake on his part. An overconfident and
foolish mistake that had led to him basically handing over his own property. He had no more say in that. Not without some drawn-out court battles. Besides, he was a billionaire. If it came down to it, he could move Pepper and Peter back into the city. Create penthouse atop the SI building, rent a large top floor apartment in Manhattan, hell, he could build a cabin just outside of the city if he wanted too... he had options and some of them sounded very appealing. Like being close to Queens.

"Is everyone else in agreement?", the head of the table boomed across the room. When no objections came he smiled. "Fine, we'll have it your way this time, Stark."

It took a solid hour to go through all of the paperwork. Tony and Rhodes both being careful to read every single element to make sure that it all added up to what had been promised. He wasn't going to make the same mistake this time. He was going to really read it and find every damn loophole. Including making sure that he and Rhody, Bruce and even Thor if he cared to join them, had the ability to back out at will with no consequences...seeing as they had nothing to prove. They were never under any sort of imprisonment and this was not to be any kind of probation for them.

Once the last line had been signed the papers were abruptly snatched out of their hands. "Congratulations, it's a team.", the man half smiled in amusement. "This meeting will be adjourned. A press conference will be scheduled for Thursday at eight in the morning at the Avengers Compound."

After that, there was a flurry of activity as everyone began to collect their things and waited for their phones to be returned. As Tony waited he sighed. He would have only one full day to go over all of this with Pepper and the kid before the press conference. Then May would be packing up and leaving on Friday. It was only Tuesday and he couldn't help but feel like the week wasn't going to get any better. Then again he hadn't slept more than a few hours in the last several days and a migraine was starting to creep up behind his eyes.

The second his phone was in his hands he excused himself from the room to call Peter. He smiled in earnest for the first time in days when the kid's voice came across the line. "Hey, Kid!"

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Peter was resting in his room at May's insistence when his phone finally started to go off. Having had it in his hand as he lay there he was able to see the picture on the display and answer it before the first ring completed. "Dad?"
"Hey, Kid!", Tony replied with as much enthusiasm as his aching head would allow. He hoped the smile that had spread across his face was clear in his voice because nothing could have possibly made him happier at that moment than hearing Peter's voice.

"I was so worried when you didn't call me last night but Pepper said that everything was fine and that you would call as soon as you could. It was hard though because she said you'd never had to keep your phone off overnight before and, and, when are you coming home." Peter rambled in response.

"This afternoon.", Tony answered easily. He would happily take nervous rambling over the tears he'd been half-expecting. "You doing good?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm fine.", Peter confirmed.

Sighing and softening his voice Tony continued to smile. "Good. I'm glad to hear it, Buddy."

There were a few seconds of silence as Peter tried to decide how to word his next question. Everyone seemed to think that this was going to be the meeting. The on that resolved everything and he really wanted to ask about that. "Is, is everything..."

"We've got a lot to talk about. I don't think it's a good idea to try and skim over it on the phone. I just called to check on you.", Tony said with assurance. It really wasn't a conversation that seemed appropriate to have over the phone. He hoped Peter didn't get the idea that he was blowing him off.

"Okay. ...but you're coming home today, right?"

"Yep. The second I can get flight clearance. I'm taking off.", Tony assured. "I'll be home for dinner. I need to give Pepper a call too, okay?"

"Oh! Yeah of course. I'm sorry Tony--", Peter gasped out. Of course, the man would want to call Pepper and here he was asking a bunch of questions. However before he could get too far into his apologies, the man cut him off with a small laugh.

"--Stop it, Kid. I wasn't trying to get rid of you. I do need to talk to Pepper, though. Do you want me to call you back?"
"Oh, no, that's okay. Maybe, maybe before you take off?" Pete replied hesitantly. He didn't want to come off as clingy but after all of the worry and the lack of decent sleep, he kind of wanted a little extra reassurance.

"Will do, Kiddo. See you soon.", Tony confirmed.

"Mm-hmm. See you soon. Love you!"

"You too, Bud.", Tony said softly before hanging up the phone. His phone call with Pepper wasn't quite as brief though he chose not to give her any details yet either. Instead, they talked about Peter and how he'd done really well up until around midnight. She explained how she wasn't sure how much sleep the boy had actually gotten and Tony admitted to his own lack of rest as well as the resulting headache. All in all nothing disastrous had happened in his absence. That was good enough for him.

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By five in the evening, Tony was walking into the front of the Compound. He'd taken a few too many pills and had something of a power nap on the plane and that seemed to have been just enough to take the edge off. He didn't even make it all the way in the door before he had both Pepper and Peter in his line of sight. It seemed that they'd gotten word of his arrival and were waiting for him to make his appearance. "Well, if it isn't my two favorite people.", he said with a small smile as he walked through the entryway. He'd expected to have his arms full of teenager by now but the boy seemed to be actively holding himself back. Assuming Pepper had told him about his headache he smiled softly. "Get over here, Kid. I feel like I haven't been hugged in days. I'm gonna start having withdrawals or something here soon."

With the invitation, Peter hesitantly looked towards Pepper who shrugged her shoulders and smiled. Smiling back at her he approached his mentor, his dad and wrapped his arms around him, tucking his head under the man's chin with a deep inhale. "I missed you.", he whispered into Tony's collar.

"I missed you too.", Tony confessed as he reciprocated the boy's affection. "I heard you didn't get much sleep last night."

"I didn't. ...I did take a little bit of a nap this morning though.", Peter replied honestly, Tony humming non-committally in response.
"Well, I for one, need a nap before dinner. My head's killing me and I'm pretty sure I haven't had a full nights sleep in days.", Tony said with a small laugh as he pulled away from Peter and approached Pepper, kissing her gently. "You'll wake me up in a couple of hours?"

"If that's what you want. I think we'd all understand if you wanted to sleep it off.", Pepper said as she wrapped her arms around his neck. Looking over her shoulder Tony could see Peter nodding in agreement.

"We'll see how I feel in a couple of hours. How about that?", Tony gave in. He really shouldn't try to make any promises. There was no telling what direction this headache was going to go at this point. Then turning towards the hall, he smiled at Peter. He hadn't realized until that moment that the kid was wearing his shirt. "You coming or what?"

Smiling back, Peter started to follow. "I'm coming.", Peter yawned, no longer able to hold back the exhaustion. With Tony home, it was much harder to keep his tired body from giving in. There was no denying that he needed more sleep.

In his room, Tony immediately noticed something was off. Something like one of his pillows being missing. Wanted to roll his eyes but knew that would only make the pain behind his eyes worsen, so instead, he just laughed. "Go get my other pillow, kid.", he called out as he began to collect his more comfortable clothing.

Peter blushed on the spot. He'd meant to return that before the man could find out he'd borrowed it. "Oh! Yeah... um, sorry?", he finally got out with a nervous laugh of his own. The idea that he'd wanted it in the first place seemed silly now.

"Don't be sorry, just hurry up. I'm tired.", he said with a smile before, snatching up one of Pepper's pillows and placing it on his side of the bed so that he could go ahead and lay down once he'd changed. He was already in the bed before Peter returned. It didn't take long for the boy to fall into the bed and press his nose into his shoulder and they were both nearly instantly asleep.

A couple of hours later when Pepper came into the room to see what Tony wanted to do about dinner, she was surprised to see that he was already awake. "Tony? Are you okay?", she asked quietly in an attempt to not wake up the teenager who was curled into his side.

"Yeah, I could use a few more pain killers but I'll live.", he sighed out as he looked towards her. "I was just thinking."
"You did sleep right?", Pepper asked in a near accusatory fashion as if he was avoiding sleep on purpose at this stage.

"Yes, Pepper.", Tony placated with a small smile. He was thankful that she cared so much. "I woke up a few minutes ago. I'll sleep some more tonight. There's a lot on my mind."

"I know.", Pepper gave in with a sigh. "I just want you to rest. I've seen you do this to yourself too many times. Please, promise me you'll rest."

"I promise.", Tony responded easily before looking at Peter who was still asleep on his shoulder. "What's the plan for dinner because this one is going to be a disaster to wake up.", he laughed. The kid was out like a light and had been since the moment he'd closed his eyes.

"May's coming here and we're going to throw something together. Probably macaroni and cheese.", she said with a twinkle in her eye.

"Yeah?", Tony said as he huffed a laugh. "That might get him up."
Chapter 61

The next day felt hectic for Tony despite the fact that he had nowhere to be that day and he was beyond thankful that migraine he'd had the previous night had eased. The morning had been filled with the phone calls he'd yet to have been able to make to the lawyers so that they could go ahead and draw up several different packets of paperwork to be ready the second a decision was made. At least that felt like an accomplishment the rest of the day's plans felt daunting. He still needed to talk to Pepper about the deal he'd been somewhat backed into, he also needed to talk to Peter about all of that to a different extent. He'd also promised the kid that as soon as he got back, he take him out to do something fun together. Not to mention everything he still needed to talk to Bruce about.

Sighing he stepped out of his office to find, Peter waiting outside the door. He'd really wanted to talk to Pepper about all of this first but it seemed that Peter was intent on cornering him about it now... or that's what he'd assumed anyway. "Hey, kid. What's up?"

Shifting slightly on his feet, Peter brought his eyes up to meet Tony's. "I was wondering if I could talk to you... and Pepper and May. When you have time. I know you just got back and everything...," he suggested quietly, allowing his words to trail off at the end.

"It's fine, Pete.", Tony replied with a smile. He hadn't been expecting that but it was okay. He'd just add it to the growing list of things he needed to do that day. Then after a few seconds thought he decided that maybe this was something that should be addressed now. The kid looked antsy and he didn't want him to feel like he was being pushed aside. A feeling he knew all too well. "Actually why don't we see if we can't get everybody together now. You eat already?"

"Yep.", Peter replied, readying himself to list off all of the items he'd consumed that morning but the request never came and he was glad that Tony had taken him at his word.

"Good deal.", Tony said with a smile before looking towards the ceiling to make a request of the AI. "FRIDAY? Can you ask May and Pepper if they could join us in the living room in the next few minutes?" When the confirmation came that both women were on their way up Tony's eyes fell back to Peter and together they walked down the hall and into the living room. It didn't take long for Pepper and May to come walking in the door. They were laughing it and it was clear that they'd been together when the message was received. When everyone was seated somewhere in the room, Tony smiled at Peter from across the couch. "Alright, Kiddo, everyone is here and accounted for. What's on your mind?"

"I've been thinking about, well, about everything we talked about the other day.", he started to stutter out. He wasn't sure why this was so hard. He'd been practicing this speech all night. "...and I think I know what I want. I already talked to May so I already know that she's, you know, okay with it and everything. I wanted to talk to everyone together though. ...to be sure."
All three adults continued to look at him expectantly and when no words immediately followed, Pepper was the first to speak up. "Honey no matter what you decide is more than okay with all of us.", she said with a gentle smile.

"Yep. Either way, we all win.", Tony added, stretching across Pepper's lap to pat Peter on the knee.

Peter gave a small smile at the encouragement and continued. "Well, I know that no matter what I pick, May will always be my Aunt May because Uncle Ben was her husband and he was my dad's brother. We're already branded together as a family and I'm really lucky to have her. After my parents died, she and uncle Ben took me in even though they probably didn't have to. In fact, they're the only caregivers I really remember. I mean, I know what my parents looked like because I have pictures and videos but I don't have any real memories of them. That used to bother me because I thought that by not remembering them, that I had replaced them. That's not true though. They weren't replaced at all. My family just changed. Uncle Ben stepped into my father's shoes and May into my mother's because that's what I needed. It took me a long time to realize that.", he said pausing for a second to smile at May. "With Uncle Ben gone, that same kind of feelings came up sometimes. I didn't want anyone to think I was forgetting him... or later, that I was trying to replace him but May reminded me that no one could replace him because he was one of a kind just like my parents were. She reminded me that there's more than enough love to go around so that no one is ever dismissed or truly forgotten..."

Once he had paused for a moment too long, May smiled encouraging him to finish. "I, I guess what I'm trying to say is... ", Peter started only to pause again but this time to get off of the couch and stand in front of Tony because this part was meant for him. "...I, I want, I want you to be my dad. I want you to adopt me and step up into My father and my uncle Ben's shoes."

"Kid...", Tony replied trying to hold back the emotion that was building in his chest. "Those, those are some mighty big shoes to fill..."

"... but don't you see? You've already filled them. This, this just makes it that much more real.", Peter hesitantly explained as he started to pace a step or two in either direction in front of where Tony and Pepper were still seated on the couch.

"You didn't let me finish, Buddy.", Tony said, standing up himself and blocking Peter's path. Then, placing his hands softly on Peter's shoulder's he smiled. "I was going to say that would be absolutely honored. You're already my kid though, you know that right?"

"Yeah. I know.", Peter breathed out in relief, allowing Tony to pull him into a hug.
"Good.", the man murmured into his ear patting him on the back. By the time they were pulling away from each other Pepper had moved down on the couch so that Peter could sit between herself and Tony.

"So, what do we do next?", Peter asked once they were all back in their seats.

Pepper easily jumped in to answer. "Next we talk to a lawyer and get the process started. There will be a lot of paperwork, probably some interviews, and maybe a home study... then eventually you go before a judge and he or she makes it final.", she casually replied. She could tell that Peter had more questions and encouraged him to ask them.

"...and the news conference or whatever? When does that have to happen?", Peter inquired with mild trepidation. That was the only part of the whole process that had him worried. At that point, everyone would know who he was, that he was essentially a Stark. The media would never leave him alone and the kids at his school would certainly be surprised, though he worried about what sort of hurtful things, Flash would come up with to taunt him about.

Pepper didn't even have to think twice about the answer. This was something she had thought through from the very moment that Tony becoming a caregiver in any capacity had been brought to the table. "Unless some sort of information leaks, not until it's all completed and official. In theory, no one should be able to get ahold of any of this information. You're still a minor."

"... and if someone does leak that information there would be hell to pay, I can assure you of that.", Tony contributed firmly.

May, who had been listening closely leaned over to get a good look at Tony. "So, it's settled then.", she said with a sly smile "We'll be officially co-parenting."

"Seems so.", Tony returned with a laugh before going back to Peter with a more serious tone. "You know Kid, if you change your mind at any point, all you have to do is say the word and we'll stop. Everything would stay the same, we would all still take care of you and you would still be my heir but--"

"--I'm not going to change my mind, Tony!", Peter cut him off slightly frantic before bringing his tone back to something much softer. "...Dad... I'm not."
"I just wanted to make sure you know that this is completely in your control, Buddy, that's all.", the man said with a smile.

By the time everyone's questions were answered and hugs had been passed all around, it was nearly time for lunch and he still hadn't had a moment with Pepper to talk to her about the accords let alone the press conference scheduled for the next morning. It looked like the first order of business as Peter's nearly adoptive father was going to be having to break his promise about spending time with him once he'd gotten back from his trip. So, as soon as he'd ordered some Pizza for them all to share he pulled the boy aside. "Look, Buddy, I know I promised you that as soon as I got back I would take you to go do something, just us--"

"--It's okay.", Peter cut him off. "I know you have a lot of things to do. We can do something together later."

"Yeah, later.", Tony replied sadly. "I need to go over a bunch of stuff with Pepper this afternoon. I can't really put it off but I'm not just avoiding you okay?"

"I know.", Peter insisted.

"I never want to break a promise to you, kid. I hate this.", Tony stressed. At the moment it seemed like he was more worried about it that Peter was. "It's just, the accords... shit. I need to talk to Pepper about it first. Just, I'm not avoiding you."

"It's really okay, Dad.", Peter once again placated. "I understand. You've spent nothing but time with me over the last two months. I knew that at some point you would have to get some work done."

Tony sighed because that wasn't the case at all. In theory, things should cool down some in another couple of days, he just needed to get through this press conference. Of course, from there, he really had no idea how things were going to go. "That's not it, Kiddo. You'll understand once I can go over this more with you. I need to--"

"--talk to Pepper first.", Peter cut him off knowingly. The man had said such multiple times already and it really wasn't bothering him. He was just happy to have him home. "I get it."

Tony stood back and held Peter at arm's length for a minute to analyze his face. He wanted to be certain the boy understood his plight. Then without warning, he pulled him into an embrace. "I love
you so much, you know that?"

"I do. I promise. ...and I love you too.", Peter easily replied.

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Shortly after lunch, Tony apologized once again to Peter and called Pepper into his office so that he could tell her everything that could be expected with the new accords and the newly re-assembled Avengers Initiative. He went over everything from the attempts to leave them out of the decision making the process to the fact that he would be taking the lead. They discussed the press conference and all of the possibilities that could come as a result of that. He'd expected Pepper to be angry, to yell, to... something but all she did was nod her head and ask several level-headed questions. In the end, Tony couldn't take the silence anymore and demanded that she say something. Anything.

"I don't know what to say. It's unexpected but it's sort of what you wanted right?", she asked hesitantly.

"Not like this.", he replied with a moan. "I wanted it to be a choice. I wanted coming back together to be something everyone wanted not to be placed in the same room together and told to kiss and make up."

Pepper gave him a small smile. "I don't think anyone expects you to kiss... though making up might be nice."

"You know what I mean, Pepper.", Tony sighed out as he leaned back in his desk chair. "I'm, I'm not so sure about Rogers. I want to trust him, I do. It's just that... It's--"

"--it's going to take time. It takes mere seconds to lose someone's trust. It could take months or even years to build it back.", Pepper assured, patting the seat on the couch beside her, hoping he would come out from behind the desk.

"I don't want to fight anymore.", he said with a shake of his head as he moved towards the couch. Once he'd seated himself there, he leaned over onto Pepper much the way Peter would lean on to him and allowed her to comfort him. Something he didn't do very often but this situation was a piping hot mess and with so much else going on he was overwhelmed.
"You don't have to fight anymore.", Pepper whispered in his ear. "Everything is going to work out and if Steve causes problems, then he gets dropped right? Back on the most wanted list?"

"I highly doubt they're going to give up on their golden boy just because we can't play nicely all the time.", Tony retorted flatly.

Pepper sighed and leaned down to kiss her fiancé on the head. "We'll just have to wait and see.", she suggested. "How much of this are you going to tell Peter?"

"All of it I guess. He deserves to know. At some point, it's going to affect him."

Pepper just nodded in agreement. She hated it that the teenager was going to have to be dragged into this mess, but she knew Tony was right. This was all going to affect him too. Maybe more so that her seeing as the accords were something he too was going to have to sign one day. The day he turned twenty it would be expected, so long as he wanted to continue being Spider-man at that point. Though everyone already knew that he would. That wasn't something he was likely to ever give up completely.

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The conversation with Peter took place later in the afternoon though it didn't go over nearly as well. He seemed agitated and frustrated throughout the explanation. His questions were much more hostile and it seemed as though he couldn't wrap his head around why Tony would want to even try to make up with Steve. "Pete, I need you to calm down. Nothing has even happened yet.", Tony implored as the boy hopped up off the couch and started to pace the room.

"...but it will happen. That's what you're saying right? You'll do the press conference and then they'll all come back!", Peter heatedly recapped, hands flying as he spoke.

Leaning back on the couch and crossing one leg over the other, Tony tried to appear more at ease than he was actually feeling. "In theory, sure. We don't know that though. We don't know who or if anyone will return."

"Why are you being so calm about this?", Peter begged, pausing for only a moment in front of where the man still casually sat.
"Calm about it? Pete, I am far from calm about it, I'm just not going to have a temper tantrum over it. Literally, nothing has happened yet.", Tony replied as gently as possible.

"I'm not having a temper tantrum!", Peter stressed. It's not like he was rolling around on the floor screaming... "I just don't get it. Why would you tell them it was okay for Captain America to come back here? He tried to kill you."

Not wanting Peter to harbor such venomous feelings towards a person who was likely to start living in their home, Tony tried to make excuses for him. "He tried to protect his friend. Neither of us was willing to listen to the other and he was... misguided.", he said through mildly gritted teeth.

"So you plan to forgive him, just like that?", Peter asked with a snap of his fingers

"I don't know? Maybe? It depends. We'd have a lot to talk about, kid.", Tony exhaustedly replied, finally rising from the couch to stop the boy in his pacing. They looked at each other for a moment as if neither of them knew exactly what to say. Then, Peter stood up taller, broadened his stance and crossed her arms over his chest.

"I won't let him hurt you.", he firmly announced.

Placing a hand on either of the kid's tense shoulder's Tony tried to force himself to smile. "It's my job to protect you remember? Besides, if Captain Spangles does try anything, Fury would be hearing about.", he promised. "Please, just relax will ya? I won't let you come to the press conference if I think you're going to end up being disruptive..."

Peter relaxed his stance but his jaw was still clenched with unsaid words. "You know I would never do that...", he said as calmly as his strain in his voice would allow.

Quirking an eyebrow, Tony tightened his grip on his kid's shoulders. "You seem pretty worked up right now..."

"I'll be fine.", Peter said defeatedly. "I promise"
With those conversations done, all that was left was to go over it all with Bruce who seemed anxious but on board. Willing to back Tony up however he could even though he seemed antsy about the idea of bringing out his big guns anytime soon. Tony had agreed that he’d never force the issue and wouldn’t allow anyone else to either. Banner as Banner was more than enough. He was smart and his expertise was necessary.

He considered trying to get in touch with Thor but decided against it. He would leave it up to Bruce. He wasn’t sure he had the patience to go over anything of this caliber with the man tonight. Instead, he went down to the lab to pretend that he could get some work done. That only lasted for so long before FRIDAY was reminding him that he had a family that would like to see him for dinner. Sighing he started towards the elevator.

By the time he made his way back up to the penthouse, he was physically and emotionally drained. Walking in the door he had to make himself smile as his future wife and child greeted him from the kitchen. Tony thanked them for making dinner and sat down to pick at his meal. No one said much. The room remained nearly silent save for the clinking of silverware and glasses hitting the table. When Peter excused himself first, Tony felt bad. The kid had told him not even twelve hours ago that he wanted him to be his dad and he couldn't even bring himself to be pleasant at the table with him.

Pepper seemed to know what he was thinking and reached over to grab his hand, assuring him that everything was fine. All he could do was nod in response, he hoped that was true. Everything had to be fine. That was the only option, really. "I'm gonna fix this. All of it. I promise.", he finally said as he looked between Pepper and Peter who were both smiling at him. It was then that it really sank in that the amount of trust they had each put in him was somewhat frightening but he supposed that was how family worked. Love and trust.
Chapter 62

The next day when better than expected. The committee had obviously wanted to talk to Bruce who was immediately backed into signing the new accords. Not that it had taken much prompting. Tony had already been over everything with him. The press conference had been short and to the point. Tony'd had no part in it other than to sit up on the stage amongst the committee members and stand when they said his name. It was an unusual experience, to say the least. Typically he was the one doing all the talking. Not that he was complaining the quicker it was over the quicker everyone could get out of his damn house and things could maybe be normal for a day or two.

The entire ordeal was over and everyone out of the building by two. Tony was thanking every deity he could come up with that he could take a moment to relax. Thought the second he dropped his tired body into the recliner in his living room, Peter appeared beside him. "D-dad?", he asked hesitantly.

"Yeah, Kid?", Tony answered with a sigh. He was so tired it was taking everything in him not to tell the kid to go away and leave him alone for five fucking minutes. He knew better than that, though. His son was a sensitive soul and having his dad say something like that to him would be hurtful at the very least and he never wanted to be the cause of Peter's sorrow.

"I was wondering...", Peter started but his voice trailed off. When Tony started visually prompting him with a wave of his hand he tried to press on. "...when, when do you think you'll know? I mean, how long do you think it will take for them to decide?"

This was quite literally the last conversation he wanted to be having right now. He didn't know the answer and frankly, he didn't want to think about it. All he wanted was some peace and quiet for five damn minutes... and maybe a nap... or a cheeseburger. Maybe all three. "I don't know, Pete. Can we have this conversation another time? I'm not up for this right now.", he admitted honestly. If it were anyone else, save for maybe Pepper he would have snapped at them but he tried to remain as even-keeled as possible for Peter's sake.

"Oh. Yeah. Sure. I'll, maybe I'll go help May pack.", Peter wavered before turning to walk away.

Help May pack? That's right, that was tomorrow, Tony thought to himself. The summer was nearly over, he only had Peter for one more week before he went back to Queens to join his aunt and apparently he was going to spend that whole time brooding and exhausted. Squeezing his eyes shut for a moment he took a deep breath. "Hey, kid? I'm going to go take a nap. You'll hang out with me after, right?", he asked before the boy could make it all the way out the door. He was pleased when Peter smiled and agreed. Knowing the kid wasn't mad or upset, he was able to allow his eyes to fall closed.
When he next awoke, it was at Pepper's gentle persuasion. "Tony... come on Tony, wake up.", she quietly urged causing his eyes to flutter open.

He felt groggy and weighed down almost to the point that his bones ached. "Yeah?", he rasped. "God, what time is it? How long was I out?"

Pepper smiled easily at him. "It's almost seven. I was thinking about ordering in."

Springing the chair up into a sitting position, he groaned. "Damn it.", he whined. "I promised the kid I'd hang out with him after I took a nap. That was hours ago. Where is he?"

"He's still with May. He's worried about you.", she replied gently.

"He eating with us or May?"

"With May. I'm sure he'll be up here shortly after, though.", she said before sitting down on the couch. "So... you want cheeseburgers right?"

Oh, she knew him so well. That was his go-to stress food for sure. "That would be great, dear. Thank you."

Raising her eyebrows she let out a light laugh. "Oh? Did the Tony Stark just thank me for something?", she teased.

Tony groaned in response. Happy had definitely been right, the kid's manners were rubbing off on him. He was going to need to get a handle on that before for accidentally said please or thank you to some member of the press. They would have a field day with that, the thought with a laugh.

Pepper had been correct and Peter reappeared in the penthouse shortly before nine with intentions of immediately seeking out his father. Feeling much more rested, Tony was eagerly greeting him from the couch cushion he was currently occupying. "Hey, Kiddo! Wanna lose to me in some Super Smash Brothers?", he asked with a smirk.
"Sure.", Peter returned with a smile. He was glad to see his dad was in a much better mood but he wasn't going to press for any more answers yet. He could wait. Right now he would focus on the warm feeling that came from the man wanting to spend time with him.

They had been quietly playing for about an hour when Tony casually turned to the side and said, "So, if we don't hear from any of them in the next two weeks, there will be another press conference." He knew it wasn't going to take that long. What he left out, what he didn't tell anyone at all, was that he planned on calling Steve himself if he didn't hear from him in the next week and a half or so. If the burner phone even worked still. He'd always kept it charged but he'd never attempted to call the singular number that it held. For all he knew, it could have been disconnected months ago.

Not knowing how to respond to that, Peter nodded his head with a small verbal 'okay' before going back to the game. Fifteen more minutes passed in silent gameplay before Tony paused the game altogether. "Pete.", he uttered with care. "I love you. You know that?"

"I do. I love you too.", Peter said back with a smile. He would never get tired of the feeling that swelled in his chest whenever Tony would say those words without prompting. Then before he could stop himself he was yawning so wide that his eyes watered. The timing was less than ideal, he hoped his dad didn't think he was crying.

"Did you sleep last night?", Tony asked with concern.

Quirking an eyebrow, Peter looked over at the man beside him. "Did you?"

"Nope.", Tony answered honestly. He hadn't. Not even for ten minutes. "...but I took a five-hour nap."

Conceding that the man had a point, Peter sighed. "I didn't sleep much last night, no."

"Hmm. You ready to go to bed now?", Tony asked, halfway expecting Peter to decline.

Faltering for only a second, Peter set the control he'd been holding onto the coffee table. "Maybe.", he casually declared. Things felt calm at the moment and he kind of wanted to take advantage of that and sleep.
Setting down his own controller, Tony nudged Peter in the side eliciting a laugh. He hadn't realized the kid was ticklish. The second Peter relaxed and uncurled himself from the protective ball he'd wound himself up into at the touch, Tony grinned. It only took him a split second to decide that this required further investigation so he quickly reached over and ran his fingers over the boy's ribs earning him more laughter combined with a slight glare. "Stop it, Tony!", Peter shouted through his laughter but Tony didn't stop. This was entirely too much fun. "Tony!... Dad!... Please!", Peter got out before the man paused to allow him to catch his breath.

"How come I never knew you were ticklish before? Is it just your ribs? Where else are you ticklish? I need to know!", Tony playfully demanded.

"Oh my God, like I would ever tell you!", Peter panted out.

Tony grinned. "So you admit that there are other places that you're ticklish?", Tony asked before grabbing at one of Peter's feet. "How about here?"

"Don't!", Peter smiled as he jerked his foot away before the man could try anything else.

"Yeah, you're right. I don't need to know.", Tony said casually before rapidly grabbing at the boy's sides again. "This is good enough!"

Curling up in a ball and resisting the urge to kick the man because he didn't want to hurt him, Peter eventually cried out, still laughing. "Stop it! I'm gonna pee!"

Not knowing if the threat was legitimate or not, Tony stilled. "Really?", he asked with a skeptical laugh but the only answer he got was the kid jumping off the couch and darting towards the bathroom. Laughing to himself, he started to clean up the controllers. As he did so, he heard a noise in the hall and thought it was Peter returning but instead it was Pepper. She was standing right at the threshold leaning in the wall with a smile across her face. Between the squeals and the slamming of the bathroom door, they must have drawn her attention.

"What on Earth are you two doing?", she asked with a laugh as she crossed her arms casually over her chest.

Tony laughed lightly but before he could really answer, Peter was coming through the door doing it for him. "He attacked me, Pepper. Attacked.", Peter replied with a nearly straight face but Tony could see the teasing twinkle in is eyes. He wondered if Pepper could see it too.
"Hmm.", she hummed in response, still smiling. "You didn't sound terribly distressed."

"I was.", Peter replied, no longer able to to keep his face straight. "I was very distressed."

Shaking her head Pepper turned towards Tony and smirked. "Leave the kid alone, you big meany.", she laughed out, shoving him lightly on the chest.

Pointing an accusatory finger in Peter's direction Tony looked at Pepper. "You're taking his side?", he called out in mock offense.

Pepper sighed. "Clearly, you were attacking him, Tony..."

Laughing fully now, Tony gestured over his shoulder to where the boy was now behind him. "Yeah? Well, he threatened to pee on me!--"

"--No!", Peter cut in, half out of embarrassment. "I said I was going to pee if you didn't stop making me laugh." The last words were grumbled as he crossed his arms over his chest. "It wasn't like that."

Realizing he'd maybe gone a touch too far Tony relented. "I'm sorry, Buddy. I didn't mean it like that. I was just messing with you."

"It's fine.", Peter sighed out. He knew it hadn't been the man's intention to fluster him. "I think I'm going to go to bed now though."

"That's probably a good idea, Peter. Good-night.", Pepper uttered softly as she gently brushed some stray hair off of Peter's forehead before turning towards her fiance. "Are you coming to bed too?"

"Not, yet.", he replied honestly. "I might go down to the lab for a little while." The extended nap he'd taken earlier was still more than fueling him.

Pepper kissed him on the cheek and started to go back towards their bedroom, Peter in her wake as
he walked towards his. "Don't stay up too late."

"I won't. ... Good-night, Pepper. Good-night, Pete.", Tony said, smiling at his family.

Peter yawned and looked back over his shoulder. "Mm-hmm. G'night Dad."

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Down in the lab, Tony started to go through all of his old designs. Pulling out and setting aside, all of the various things he'd made or planned to make for his various team members. Each blueprint came with a memory and he sat there dwelling in those thoughts for far too long and the was morning eventually sneaking up on him. "What are you doing up?", he mumbled out as Peter walked through the sliding glass doors.

"Huh?", Peter asked in confusion. He'd been asleep for over eight hours... Then it occurred to him that Tony probably had no idea what time it was. "Dad, it's seven-thirty. Were you here all night?"

"Oh.", Tony frowned. He'd definitely not meant to be in there that long. He'd meant to be in bed by four. "I guess I was in here all night. Pepper up?"

Nodding, Peter took a few steps towards where Tony sat. "Yeah, she told me to come to get you for breakfast." He tried to get a look at what kind of design Tony'd been messing with but the second he got close enough to see it, the man cut off the projection.

"Hmm. Is she upset?"

Furrowing his brows in thought, Peter tried to decide if Pepper seemed upset or not. When he finally decided that he didn't even begin to know what that would look like, he shrugged his shoulders. "I don't think so?", he replied causing Tony to sigh. He'd find out for himself in mere minutes.

Entering the suite together, Tony met eyes with Pepper. She didn't look mad. That was something. "Hey, Pepper.", he said trying to sound as cheery as possible. "It smells great in here. What did you make?"
Sighing and giving both boys a small smile, Pepper continued pulling plates out of the cabinet. "I made a quiche. Two actually. One with onions and one without."

Realizing that Pepper had done that as a complete consideration to him, Peter smiled. "Thank you, Pepper.", he said with genuine gratitude. "I can finish setting the table if you'd like." When Pepper indicated that she would appreciate that, Peter set to work allowing her to cross the room towards Tony.

"I thought you weren't going to stay up too late.", she accused through gritted teeth but the concern was there.

So she is upset, Tony thought as he tried to place his hands on her hips only to be dodged. "I wasn't intentional, Pepper. I should have had FRIDAY keeping track of the time for me.", he pressed in frustration even though he really had nothing to be frustrated about. Pepper was the one who had been basically lied to and he knew that.

"I thought this was getting better!", she quietly returned but it was strained. Peter was in the room and she didn't really want to start a fight directly in front of him. "I thought you were being responsible."

Also vastly aware of not only Peter's presence but also his enhanced hearing Tony tried not to growl. The kid could hear them, no matter how quiet they tried to be. "Can we not do this right now?", Tony rumbled, keeping his tone as even at the situation would allow him to. Every book he'd read, had said that the adults shouldn't fight in front of the kids. Not that this was really a fight. It was more like... bickering. It happened sometimes.

"You're right.", Pepper all but snapped. "We should eat. Breakfast is getting cold. ... Peter? Is the table ready?"

Shifting on his feet because that had been one of the most awkward things he'd ever had to witness, Peter strutted his response. "Um... Y-yeah. I mean, Yes, ma'am. It, it's ready."

Only then, realizing the discomfort that the short spat had caused Peter, Pepper closed her eyes and took a deep cleansing breath. "Thank you so much. Why don't you grab the juice and milk out of the fridge for us?", she said as she crossed the room and took a seat at the table. Tony followed closely behind, sitting across from her. Soon after, Peter was placing the two jugs onto the table and taking his own seat between them.
None of them knowing what to say, they sat there quietly as they ate. Sometime after his third slice, Peter could no longer take the suffocating silence. "Can you, can you please not fight?", he finally asked. His voice sounded strained and that alone got both adults attention. "I hate it."

"We weren't fighting, Kid.", Tony tried to assure but he could understand how the boy would think that. He didn't guess the kid had ever seen them disagree before.

"Sure sounded like fighting to me", Peter grumbled as he shoveled the rest of his food into his mouth and got up to take his plate to the dishwasher. "I'm going to go see if May needs any help with anything."

"Alright, Pete. We'll be down in a bit.", Tony replied with a heavy sigh. Peter nodded and walked through the door leaving the two adults alone to finish their argument out of his earshot.

Of course, there was no real argument to be had, Pepper was worried and that was fair. They bickered and talked it out and by the time they reached May's apartment for lunch, things were fine. Peter had looked at them skeptically as they walked through the door but after a few moments seemed to decide that all was well. They ate lunch together and then Happy drove May and all of her belongings back to Queens.

Peter stood out front with Tony and Pepper at his sides and waved until the car was out of sight. It felt strange seeing his aunt go but he decided it would have felt just as strange to leave with her. This new arrangement was going to take some getting used to. The happiness of having Tony's hand resting on his shoulder churned miserably with the hurt of watching May go and when he tried to swallow down the lump in his throat, Tony noticed.

"You're alright, Kid. She's fine.", he said, misinterpreting Peter's mild distress. He turned around in the man's grasp and hugged him with a deep inhale.

"I know she is. I just miss her already ...but if I'd gone with her, I would miss you so... I guess I lose either way.", he said with a humorless laugh that caused Tony's heart to sink. He hated it that he was the reason the kid felt that way. A tiny part of him felt guilty. If he'd never picked up that phone, or if he'd simply said no, they would have never grown so close and the kid wouldn't be so anguished and torn right now. At the same time, he knew if given the option, he would selfishly make the same decision all over again. The kid was his life now, his son, his family and he wouldn't want it any other way.

"Kid... It's going to get easier, I promise. We're all going to have to adjust. God, I'm going to miss you like crazy when you go back to school and start staying the weekdays with May. I won't know
what to do with myself."

"I'll call you.", Peter half laughed into the man's chest.

"Good. I expect it.", he assured as he squeezed the boy even more tightly. "Until then, how about we do something fun, yeah? We've got one week before you go back. What do you want to do, hmm?"

"I don't know. What are my choices?", Peter asked never making a single move to pull out of the man's embrace.

"Sky's the limit, kid. Literally...", Tony said with a small chuckle. "I mean if you're still not wanting to fly that is..."

Peter pulled his head off of Tony's chest so he could look at him. "You want to take me somewhere?"

"Only if you want to go somewhere. It's an option that's all.", Tony smiled with a shrug of his shoulders. The kid could ask him to fly them to the moon and he'd build a rocket.

"Maybe, maybe I just want to stay right here. I love it here, Tony. It has everything I need.", Peter sighed out in honestly. He couldn't really think of a single place he would rather be the moment.

"Oh yeah? Like a pool and big screen TV with a Nintendo hooked up to it?", the man teased but he knew what Peter meant.

"No... Like you. ... and Pepper ... and Happy and Rhody. ...and now Dr. Banner too.", Peter replied with a slight roll of his eyes before an idea dawned on him. "Hey! Can we all do something together again? Can they come over or something?"

"Sure, Bud. Whatever you want.", Tony said with a smile, clapping the boy on his back before pulling away completely.

"That sounds like a great idea, Peter.", Pepper agreed. "How about a movie night?"
"Yeah, that sounds nice.", Peter sighed out. He still had one more week of summer and he was determined not to spend it wallowing in his own despair. Tony was right, they would all get used to the new dynamics in time. He could do this.
Chapter 63

Chapter Summary

Tag adds: Loki

Peter spent the entirety of the next week looking forward to Thursday night. That was the one day that seemed to work with everyone's schedules. By some coincidence, when Peter had gone to beg Bruce to join them he found out that Thor was coming by to discuss a few things that same day. Tony had suggested that he invite Ned to spend the night as well but that didn't work out. Ned and his family were going out of town for the last few days of summer.

Of course, there was plenty to keep him busy during the wait. The weekend had been mostly spent in the pool or in the garage as they rushed to finish up the engine of the car before Peter started school back up. Then during the week Peter joined Tony in a few meetings and patrolled during others. He called May every night and was glad to hear that everything was going well for her and she was excited to listen to him chatter about the upcoming movie night.

On Thursday morning, Peter was awoken by FRIDAY announcing that Thor had arrived. Despite the early hour, Peter jumped out of bed and hurried to get dressed. When excitedly wandered into the common room, he froze for a moment. Thor wasn't alone. Bruce was there, of course, but so was Loki. Peter wondered if Tony knew but surely FRIDAY would have notified him if a third party had entered the building. Then before he could say anything or announce his presence, Tony walked back into the room from the kitchen. So he did know Loki was there, Peter thought as he started towards the four men who were scattered loosely around the room. "Um... hi?", he finally uttered as he walked into sight.

"Ah. You must be the child I was forbidden from seeing.", Loki drawled before turning towards Tony, his bored expression never changing. "Shall I close my eyes, Stark? ...or are you going to give up this charade and introduce us?"

Making a small noise of frustration, Tony glared at Peter. "What are you doing down here, kid?"

"I asked FRIDAY to tell me when Thor arrived.", Peter replied with a shrug of his shoulders.

"FRIDAY!", Tony shouted. "I asked you not to tell the kid where we were!" That had literally been the first thing he'd done when he heard that Thor had shown up with his brother in tow.
"I only told Mr. Parker that Thor had arrived as requested. I didn't reveal anyone whereabouts.", the AI smugly explained.

Peter in an attempt to defend both himself and for some reason, the AI as well, held up his hand in surrender. "I just assumed that this is where he would come first. I didn't know I wasn't supposed to be here, Tony!", he quickly reasoned.

"It's fine.", Tony grumbled under his breath as he pinched the bridge of his nose. "You're here now. Kid, Trouble. Trouble, Kid. There now you've been introduced.", Tony rapidly spoke before turning his attention to the dark-haired Asgardian. "I swear to god if you lay one finger on him--"

Cutting Tony off completely, Loki rolled his eyes. "--I assure you I have better things to do than to bring harm to your child."

Tony had no time to respond to that before Thor was stepping in. It was unclear if he was trying to end the conversation between his brother and Tony or if he'd just decided he'd been patient long enough. "Peter!", he said with a smile. "It's nice to see you again. I heard about the party you're holding this evening and I'm looking forward to it very much."

Peter perked up at the change in subject and smiled in the larger man's direction. "Is Loki coming with you?", he asked with a smile crossing his face.

"No", Tony curtly supplied as Thor simultaneously smiled a polite, 'Of course'. Tony, unable to give in to the kid's excitement about the idea and not wanting the Asgardian disaster to be left alone for any amount of time relented. "Fine but only if he sits on the opposite side of the room."

"Does no one intend to ask me what I want?", Loki spoke casually glaring between the other men in the room.

"No.", both Tony and Thor, stated at the same time.

Grinning ear to ear Peter practically vibrated with excitement. "This is going to be the greatest day of my life.", he practically squealed causing Tony to roll his eyes.
"Thanks, Kid.", Tony replied flatly. Though he wasn't taking any actual offense. The kid regularly stated that whatever exciting thing was currently happening was the greatest thing ever. "Why don't you head back upstairs. I'll be there shortly."

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As promised Tony returned within half of an hour and offered to take Peter out to Queens to patrol. He had some papers he wanted to go over that were on his desk and Pepper had asked him to come in and go over the pending Dubai contract. It seemed to be going well which would mean planning a trip soon and for the first time ever, she wanted his input on the dates and itinerary. They managed to get everything settled by three and all three of them were soon heading back to the compound.

The elevator ride up to the penthouse was filled with excited chatter as Peter filled the Tony and Pepper in on everything that had happened during his patrols. Then, the second the doors opened on the top floor he rapidly changed the subject. "What are we going to have for dinner?", he asked as he practically skipped into the living room.

Pepper looked at him with an amused smile. "Are you hungry already? It's only five.", she asked with a laugh. She knew the kid's metabolism meant that he ate all the time but it still never ceased to amaze her. He was like a bottomless pit when given the option and in their home, the option was always there.

"I'm always hungry...", Peter said with a small laugh. "...but I was only wondering. I didn't know what everyone would like. I mean, what do Asgardian's eat?" The last question had been directed at Tony and the man was quick to reply.

"I thought we would order pizza. Seemed like the easiest way to go.", he said with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Awesome.", Peter replied, even though the question of what kinds of foods Asgardian's ate went unanswered. He decided he could just ask Thor later because right now, he wanted to put in his own dinner request. "Will you get me a supreme with no onions, please, Tony?"

"Kid, I know what you like. Have I ever not gotten you a supreme with no onions?", Tony asked, raising an eyebrow in question.
"no... but it's polite to ask...", Peter returned with amusement. Manners were something that had been expected of him for as long as he could remember and it was always funny to him when Tony would seemingly question it.

Rolling his eyes, Tony used his hand to shoo the kid towards the kitchen. "Go get a snack and take a shower. You smell like a sweaty teenaged boy.", he quipped, feigning annoyance. He smiled when Peter gave him an unamused look. Peter, two months ago would have been flustered by that comment. Apologizing and scurrying towards the bathroom.

"Wow. Thanks, Dad.", Peter came back, crossing his arms over his chest and slowly walking into the kitchen, where Pepper was holding out a large muffin for him to eat.

"Yup.", Tony quickly replied as he watched Peter thank his fiance and completely devour the pastry in seconds. "Now, go. I told everyone to meet us in the common room by six and Happy is a stickler for being on time."

Peter quickly showered and dressed in some of the nicer sweat pants Tony had gotten him. He wanted to be comfortable because if he had his way they would be watching movies well into the night. Just as he was about to come out there was a knock on the door. It was Pepper reminding him of the time. Apparently, he'd spent more time in the shower that he'd thought.

Once he got to the common room, he found it to be just as exciting as he'd hoped. Bruce was in his favorite recliner and Happy was sitting happily on one of the large couches while Tony, Thor, and Rhodes milled around in the kitchen. At first, he thought that Loki hadn't come after all but then he spotted him in the corner of the room sitting atop one of the tables. When Peter locked eyes with him, the man nodded in his direction. After that everyone seemed to realize that he'd entered the room and he was being greeted from all angles.

"What movie are we watching, Peter?", Happy asked from the couch. "Tony said this was all your idea so you had to pick."

"I haven't really thought about it...", Peter lied. He'd actually been thinking a lot about it. Nothing good came to mind. It seemed like such an odd assortment of people in the room that he had no idea how to appease everyone. Pepper had just walked in the room before that and seemed to know exactly what he was thinking.

"Whatever you pick will be great, Peter.", she said with a smile as she crossed the room and gently
patted him on the back. "This is your get together."

After some careful thought, Peter looked towards Tony and hesitantly smiled. "How, how about Back to the Future or, or if you would rather, we could watch, that movie you were talking about the other day. What was it called? Um... Blade Runner, right?"

"It's your pick, kiddo.", Tony said softly. Just like Pepper, he realized that Peter was hesitating because he wanted to please everyone. "We all want to see what you choose. That's why we're here.", he added, now addressing the entire room full of waiting adults. "Right guys?"

As the chorus of agreement came from around the room Peter realized. Then with very little thought he finally selected one of his favorite movies. It may have been a childish choice but he didn't care because it felt so right at the moment. "How about Meet the Robinsons? It's a cartoon but it's really good. I promise. Then, then maybe we can watch Back to the Future or something."

Once everyone had filed into the room and found a seat, Tony looked towards the ceiling and smiled, "FRIDAY? You heard the kid. Start it up for us, dear." He'd never even heard of this one and was eager to see what it was.

As the movie started, Peter settled in a little more closely to Tony's side. It ended with perfect timing as the food arrived. Tony invited Peter down to help him retrieve it, the movie had indeed been an interesting choice. "Your first movie choice was an interesting pick."

Nodding his head, Peter smiled towards the floor. "Yeah, I hadn't seen it in a while.", Peter said with a shrug of his shoulders. "I love the way the movie ends with a huge crazy family. It's fun."

Nodding his head, Tony put a hand on the boy's shoulder as they walked towards the entrance. "I like that too.", he murmured thinking about how his own big crazy family was starting to come back together and now Peter was going to have that also.

As they ate dinner, Tony kept a close eye on Loki who hadn't said a single word since they had entered the room. He'd expected the man, who seemed to be twenty times more arrogant than himself, to turn his nose up to pizza and was surprised when he ended up eating it. He was even more surprised when he thanked him for it. "Why do you look so surprised, Stark? Do you think so little of me that you assume I have no manners at all?"

"Uh, yeah, actually.", Tony came back. "I don't get it. First, you want to take over the Earth, then
you want to help Asgard. It's like you can't pick a side. What am I supposed to assume?"

"You know those friends of your's weren't the only ones being manipulated during that time., Loki seethed before lightening his tone. "You can assume that I will honor my word. I have no intentions of causing any harm. Though, should I ever change my mind, I'll be sure to let you know."

Glaring across the table, Tony tried to sort out what the man could have meant by that but ultimately decided to let it go. He had enough technology available to him to keep tabs on the god should he feel the need but he mostly hoped Thor had him under control. As Bruce had said, he didn't seem to be a threat at the moment. Peter seemed comfortable enough around him and generally speaking the kid's sixth sense was fairly reliable.

By the end of the third movie, Peter was sound asleep on his side with his head in Tony's lap. The man wasn't surprised, it was after one and kid had gotten up pretty early, then patrolled for hours on end. He was actually kind of surprised he'd managed to stay up as long as he did. It wasn't until the credits started to roll that he realized everyone in the room was looking at him. Pausing his hand where he'd been running it through the boy's hair he rolled his eyes. "What are you all looking at?"

When everyone around the room all replied with some form of the phrase 'nothing at all' he sighed. "Yeah, well, I guess, movie night is over since the host here is knocked out. I'm sure if he was awake he would be going around the room thanking all of you for coming", Tony said before huffing a laughed and smiling at the boy in his lap "...and more than likely hugging you."

"Yeah, well, thank God he's asleep then.", Happy said with mirth as he climbed out of the chair he'd been in for the last several hours. "I need to get going anyway. I've got a security meeting in the morning and my boss is pretty serious about that kind of stuff."

After that everyone started to go their separate ways and soon there was only Pepper, Tony and a sleeping Peter left in the room. "This was fun. Tonight I mean. Having everyone here. It was almost like old times.", Tony said with a smile as he stared down at Peter's relaxed face.

"Almost huh?", Pepper asked, moving to sit on the armrest beside him.

"Yeah. Only better.", he mused looking between his future wife and his sleeping child. "I never thought I would see the day where I wanted to have a kid of my own. I mean, I had sort of played around with the idea in my head but not like this. I always thought that we might, you know, choose to have a baby together... but this, this is good too."
"It's perfect. Maybe someday a baby wouldn't be such a bad idea but for now... this is perfect."
Pepper agreed as she leaned her cheek down onto the top of Tony's head from where she sat.

They sat there together for only a few moments more before Tony decided that it was time to retire to an actual bed and began to rouse the sleeping spiderling. "Hey, kiddo, it's bedtime for spider-kids."
Tony whispered as he prodded the kid in the arm. When Peter made no real move to get up he reached his hand over to the boy's exposed side and began to run his fingers slowly over his ribs. Then, laughed when the kid's reflexes kicked in and he found his hand firmly in the kids grasp.

"Don't", Peter grumbled as he started to get up. "I'm getting up." Then yawning, he made good on his word and groggily sitting up on the edge of the couch only to rapidly fall back over onto Tony's side. "Can't I just sleep here?"

"You have a bed, kid.", Tony said with a roll of his eyes. "...but seeing as I'm not carrying you, I suppose you can sleep here if you really want to." While he'd somewhat expected the kid to take him up on that what he didn't expect was for the kid to immediately drop his head back down onto his thigh. "Hey now, wait a minute... I never said I was staying. Get off of me."

Sighing and sitting up once more, Peter relented and got to his feet. "Fine. I'll go to bed.", he said as he stretched out his arms. "Did everybody already leave?"

"Rhodey's spending the night. Thor and Loki are already gone. Thor had some business to attend to with is people.", Pepper supplied as she started towards the elevator, with Peter and Tony behind her.

"That sucks", Peter replied after a moment of thought. "I really wanted to get to talk to them more."

"Another time.", Tony said patting him on the shoulder. Peter nodded and nothing else was said until they reached Peter's bedroom door where a few brief good-nights were exchanged.

The next day no one was up before ten and the entirety of the day remained laid back and casual. Tony and Peter worked in the garage for most of it. The engine was nearly operational but the interior still needed a good bit of work. They had hoped to have it ready by the end of summer but there would be more time to work on it even once school started. After all, Peter would be there most weekends and school holidays.

It wasn't until they were all eating dinner together that any kind of real conversations started.
"Tomorrow's Saturday, kid. You only have two days until you go back to your apartment with May. Anything, in particular, you want to do? We need to sit down and order some school stuff but other than that, it's all up to you."

At those words, Peter lost his appetite. While he was ready to see Aunt May again, he wasn't ready to leave his home at the compound. Dropping his fork to the plate with a loud clank, he stared down at the food he'd hardly touched, in front of him. "I didn't think about what day it was. I, I guess, I don't know what I want to do."

Smiling gently in kids direction Tony picked up the fork and tried to put it back in Peter's hand. He could see what was going through the boy's head from where he sat. "You'll be back here next Friday. You can call or text whenever you want. ...except during class. Don't get yourself in trouble.", he said with a teasing smile as he tried to lighten the mood.

"Y-yeah. Friday. I know. Happy's going to pick me up after school. I remember Tony.", Peter replied with a nod of his head.

"Good. Now let's talk about this weekend. Rhodes is still here. We could go play paintball again or we could just hang out by the pool. Hell, if you want we can fly to Miami."

Looking up at Tony as if he'd suggested fire-walking, Peter shook his head. "No flying. Not yet."

Regretting his decision to use that activity, in particular, to drive his point home, Tony sighed. "I know, Bud. I was just making sure you understood that we can do literally anything you want... I wasn't trying to push you into anything."

"I want to stay here. Maybe do the paintball thing. That was awesome.", Peter said with a smile before adding one last request. "...and maybe, maybe one night we can all go to dinner or something." He wasn't sure when he would be seeing Pepper again. He'd overheard some discussions about another out of the country trip but didn't know the details. Besides, he kind of liked the idea of spending time with this newly forming part of his family.

Tony thought for a moment before answering. "Well, Rhodes is going to be leaving, Saturday night-

"--No.", Peter quickly cut him off as he realized the man had misunderstood. "I mean us. You and me and Pepper." He didn't miss the way Pepper's face softened at the clarification.
"Oh.", Tony said in mild surprise. "That we can definitely do, Pete. That's a great idea."
Chapter 64

The weekend passed by more quickly than Peter would have cared for it to pass. Paintball had been a blast. This time they switched teams between rounds Peter and Tony won the first round, Tony and Rhodes won the second and Tony and Happy won the third. At one point they thought it would be fun to go three one against Tony after he spent their entire lunch break bragging that no matter what team he was on, he won. That round was the most fun, especially when it was Peter who finally took him out.

Sunday was more of a lazy day spent lounging around the house. The problem was that not having anything to do, left Peter to his thoughts and that never seemed to go well. In need of a real distraction, Peter tracked Tony down sometime after lunch. "We never did any school shopping.", he announced as he walked into the man's office.

Never looking up from his tablet, Tony quickly replied, "I thought you didn't want to do it so I did it for you. May sent me the list and I had FRIDAY order it."

"Oh... well, what about clothes?", Peter asked after a moment's hesitation.

Finally, looking in the boy's direction, Tony raised his eyebrows. "Clothes? You, Peter Parker, want to shop for clothes?"

"No... I just want something to do.", Peter grumbled in reply. He wasn't sure why he'd said that when he could have simply asked the man to do literally anything else with him and probably been told yes. Before he said anything else he crossed the room and flopped down onto the couch in the corner. "It's my last day here and I'm, worried or something. It feels weird knowing that it's my last night in my room."

Gently smiling, Tony got up from the desk and sat down beside Peter on the couch. "It's not the last night in your room. You'll be back on Friday. In fact, you'll be back most Fridays."

"I know that, Tony.", Peter said with a sigh. Then after a few minutes of silence, he turned towards the man and asked, "When is Pepper leaving for her next trip? I heard you guys talking about it."

"What all did you hear?", Tony returned skeptically. He wasn't planning on telling the kid about that trip until closer to the time but if he already knew about it then he should probably make sure the kid understood what was going on.
"Just that you guys were planning a trip. I was wondering when she left.", Peter replied with a shrug of his shoulders. "Will I see her next weekend?"

"Yeah, she's not leaving until the following Monday.", Tony, readily supplied before faltering slightly. "...I'm going with her on this one. I'll be back on Thursday, she'll be back the following Sunday."

Peter scrunched up his brow and tried not to sound nearly as upset as he felt. "You're going? Why? You never go."

"Actually, kid. I go all the time.", Tony sighed out. "I just haven't this summer because I've been with you. I need to go on this trip though, it's important but you'll be in school while I'm gone and I'll still see you for the weekend." This was going just about as well as he'd expected. The kid looked worried and he really hadn't wanted to put that on him until he had to.

"You'll be back Thursday.", Peter repeated as if he were in a daze.

"Yes. I promise. I'll even pick you up from school that Friday if you want me too.", Tony said as he stood up and placed a hand on both of Peter's shoulders. When all Peter did was nod in response, Tony pulled him up off the couch and into his chest. "You can text me the whole time... well, not during class, there will still be no getting into trouble for that... but any other time, text me. ... or call me. Whatever you need alright?"

"Sure.", Peter whispered into the man's chest before taking a deep breath and pulling himself together. "So, uh, where, where are you guys going? Anywhere cool?"

Tony laughed at the dramatic change the kid's attitude and gave him a tight squeeze. "Dubai. Not that interesting...well, there's some really good architecture... I'll send you pictures though if you want."

Peter forced a smile and nodded his head. "Yeah, I want pictures. ...Do you think that one day I can go on one of those kinds of trips with you?", he asked hesitantly. He wasn't ready to fly but he kind of liked the idea of knowing that it was an option in the future. He wanted to see new places and he knew Tony would take him where ever he wanted to go at the drop of a hat but asking to come with him on a business trip sounded more practical.
"Of course, Bud. You're going to have to. Someday you'll be the one making these trips, you'll need some practice.\text{"}, Tony said with a smile and wink. "Not that I plan on you needing to do anything like that anytime soon. You've got time."

Peter sighed and pulled out of the man's arms. "I want to go to Europe. SI has some offices in Germany, right?\text{"}, Peter mused as he glanced around the room at the various books, awards, and photographs.

"Yes...\text{"}, Tony slowly drawled, unsure of what the boy was getting at. "...and there are some projects going on in France and Italy as well. As soon as you're ready we can go check those out." He wasn't clear if this had all been hypothetical to see what the answer would be or if the kid really did want to join him on a trip across the globe but he would gladly take him anywhere he wanted to go.

"Awesome.\text{"}, Peter said with a nod of his head before taking a seat in the desk chair Tony had just gotten out of. "Are you busy right now?"

Rolling his eyes and sitting on the couch, Tony looked at the boy sitting across from him. "Not too busy for you. What's up?\text{"}, he asked with a smile.

Without any hesitation, Peter looked up and Tony and smiled. "I know we're going to dinner tonight but can we do something else until then?"

"Like what?\text{"}, Tony asked wondering if the boy had something specific in mind.

"I don't know. Anything.\text{"}, Peter replied with feeling. He really didn't care what they did as long as they did something. He wanted a distraction, anything to keep his mind off of the transition.

"Do you want to spar? We haven't done that in a couple of weeks."

Peter's eyes lit up at the suggestion. They hadn't done that in a while, he hoped he wasn't terribly out of practice. "Yes! I would love that."

"Well, let's go get in our suits. I'll meet you down there in ten."
They spent the remainder of the afternoon in the gym. As usual, Tony rarely got a solid hit in but was still quick to comment on Peter's 'sloppy swing' or 'unbalanced stance'. Not that Peter minded. He was there to learn because he couldn't always rely on his spider-senses alone. Though, they sure did come in handy.

When six o'clock rolled around and FRIDAY was warning them that they should start getting ready for dinner, they were both sweaty and Tony was decidedly sore. "Come on, Kid. We don't want to keep Pepper waiting. Let's go get cleaned up."

"Yes, sir.", Peter tiredly replied as he offered the man a hand to help him to his feet.

Tony gave Peter a slight sideways glance at the 'sir' but didn't say anything. The kid had been antsy off and on all day and he'd really hoped that tiring him out would do him some good.

A quick shower and a change of clothes later both Tony and Peter were meeting up with Pepper in the garage, ready for an evening out together. They had let Peter choose where to go and therefore predictably ended up eating at the same Italian restaurant they had eaten at on his birthday. There was no dress code and it was pasta. ...and that was pretty much the entirety of Peter's criteria.

As usual, Tony had called ahead to make sure they were able to accommodate their privacy and that left them sitting in a back corner of the restaurant pretty much undisturbed. Peter wondered if that would change once it was out in the open that he was Tony's adopted son. He kind of hoped that they would still somewhat protect him from the crowds and cameras because he liked spending time with his family without all of that. As he sat soundly between the two adults, Peter smiled. This was exactly how he wanted to spend his last night at the compound for the summer.

They talked about anything and everything as they ate their way through their meals. Tony whined about how it was going to be hot in Dubai and Pepper told story after story about her different travel adventures while Peter chattered along. In fact, they sat there so long that when the check finally came, the restaurant was nearly cleared out. "Thank you so much for taking me out to eat tonight.", Peter said from the back seat as they drove home.

"You're welcome, Peter. It was really nice to get to spend some time with you, like that.", pepper smiled from the front. "Maybe we can go again when you come back next weekend." While the food there was pretty good, she mostly wanted to reiterate that Peter would, in fact, be there next weekend.

"Maybe we could go somewhere else though.", Tony quipped from beside her. "I'm thinking, steak."
Uncaring about where they ended up for dinner, Peter sighed. "I don't care where we go. I'm just glad that I get to come back."

Both adults could feel how much weight was placed in those two short sentences and smiled. "You can always come back, Buddy. Always.", Tony eventually muttered towards the rearview mirror.

That night, sleep was hard to find. Tony and Pepper sent him to bed after eleven and Peter complied even though he could feel the uneasy thoughts coursing through him. After laying there for more than an hour, tingling with anxiety and restless energy he gave up and sat at the edge of his bed. A quick check with FRIDAY revealed that while Pepper was asleep in her room, Tony was awake in his lab.

Climbing out of bed and pulling on a pair of shoes, Peter quietly exited the penthouse and started towards the lab area. Once he arrived, he faltered, unsure if he would get in trouble for being out of bed or not. He'd not had a nightmare, so there wasn't really an excuse for him to be lingering in the doorway as he was. However, before he could really make up his mind FRIDAY betrayed him by announcing his presence. "Kid? What are you doing up?"

"I couldn't sleep.", Peter replied with a shrug of his shoulders.

"It's almost one, Bud. You must be tired.", Tony suggested as his brow came together with concern. He'd sort of expected some sort of nightmare to occur that night but not sleeping at all hadn't even crossed his mind.

"You're up.", Peter quipped with a small smile.

"I'm always up.", Tony retorted with a roll of his eyes.

With his smile growing, Peter started to walk towards where Tony was seated. "That's not true and you know it."

"You're right. That's not true.", Tony conceded before getting to the actual point. He was pretty sure he already knew why his son was up but knew it was best to confirm it. "What's got your brain working so hard tonight, kid?"
Sighing, Peter dropped himself on a nearby workbench. "I'm leaving tomorrow... and school starts soon... and, well, when are we going to be meeting with the lawyer?"

"Okay... one thing at a time. I know you're worried about leaving but you'll still have me. I'm a phone call away. You know that. I'm not sure why you're worried about school but, you'll do fine. You always do. ...and the lawyer? Probably not until after we get back from Dubai. May and I have filled out the petition it's just a matter of waiting for the state to start its end of the process. My lawyer is pushing it through as fast as he can. Why are you worried about that? I'm not going to change my mind."

"I know. I'm not worried about that part.", Peter said with confidence before wavering. "I'm worried about the press conference."

Realizing that this wasn't likely to be a quick conversation, Tony saved his work and rose from the chair he'd been sitting in. Then, taking Peter gently by the shoulder, he guided him towards the couch in the corner. "What about it, kiddo?", he asked with concern. He knew Peter didn't love being the center of attention and despite the need to introduce him to the world, he had no intentions of allowing his son to be overtaken by the media.

Peter sat on the couch in the dimly lit corner of the lab and laid his head on the man's shoulder. "Well, everyone will know it's me. It won't be a secret anymore and the kids at school will know and they won't leave me alone about it. I'm sure. They already don't believe that I have an internship with SI. They say that I've never even been in the same room as you--"

"--This would solve that, though, right?", Tony interjected with confusion. They could have cleared up the whole internship doubt months ago if he'd known it was a problem. Though, he had to admit that if that was the kid's biggest concern, he could deal with that.

"Not really. I think it's just going to make it worse. Like, they're going to make up all kinds of stupid things to say about it.", Peter replied as he sat forward and rested his face in his hands. He could already hear the insults that would result.

"We'll cross that bridge when we get to it.", Tony sighed out, reaching over to grab his kid by the shoulder and pull him back into his side. "I'm not going to allow you to get picked apart. Pepper won't either. If school becomes a problem then we'll talk to them. Whatever you need to feel comfortable. You don't even have to go to that school if you don't want to. We could send you to a private school with a twenty-foot-high privacy fence if that's what you need--"

"--I like my school. My friends are there.", Peter adamantly cut in. Sure, he had some problems at
school. There were a few assholes and the classes weren't as challenging as they could be but he was happy there.

Knowing that was going to be the kid's reaction to the prospect of changing to a private school, Tony was able to respond quickly. "Then we'll do whatever we have to do to make sure you can stay there."

Feeling much more confident that the whole school situation would be kept under control Peter moved on to the next thing that was floating around in his mind. "Okay. ...We never talked about my last name..."

"What about it? That's up to you. You know that. You can change it or not change it. No one is going to pressure you into going one way or another.", Tony replied, giving the boy a gentle squeeze. He would love it if Peter took his name, of course, but that was a pride thing and this wasn't about his pride. It was about Peter and Peter didn't need to be labeled as a Stark to be his son.

Pulling his feet up on to the couch and melting further into Tony, Peter hesitated. "People will expect me to change it."

"People expect all kinds of things that they never get.", Tony said with a smirk crossing his face. "This is about you and you alone. It's your choice. Parker, Stark, Parker-Stark...", he suggested before his smirk turned into a teasing smile "...Or you could go all Asgardian and change it to Tonyson."

Peter laughed at the notion but didn't comment on it. The choice still felt overwhelming. He didn't want to offend anyone. He was born a Parker. His biological father was a Parker but he couldn't deny how nice it would feel to share a name with Tony. "I don't know what I want to do."

"You don't have to know right now. You've got plenty of time. Even after everything is final you can change it whenever you want. It's just a little bit of paperwork.", Tony assured, noting that Peter was definitely growing heavier against him. The kid was finally winding down enough to actually feel the late hour and his suspicions were confirmed when Peter let out a wide yawn.

"I'm tired.", Peter finally admitted when he couldn't bring himself to voice any of his other concerns. It wasn't that he didn't want to. He just didn't have the energy to do so.

"You should be.", Tony scoffed. It was pushing past two in the morning at this point. "Let's get you
"Mm-hmm.", Peter hummed as he allowed himself to be tugged from the couch and led towards the elevator. Nothing else was said until they reached the bedroom and Peter was laying comfortably under his blankets. Seeing that Tony was still standing there, leaning on his door frame, Peter gave him a tired smile. "I love you."

"I love you too, Pete. Sweet dreams and all that.", Tony whispered back as he began to close the door behind himself with the intention to go get into his own bed. He really needed to get some sleep. Tomorrow was likely to be just as emotional and he needed to be ready to deal with that but before the door could click shut he heard Peter speak and paused.

"Night, Dad.", Peter uttered quietly towards the still cracked door.

"Goodnight, Kid. See you in the morning.", Tony softly returned before finding his way to Pepper's side in the master bedroom.
Chapter 65

The next morning, Tony got up with Pepper. It was early and he didn't get much sleep but he'd had enough to work with. Walking out into the hallway he wasn't the least bit surprised to see that Peter's door was closed. That meant that he was still sleeping and Tony was more than willing to allow him to stay that way as long as possible. He didn't actually need him to be up until lunchtime. That was when they were going to be getting the last of the things he wanted to take with him back to Queen's packed up and in his car. Being a Monday, it would be just the two of them, Pepper had meetings to attend and would be leaving shortly after breakfast.

"Peter's not up yet?", Pepper asked as she poured herself a cup of coffee and joined Tony at the breakfast bar.

"Nope. He didn't actually get to sleep until early this morning, I figured I'd let him rest. I'll get him up before lunch if he's not up already."

"Hmm.", Pepper acknowledged as he took a sip from her mug. "What was he doing up?"

Tony who had been pouring his own cup of coffee stopped, setting the mug to the side and looked Pepper right in the eyes. "Worrying.", he sighed out.

Pepper looked back, sympathetically. It was obviously bothering Tony to see his kid so upset, especially when she knew that he would do anything possible to prevent it. "Poor, kid. This must be so hard on him."

"Yeah, he'll get through it though.", Tony replied as he began to pour his coffee into his mug. "He's a tough kid." He meant that. The kid was something else entirely. He could stop a bus with his bare hands and heal a broken rib in two days flat but more importantly, he was resilient. He'd been through so much, yet he kept a positive attitude and accepted every change, hesitantly, sure, but he accepted it none the less. There was no doubt in Tony's mind, the kid would be fine. It just might time some time and reassurance.

Pepper smiled and then as if she could read Tony's mind she said, "I have no doubt. Besides, he has a lot of people back him up."

"Exactly.", Tony agreed with a smile. Then walking around the bar, he wrapped his arms around his fiance's back. "God, I love you."
Turning slightly to allow her fiance to kiss her lightly on the cheek, Pepper hummed in agreement. "Mm-hmm. I'll see you tonight?"

"I'm going to go into the office after I drop him off.", Tony dutifully replied. He would literally be fifteen minutes from the office and wasn't exactly keen on the idea of returning to an empty penthouse. This way he could ride home with Pepper. "May as well, I'll be in the area"

Pepper nodded her head and smirked. "You want a distraction.", he surmised as she began to gather up her things.

Knowing that she already had him figured out he let the business conscientious facade fall and dropped his shoulders in defeated relief. "Please.", he begged. That was exactly what he needed.

"No problem.", Pepper offered with a small smile. "I'm sure I can find something for you do get done." Of course, by something, she meant everything. The things she'd not been sending Tony's way all summer were piling up and the R&D department was more than overdue for a walk-through.

"I've no doubt.", Tony agreed with a nod of his head before leaning in to kiss her once more before she walked out the door. "Thanks, Pepper. I'll see you later."

Once she was out the door, Tony really didn't know what to do with himself so he started going through the large box of school supplies that had been delivered. It seemed like a ridiculous amount of items especially since May said that those were just what was suggested. Apparently, the teachers could up and decide that they wanted completely different things once the semester started. As such, he gone ahead and ordered a few extras of the more basic supplies and made a point of purchasing the 'recommended' color graphing calculator. Which he sat and messed with for a good ten minutes until he heard Peter's door open. "What are you doing, Tony?", the kid asked as he walked into the room to find the man surrounded by notebook and holding the large calculator.

Tony looked up and started repacking all of the supplies into the box. "I was making sure everything was here, that's all.", he casually lied. He'd really just been killing time until the kid got up.

"You got the calculator?", Peter asked in awe when he saw it still laying on the floor. "That is so awesome. I won't have to borrow one now. Like, the school has a few in each classroom for you to borrow but you have to take turns. Having my own is going to be so much easier. Thank you."
Tony just smiled at the enthusiasm and went about to make some breakfast, well, lunch. It was already eleven and the plan was for him to drop Peter off at his apartment at two or so. That didn't give them much time to get everything together. That was Tony's fault really. He hadn't wanted to bring it up before but now he was sort of back into a corner with the time being what it was. "Hey, Kid? I need you to go ahead and start packing up the clothes that you want to take back with you. You can leave some here, that's fine but whatever you're going to need for school and whatnot you need to take with you, yeah?"

With his smile fading into a frown, Peter got up and quietly started towards his room without reply. By the time he had haphazardly thrown a little more than half of his wardrobe into the provided suitcases, Tony was calling Peter for lunch and despite the fact that he's not eaten since dinner the night before he wasn't the least bit hungry. As such, he didn't even bother to leave his room. It crossed his mind that the lack of action would get him into trouble but he didn't care. Maybe having Tony mad at him would make leaving easier.

When Peter didn't emerge from his room after several minutes, Tony called him again and yet there was no reply. "FRIDAY, what's the kid doing?"

"Sitting at his desk boss.", the AI informed.

Frowning, Tony walked down the hall. He figured he would give the boy the benefit of the doubt and assume that he's not heard him calling and was surprised to find the door locked. Knocking lightly, he called through the door, "Kid? Lunch is ready. I heated up all the leftovers. It looks like a weird buffet out here." He'd expected Peter to open the door and laugh but instead, he continued to stand alone in the hallway. "Pete? Everything alright? Why don't you unlock the door, kid."

Peter heard him calling but remained silent. He knew that at some point Tony would become concerned enough to have FRIDAY override the lock but he would deal with that when it happened. However, to his surprise, that's not what happened next. Rather than force the door open and invade his personal space, he heard Tony ask the AI if he was in distress. When the AI confirmed that he was fine, Tony simply said, "Alright, Buddy. I'll make you a plate for when you're ready. We need to leave here in about an hour, so keep that in mind, yeah?"

Sighing and walking back into the kitchen, Tony tried to decide if he'd done the right thing there. If the kid needed some space, that made sense right? ...Or maybe that was some sort of a test to see if he really cared or not. There just wasn't anything in any of the book's he'd read to prepare him with this. Then it crossed his mind that the boy had compared the arrangement as some sort of a weird divorce and wondered if he should read up on that. As he started to make a large plate to set aside for Peter, he went ahead and asked the AI to download some books onto his tablet. It wouldn't hurt to flip through it.
It only took about twenty minutes for Peter to give in and quietly exit the room. Tony hadn't gotten mad at him like he'd thought he would and if anything his willingness to give him space just made him want to be near him more. "I'm sorry.\textquotedblright, he mumbled as he wandered into the room and sat down at the breakfast bar.

"You're fine, kid. Why don't you go ahead and eat, I'll get Happy to start taking your bags to the car."

Peter nodded and started picking at the plate that Tony had thoughtfully set aside for him. It was all of his favorite foods, yet all of it seemed to turn to ash in his mouth. He'd not even eaten half before he was scraping it into the trash can, hoping that Tony wouldn't notice.

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The ride to Queens was quiet. Happy drove and Tony sat in the back with Peter who unabashedly ended up laying down in the seat with his head on the man's lap but he didn't dare fall asleep. Even when Tony began stroking his hair and running his hands gently along his exposed arm.

As soon as they arrived in front of the familiar apartment building, Happy began to carry Peter's things up, giving Tony and Peter some space. Having already decided to make it something of a clean break, Tony urged the boy to sit up and gave him a hug. "Alright, Kid, this is your stop. Tell your Aunt May that Pepper and I say hello. I'm going to go to work but I'll call you when I get home, yeah?"

Peter swallowed the lump in his throat and returned the hug. "Yeah. I'll tell her. ...and I'll talk to you tonight."

Pulling away, Tony reached over and opened up the door. "Skedaddle there, kid. I love you, alright?"

"I know. I love you too. Talk to you tonight.\textquotedblright, Peter replied as he exited the car and slowly made his way up the stairs, meeting Happy in the middle.

Seeing as the kid looked on the verge of tears, Happy wasn't sure if he should say anything to him or not but he did. "Hey, Peter, come here.\textquotedblright, he said in a soft tone that he'd never used with Peter before. "You must be a little bit glad to be home, right? You're aunts up there waiting. She seems
awfully eager to see you."

Peter nodded and took a deep breath. "I'm ready to see her too. I guess, I guess Is hold get going.", he faltered.

"I guess so.", Happy returned with a smile and reached out to give the boy's shoulder a squeeze. "...but I'll see you on Friday after school. Don't make me wait."

"I won't", Peter laughed and then darted up the stairs.

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Walking into his office, Tony was met with an abundance of messages that needed his immediate attention. However, before he could look at a single one his phone was going off in his pocket. Assuming it was Peter, Tony sighed and pulled it out to check the screen but rather than a caller ID flashing across the front, it was an urgent notification from FRIDAY. His stomach dropped as he clicked the link and read the article:

'Family Friend or Secret Child?

Tony Stark was recently spotted attending a downtown production of the Lion King with two teenaged boys. One source says that the smaller of the two boy's pictured is, in fact, Tony Starks son. The boy in question who appears to be in his mid-teens was overheard referring to the man as 'Dad' while Stark himself addressed a small group, indicating that the same boy was his, though no relation was specifically mentioned. It is still unclear if this is the same child who was referred to during the Stark Industries Press conference earlier this summer, stating that Stark was looking after the son of a family friend but witnesses believe that story may have been a cover for the truth. Does Tony Stark have a secret child? All evidence seems to be pointing in that direction. We were unable to reach Stark Industries prior to print.'

'Shit', he thought to himself as he zoomed in on the picture. It was the clearest one yet. Peter was looking down but you could see his face clearly enough that anyone who knew him would be able to tell who he was without question making is identity easy enough to figure out from there. All they would have to do is ask around. "FRIDAY, get Pepper in here now.", he uttered as he continued to stare at the article not even bothering to go through the comments. 'Of all days, why today?'; he angrily thought as he tossed his phone across the room and threw himself into the chair, slamming a fist against the desk.

Pepper came into the room looking confused. "Tony? Are you okay? FRIDAY said you were in
"I'm not in distress. I'm pissed!", Tony shouted in frustration.

"Okay. Care to fill me in?", she asked, taking a step back when a flick of Tony's wrist created a holographic projection of the offending story directly in front of her face. Sighing, she pushed the image aside to look at her fiance. "That's not so bad. In fact, that might even blow over in a few days. Why are you so upset about it?"

"The kid's already worried about people knowing who he is after the adoption and now his picture is all over the internet. Everyone is going to know his name and school starts in two days. He's a minor. Can't we sue them and make them take it down?"

"We could.", Pepper replied thoughtfully, "...but at this point, I'm sure it's spread all over the place. We can't just make it disappear from the internet."

"Sue them anyway! Make a show of it. They photographed and printed the image of a kid. My kid. If we nip this now, maybe it won't happen again.", Tony snapped back.

"Tony, it's going to happen again. It's going to happen many times, especially once we announce that he's your kid. Now, we could go ahead and schedule a press conference or we could wait and see where this goes.", Pepper calmly explained before another thought crossed her mind. "Has Peter even seen it?"

"I'm guessing he has no idea, yet. He'd be blowing up my phone.", Tony sighed out as he leaned back in his chair. While his phone wasn't in his hand he could clearly see it from across the room and FRIDAY would have told him if he was missing calls.

"Alright, I'll have the PR team keep an eye on it but you need to talk to Peter about this. Especially if you're worried about the school. We can always go talk to them--", Pepper said in an attempt to ease Tony's mind but that was going to be hard to do at the moment.

"--I know!", Tony groused before sighing again and sounding more defeated than angry. "I really didn't want this to happen. Not right now. Not like this."

"I know. It's really shit timing but we'll figure out. Talk to Peter."
"Yeah, maybe I'll call May first. I literally just dropped the kid off.", Tony practically whined as his emotions continued to swing drastically between fury and acceptance.

Walking around the desk, she gave her fiancé a reassuring pat on the shoulder. "Whatever you think is best but he needs to know what's out there."

"Yeah, yeah. I know. I'm on it.", Tony grumbled as he got up to cross the room and retrieve the discarded phone. He held it in his hand for several minutes before cursing to himself and allowing his thumb to waver between Peter and May's numbers. He eventually settled on calling May first, not eager to upset his kid on his first day back in his apartment but it rang and rang before going to voicemail. On the third successive attempt, she finally answered. "Tony? Thank God.", May said the second she picked up the phone.

"Shit. He found it already, didn't he.", Tony grumbled into the phone as if he would have expected anything less. The kid spent as much time on his phone as he did in the spider suit.

"Of course, he did.", May chastized. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Pepper think's it will blow over but... How, how's he taking it?", Tony stuttered out. He felt so inept that he was having trouble figuring out how he was supposed to be handling any of this. All he'd wanted to do was to make the kid happy. 'I should have known better.', ran through his head over and over again.

"How do you think he's taking it, Tony?", May bit back in annoyance. "What's the plan? He has school and--"

"--I know!", Tony shouted as he started to lose control of breathing, the panic now starting to take over but he managed to push it back down for the time being. He had to. He was of no use to Peter if he allowed himself to get too wrapped up in his own defects. "You think I haven't already thought about all of that? I talked to Pepper she said I needed to talk to Pete. See, what, what he want's to do or something."

"Currently?", May asked as she somewhat softened her tone. "He wants to crawl in a hole and die, his words not mine. Look, I'm--"

"--Shit.", Tony interjected with misery. "I'm sorry, May. I really am so sorry. I never meant--"
"--Would you stop apologizing! I'm not mad at you. I'm mad at the asshole that decided to print his picture on the internet.", May explained. Tony could hear the slight hesitation in her voice. They were in the same boat. Neither of them knew how to handle this because it was about Peter and they both knew he was upset.

Sighing, Tony fell onto the couch in the corner of his office. "Me too. Trust me, me too."

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Later that evening after Pepper and Tony solemnly entered the Parker's apartment. From there a long conversation ensued. Peter was clearly upset, this hadn't been the plan. He'd know it was a possibility that his picture would leak but it still came as a bit of a shock. The fact that it was Monday and school was starting on Wednesday didn't help. There was very little time to calculate the correct public reaction.

After hearing all of Peter's concerns and fears, Pepper sighed heavily. "I think that our best bet is to go ahead and put it all out there. Do the press conference. Clear the air, so to speak. We could do it tomorrow and meet with the school after. On Wednesday, Happy can follow Peter aroun--"

"--No!", Peter shouted before Pepper could finish. His eyes were wide and he wasn't sure what had come over him but he really needed to stop her right there. "I don't want anyone going to my classes with me! That, that's weird. I can call--"

"--Then he can sit outside.", Tony said cutting him off. There was no way he was going to throw his kid to the wolves and then leave him alone in a public school. "Pete, we aren't going to introduce you to the world and not take any precautions. We've discussed this. I'm not going to chance you getting hurt or--"

"--Fine!", Peter haughtily agreed as he leaned forward on the couch and ran his fingers harshly through his hair. "He can sit outside but, but I want school to be just... normal. Please." That was the one place he's wanted to remain the same at least until the adoption was complete. He'd known after that it would be like this but the first day of school was supposed to be completely normal.

"We'll do our best, Peter. I promise.", Pepper calmly spoke as she looked from Peter to May. "...and May if you have anything to add let us know. We want you to be comfortable with all of this too."
May who had been sitting back and watching the majority of the exchange leaned back in her chair. "It's a lot to take in but I trust that you two will have it under control." From there the room grew silent as Pepper excused herself to go make the necessary arrangements.

After several minutes, Tony scooted over so that he was sitting directly beside Peter. So close that their legs were brushing together. It didn't take long for Peter to lean in to get the comfort he desperately needed. "You ready for this, kid?", Tony whispered once Peter's head was on his shoulder.

"I don't know. ...but you'll be there, right?", Peter asked with trepidation.

"Right beside you, Buddy. ...and May will be in the front row. Pepper will be with us and Happy will be just across the room. Hell, if you want him to be, Rhodey, will fly in and be there too. Whatever you need, kid."
Chapter 66

Tony had told Peter good-night and left to go spend the night at Pepper's apartment sometime after eleven. Sleep didn't come easily for anyone that night but especially not Peter. He lay awake until the wee hours of the morning when he finally gave up and went out into the living room. May was already there so he simply sat down on the couch beside her and sighed. "Not sleeping, huh?", she asked him as he sat.

"Nope. Not even a little bit.", Peter said under his breath as he leaned back onto the couch and attempted to close his eyes.

"Come here.", May said with a smile as she readied herself to be leaned upon. Peter complied and she started to run her hands through his hair. "It's all going to be fine. You'll see."

Peter didn't reply. Instead, he tried to bury his worry and relax in May's grasp so that he could get at least a few hours of sleep before Tony returned in the morning.

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Later that morning Peter was startled awake by a knock on the front door. While in his sleep haze, it took him a few seconds to figure out who would be at the apartment so early in the morning, May was already getting up to answer. He could hear the murmurings from across the room but made no effort to actually listen. He could clearly hear their every word if he cared to try but he already knew it was about him. Probably May telling on him for not sleeping.

"Hey, kid.", Tony said quietly as he sat down beside him. "May says you didn't sleep much." Nodding his head, Peter tiredly laid back down on the couch but this time with his head on Tony's thigh. "I didn't think you would.", he sighed out as he laid his hand on Peter's head.

"Sorry.", Peter grumbled, still not ready to be fully awake. Mostly because he knew that once he was, his brain would start working again and he didn't want to deal with anxiety right now.

Tony smiled down at him. "Pepper's gone to get you a suit for today since your's is at the compound. I'm supposed to be going over how things are going to work today. Are you awake enough for that?", he said with a small laugh but the truth was he was just as tired, having slept just as little as Peter had.
"I'm awake.", Peter said, pulling himself into a sitting position.

"Why don't you get some breakfast or something, we can talk after that.", Tony replied, mostly to give the boy a chance to wake up a little more. When Peter momentarily left the room, Tony rose to his feet with a yawn and looked towards May. "I don't suppose you have any coffee do you?"

May laughed and started the coffee pot, not exactly energized herself. This was going to be a long day for everyone.

The second Peter was sitting at the table with his cereal, Tony started going over everything. "Pepper's going to talk first and then call me to the stage with her. Once everyone shuts up, I'm going to come to get you and bring you out to sit beside me at a table. By then, they'll already know everything and be more interested in seeing you. The idea is for you and I to answer a few questions but you don't have to say anything at all if you don't want to. If they ask you something and you don't want to say anything, I pick up the slack, you can give me a nudge or something if at any point you've had enough and want it to be over. Got it?"

"Yeah, I've got it.", Peter said between bites of cereal. "Pepper is going to talk and get you then you'll come to get me. People are going to ask us some stuff and I don't have to answer if I don't want to. ... but I probably should. It'll be expected, right?"

"I never said that.", Tony came back firmly. "I've already told you, People can expect whatever they want. It doesn't mean it'll happen. I'm more interested in you than I am whatever the nosey public and a bunch of media sharks want."

About that time, Pepper came in with two suits in tow. One for Tony and a matching one for Peter. They both rolled their eyes as Pepper explained that having them match would pull at people heartstrings and make things go that much easier. Peter wanted to interject that he wasn't seven and didn't need to play dress-up with his dad but decided that Pepper was the expert here and if she thought him dressing up like Tony would help smooth things out then he would do so without complaint. At least the one she had chosen wasn't flamboyant.

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Once the conference had started, Peter stood behind a closed door with Tony. There was a screen in the corner of the room that, showed Pepper standing on the stage addressing all of the carefully selected new outlets that had been invited to broadcast. They had decided to go ahead and talk about the fact that Peter was already Tony's heir and mention the pending adoption process but that there was no timeline, they all knew another conference would be in order when it was complete.
Though, Peter would have the option to not attend that one.

Too soon, Tony was being beckoned to the stage. Giving one last reassuring smile and a quick hug to his son, Tony made his grand entrance. When everything quieted down at his request he began the speech that Pepper had so diligently written out onto index cards. Of course, he only made it to the second one before slipping them into his pocket and going off on his own tangent. "I don't need a bunch of cards to talk about my kid", Tony grumbled before going back to his more serious posture. "Here's the thing, I wasn't ready for any of you to know any of this. This is my private life and the kid, my kid. He's a minor. That means that his guardian gets complete control over what images are published. It also might be good to keep in mind that he's my kid too. The legality of that may be pending but for all intents and purposes, he is my son and the heir to Stark Industries. That may very well be the most important thing that anyone can take away from this little shindig. Do not mess with him. Don't follow him around, don't shove microphones or cameras in his face. He didn't grow up in this mess, as I did, thank God. So just back off and let him have his childhood. I swear I will sue--"

"--Thank you, Tony, for those kind words.", Pepper interrupted as she turned off the microphone to get onto him about his 'behavior', smacking him lightly in the chest. "Now, I am sure you all have a lot of questions but before Tony introduces you all to his protege, I ask that you treat both of them with the respect they deserve. Please keep in mind that any questioned deemed too personal will be dismissed."

There was a lot of chattering in the room as Tony came to retrieve Peter who was suddenly feeling as though he weren't in his own body anymore. Pepper had only used his first name and Tony hadn't said it at all but he was about to walk out onto that stage where everyone one would be getting the first look at him as Tony's son. Maybe not officially, but it was heavily implied that even without the paperwork that is exactly what their relationship amounted to.

Taking a deep breath, Peter stood up a little taller and started to walk into the large room with Tony's arm around his shoulders. He was grateful for the gesture because he was so nervous that his stomach was doing backflips but at the same time he was trying his hardest to maintain a casual facade. This was to be a defining moment in his life and it was going to be very public. Making an effort to keep his strides even with Tony's, Peter entered the room with what he hoped was a mature posture. The room hushed the moment they came into view. Tony pulled out a chair for Peter before seating himself. Then, the room hushed as Pepper began to speak.

"Alright, they'll be taking a few questions now.", Pepper said causing a frenzy of waving hands and shouts. "You in the front, with the white hat."

"Hi, Arron here, WZZY Radio. Can you tell us how old you are?"
Tony spoke first with a smirk. "I think you all know how old I am. I'm pretty my birthday is a national holiday at this point. ...but I'm guessing you meant him." The joke was enough to make Peter laugh and that was all he'd really wanted. Turning towards him with a smile he urged Peter to answer the question.

"I'm, uh, I'm sixteen. My, my birthday was a couple of weeks ago.", he stuttered slightly as all eyes were on him.

"Next...", Pepper called out rapidly having the press at her attention. "You in the green, second row."

"Mathew Penington, NCC News Outlet, This question is for Mr. Stark. What made you choose this child in particular to be your heir and what about any other future children you may have?"

Peter was curious about that answer and looked at the man with rapt interest. "He's a smart kid. Maybe smarter than me and that's saying something. But as Pepper already mentioned, he started as my intern, then he and his aunt became close family friends. From there, the kid grew on me. He's compassionate, enthusiastic and brilliant in his own light. He's everything Stark Industries needs to succeed in the future. ...and as far as any future children, should I have any others.", he said with a slight smile in Pepper's direction. "...then things will be handled as they would be in any other family with siblings. Peter will always be my oldest, that won't change."

Pepper took a moment to smile back before calling on the next question.

"James, WNN World News. Peter, what grade are you in and what school do you attend?"

Peter flashed a glance at Tony who seemed to have already decided that that question was too much. "Classified.", he curtly replied causing the man to backtrack and change his question to 'Do your classmates know that you're in the process of being adopted by Tony Stark? Are you concerned about how that could affect your security at school?' Tony whispered in Peter's ear that he would take the second half of that question if he wanted to answer the first one himself. Peter nodded and leaned slightly towards the microphone.

"Only my, um, closest friend really knows but I guess now they all do? My best friend, though, he thinks it's pretty awesome.", Peter said, easing up the more he talked. This wasn't nearly as bad as he thought it would be.
Once he'd answered, Tony took over with seriousness. "The safety of Peter and his classmates is of utmost concern. There are multiple measures in place to make sure that he's safe and I won't hesitate to take action on anyone who attempts to disrupt that. Are we clear?--"

"--Security is definitely a priority. We'll take a few more...", Pepper replied with a mild glare in Tony's direction that made Peter smile. The next few questions were easy and Tony did most of the talking. Pepper pipped in on a few of them to keep things good-natured and soon they were taking the last question.

"Kelsie Jenkins, NYC News. This question is for Peter.", the woman said with a smile. "I think we would all love to hear some kind of story about Tony Stark being a father and what that's like. Have anything you could share with us?"

Tony rolled his eyes as Peter smiled at him as if asking for permission to answer. "Go ahead, whatever, ruin me, you little shit.", Tony teasing whispered as he crossed his arms over his chest and waited to see what the kid was going to say.

"Well...", Peter started as he tried to come up with the perfect anecdote that would encompass everything that Tony was as a dad. "...There... You know... I don't think I can come up with one story that really says everything I want to say. So, so I'll just tell you this.", Peter began, again glancing beside him to see Tony's reaction. When he got what he felt was permission to continue he smiled and turned back to the crowd. "He does everything, I would expect a dad to do. He smacks me on the back of the head when I talk with my mouth full--"

Tony's eyes shot up at that and he grabbed the microphone so that he could be heard clearly. The last thing he needed was for the world to think he was abusing the kid. "--I do no such thing. I would like that stricken from the record.", he said flatly as he watched Peter smile in peripheral, seemingly unaware of the potential damage that an accusation like that could make.

"Tony this isn't court.", Pepper replied with a laugh. Clearly, she didn't see any harm in that comment either but Tony was still slightly on edge.

"Yeah? Tell that to everyone who's out there judging me right now.", Tony quipped causing Pepper to shake her head and roll her eyes. When it seemed like he wasn't going to get any kind of response from her or anyone else he settled down and looked at Peter. "Whatever... Go on, Kid."

Still smiling, Peter took the microphone back and put it in its holder between them before moving on. "He grounds me when I screw up--"
"--Jesus, kid.--", Tony said cutting him off but this time with a smile of his own because he couldn't figure out what the kid was doing and at this point, all he could do was laugh it off. "Can't you say something nice?--"

"--I am! Give me a minute!", Peter interjected with a laugh as he held up his hands in defense. By now, the entire room was watching with awe as the two continued to banter so easily right in front of them and Peter had to wait for them to quiet down. "He also plays video games with me and is teaching me how to fix a car and takes me to work with him sometimes. Everyone else see's him as Tony Stark or Iron man but, but, not me. Not anymore. He's just... Tony. ...My dad. He takes care of me."

At those word's Tony, reached over and grabbed Peter's hand that was resting atop the table and smiled softly beside him as Peter continues to smile charismatically at the crowd, looking periodically towards Happy, May and Rhodey, who had flown in specifically for the occasion. ...and of course, that was the image that made it to the top of every resulting article. Tony sitting there looking at Peter, holding his hand and smiling stupidly as Peter grinned at the cameras.

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As they all sat together in the Parker's apartment eating lunch and surfing through all of the various stories that had popped up, Tony made a point of grousing every time that photograph showed up...and as much as Tony wanted to hate it, he didn't but he was going to keep up the front that he did for as long as humanly possible. At some point, Pepper reminded them of the time and Tony sighed. "Alright, Kid, We're going to be going to talk to your school here in a few minutes. You coming?"

"Do I need to come?", Peter asked. He was tired and didn't really care to see his principal on the last day of summer. Besides, Ned had been texting him non-stop since the night before and he really wanted to call him.

"Not really.", Tony suggested with a shrug of his shoulders.

Looking the man over skeptically, Peter squinted his eyes. "What are you going to say?", he asked.

Tony sighed and went into a quick run-through of what they planned on talking about. Mostly that he wanted the teachers to be vigilant since Peter was concerned about social repercussions and the fact that his own security would be outside the building until he decided it was no longer necessary.
He wanted Happy to be able to enter and exit the building freely as needed and of course, May wanted to update all of his contacts information.

Peter nodded along and when nothing sounded over the top he sighed in relief. "Are you going to come back after?", he asked quizzically after a moment of silent thought.

Looking at Peter with a somewhat confused expression, he snorted a laugh. "Well, yeah, we'll need to bring May back."

"No, I mean are you going to come up.", Peter explained with a roll of his eyes. Obviously, they would be bringing May back home.

"Probably not.", Tony breathed out. As much as he wanted to stick around, the kid needed a routine and they'd already messed that up enough as it was. He needed to be with May. "I've got some work I need to do at the compound and you need to get ready for school tomorrow. Which reminds me... Did you ever finish that assignment?"

"Yeah. I finished it last week.", Peter said as if he hadn't been putting it off until the last minute all summer long.

"Good.", Tony replied with a gentle smile before turning to look at the two chatting women across the room. "You two ready to head out?"

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The visit to the school had been easy enough. They agreed to everything Pepper had suggested and were more than cooperative about the whole thing. Tony said it was because Peter had just become paycheck and they were hoping to get Stark Industries to support the school. Pepper had swatted him on the arm and told him to stop being so cynical but she already knew that he was probably right. Not only was Peter going to have to deal with his peers questioning he was going to have to put up with his teachers seeing him in a completely different light.

They all talked through it a bit on the way back to the apartment and once they got there, Tony decided, last minute, to run up and say one last good-bye to Peter. It was probably selfish but he didn't care. However, once May had the door open, Tony was rolling his eyes. The boy was sound asleep on the couch with a half-eaten bowl of popcorn still balanced on his abdomen and a movie
playing in the background. Sighing, Tony strode across the room and placed the bowl on the table before brushing Peter's hair to the side. "See you later, Kid. Love you."

he whispered before bidding good-bye to May and walking quietly out the door.
Chapter Notes

Over 2,000 kudos? Holy cow! Thank you, everyone, who is still following along on m long, drawn-out, hot mess.

You guys are the best... especially since I was reading it from the beginning the other day and cringing. I can see growth in my writing as I read through it. It's weird.

Again... THANK YOU

Tag Adds: Michelle Jones, Flash Thompson, Flash Thompson being a jerk

The next morning was filled with anxiety as Peter got ready for school. He'd agonized over what to wear because he wasn't just Peter Parker anymore, he was Tony's heir and soon to be adopted son. May tried to tell him that none of that matter but he managed to fret all the same. Finally settling on a pair of the new jeans Tony had gotten him and a button-down that Pepper had insisted he needed, he exited the room.

He didn't have time to eat but he wasn't hungry anyway and just as he was about to grab his shoes, Happy was rapping on the door. "Morning, Kid. Here, Boss said to give these to you. Apparently, they delivered late or something.", Happy said as he handed over two shoes boxed. A pair of black Converse and some fairly basic, yet name brand sneakers.

"Oh. Um, thanks. I didn't know he ordered me any shoes...", Peter said as he peeked inside each of the boxes.

"I asked him to!", May called out from the kitchen where she was starting on a cup of coffee.

Happy stood there patiently for several minutes as he watched Peter slowly lace up the new sneakers before finally feeling the need to rush him. He'd expected this to be much quicker. "Hurry up, Peter. I want to get there early."

Nodding his head, Peter tried to make an effort to get the shoes on and tied at a more rapid pace but paused to look up at the man when a thought occurred to him. "You're not going in with me, right?", he asked with a sigh.
"Not unless you need me too. ...or want me too.\textsuperscript{,} Happy said honestly. Tony had tried to insist that he follow Peter through the front door but Pepper had jumped in and reminded Tony that Peter didn't want that. However, Happy did want to make sure that the kid knew it was an option, should he ever change his mind.

Cinching the last knot, Peter sat up on the couch and looked towards Happy with a small nervous sort of smile. "I want to go in by myself, please. This is going to be weird as it is."

"Fair enough but I won't be going too far. If you need anything or someone's giving you a hard time call me. If the media every shows up call me and stay inside. Keep your phone on but don't get in trouble with it. If there's ever--"

"--I know Happy. May already told me all of this.\textsuperscript{,} he abruptly replied as he stood up and headed towards the door. "I'm ready."

"Did you eat?\textsuperscript{,} Happy asked skeptically.

Peter froze by the door and looked over his shoulder. "No... Did Tony tell you to ask me that?"

Grinning, Happy picked up Peter's backpack and handed it to him. It was amazing to him how well, Tony knew this kid. "Yep. He also told me to show up with a two bacon egg and cheese McGriddles and an orange juice so if I were you, I'd hurry up. It's getting cold."

"You're the best.\textsuperscript{,} Peter said with a smile as he grabbed the bag out of Happy's hands and tossed it over one shoulder.

Having heard the exchange, May laughed from the kitchen. "Hey! I offered to make you toast!\textsuperscript{,} she shouted in mock offense.

"You're the best too, May!\textsuperscript{,} Peter defended before giving her a teasing grin and walking out the door. "... but he has McDonald's!"

Rolling her eyes, May threw a hand towel in his direction only to miss completely. "Have a good day!"
The ride to school was quick and quiet. Peter sat in the back texting Ned, who had agreed to meet him outside, and fretting about the day. Once they arrived, Happy insisted on pulling up behind the school to drop him off instead of using the actual car rider line. "Nope. Already talked to the school about it. This way if the media does ever show up they can't bother you. They aren't allowed on the private property and back here they can't even zoom in. I'll pick you up here too. Got it?"

"Yeah. Let me text Ned he's waiting for me out front.", Peter griped in defeat. He was already being treated differently and he hadn't even gotten out of the car yet.

As soon as Ned arrived, Peter hopped out and braced himself as they walked through the doors. As expected, all eyes were on him and he hated it. He tried to keep his head down and only look at the paper that had his locker assignment and class schedule on it. He and Ned had already compared notes and it turned out that they only had two classes together this semester and unfortunately neither of them was the first period. That meant parting ways when the first bell rang.

They walked together to Ned's locker first, where they ran into MJ. Neither of them had seen her since the last day of school and Peter couldn't help but smile. "Hey, MJ, how was camp?", Peter called once she came into view. It was nice to see another friendly face, even if that friendly face wasn't smiling in return.

"Empowering.", she said with squinted eyes. "I got to teach a bunch of little girls how to turn a blind eye to societies expectation on how young women should express themselves."

Peter raised an eyebrow in question, a habit he'd picked up from all of his time around Tony, as Ned asked out loud what he had already been thinking. "I thought it was a STEAM camp...?"

Breezing past Ned's question, MJ brought up one of her own. "It was. What about you, Stark Junior?", she directed towards Peter. The question seemed genuine despite the look of disinterest that was crossing her face. "Clearly, I missed some out on some sort of wildly transformative event."

"Yeah...", Peter replied with a nervous laugh as he raised his hand to rub the back of his neck. "I'll, I'll, uh, tell you at lunch, it's kind of a long story."

"... but awesome!", Ned added when MJ didn't seem to be acting nearly as enthusiastic as he felt was
necessary given the circumstances. "It's been a crazy summer, MJ, you have no idea."

Giving something of a curt nod, she looked over her shoulder. "I'm going to go check out the library. They were supposed to be recategorizing over the summer. I want to make sure they didn't screw it up.", she said before turning to walk away. Despite the seemingly abrupt end to the conversation, neither boy felt offended. That was just how MJ worked and they were used to it.

"Later!", They called out as he headed out of sight but all they got in return was a small wave of acknowledgment.

Eventually, Peter finished unpacking his bag and they were about to go track down Ned's but before they could another familiar face was coming into their personal space. Only this time it wasn't friendly. In fact, it was the one person Peter had hoped to avoid. "Hey, Penis. I would ask you how your summer was but I guess we all already know.", Flash stated as if he were bored of the news already but Peter could see the glint of jealousy in his eyes. He'd seen it before. Anytime Peter accomplished anything and was praised by a teacher, Flash had to bite at him. The taunting always came with that same look.

"Get lost Flash.", Ned quickly cut in before Peter had time to say it himself. Ned knew that dealing with Flash in the aftermath of the previous day's announcements was probably high on the 'I don't want to deal with this' list.

Flash ignored him and stepped a bit closer to Peter so that he could glower in what he felt was a much more threatening proximity but Peter was unfazed. "All I want to know is what exactly one has to do to get Tony Stark to give a shit about them.", the boy spat with mock curiosity and Peter already knew where this was going. He'd been preparing himself this yet still felt unprepared to hear it. "I mean what could he possibly see in you? ...unless--"

"--Don't! Don't say it! It's--", Peter interjected as he raised a threatening finger towards the other boy's face, causing him to smile rather than back down.

"--So it's true then. Interesting.--", Flash said as he pulled out his phone. Maybe to text someone, maybe to start a video recording. It was hard for Peter to tell when his eyes were filled with silent rage. Why did he have to run into Flash within the first thirty minutes of being inside of the school?

"--Don't you have somewhere else to be?", Ned cut in, knowing that Peter was already done with the budding argument.
"Sadly, I do.", Flash said with a sigh before once again smiling in Peter's direction. "We can pick this up where we left off later. Inquiring minds what to know what it's like to be Tony Starks personal play thing.--"

He seemed to have more to say but an administrator that Peter was pretty sure had been watching him since his arrival cut him off. "--Eugene Thompson! Shouldn't you be at your own locker?", she asked with authority. She knew that there had always been tension between them and wasn't eager to have Tony Stark coming to complain about their ability to keep his kid from being bullied on the very first day of school. The principal had called an emergency meeting early that morning to discuss Peter's newly established notoriety and how it would be handled. No one wanted to lose the possibility of Tony's monetary support to their school leaving them all seemingly eager to do their part.

"Oh, yes ma'am, I was just helping Peter out.", Flash said as he threw an arm over Peter's shoulder only to have it immediately shrugged off.

As Peter stared at Flash in a manner that was supposed to convey the message 'what the hell?' the administrator looked between them before settling his eyes on Peter. "Get done and get to class boys.", he said calmly. The quicker they all got to the classes they were supposed to be in the better.

"Yes, ma'am.", all three of them chorused together before parting ways.

The remainder of the morning was fairly uneventful. Like every other first day of school, the ability to reengage with friends and socialize in the halls was exciting while the classes were decidedly boring. Going over syllabuses, expectations and grading systems. So far it sounded like it was going to be another, less than a challenging year as they covered topics that Peter was somewhat familiar with already. What he didn't know he would pick up quickly and it tended to make classes less engaging for him than for some others. It was okay though. He loved his school. Ned and MJ were there. The halls were familiar and really, other than Flash and a few of his cronies, he got along with everyone. It was comfortable and he was glad that Tony had allowed him to stay there. The idea of being shipped off to a boarding school wasn't something he wanted to deal with... ever.

Lunch came without any major incidents and he was glad to be in the lunchroom with his friends. MJ joined them at their table and Peter was able to retell the entire story of how Tony had gone from mentor to father over the summer. Once he was done, MJ stared at him for several moments as if she were trying to figure something out before she spoke. "When Do I get to meet him?", she asked without any enthusiasm at all.

He didn't know what kind of reaction he'd expected but it wasn't that. "Why do you even want to meet him?", Peter asked in confusion.
"He's the only real name in clean energy right now. I want to ask him about his opinions on the New Green Deal.", she explained with a shrug of her shoulders. "Unless you don't want me to meet him. Is that it Parker? You don't want me to meet him?"

Slightly taken aback by the harmless accusation, Peter began to stutter. "Of course not! You can meet him... I guess. I mean, eventually. I need to talk to him about it and you know--"

"--Relax, Peter. I'm not going to hunt you down if it doesn't happen tomorrow.", MJ laughed as she took the last bite of an apple and left the table. "See ya, losers!"

"Yeah.", Peter sighed out as he finished off his own lunch and looked towards Ned. "I'm going to go ahead and clean up and go to my locker. See you later."

However, by the time, Peter made it to the appropriate hall his path was being blocked and there wasn't a teacher insight. *Great.* "Oh, look. If it isn't Stark's newest toy..."

"Leave me alone, Flash.", Peter said with as little enthusiasm as he could. He didn't want to give the other boy anything else to work with. "It's not like that and you know it."

"No, I don't know it. I just know what the media wants us to believe but come one. Why would Tony Stark give one singular shit about you? You must have done something. What was it? Send him a letter about how you're a poor little orphan or is it something more... personal. Maybe you offered your services and he took--"

"--Oh my God! Just go away. You have no idea what you're talking about.", Peter nearly shouted as he lengthened his stride to get away. Flash was usually easy enough to ignore but for some reason, that subject was getting to him worse than the rude nicknames and mild taunting. The worst part was he'd prepared himself for this. He knew Flash would come up with the worst possible spin on the story and throw it in his face. Though it struck him that he wasn't upset by the other boy's implications towards him so much so as the fact that he was basically accusing Tony of being a pedophile. He'd heard people call the man many things but that wasn't one of them and the whole idea that anyone would say something that horrible was enough to make him sick.

Following him for only a few more steps, Flash shouted once more. "The name Penis Parker has never been more fitting! Catch ya later dickwad!"
Peter managed to get through the rest of the day without having to talk to Flash again though as he was walking out the back door he saw him flip him off before making a few other rude gestures. It had Peter's blood boiling but he had to keep it together. Mostly because Happy was there and if he knew what was going on he would go tell his dad who would then lose his shit and do something embarrassing.

"How was school?", Happy asked as the back door was pulled the door open.

"Fine.", Peter replied working hard to keep the aggravation of the day out of his voice. It didn't matter though. The one-word answer alone was enough to clue Happy in that something was off.

"Fine? That's it? Just... fine.", the man asked in confusion. The kid normally talked a mile a minute. "Did something happen?"

Trying to recover quickly Peter smiled. "The first day is just kind of boring. That's all.", he said before pretending to go through his backpack.

"Hmm. Do you want some ice cream or something before I take you home?", Happy asked as more of a test than anything else. The kid never declined a snack... ever. So either Peter would agree and that would give him more time to question the boy or he would decline to confirm his concern.

"No thanks.", Peter politely replied not realizing that he had sent Happy's nerves through the roof.

"Are you sure you're okay?", the man asked skeptically as he squinted at Peter in the rear view mirror.

"I'm fine!", Peter unintentionally snapped when the line of questioning continued. He knew he shouldn't have but it slipped out. Everything Flash had said that day was weighing on him and he wondered how long it would take for the media to get the same idea. He hoped they wouldn't. They'd had a press conference for the sole purpose of being transparent.

"Cool it, kid.", Happy warned, all softness gone from his tone. "It's my job to ask you that. Your dad put me in charge of your security. That's a pretty big deal to me and I take my job seriously so if you could cut the crap that would be great. Now did something happen today or not because the Peter I know doesn't decline ice cream."
Sighing and looking out the window, Peter tried not to snap again. He knew this was Happy's job and maybe that was part of the problem. He didn't want Tony to know. "It's nothing I can't handle. You don't need to bug me about it. *I'm fine.*"

"If this is you *handling it* then I don't want to know what you not *handling it* looks like.", Happy blandly observed as he finally pulled out of the parking lot. The kid was clearly in a mood and frankly, he wasn't used to seeing it. He'd heard Tony talk about it he'd never been able to picture Peter as anything except bubbly, enthusiastic and occasionally anxious.

Deciding that he wasn't going to get out of this Peter growled towards the window. "There's this one kid and he was being a complete asshole today. You happy now?", Peter groused hoping that was enough to get the man off of his back. It was only a twenty-minute ride.

"No... because you just said the word asshole and *I'm not sure* how to handle *that*.", Happy said with a slightly teasing tone because that too was new for him. Even when Peter had slammed his fingers in the door while back he'd been very careful to avoid any word stronger than shit. "How was he being an asshole?"

"I don't want to talk about it.", Peter griped towards the window.

"Well, I do. What did he do?", Happy pressed. He was going to get to the bottom of this if it was the last thing he ever did. Even if it meant driving around the block twelve times to wait the kid out, so be it. ...but thankfully he didn't have to.

"Nothing. He runs his mouth. It's not a big deal. He's been doing it for years. I'm just a little bit--never mind."

Now that he was certain it wasn't physical, Happy felt like he could back down some but he really wished the boy would tell him what was going on. "Kid. I know you think you can handle whatever it this jerk is saying but you'll let me know if it gets to be too much right?"

"Sure, Happy.", Peter sighed out. It had been a long day and he really wished he could go to Tony's lab instead of his bedroom but that wasn't an option for a few more days.

"Alright.", Happy responded with a smile. "So... seriously, no ice cream?"
Never taking his eyes off of the scenery passing by the window, Peter gave in. Mostly because he was hungry and now that he thought about it ice cream did sound good. "Double scoop with sprinkles... on a waffle cone."

"You got it Mini-Boss.\textquotedbl", Happy laughed, glad that the boy seemed to be in a slightly better mood.

Peter looked up towards the front and half-heartedly glared. "Ugh. Don't call me that, Harold."

"Alright, never call me that again. It's weird."

"Exactly."
Chapter 68

Happy had sat with Peter at the ice cream shop for quite a while as they ate their respective treats. Peter had thought it was going to be weird at first because Happy had never done anything like that with him before. If they hung out for any amount of time, outside of a ride, Tony was with them. However, rather than being awkward it was extremely comfortable. They'd casually chatted about Peter's friends and Happy mentioned that he was going to be visiting his mother soon. It was as if they had been doing things of this nature for years on end.

Once home, May was back from her early shift at work. She was already sitting at the kitchen table waiting on him and Peter halfway wondered if Happy had texted her about his arrival. He supposed that didn't seem like a stretch considering they hand't come straight home. "Hey, Sweetie, How was your first day back?"

"It's was alright I guess. It was nice to see MJ, classes were boring and everything else was just as I expected.", Peter explained as cheerfully as he could in order to avoid interrogation. It didn't seem to work though, leading him to believe that maybe Happy had messaged her about more than their stop for ice cream.

"Hmm. Like what?", May asked already knowing that things could not have gone that perfectly given the previous day's events.

Sighing because he knew that he wasn't going to be able to get out of this conversation, Peter sat down in the chair across from her. "Like, Flash.", he grumbled under his breath, hoping to not have to elaborate too much.

"Did you tell anyone.", May asked with genuine curiosity. She was well aware that Flash had been giving Peter a hard time for several years now. Nothing serious, mostly namecalling and immature teasing. Nothing that Peter wasn't capable of walking away from. She had actually been curious if the newly announced relationship between Tony and Peter would help or exacerbate that particular problem.

"No. Why would I? I never have before. It's annoying but it's not like I can't deal with it.", Peter replied defensively. This was the second time today that he's been treated as if he were a kindergartener getting lunch box stolen. "That hasn't changed. It's all talk."

"You shouldn't have to deal with it. You have enough on your mind.", May tried to explain. She'd been begging Peter to go to the school about the other boy's behavior towards him for years now but he always refused because he could handle it.
"I'm fine.", Peter finally snapped. It had been a long day, he was tired and now everyone wanted to pat him on the head tell him to go tell the teacher that he was being picked on. He was Spider-man, not a baby.

"Okay, okay. I get it.", May placated. "There's no reason to snap at me. Just promise me that if it gets to be too much, you'll talk to someone."

"Sure.", Peter replied in the same tone of defeat as he had when Happy told him basically the same thing. Then before she had time to say anything else about it, he quickly brought his backpack up to the table and started to going through it "Here are all the things I need you to sign. Five Syllabuses and...", he said grabbing a stack of papers out of the folder he'd collected them all in before taking out a separate set of papers from another. "This one here is about the class dues and field trips, the second page is fundraisers and other PTA stuff."

May took all of the sheets and the pen that peter had handed her, glancing through them before handing one of them back. "Take a picture of that one and send it to Tony for me.", she said without pause as she began to scribble her name across the multiple class outlines.

"Why?", Peter asked incredulously. Sure, Tony was basically his dad at this point but he couldn't see why he would need to send him a copy of anything school-related. May was there for all of that. Then again he was still trying to sort out how all of this was going to be working. The adults seemed to have talked more about it together than they had with him but he supposed that he didn't really need to to know all of the nitty-gritty details all at once.

"He's going to help with some of the student dues.", May distractedly explained as she continued to skim through the multiple sheets of paper.

"Of course he is...", Peter sarcastically replied as he leaned back in the chair and crossed his arms over his chest.

That was enough to get May's attention. "Yes, Peter. Of course, he is. He signed up for this now stop it.", she mildly corrected.

Not wanting to spark an argument, Peter stood up and started to walk the short distance to his bedroom door. "I'm going to go to my room to lay down for a while."
"You're not going to patrol?", May asked out of surprise. They had all thought that once Peter was back in Queens that it would be difficult to keep him inside but so far he hadn't gone out once. It was almost concerning.

"Not right now. Maybe, maybe after dinner.", Peter sighed out before closing his door and laying down on his bed. He hadn't even had time to settle before his phone was buzzing. He found himself tempted to toss it across the room. It was Tony and as much as he missed the man and wanted to talk to him. He wasn't ready to go over the day's events yet again. Twice had been enough. When the call went to voice mail only to begin ringing again seconds after Peter reluctantly answered. "Hello?"

"Hey, Kiddo! How was school?", Tony called out into the phone not noticing the tired voice his son had answered with.

Sighing, Peter gave the man a quick run down even though he knew it was going to end with him having to once again talk about Flash. "Class was boring. I saw my friends. Flash was an asshole."

"Okay... language and what do you mean.", Tony asked slowly as he began to detect his kid's bad mood. Happy hadn't alerted him of anything so he'd thought that the day had gone off without a hitch and had called to hear Peter happily chatter about his day.

"Ugh. Just ask Happy or May I'm tired of telling this story.", Peter snippily came back causing Tony to sigh into the receiver.

"Hey...", he said softly not willing to start a fight over the phone even though at this point he was more curious than ever about what had transpired at school that day. "I was just curious about your day. You don't have to tell me anything."

Peter grunted again in frustration because he had such mixed feelings. He wanted more than anything to talk to Tony but at the same time, he didn't want to have to talk about Flash. The last thing he needed was for a third adult to tell him that he should tattle. "I want to tell you everything, I do but it wasn't the best day ever and I already had to explain it all to Happy and May and I'm just tired of it."

"Alright, so tell me all the good stuff.", Tony suggested. You could practically hear the shrug of his shoulders as he spoke. "Tell me about that girl. Was she happy to see you?"
Relieved that Tony wasn't going to force any of crappier information out of him he smiled to himself. He could talk about that. "Yeah. Yeah, she was...", he began and continued to talk about every social aspect of his day and then about the majority of the classes he'd been assigned. Tony sympathized with him about some of them being a bit boring and promised to keep him challenged in the workshop. Peter even told him about Happy taking him out for ice cream which seemed to make Tony a bit jealous... but he never actually said that, so Peter couldn't be sure.

"It sound's like your day wasn't all bad, kiddo. I'm glad you have Ned and MJ there with you.", Tony assured once the details of the day had started to dwindle.

"Me too.", Peter sighed out before remembering something. "Oh! MJ wants to meet you. Something about asking you about some environmental stuff or something. I told her I didn't know about that..."

Laughing a bit to himself because this girl sounded like trouble, Tony replied easily. "I'm always happy to meet your friends, Bud. Whenever you want her to come over is fine with me."

"Maybe in a couple of weeks. I want this weekend to be just us.", Peter said with honesty. He really did want this coming weekend to be just him and Tony working in the lab, watching movies and eating take out. Maybe have lunch with Dr. Banner... but mostly he wanted to be with his dad. It had only been twenty-four hours since he'd last seen the man and it already felt like too long.

"Sounds fair.", the man returned with a laugh. He too was already looking forward to the weekend. Then without much warning, he rapidly changed the subject. "How come you're not out spidering?"

"I'm tired. I might go out after dinner or something.", Peter explained with a shrug of his shoulders.

"In bed by eleven. School night."

"I remember", Peter assured. Both he and May had gone over all of that with him before the whole media upset. He supposed it was fair to be reminded again. That had been days ago and he hadn't actually been out since.

"Good deal. I'm going to let you get some rest. I'll talk to you later, alright?"

Not really wanting to hang up but also not having much more to say, Peter agreed. "Mm-hmm."
Bye, Dad. Love you.", he whispered into his phone as if it were a secret.

"You too, Kid.", Tony promised as the call ended leaving both of them sitting in silence.

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Once Tony had ended the call he couldn't quite get past the fact that Peter had basically admitted that he'd had a bad day and then turned around and told him to ask Happy or May about it. With a small twinge of envy, he decided to do just that and called Happy. "What's up with the kid?", he asked the moment the other man answered the phone.

"Apparently there's a kid at school who's been giving him a hard time and today was a little rough. I honestly didn't get a whole lot out of him", Happy admitted with a sigh. "He didn't talk to you about it either?"

"No. Told me he had already talked to you and May and didn't want to talk about it anymore so I let him off the hook.", Tony replied as he ran his free hand down his face. This was the part of being away from the kid he hated. He was having to rely on other people to fill him in on things that he thought Peter would have been more than willing to tell him on his own. "Did he say what the kid was doing?"

"Seriously I don't know much about it. He said the kid was being an asshole and that it was all talk. It didn't sound like he was in any sort of danger so I let it go. I did make him promise to tell someone if it got to be too much.", Happy explained knowing that Tony was going to hate the fact that he didn't have any real answers but he'd assumed Peter would have spoken to him about it himself... or May.

Tony groaned and dropped his head onto his home office desk with a loud thunk. "Thanks for driving him home Happy.", he replied in defeat. If there wasn't any more information to get from the man then he figured he might as well end the call and try May instead.

That phone call ended up being just as fruitless, other than spurring a whole new set of concerns. Peter had been reluctant to talk to Happy, been irritable when he had to rehash the same information with May and by the time Tony had gotten around to asking he'd not wanted to talk about it all. It also became clear that no one had gotten any complete answers about what was said but May seemed to be under the impression that it was the usual taunting.
After some talking further, May suggested that maybe all of them back off a little. It was only the first day of school and it didn't seem to have gone how Peter had planned. Then to add to his irritation he was bombarded with questions by three different adults. That was a situation no one had yet considered. Of course, it would be aggravating to have to retell the same crappy story over and over again. As such, they agreed to calm down about it and wait to see how Peter handled it because surely he would come to at least one of them if there was a real problem.

"Sure. If you think that's best. I'll talk to Happy about it too though if he thinks there's a serious problem he's going to press him about it. I made it his job to make sure the kid stays safe and out of trouble.", Tony eventually replied and May agreed. Happy pressuring Peter for pertinent information was one thing but he and May badgering for details was another. This was still new for all of them and they decided to take this first day as a learning curve.

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Later that evening Peter did end up going on patrol. It felt good to be out and about in the night air and he soon found himself busy with everything from petty theft to picking up some trash in the park. When things started to slow down he ended up tapping on Ned's window. "Hey, Ned! Let me in, man.", he called through the window into the dimly lit room where he could see his friend sitting at the computer with his back to him.

Ned jumped out of his chair the second he heard Peter's presence. "Dude! What are you doing here? ...and why didn't you call me when you went out? I'm supposed to your 'guy in the chair'.", Ned said with concern as Peter climbed in through the window.

"Sorry. I needed some space to think for a while. Then I had a question for you and since I was right around the corner I decided to stop by.", Peter tried explaining once he'd removed his mask and had it held tightly in his hand. Then realizing that Ned's mom was still up he lowered his voice and sat down on his friends lower bunk.

Crossing the room and locking his bedroom door, Ned lowered his voice to match Peters. The last thing they needed was to have to explain that Peter was Spider-man to his mom. "So what is it that you wanted to ask me?", he asked eagerly, assuming incorrectly that this had something to do with his friend vigilantism.

Peter took a deep breath and went into a detailed story about everything that had conspired between himself and Flash and the multiple explanations he'd had to give that afternoon. How he'd not wanted to talk to Happy at all because he didn't want anyone to know what Flash had said and then how he'd been back into a corner and had to admit to some of it only to be cornered again by May.
Then, Tony had asked him about it too, though thankfully the man had let it go quickly. "Is that how it works? I mean is it going to be like that forever now because I don't think I can take the constant interrogations."

Ned sat there thoughtfully for a few moments before answering. "I dunno. Sometimes? I mean my dad works all the time there aren't a whole lot of opportunities for him to pester me about stuff and I don't have a... whatever Happy is. ...I mean but yeah, sometimes they both ask me the same questions and I guess it could be annoying... I suppose I'm used to it.", the boy said honestly. He'd always had two parents it was how things worked. "Didn't Your uncle ever do that? Like, ask you stuff you already told your aunt?"

"Well... I suppose so", Peter replied waveringly as he tried to think back. He thought maybe he could remember that happening but he didn't remember it bothering him. "Maybe I was just being dumb about it because it was Flash and ... I really don't want anyone to know what he said."

"I suppose I could understand that but maybe you should tell someone.", Ned tried to insist. This seemed like the kind of insults that were beyond being an annoyance alone. It almost felt like harassment. "What he's saying is pretty... gross... and not cool."

"I can handle it.", Peter assured. It was frustrating and the first time the other boy had said those things, it felt like a punch to the gut but now he was ready for it. He could brace himself for it and walk away like he always did. He was going to tell Ned that but then he got a look at the numbers on the clock in the corner and almost jumped out of his skin. "Shit. It's ten-thirty. I've gotta go! See you tomorrow!"

Once he had carefully crawled back into his window he found May was in the room waiting for him. Crawling across the ceiling, he dropped carefully to the floor in front of her. "How did it go tonight?", she asked.

Peter shrugged his shoulders and sat down on the edge of his bed. "It was alright I guess. Nothing interesting. I, uh, I went to Neds for a while.", he said as his eyes flickered between the floor and Mays face.

"Oh? How is Ned? I bet he was happy to see you out and about tonight. It's been a while since you could drop in like that, huh?", May said with a smile. She wasn't at all surprised that Peter had taken the opportunity to go visit his friend's house. That was almost a given really.

"Yeah. Yeah, it has.", Peter replied with a nod of his head. The room remained quiet for a moment before Peter spoke again and this time it was to change the subject. "I'm sorry I was sort of snippy
with you this afternoon... and Tony. It wasn't a great day and, well, I was tired of talking about so I started acting like a jerk I guess."

May sighed and leaned back in the computer desk chair she'd been sitting in. "Yeah, I wasn't super happy about the attitude and neither was Tony but we talked about it--"

"--What do you mean, you talked about it?", Peter asked in horror though he wasn't sure why. It wasn't like he didn't know that all of the adults spoke to each other on a regular basis. Maybe he thought that would stop once they weren't living there altogether anymore.

May laughed. "Of course we talked, Peter. Something was going on with you and we wanted to talk about it. Now, do you want to know what we said or not?», May asked with a smirk as she waited for Peter to nod his head in the affirmative. "We decided that maybe we shouldn't all bombard you with a bunch of questions. Happy might, because he needs to keep you safe but the rest of us... we're going to try to restrain ourselves and let you come to us. I'm still asking you about your day though! ...and Tony probably will too. We love you and we want to know how you're doing, that's all."

"I know. It's just weird to have so many people asking me questions about everything and I'm sorry I was in a bad mood.", Peter muttered under his breath and May seemed to understand that because she nodded her head knowingly.

"This is new for all of us. There's a learning curve. ...and like I said, we'll try not to pester you too much.", She said with a grin as she got up and started to leave the room. "I'm going to bed. It's late. You need to be in bed too. You have school tomorrow."

As Peter hit the spider emblem on his suit he sighed. "I know, May. I'm going to shower and go to sleep. I promise." Then, after a quick evening exchange, Peter was left to get ready for bed. A quick shower and a set of pajamas later he was laying in his bed with his finger hovering over the call button beside Tony's name. After a second or two of consideration, he decided to just text but not before changing the contact name to say 'Dad'. 'I'm sorry I was a jerk today', he texted first, wanting to get that out of the way.

It didn't take long for him to get a message in return. 'I'm sorry you had a bad day. Tomorrow will be better.', the man shot back making Peter feel ever so slightly hopeful. He really wanted that to be true.

'I hope so. I'll let you know. I'm going to bed, now.', Peter typed out with a sigh. Now that he said that he kind of wished he'd called. Then again he'd already talked to the man on the phone one time
and didn't want to come off as needy.

'Alright, Kiddo. Good-night, love you to pieces.', Peter read with a smile. Tony had never said that before but he liked it.

'Love you too. Good-night.', Peter typed back quickly before setting his phone on his bedside table and closing his eyes.
Chapter 69

Despite Tony's hopeful reassurances, the next day wasn't any better. Flash was still insistent on being a dick and by Friday had already mastered avoiding the teachers who Peter had decided were tasked with keeping close tabs on him. He wanted to find that annoying but at the moment it was lessening Flash's opportunities to toss the disgusting insults his way so he chose to be grateful for the reprieve. Had it not been for the fact that it was Friday, Peter would have said that it had been the worst day as of yet. Though realizing that they were only three days into the school year wasn't great. Generally speaking, the first week should be the easiest. Knowing he would be getting to see Tony for the weekend was the only thing keeping him from completely losing it by the time the final bell rang.

Once he had dragged himself out the back door of the school and flopped himself down in the back of Happy's car, the man was already looking at him with the same concern he'd carried with him all week. "Are you sure everything's alright, Peter? I can go talk to somebody--"

"--No!", Peter tiredly interjected. "I've got it. It's fine. I'm just tired and want to go home."

Happy sighed and started to pull out of the parking lot. "You want to get a snack on the way there?", he asked with a smile.

"Yes, please!", Peter replied with a bit more enthusiasm. With the school no longer in sight, he was starting to get excited. It had only been a few days but he was so ready to be back in his room at the compound that it almost felt silly. "Can we get cheeseburgers?"

Happy laughed at the request but agreed all the same and was soon pulling into the fast food restaurant on the corner. "There you go, kid.", Happy said as he handed back the bag of food and the large drink that had been requested with another sigh. Three days of sitting outside of a high school was more exhausting than you would think it would be and he too was ready to be home. Though he held little hope that they wouldn't end up getting there without another stop. "Go easy on that cup, kid. I don't want to stop again."

Peter nodded his head but made no promises as he started to dig through the bag. By the time he had polished off the entirety of the meal, he'd been offered he was leaning his head heavily on the window. He'd hoped to fall asleep and make the ride feel a bit shorter but his own excitement was standing in his way. He ended up messing with his phone while texting Ned and MJ until they were close enough for Peter to see the turnoff that led to the compound which was good because he was ready to see his dad... and be out of the car, in general.
Someone must have told Tony that they were almost there because he was waiting out front and Peter couldn't have been any happier to see him. The second the car came to a stop he was darting towards the man who was standing there with open arms. "Hey, Kiddo! I missed you so much I don't want to let you go.", Tony said as he hugged Peter tightly.

Laughing and trying to pull away from the man's grasp without hurting him, Peter looked towards the door. "Missed you too but you're definitely going to have to let me go... at least for a minute because I need to go to the bathroom.", Peter said with a smile causing Tony to huff a laugh and relinquish his hold.

Once Peter had emerged from the lobby restroom, Tony wrapped an arm around his shoulders as they walked towards the elevator, Peter talking the whole time. Then, once they entered the suite, Peter took a deep breath because even though his apartment felt like home... this did too and he was so glad to be back. He'd felt the same way when he'd gotten back to Queens and he wondered if it would feel that way each time he shifted homes. "What do you want to do tonight?", Tony asked, pulling him from his thoughts.

"I haven't really thought about it.", Peter replied because he really hadn't. His thoughts had all been occupied by Fash for the last three days. The only thing he had really thought about weekend-wise was that he couldn't wait to see Tony.

Nodding his head in understanding, Tony walked into the suite with Peter close behind. "You have homework?"

"It's only been three days, Tony...", Peter laughed as he sat his backpack down by the door. "I only have to read. Nothing in particular or anything just read for like twenty minutes a day. It's not like they can really keep track of it though... like I could write down that I did it and they would never know the difference..."

"Uh-huh. You would know the difference and I've met you. You'd be all weird about making up an entry.", Tony said with amusement. "Why didn't you read in the car on the way here?"

"Because I was eating and talking to Ned and MJ?", Peter asked more so than stated, with a sheepish grin. It was a valid question and he had no good answer for it. Next week he would plan better.

Flicking Peter on the back of the head as he walked past, Tony picked up a packet of papers off of the counter. "Go get your book, kid. I need to go through all of this anyway."
So that was how they spent the next thirty minutes or so. Peter, laying across the couch with his nose in a book while Tony sat at the kitchen table. Peter could hear the rustling of papers and the scratching of the man's pen and it didn't take too long for his curiosity to take over. "What are all of those papers for?", he asked as he peeked over the back of the couch.

Tony glanced up from where he had his head resting on one of his hands. "Huh? Oh, it's for the lawyer. This is all of the stuff that I have to fill out for the home visit and whatnot. There's also a list of recommendations on what sort of answers I should give during the interview.", he said with a smile and a roll of his eyes. "Apparently they think I need to be coached on how to behave with the social worker." He didn't say it out loud but that was probably fair and he was sort of glad they were giving him a heads up on what kinds of things he would be asked about.

"Can I see it?", Peter asked as he got up from the couch and walked around into the kitchen. It occurred to him that the information in that packet might be a bit too personal for him to have been asking to read it but the words were already out of his mouth and he couldn't take them back now. Hesitating slightly, Tony sighed and patted the chair beside him. "These first couple of pages are just me giving permission for them to go through my tax information and for a background check. Nothing super interesting there.", he said before flipping through to the more personalized portion of the packet. "These are some of the questions the lawyer thinks that they might ask me. There are a few about my past, like this one here.", he said pointing to the second point on the list. "It's not exactly a secret that I used to be an alcoholic so that's one thing that they think could come up in the interview. They're basically suggesting that I keep the place dry until after everything is final and tell them how I'm a changed man, blah, blah, blah, blah... nothing interesting."

Peter wanted to interject that it actually sounded very interesting because the man didn't talk much about that period of his life but he didn't. "Is there a list for me? They're going to talk to me too?"

"Yeah, but you don't have anything to worry about. Just tell the truth and be yourself.", Tony explained causally. He wasn't sure how to explain that his past was sort of rocky and that his superhero gig wasn't exactly... stable? He didn't really look like the ideal candidate to adopt anyone. He wasn't worried that it wouldn't go through, though. He was actually certain that it would without a problem. He met the criteria, May was supportive and he had good lawyers. What he was worried about was having to rehash all of his past indiscretions with a total stranger. "You don't have an ugly past that they're going to be very keen on discussing."

Having never thought about it that way, Peter frowned. "I'm sorry.", he said in sympathy. All of a sudden he felt somewhat guilty for being the reason that the man was going to have to go through all of that. He knew Tony didn't really like talking about his history of alcohol abuse or well-known erratic and risky behaviors. He'd seen interviews on television where he'd abruptly walked out when that was where the line of questioning started to go. "I guess I never thought about it like that..."
"It's alright, kiddo.", Tony said already being able to guess where they boy's thoughts were heading. "This isn't going to be broadcast anywhere or anything. I can work with that. This is important."

Glancing through the page that he could see Peter laughed. "Why do they want a DNA test?"

Then, all at once it went from funny to nerve-wracking. "Wait won't they figure out that I have like... weird DNA or something? What are we going to do? Do we really have to do that?"

Reaching beside him to grab the kid's rapidly bouncing knee, Tony sighed. "They want the DNA test because of my past and there's no way to get your parents DNA. So this will prove that I'm not trying to adopt my own kid in an attempt to avoid child support or something. I guess I'm not completely sure. As far as your spideriness goes, Banner is going to take care of the test so that he can redact anything that comes up unusual. Though since they are looking for genetic markers and not full strand analysis we don't think it will be a problem.", Tony explained calmly because he had already had the exact same moment of panic.

"Is he going to take blood?", Peter asked squeamishly enough to make Tony laugh. "What? I don't like it. You have to sit still and--"

"--and you can't sit still for anything. I know...", Tony cut in as he continued to laugh.

Crossing his harms indignantly over his chest Peter glared at the man. "No. I was going to say you have to sit still and let somebody stab you with a needle. It seems sort of, I don't know... counterintuitive.", Peter faltered as he tried to explain why he didn't want to have his blood drawn. However, after those words left his mouth he realized that it sounded ridiculous, especially considering he'd been stitched up more times than he could count on one hand. "Oh, never mind. It doesn't make any sense. I just don't like it."

"It's fine, Buddy. Lean Green doesn't need your blood. Just a little bit of spit. I've already donated mine. We'll get your's tomorrow.", Tony said as his laughter died down. It had taken him by surprise that the kid would be so against having his blood taken. He himself had not only sewn the kid up but he's also basically performed surgery on him himself... without medication or sedation. Shock may have been somewhat on their side at that point he supposed. Which reminded him of his other task for the weekend. "Oh! ...and while we're with Banner, he's trying to get some drugs that work with your metabolism. He wants to run a few... needle-free... test. Figuring out exactly how fast your body burns through things is sort of crucial to the project."

"I know. I get it. Forget I said anything. It doesn't make sense.", Peter replied before rapidly changing the subject to more pleasant things. "Can we work on the car this weekend? ...and maybe get pizza for dinner?"
"Sure, kid.", Tony said as he started to place all of the papers back into their manila folder. "For now let's go do some diagnostics on your suit.", he added with a smirk. "I want to look at the code too. I need to change it so that I don't get a notification every time you take a break at Ned's house."

Rapidly lifting his head up off of the table Peter replied with more shock than was actually necessary but he'd been taken completely by surprise. He knew Tony tracked the suit by he had no idea that it was sending him any kind of location updates at random. "What? Why would you get a notification like that to begin with?"

"It pings me if you've been in one location for longer than thirty minutes. Originally it was in case you ever disabled the protocol that sent me a notification if your vitals ever tanked.", Tony explained without going into any details about the additional protocols he'd added to make sure everything was cross-referenced. It lessened the amount of tampering the kid could get his friend to do.

"Isn't that a weird thing to track? I mean, what if I was on a stakeout or something?", Peter replied skeptically.

Alarm bells started going off in Tony's head the moment Peter had finished that sentence and he found himself nearly shouting. "If you ever feel the need to stake anything out for that long then it's above your paygrade, kid. You'll report it to the police or to me because if you get in over your head--"

"--You can't help me without getting us both into trouble. I remember", Peter defensively cut in. It wasn't like he was planning to get himself or Tony into trouble. It had been hypothetical at best. Then, another thought crossed his mind. "What if you ever need me to help with something? Like, something really big and you need another person? Then what?"

Tony took a deep breath and sighed. "We will burn that bridge when we get to it.", he calmly retorted. Losing his temper wasn't going to help here and he knew it.

Rolling his eyes and crossing his arms over his chest, Peter scoffed. "I don't think that's how that saying goes."

"Oh, that is definitely how that saying goes. Even if you showed up out of nowhere I would still send you home. Burn. That. Bridge.", Tony came back easily. He didn't shout but there was a shake in his voice that gave away how much he wanted to.
All of a sudden rage was racing through him and Peter shot up out of his chair, knocking it over in the process. "You can't do that, Tony! That's not fair!"

"None of this is fair, kid!", Tony strained, rising out of his own chair to meet Peter's height. He wasn't going to sit there and allow the kid to yell down at him.

This time it was Peter's turn to try and quieten the argument as he lowered his voice and pleaded. "If the world needs me then--"

"--then they can wait until your twenty. Older if it were up to me.", he uttered with seriousness and something else that Peter couldn't quite pinpoint.

"Why though? I just want to be like you.", he replied in a tight whine that was high in his throat and made him sound younger than he'd like to have sounded.

While Peter was frustrated with his slip in maturity, it was a reminder to Tony that he wasn't dealing with another adult. This was a kid. His kid, his son. "...and I still want you to be better, Pete and for now that means that if anyone is going to be putting their life on the line, I would rather it be me. You're the future, kid and not just mine. The next generation of heroes. You can take over on the frontlines when I'm g--", he started. He was going to say 'gone' but then thought about the implications of that one little word and rapidly changed it. "--too old to do it anymore."

"I'm ready to do more now. We can do that kind of stuff together. I can help you.", Peter explained, his eyes already starting to water.

Sighing, Tony tried to reach over to place his hand on the boy's shoulder but found it quickly shrugged off. The action hurt more than he was willing to admit at the moment. "Kid, you can help me by staying alive."

Peter took a few steps back, inadvertently tripping over the chair he'd previously knocked over. Tony had reached out on instinct to help him stay balanced but again, Peter pushed him off. "Staying alive? Dad... you're the one who's over there talking about putting your life on the line!", he shouted as his voice became thick with emotion.

Not knowing how he was supposed to address this, Tony swallowed. His own eyes were starting to water and he wasn't really sure how to handle that so he forced them back. 'How did this
"conversation even get here?", he wondered and he searched within himself for the right words to say. "I'm Ironman, Pete. You know that and you know what that means. I'll always try to come home to you but... there may be a day where, where I can't. I need--", he nearly whispered in a cracked voice that he didn't recognize.

"--don't say that! This is why you need to let me help you!", Peter shouted over the man as he covering his ears petulantly and collapsing to his knees with a painful thud. He suddenly found himself unable to breathe as he choked and gasped through the tears.

The second Peter hit the floor, Tony was dropping down beside him internally cursing at himself for getting his son as worked up as he had. "Kid...Pete... come on, buddy. Breathe. I'm not going anywhere anytime soon.", he soothed through his own tears, not bothering to hide them at this point. "I'm right here and I've got you."

They stayed on the floor tangled in each other's arms long enough for Tony's back to become stiff and Peter's knees to ache. Then once both of them seemed to have calmed enough, Tony groaned and climbed to his feet, watching as Peter did the same. "well... that was... therapeutic", Tony quipped with a half-smile as he leaned onto the table with one hand and wiped his face on a napkin with the other. "Are you alright now?"

Peter nodded and held onto his stomach protectively. He couldn't remember a time where he'd cried that hard for that long and now that he thought about it he felt stupid. Nothing had happened. There was no reason for him to be so upset. "I'm sorry.", he whispered before a whine escaped him.

"You gonna be sick?", Tony asked knowingly. It had been a long time but he'd certainly had his share of panic attacks that had led to being sick and hoped that wasn't the case. When Peter shrugged his shoulders and didn't say anything, Tony led him over to the couch and handed him a bowl before going to get them both some juice and Peter a couple of snack options. "You're alright."

"I know. I'm sorry. I don't, I don't know where that came from.", Peter said as he took the bowl from Tony and continued to swallow back the bile that was trying to creep up his throat.

"Really? I think you do know.", Tony said softly once he'd returned with the necessary items to help boost the kid's blood sugar. "Kid, you've lost an awful lot and I wish I could say I was going to live forever but well, I can't make any promises beyond saying that I won't be reckless. I won't do anything that doesn't have to be done... and nothing that doesn't have to be me. I love you and I love Pepper and I'm not going to carelessly put that at risk. All I ask is that you do the same. Don't be reckless. May loves you. Pepper and I love you... hell, even Happy loves you.", he added with a laugh before dropping back down to a soft, yet very serious tone. "Don't carelessly put that at risk."
After downing the glass of juice and waiting for a moment to make sure it wasn't going to reappear, Peter set the bowl aside and leaned into Tony where he sat. With the panic having passed, he was able to react to everything the man had said with much more reason and understanding. "I won't...and when you're old... very, very old.", he emphasized with a quick side glance towards his father's face. "I'll be there to step up as the next Tony Stark."

"No, you'll be there to step up as the first Peter Parker.", Tony replied with pride. He had been somewhat worried that the conversation was going to once again degress into subjects he wasn't ready to touch again at the moment. He'd had enough feelings for one afternoon but even he could admit that shedding a few tears felt... cleansing. "The Future of Stark Industries and the fate of the world... hopefully with a good team by your side."

After a moment of quiet, Peter again looked up towards Tony and took a deep breath because he'd made a decision. "Stark. Peter Benjamin-Parker Stark.", he confidently stated causing the man beside him to squeeze him further into his side.

"I like that, Kid. I like that a lot."
Chapter 70

Between Peter's melt-down and Tony's empathetic reaction to said melt-down, neither of them felt like doing much that evening. Initially, they had gone down into the garage but it didn't take long to realize that nothing was truly getting accomplished. "You tired, kid?", Tony asked with a sigh because he was and it wasn't even from lack of sleep. It was more likely a result of the spontaneous tears that had invaded his normally rock-solid emotions earlier that evening.

Peter sighed in response and set down the ratchet he's been fidgetting with. "Yeah. Can we watch a movie or something?", he asked never taking his eyes away from the haphazardly laid out tools.

"Sounds like a plan, Kiddo.", Tony replied in relief. It had been Peter's idea to come down there in the first place but neither of them seemed to be into it and frankly, he was exhausted. "We can make it a marathon if you want."

Smiling as they walked, Peter agreed that a marathon movie night sounded perfect and by the time they had reentered the penthouse, they already had a list. "Hey, Dad? Is Pepper coming here after work?", Peter asked once they started discussing pizza.

"She's not going to be here until late... if at all. She has a business dinner tonight, some big wigs from... I don't even remember. It must have been important though. She likes you."

"How come you never go on to the business dinners. I know she's the CEO but you're the owner so shouldn't you be there?", Peter asked mostly out of curiosity. He still didn't completely understand where Tony stood within his own company but then again he was by far no expert on any kind of administrative practices.

Tony took a moment to decide how to answer that because the fact was that he typically did go to the business dinners, galas, and events. He hadn't recently because of Peter and would no doubt have to start attending them again soon. Not that it mattered too much now that Peter was in school. Usually, they were held on Weeknights. "Well, that's another thing that I do normally do. I've put it off all summer and then I didn't go this time because it was our night. You're--"

"--I'm so sorry, Tony! You should be there and I can stay here by myself and wait for you next time--"

"--Kid! You're more important than a stupid business dinner. If they desperately want me to attend
then they change the date. *...or you come with me...*", he added as the realization that everything was out in the open now sunk in. It wouldn't be the least bit odd for him to bring Peter along to those kinds of meetings now. It was common knowledge now that he was practically Tony's son and the heir apparent to the company.

Peter sat their quietly for a moment before speaking again. For some reason, the idea that he could join Pepper and Tony at any kind of a dinner engagement was both exciting and daunting at the same time. "I can do that?", he finally asked in mild confusion.

"Uh, yeah.", Tony laughed. "You're my kid. Feeding you is sort of expected of me.", he quipped with a wink. "Besides, you're good company."

"That, that might be interesting.", Peter unsurely replied.

Scoffing, Tony leaned back on the couch. "Interesting is not the word I would use but it would be a new experience for you. The food is always good. Gotten impress everyone and all that, so that's sort of a bonus."

It was right about then that they were notified that the pizza had arrived and the subject was left forgotten in favor of movies. It was nearing one when Peter's eyes started to drift closed. "Is Pepper coming?", Peter asked once he'd forced himself awake for the third time.

"Were you waiting up for her, kid? She texted me a little while ago and said she was going to go to her apartment for the night and come here in the morning.", Tony replied sounding almost guilty. It hadn't crossed his mind that Peter might be forcing himself to stay up for that but as it were, that wasn't really the case.

Sheepishly ducking his head so that Tony couldn't see him blush, Peter replied, "Not especially? I mostly wanted to know if, um, if I could maybe... maybe sleep in your bed tonight. ...If she's not coming."

Rolling his eyes and patting Peter's shoulder, Tony chuckled lightly. He wasn't sure how he'd ended up with the one teenager in the entire universe who still liked to sleep in his dad's bed but he was fine with it. Then again, he supposed he'd started it. "Sure, Kid. You ready to go now?"

Nodding his head and stretching his limbs, Peter rose from the couch and held out a hand to help Tony to his feet. "Yeah, it's been a long day... week... maybe more.", he said through a yawn and
Tony could completely sympathize with that. It had been a very long week. ...or more.

After a quick stop in his own room to change into pajamas and brush his teeth, Peter climbed into Tony's large bed not even bothering to pretend like he was going to stay on his assigned side. Once, they were both tucked under the covers, Tony lowered the lights and resigned himself to sleep. That is until Peter settled himself comfortably on his shoulder and quietly requested his attention. It seemed that there was still something on the boy's mind and despite the fact that sleep was calling him, Tony was ready to listen.

"I didn't mean to make you cry.", Peter whispered into Tony's collar bone.

"You didn't make me cry, Buddy. I just wanted to make you feel better and I couldn't seem to figure out how to do that. I guess it made me sad. Knowing that there was something I could never completely ease your mind about.", Tony said with a sigh. He still wasn't good at these kinds of talks but having the benefit of low lighting seemed to help both of them open up more. These crepuscular discussions were becoming a habit. A good kind of habit.

Peter huffed a small laugh at the man's explanation. "So... I did make you cry."

Realizing that his explanation hadn't exactly diverted the blame, Tony sighed. "You didn't make me... it just... happened.", he replied almost grumpily as he wasn't exactly enjoying a conversation revolving around his own feelings. It was much easier to talk Peter through his.

"Do you not want to talk about it?", Peter whispered, having picked up on his father's discomfort.

"It's not that I don't want to, kid. It's not easy, that's all.", Tony admitted. "...and to be fair, I made you cry first."

"You didn't make me cry. It just happened.", Peter cheekily replied. I never failed to amuse him when he was able to turn Tony's own words around on him. One of these days it was bound to get him in trouble but he couldn't help it.

Unsure as to whether he should reprimand or be proud of the kid for his quick snark, Tony laughed. "You're awfully sassy for a sixteen-year-old who's cuddling his dad in the middle of the night...", he said with a smile before reaching over to run his hand through the boy's hair.
"Maybe", Peter replied with a contented hum. He knew that sleeping in Tony's bed wasn't something that he should be doing at his age but it was comfortable and the man allowed it so he took advantage. Besides, between the horrible start to the school year and having a breakdown turned panic attack earlier that evening he felt like he deserved the assuagement.

"Go to sleep, you brat.", Tony teased before tucking his hand back behind his head. "I love you."

"Love you too, dad. G' night", Peter slurred, already allowing the drowsiness to take over.

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With the new day came calm and working side by side was easy again. They bantered and quipped back and forth across the lab as Tony made the promised adjustments to the Spider-suit and Peter worked diligently on his web-fluid as he tried to create a new, longer-lasting version. Just in case the occasion ever arose where he needed it. If nothing else it was a welcome challenge.

By lunch, Pepper was there and Peter embraced her with a smile. "How was school?", she asked causing Tony to cringe. He hadn't mentioned the conversation he's had with May.

"It was fine.", Peter replied easily but Tony could hear the hesitation. He was lying and he didn't know whether to call him out on it or not. He didn't like the idea of his kid lying to his fiance but at the same time, he understood that he was probably still tired of that question. According to both Happy and May, the start of the school year had been rocky at best.

Either Pepper couldn't tell that Peter was being less than truthful or she decided to let it go. Tony wasn't sure but they could talk about it later. "How about I take my two favorite people out for dinner tonight?", he asked once it seemed like an appropriate time to cut in.

"That would be awesome, Dad!", Peter called out with excitement. He loved going out to eat with the two of them. He and May would go out sometimes but it was the small and inexpensive places. Tony took him slightly more expensive places sometimes uncomfortably expensive places... but not often. The man was usually really good about respecting his comfort zone, even if it was clear that he was trying to expand it. Peter supposed that was necessary if he was going to become a Stark. "Where are we going?"

Tony shrugged his shoulders. "I hadn't thought that far out. Any suggestions?", Tony asked in
consideration. He wasn't sure what was going through the kid's head at the moment but he knew he wasn't completely comfortable with dress codes and high-priced menus just yet but they would get there.

"Where ever you want to go. I don't mind.", Peter answered with a half-smile having already decided that he wasn't going to fight being taken to those kinds of places anymore. It was something he was going to have to get used to and he could do that. Though, he did sort of hope that he wouldn't have to do it that day.

Part of Tony really wanted to give in to Peter's silent pleas for a casual restaurant but at the same time... he hadn't been out in a while and he really wanted a good steak. "Let's go to that Steak House that's not too far from here. What's it called? Strip 145?"

Pepper raised her eyebrows in surprise. Usually, when Peter was involved they would go to a place that Peter would like. She knew Tony had dragged Peter to a nice place in Washington but she'd also heard from Rhodes that it hadn't exactly gone over very well. "They're by reservation only. You had better give them a call now if that's your plan.", she said as he met eyes with Peter who seemed unfazed. "You'll need a tie and jacket, Peter. Is that okay?"

"Yeah. It's fine. It's just a restaurant, right? It'll be good.", Peter said with a nervous laugh. Tony smiled down at him with such pride that Peter knew he was locked in now. There would be no backing out so he took a deep breath and looked back at him. "Can, can we look at the menu together before we go?"

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Going over the menu before they left turned out to have been the best possible idea because the kid who Tony has come to know at the furthest thing from a picky eater he'd ever met hesitated over the entire menu. There was no chicken and the only pasta they served had seafood in it. By the nature of the restaurant alone, Peter had been locked into getting a steak. Tony for the life of him couldn't figure out why that was a problem. The kid had eaten bites of his steak before so he knew it wasn't that he hated it. "What's the deal, Kiddo?", Tony asked as they sat on the couch together in their suits and ties. "You have no problem eating some of the steak off of my plate. Why don't you want to order your own?"

Sighing, Peter leaned back on the couch. "It's expensive.", he sighed out knowing how stupid that sounded. The man was literally a billionaire and he was almost literally his kid. It wasn't like it was a hardship to buy him a thirty-plus dollar entree.
Rolling his eyes and smiling, Tony placed a hand on Peter's knee. "You know what? I'm going to start giving you an allowance.," Tony unceremoniously announced. "You're my kid and you don't ever have to worry about what something cost. I mean it's great that you want to be conscientious but me buying you a steak is not something you should be hesitating over. Yeah?"

It took a few beats for Peter to find his words after that. He'd never had an allowance before. He just sort of trusted that May would take care of everything and sometimes he could ask for a little something extra. He'd never asked for cash for the sake of having cash before. The idea seemed foreign despite the fact that he knew many of his friends at school received money on a regular basis from their parents. "I don't need an allowance. You and May buy me everything I need and a lot of the things I want."

"I'd buy you all of the things you wanted if you asked me for them.," Tony replied in honestly. But he supposed that the fact that the kid didn't ask for everything was a good thing. He wasn't demanding, needy or bratty as he had been. No, Peter had a good head on his shoulders. "I kind of like that you're not spoiled like that though."

"Thanks?", Peter said with a laugh, unsure of what to do with a comment like that.

"Seriously. I'm going to run it by May but I'd like to get you a bank account and have maybe a hundred dollars a month deposited into it.," Tony further explained after some careful thought. He would have put more in but he was afraid that Peter would fight him on it if he went much above that number. "You can save it, spend it, whatever. It's yours."

Nodding his head in understanding, because there would be no talking the man out of this, Peter replied with a quiet, "Okay."

"You pick a steak yet?", Tony asked after several minutes of silence. He was pretty sure they needed to be heading out soon and Pepper had just entered the room dressed in one of his favorite dresses. Blue really was he color.

Sighing in defeat, Peter glances at the menu displayed on the tablet before him and made a quick decision. "Yeah. The top one and some of the weird fries and maybe some of the corn chowder stuff.," he said, still somewhat miffed that they would ruin something as perfect as macaroni and cheese by putting lobster in it.

"Done.," Tony said with a clap of his hands as he rose to his feet and started towards the door. "Let's go. I'm hungry."
At the restaurant, Peter was surprised to find that he was completely at ease. Well, once they were seated anyway. Before that he was pretty sure every person in the place had their eyes on him but he tried to ignore it the way Tony and Pepper always seemed to do. It helped that Tony was protectively wrapping an arm around his shoulders and keeping him close.

Peter had never in his life, ever had a full piece of steak on a plate in front of him before and he had a hard time not being excited about it. Tony hadn't let him have a menu once they arrived because he didn't want to start that chain of thought all over again. It was a good call really.

It didn't take long for Peter to warm up to the situation and was happy to participate in the conversation. Pepper asked him what classes he was taking for the semester and Tony talked about when he was in school. Peter laughed at all the trouble he'd cause and swore that he was never going to be that bad. Tony pretended to not agree and Pepper smiled at the interaction.

It was all pleasant up until Pepper brought up the upcoming travel. "So, you remember that Tony and I are going to be out of the country next week right?", Peter asked after a brief lull in the banter that had been consuming the conversation.

Stiffening in his seat Peter looked between the two adults wondering how he was supposed to react to that. Of course, he remembered. That didn't mean he was happy or excited about it though. "Yeah. I remember. Tony gets back on Thursday.", he replied easily and with less anxiety than he felt. "He'll pick me up from school on Friday."

Realizing that he too had tensed up at the subject, Tony tried to relax his posture. "Yep. ...and Peter's going to text me so that I don't get too bored while I there.", Tony quipped with a wink in Peter's direction.

"Right, because your short attention span needs further encouragement.", Pepper blandly replied making Tony laugh.

The remainder of the meal was relaxed and they were soon returning home. Once they had arrived Tony went through the notification on his phone and smiled at a picture that was trending. It hadn't taken long for the onlookers to get their photographs online that was for sure. This one wasn't bad. It was a photo of Tony with his arm around Peter's shoulders while Pepper seemed to be smoothing Peter's tie as she laughed. He tried to think back to what they might have been talking about to make
them all smile like that but nothing specific came to mind. Though, he realized that he tended to smile more in general whenever Peter was around. So maybe that was it.

He made sure to show Peter so that there were no surprises later and was relieved when his son didn't seem to be upset about it. His son. That's what all of the trends said and he would be lying if he said that he didn't find those words to be more than a little bit appealing. He actually found himself looking forward to the day that he got to start introducing him as Peter Stark.

That night, Peter went to sleep in his own bed and woke up Sunday morning ready for a day in the lab or garage or by the pool... he didn't care as long as it was with Tony but a the same time there was an ice-cold stone settling in his stomach at the idea of returning to Queens while Tony left the country completely. He spent the remainder of the day pushing those feelings down and focusing fully on the present because for now, Tony was right there.
I can't decide if you guys are going to love me or hate me for the next few chapters... I mean I'm kind of hoping for the former rather than that latter but... Anyway. Things are about to get very interesting. ...Things are coming together.

Also... I am sort of devastated by the whole Sony/Disney break up. So you, know... I'm just really freaking sad. Still hoping they can put a nice end to the Spider-man Civil War and keep making great movies together.

Tag adds: Steve Rogers, Hand Wavy Logic, I Repeat: This is an AU, The Author Does What She Wants

Tony opted to be the one to drive Peter back to Queens. That gave them a couple of extra hours together and to be honest he also wanted to make sure that Peter was really okay with him flying out the next morning. Not that it would change anything, he had to go and there was no reason for him not to. Peter wasn't a baby and he had his aunt to look after him too now. "Alright, kiddo...", Tony said once he'd come to stop on the street by Peter's apartment. "...I'll already be on my way to Dubai before you wake up for school. You can call me on your way to school if you want to."

"I will.", Peter assured as he clutched his backpack to his chest in preparation of getting out of the car.

Tony smiled. "Stay out of trouble and remember that if anything happens, you call Happy. It's his job to bail you out.", Tony said with a wink, knowing that Peter would never get into any real trouble while he was gone. That didn't mean that he hadn't already talked to both Bruce and Rhodes about being ready to come in for an assist if his kid got any hairbrained ideas. "Stay in that little gray area we talked about. I don't want to have to send a suit to fish you out of any lakes while I'm gone."

Peter laughed but really he sort of wished that his dad could stop bringing those kinds of things up. "I'll be fine. I swear. Nothing crazy.", he replied with a tight smile. "I'll see you on Friday."

"Yep. Three o'clock on the dot.", Tony promised as Peter began to open his door. "Love you, kid."
"Love you too! Bye!", Peter called out as he made for a clean break and took off towards the stairs. He knew that if he continued to sit there he would end up never getting out of the car. Besides, Tony was only a phone call away and he would see him in five days. Five days wasn't that long... right?

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At way too early on Monday morning Tony was heading out the door to meet with Pepper so that they could sit in a plane for the next twelve hours. He'd double checked everything he'd need and was about to walk out when he paused by his office door. Walking inside he stared down at tightly locked draw. The one that only held one thing. The burner phone Roger's had sent to him so long ago. Without much contemplation, he sighed to himself and quickly opened up the drawer to slip the phone into his pocket.

By the time Happy was dropping him off at the private airport, he'd already decided to make the call. It had been a while since the Press Conference and he was starting to get antsy about what was happening on the other side of the fence. As he boarded the plane and took a seat next to Pepper he kept his checking his pocket, as if the phone was going to disappear. If Pepper noticed, she didn't say anything.

Several hours into the flight, Tony couldn't put it off any longer. Pepper was diligently working on some contractual agreements and doing research not really paying him any mind. If he was going to do it, Now was the time. "Hey, Pepper. I'm going to go make a phone call. I'll be back.", he said as he stepped into the pre-programed, pilotless cockpit and took a seat. He hovered his thumb over the call button for several seconds before taking in a breath and pressing it. One, Two, Three rings later there was still no answer. After the fourth, he was going to hang up but then it happened. The line came alive and a very familiar voice came through the receiver.

"Tony? Is that you?", Steve asked hesitantly. He'd seen the news report, they all had but he'd not expected Tony try to contact him.

"Yep. It's me, Cap. How've you been?", Tony asked stupidly as if this were some sort of a casual chit-chat with an old pal instead of the man who had single-handedly ruined his family. Okay, that wasn't fair. He'd had his own hand in that too but at the moment he wanted to blame Steve. They could sort out who did what later. Then, the line went quiet long enough for Tony to believe that Steve wasn't going to speak to him and he was starting to wonder why he thought he ever thought he would. Listening carefully, he was almost sure he could still hear the man breathing on the opposite side of the line and he tried again. "I'm guessing you saw the news, then."

"We did.", Steve replied simply, emphasizing the 'we'.

"Okay, that wasn't fair. He'd had his own hand in that too but at the moment he wanted to blame Steve. They could sort out who did what later. Then, the line went quiet long enough for Tony to believe that Steve wasn't going to speak to him and he was starting to wonder why he thought he ever thought he would. Listening carefully, he was almost sure he could still hear the man breathing on the opposite side of the line and he tried again. "I'm guessing you saw the news, then."
For a second Tony thought that he was trying to rub it in that they were still together but he pushed that aside. There wasn't time for pettiness right now. "So...", Tony hesitated. "What are you going to do?"

"Tony... we need to talk. We can't just show up and put ourselves at risk like that. The information was vague at best. Reforming the team? Pardons? What does that even mean?", he asked with legitimate concern and curiosity. Some of what had been said sounded alright. Other bits had left more to be desired.

From there, Tony went into a detailed explanation of the entire process. Everything that had been discussed every step of the way. Including the fact that the board was interested in finding and helping Barns.

"He's already being rehabilitated.", Steve hesitantly spoke. "He'd somewhere safe right now and I think he'd like to stay there for a while longer."

"What about you and your bird friend, Wilson? ...and Natasha, Wanda and Vision. What about them?", Tony asked with a bit more passion than he'd meant to but he really wanted to know. Especially after Steve had hinted about maybe returning.

Steve sighed. "We'll need to discuss it some more but I'm interested and Sam would follow, Nat might be interested too but she went further underground shortly after that. I haven't heard back from her since. I'm sure she's watching and waiting to make her next move. As far as Wanda and Vision go... I haven't heard from them. I have no idea where they are but I assume they're together."

Tony's heart was racing. Steve had said that he was interested in coming back. He'd expected as much but it still came as a bit of a shock. After a few deep breaths, he decided that he needed to say something. "When do you think you might show up?", he asked trying to sound as casual as possible.

"That's the thing, Tony. I don't know. We have a few things that would need to be... settled. It could be days, it could be weeks."

Tony scoffed knowing what was really going on there. They didn't want to be expected. They wanted to have control of something and their arrival date was the one thing no one else could dictate. "So, you're one of those people. Just going to show up all unannounced. That's bad form. Terrible house guest manners. I would have expected a little better from the Golden Boy, Steve
Rogers.", Tony quipped, annoyance creeping up on him.

Sounding slightly annoyed himself, Steve sighed again. "It's not like that and you know it. We--"

"--Sure.," Tony curtly replied. "It's fine. Show up when you want to. There will be another press conference soon. I'm not sure how many they plan to do after that before they give up." After a few hesitant moments, he continued, though he wasn't sure why he was so compelled to say what he was about to say. "This might be your last chance. You should take it. We can make it work."

"I'm sure we can.," Steve said almost softly. "By the way, we saw your other press conference as well. Cute kid. Congratulations."

He didn't know why he'd never considered that the rouges would care to listen to that kind of news but he was almost grateful. "Thanks.," he whispered out. "He's a good kid."

"I've no doubt. Look, Tony, I need to go. We'll show up soon. I'm going to disconnect this phone for a few days until we decide to make a move. We'll be seeing you."

"Yeah.," Tony said with something between anticipation and anxiety. "See you soon."

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While Tony was attending meeting after boring meeting in Dubai, Peter was at school, having just as lousy of a time. In fact, by Monday afternoon he was already getting stressed. Flash had continued his quest to get a good reaction out of Peter and frankly, he was getting really good at pinpointing which whispered accusations and subtle hand mimes would get Peter angry the fastest. It was truly a good thing that Tony had set it up so that there was almost always a staff member within his vicinity because if not he was sure Flash would have already gotten the outburst he was fishing for.

He still hadn't confessed to anyone that the words were getting to him because he couldn't help but feel like he was overreacting. Even when both Ned and MJ told him that he wasn't. He was a super-hero for Christ's sake he shouldn't be getting so worked up over something so simple. So, whenever Happy would predicable question him about his day and specifically about Flash, Peter kept his mouth shut. He didn't need a babysitter to step in and fix everything for him.

Come Wednesday the staff seemed to have lost some of their interest in keeping a close eye on their newest celebrity leaving a few more opportunities for Flash to get up in his face. He tried to distract himself with the fact that Tony would be home the next day and picking his up the day after that.
However, it didn't take long for the other boy to hit the last straw and Peter was fuming. Before he could think or Ned could stop him he was placing both of his hands on Flash's chest and shoving him into the lockers.

He'd had enough good sense about him to pull back some, to not use his super strength but the other boy fell backward at the unexpected physical retaliation and hit the lockers with a bang. As Flash slid down the metal doors and into a sitting position, his hand came up to the back of his head for a moment before bringing it forward to look at it. "What the fuck, Parker? I'm bleeding you asshole.", Flash sneered as he tried to pretend like it didn't hurt as much as it did.

Peter stilled as panic began to fill his chest. Not only had he thrown the first punch but he'd hurt someone. It was more than likely going to require stitches and he'd done that. Before he had time to spiral, Ned was tugging on his arm. "Peter, Holy shit. Peter!", he finally heard once his friend had squeezed his arm hard enough to get his attention. "Peter, you need to call Tony or Happy or something. Are you listening to me? Where's your phone?", Ned hissed quietly as he tried his best to prevent disaster.

The locker Flash had hit his head on was dented and there was a small amount of blood trailing down it. The sight made Peter nauseous as he went into autopilot and handed his phone over to Ned who rapidly dialed Happy.

"What's wrong, Kid?", Happy asked without much concern when he'd answered the call. The boy hadn't been in school long enough for it to be a real problem. It wasn't even nine. "Forget your lunch money?"

"Happy! It's Ned and you need to get in here, like right now. Peter's in trouble.", Ned rapidly spat out, already seeing the administrator heading towards the chaos. Flash had risen to his feet and the buddy that wasn't helping him up was approaching Peter with his fist pulled back. There was no hesitation as he landed his punch squarely on Peter's jaw.

Stumbling backward with the impact that he chose not to avoid, Peter kept his hands limply at his sides. He's caused enough damage and Tony was going to kill him. The man had specifically told him to not get into any trouble while he was gone and this was serious. He just prayed he didn't get expelled and sent to a boarding school.

Before he knew it Happy was holding onto both of his arms leaned in to get a good look at Peter's already bruising cheek. "Peter? What happened?"

Seemingly unable to respond verbally, Peter's eyes started to mist over as he listlessly gestured
towards the boy who was being looked over by the administrator while the majority of the 
bystanders were being ushered off to class, Ned included. Happy looked over his shoulder at the 
dented locker and the angry exchanges taking place around them and cringed. "Shit.", Happy 
muttered under his breath before being pulled to the side by the principal. After a brief exchange, 
Happy was back by Peter looking at him with something between annoyance and sympathy. "We're 
going to have to call Tony and your aunt. Until then let's get you some ice for your face."

Allowing himself to be led away from the noisy hallway, Peter remained as silent as ever. He had to 
periodically bite his lip to prevent it from quivering and had to work to keep the tears from falling. 
This was his own fault, he couldn't cry about it. That wouldn't be right. Even if his cheekbone 
burned and his head was starting to ache he felt as if he had no right to be upset.

The nurse handed Peter some ice and the principal led him into a room to sit by himself. He wanted 
to ask about how Flash was doing but he couldn't get his voice to work. Instead, he sat on the hard 
plastic chair beside the copy machine and closed his eyes. At least, it was quiet in there. It was so quiet that when Happy came though the door already talking, Peter practically jumped out of his 
skin. "May's at work and can't get here anytime soon and Tony's, well, he's not even in the country, 
I left him a message. So, it's you and me, kid. Start talking." When Peter remained silent, Happy 
tried not to get annoyed. "I can't help you if I don't know what happened. Was that the kid that's 
been mouthing off to you since sixth grade or something? Because if so, then I'd like to say he had it 
coming..."

Before Peter could reply Happy's phone was going off and he was being informed that Tony was on 
his way home early. This caused even more guilt to coil within his belly and he was starting to 
believe that he might actually throw up. "I think I'm gonna be sick., he whispered rather than 
answering the questions that were still being continuously directed at him.

Knowing that the kid was clearly under a lot of stress, Happy immediately went to the nurse to 
obtain a waxed cardboard vessel in case Peter made good on his threat to throw up. "Here, hold 
this.", Happy said as he placed the bowl in Peter's hands. "...now, start talking. I need to know what 
happened before Tony starts badgering me about it. ...and keep that ice on your face."

Ignoring the command to keep the ice on his bruised face, Peter leaned over the bowl he'd been 
handed and allowed the saliva that had been pooling in his mouth to trail out. It didn't take much 
longer after that for his stomach to make its decision and his breakfast was being forced up his throat and into the bowl. Though, he had to admit that he felt a bit better once he was done. Maybe because the pancakes were no longer being forced to share the same restrictive space with all of his 
growing shame and remorse. "I'm sorry.", Peter said quietly as Happy took the bowl from him and walked out of the room with it, only to return moments later with a replacement, just in case.

"Peter", Happy said softly as he held the ice to the boy's face himself. "Calm down, okay? Whatever happened... we're going to fix it. Nothing bad's going to happen."
"I screwed up and I'm in so much trouble.", Peter replied with a little more vigor than before. It seemed that getting sick had been enough to pull him out of his nearly dissociative state and he was able to more easily answer Happy's questions. "May and Tony are both going to kill me."

Happy nodded his head. "Yeah, you're right. You're in a lot of trouble. No one's going to kill you, though. Yell maybe... but no killing. Too much paperwork."

Unable to laugh at the man's attempt at humor, Peter nodded his head and began to explain. "Flash has been giving me a hard time since school started. Like, worse than normal. He keeps saying...these things... and I let myself get mad about it. Then, then I shoved him. I didn't mean to hurt him. I only wanted him to shut up. I shouldn't have done--", Peter started only to stop mid-sentence to whine and lean his head down onto his hands, dodging the ice pack in the process. "--I still don't feel very good." His head was throbbing and his stomach was starting to once again flutter with stirring unease.

Setting the ice to the side, Happy started to rub Peter's back. "You going to be sick again?", he asked even though he was certain that there was no way the kid could possibly have anything else left in him.

"No. It's my head. It hurts.", Peter said as he rubbed the heels of his hands into his eyes.

"If you're not up for this today, I can take you home and you can give your statement tomorrow.", Happy suggested with concern.

That sounded like one of the best idea's Peter had ever heard but he knew it wasn't feasible. "I can't just leave before they talk to me.", Peter explained miserably.

Not missing a beat, Happy reminded Peter of his pending parentage and assured him that they could do just that if that's what Peter needed. When Peter refused to leave before getting his punishment, Happy sighed. "Alright, kid but I'm going to go make them hurry the Hell up."

It didn't take much longer for Peter to be ushered into the principal's office where he was reprimanded for starting a fight and sentenced to three days suspension. Apparently, it should have been longer since Flash required medical attention and there was property damage. However, they decided to take into account that this was Peter's first offense and that it had been, as they said 'somewhat provoked'. Peter didn't argue and nodded his head in agreement.
Back at the apartment, Happy insisted on staying until May got back home, telling Peter that it was so he could rest his head and that he would explain everything to May when she got there but really he was just worried. He kid had lost his shit, hit another kid, become despondent, puked and was now miserably laying in a dark bedroom with a headache. He knew Peter wasn't much of a fighter, outside of his hero persona but this reaction seemed over-kill and he couldn't sort out what was really going on.

When May arrived back at the apartment she too looked worried as she glanced around the room. Finding only Happy on the couch cocked her head to the side. "Where's Peter?"

"Asleep I hope.", Happy sighed out. "You ready for the whole story?"

Sitting her purse on the table and filling a glass with water, May nodded. All she knew at this point was that there had been a fight and Peter had started it. That had never happened before and she wasn't really sure what could have provoked such a reaction. Though her understanding was that the boy he'd hit was the same one who's been giving him a hard time since day one. "Yeah, let me have it. Oh and Tony seems to think he can be here by six... which doesn't actually seem practical do you know wh--"

Smiling, Happy stood up and met May in the kitchen. "--This has to do with Peter. You think he's waiting for a plane. He took an Ironman suit."

"Of course, he did.", May said with sarcasm as she finished off her glass of water. "So, what happened."

Happy went into detail with everything he knew, which wasn't a whole lot. With Peter reacting the way he did, he hadn't pressed for anything else. They both agreed that there was something missing because that wasn't very Peter-like behavior. "...Once we got back I told him to try to get some sleep. Has he been sleeping at night?"

"Mostly I think. He had a nightmare on Sunday night but as far as I know, he's been fine the rest of the week as far as I know. He's usually good about talking to me about that kind of stuff...", she sighed out. About that time, Peter came out of his room and was standing in the hallway, with his blanket wrapped around his shoulder's, watching. "Peter? Sweetie, are you okay?", May asked once she'd spotted him. His hair was a mess, he was squinting his eyes and even though the bruise on this face was already starting to fade it was still there looking as painful as ever. "Come here."
Peter acquiesced and crossed the room, pausing by the small kitchen table. "Can I get something to eat?", he asked hesitantly, confusing both May and Happy. There was no reason for the kid to ask. It was his house... and he'd already missed lunch.

"Not only can you but you need to.", Happy replied before May had the chance to say anything. "I can go get you something if you want me too."

"You don't need to do that.", Peter said as he started going through the pantry, settling on an apple and a couple of granola bars. It wasn't an ideal lunch but he didn't feel like putting forth any effort, his head was still throbbing.

Once he had eaten, he joined May on the couch and leaned into her. "I'm sorry.", he said quietly. "I really messed up."

Sighing May put her arm around him and gave him a squeeze. "Yeah, you did.", she said making Peter cringe. "...but it sounds like you've punished yourself enough. How's your head?"

"Hurts.", Peter replied simply. "Are you mad?"

Taking a moment to choose her words carefully, May replied, "I'm a little mad but I'm even more... confused. Why would you do that Peter? You've never done anything like that before. Ever."

"I don't know. He just made me so angry... and then, then I could stop myself. I hurt him, May. He got hurt because of me.", Peter replied as his voice started to become thick with tears. Before the conversation could go any further there was a knock before the door started to open revealing an extremely concerned and maybe even angry, Tony.
By the time Tony had opened the front door and spotted Peter, he was already talking. "What on Earth is going on? I leave the country for three days...", Tony said as he closed the door behind him. Despite the fact that he'd had hours to come up with something better to say, that was all he could get out of his mouth once he'd walked through the door. He didn't mean to sound angry but he kind of was. The last thing he'd told to his son before he left was for him to not get into any trouble while he was gone. He hadn't realized the boy would take that as a challenge.

Seeing the looking look on his fathers face, Peter started to crumble all over again. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean for it to happen."

Tony crossed the room to get a better look at Peter. When he saw the tear streaks on his face and the way he was clinging to May he took pause. "Somebody tell me what's going on.", he said as he looked helplessly around the room.

Happy once again when through what he knew while Tony nodded along. "You still feeling sick, kid?", he asked once Happy had finished his explanation.

When Peter nodded miserably, Tony finally went to take a seat on the end of the couch essentially sandwiching Peter between himself and May. When Peter didn't immediately leave May's side to fall into his he had to push down the little pang of jealousy that crept up within him. Though instead throwing out a witting quip or teasing the kid for picking May over him he just reached over and placed his hand the legs that Peter had curled up on the couch beside him. "My head still hurts."

He was going to ask him if he'd eaten anything but he figured that between Happy and May someone else was probably already on top of that. In fact, at that moment he felt utterly useless. Happy had already saved him from the school and May was already comforting him. He was suddenly hating himself for ever agreeing to go on that trip. "What do you need me to do?", he finally asked in defeat.

Peter shrugged his shoulders and looked towards the man beside him. "Are you mad at me?"
Thrown by the question, Tony looked from May to Happy as if he was hoping that one of them would telepathically tell him what the right answer was. When nothing came he decided to just be honest. "Kind of?", he admitted before offering more of an explanation. "...but mostly I'm also really curious about what that asshole said that would finally make you hit him."

"I pushed him.", Peter clarified though he was sure why. It wasn't like that was any better.

"You pushed him into a locker so hard that he needed stitches, Peter.", Happy added. "We need to know what the hell he was saying to you."

Sitting up with a small groan, Peter looked at all of the adults in the room as they watched him with rapt interest. Eventually, his gaze settled on Tony because repeating what Flash had been saying felt like an impossible task with him in the room. "I don't want to say it.", Peter whined. Between the pain his head and the embarrassment of the entire situation he just wasn't ready to divulge that information

"How about you type it out then.", Tony suggested, handing over his phone. When Peter accepted it he sat back and waited as the boy took his time spelling it all out.

Once he was done, Peter was really unsure about who to hand the information to. Not that it mattered, they would all know within seconds so he took a deep breath and handed it back to Tony. It was his phone after all. As expected it only took a few short seconds for the man to react. "How long has he been saying that kind of shit to you?", he asked in a low rumble as he handed the phone to May who then passed it to Happy.

"Why does it matter?", Peter asked. "I shouldn't have let it get to me. I know it's not true and that's all that matters. He's just giving me a hard time."

"Buddy, this isn't giving you a hard time, this is harassment. You're allowed to stand up for yourself. He can't say those kinds of things to you.", Happy replied before a grimace across his face. "I know you don't want me to but I'm going to have to take this to the school. It has to stop."

Not having the energy to fight it Peter agreed and prepared himself to be lectured on why he should have come to them when it first but thankfully there was to be a short reprieve.

"Later, when you're feeling better, we need to talk more about this because if you're keeping these kinds of things to yourself then we have a problem.", Tony finally said before hesitating slightly as
he weighed what could be the effects of his next words. "I had to drop multiple meetings to get here only to find out it could have been resolved last Monday."

"I'm sorry. I didn't know you would come all the way back. You didn't have to."

"Of course, I did! Pete, you're my kid and you getting into a fight is so out of character that I was scared. I, Ironman was scared because my son started a fight at school and I couldn't sort out why. I needed to see you."

"I said I'm sorry!", Peter repeated before getting up and walking back towards his room. "I, I need to lay back down for a while or something."

"Go ahead, Peter...", May said. "...but this conversation isn't over."

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By the time Peter woke up again, his head was feeling better and his stomach was cramping with emptiness. Seeing as his breakfast hadn't stayed in his stomach, all he'd really eaten that day was an apple and a couple of granola bars. As he stepped into the living room he noticed that Happy had left at some point but Tony was still there. He was sitting at the table with May and they seemed to be having some sort of serious discussion. He could only assume it was about him. He just hoped it wasn't about changing schools too.

Clearing his throat to announce his entrance, Peter wandered slowly towards his parents. Unsurprisingly, Tony was first to speak. "Well, speak of the devil. We were just talking about you.", the man said with a smile. "Get food and come sit down."

Peter nodded his head and made a substantial sandwich, tossing a banana onto the plate with it before going to get a bag of chips from the small pantry. By the time he'd also gotten a glass of water and sat down May and Tony were already back to talking amongst themselves. Peter could hear them clearly and he knew that they knew that. He had to push back the annoyance that came from them talking about him as if he weren't in the room. Not that they were saying anything bad, in fact, they were mostly talking about his likes and dislikes. Almost as if they were comparing notes. It was weird.

"You're both wrong.", he said as he was sitting down and the two adults were playfully bickering
over what Peter's favorite foods were. "Macaroni and cheese is, like, third and pizza hasn't been my most favorite thing since I was eleven. Lasagna is my favorite now. The kind Pepper makes."

Both adults looked at each other for a moment before breaking out into laughter. Neither of them had expected that answer. "Well, what's second then?", May asked out of curiosity because if it wasn't macaroni and cheese or pizza then she was lost. Those were the two things he tended to ask for before the accident but staying with Tony seemed to have shifted his taste a bit. Though it wasn't exactly shocking that his new favorite still involved pasta and cheese.

Without missing a beat, Peter said, "Cheeseburgers". When Tony started to laugh again he looked between them in question. "What?"

"Nothing, kid. I like cheeseburgers too...and Pepper's lasagna.", Tony chuckled before schooling his face so that he could become more serious. "We're going to go ahead and talk about today, alright?"

Not really having an option, Peter nodded his head and started into his sandwich, hoping to get some food in him before things started to get stressful. "What do you want to talk about?", he grumbled through the food in his mouth a habit he still hadn't quite broken.

"Gross, kid.", Tony glared but he didn't smack him this time seeing as the kid had just gotten over a massive headache. "We need to talk about why you didn't want to tell anyone that this was happening."

Sighing, Peter put down his food and got a cup of water before explaining. "It was just words. I should have let it go."

"Kid, calling you names and, I don't know, picking on your wardrobe choices are 'just words' this was harassment. You know that. I know you know that because you would have never allowed him to talk to anyone else that way. As Spider-man you would have webbed his mouth shut and told the victim to get a restraining order...which we are also going to talk about--"

"--Yeah, but I'm not a victim. I'm Spider-man.", Peter firmly stated. He could climb walls, lift buildings and heal a few broken ribs in a week. Nothing about that screamed 'victim' to him. He could see the anger that flashed momentarily across his father's face and didn't know if he should fight back or cringe.

"Yeah? You're also my son and no one gets to talk to you like that.", Tony spat before taking a
breath and wiping all evidence of his internal seething from his face. "...and if I'm being honest, I'm actually kind of glad you finally did something to shut him up."

May sent Tony a mild glare at his last words but she would be lying if she tried to say she didn't agree. "Peter, it was clearly bothering you and we all knew something was wrong. It wouldn't have killed you to talk to one of us."

, she calmly explained even though she herself was feeling a little frustrated by her nephew's stubborn attitude.

"You would have overreacted and gone straight into the school like I didn't want.

Peter claimed with a glare that went from May to Tony and back again. He'd always been able to stay in the background at school and he wanted to stay that way. Having one or more of the multiple adults that he had in his life now running into the school every time he got picked on wouldn't help anything at all.

"Maybe we wouldn't have.", May suggested. "Maybe we would have been able to give you suggestions on how to take care of it yourself. Then only stepped in when it was necessary.

She added, her voice getting more firm as she spoke. "...before you lost control and started a fight. Peter, I don't want you to let people walk all over you but I don't want you fighting either. You've got to speak up."

"Kid, just because you come to one of us doesn't mean that we're going to automatically jump right in clear it all up for you.

Tony said before pausing and throwing a hand up in the air. "Okay, I might have but May says that I shouldn't so I won't."

, he added with a roll of his eyes and a small smile "I'll try not to anyway. I know you're sixteen and I know you don't need me to do that for you but--"

"--I get it. I'm sorry I didn't tell anyone. I'm sorry I pushed Flash and I'm sorry that I made everybody worry."

, Peter irritably cut in. He was already tired of this conversation.

May sighed because she could somewhat understand where Peter was coming from, not wanting his parents to fight his battles for him. She assumed Tony could too but they had already discussed all of this. They couldn't let him navigate all of it on his own anymore. He didn't have the luxury of anonymity anymore. "I know you're sorry. ...though maybe don't be too sorry about finally defending yourself against Flash. He'd been bothering you for years. I mean, I don't condone you fighting at school but in this case, I can be a little bit more forgiving."

, she said with a smile before finishing her piece. "That being said, you're going to have to get used to letting all of us help you."

Tony nodded his head from across the table as a small pang of guilt crossed through him. "This kind of stuff... It's a big deal, kid. I know that kid's been bothering you and I'm glad you stood up for yourself but the media would have a field day with this, kid. Thank God they've yet to figure out where you go to school, but Buddy, it's only matter of time."

, he said with a frown. This was one of
those moments that made him hate himself for dragging Peter into the spotlight. The kid shouldn't have to worry about being misrepresented for getting into a harmless high school scuffle. Then again, this one hadn't exactly been harmless.

After several miserable moments, Peter lifted his head from where he'd been resting it on the table. "I'm sorry you're missing your meetings too. Is Pepper mad?"

"When I told her I needed to take off to get back here she was worried. Not mad. Me having to come home from some sort of a trip to take care of something for you was bound to happen at some point. I just didn't think it was going to be the first time I'd left the country in months. Let's not make a habit of it, yeah?"

"No, sir. I won't.", Peter readily agreed. It hadn't occurred to him that his timing couldn't have been any worse. He looked like a spoiled brat acting out to get his dad to come home even if that hadn't been the case. "I know you have to work. I'm sorry."

"To be clear, you will at minimum talk to Happy if something like this comes up again, okay, Peter.", May added partially because she didn't think any of them could take another round of this kind of drama.

Nodding his head and hoping that this conversation was coming to a close, Peter replied, "Sure. I promise."

Sighing and rubbing his hands down his face, Tony stood up from the table and placed a gentle hand on Peter's shoulder. "Good deal. I need to head out. I'm jet-lagged as hell and have a video conference at one in the morning." Just because he'd had to leave didn't completely get him out of everything. Pepper made sure of that.

"Wait! Are you still going to come to get me on Friday?", Peter asked as the man was reaching for the front door handle. He was supposed to be picked up from school and now he'd been suspended, it didn't feel like a stretch that maybe he was going to have to miss out on his weekend at the compound. the idea made his chest feel tight with further regret.

"Of course, that didn't change.", Tony said in disbelief. Surly the boy didn't think that they would take away his visitation as punishment.

"Just checking, since I was suspended and all.", Peter uttered quietly as he avoided looking either
adult in the eye. "The rule used to be no school, no internship."

Rolling his eyes and smiling slightly, Tony sighed. "Well, I think things might have changed a bit since then. Don't you?", he asked with some amount of humor. To be fair they had never discussed a scenario like this one. They had talked about what would happen if Peter was sick or had other pressing plans that fell on his scheduled weekends but not him getting himself in boatloads of trouble at school.

"Yeah.", Peter replied with a grin. A lot had changed and he knew that. He just wanted to be sure. Having that rug ripped out from under him come Friday would have been even more painful.

With that taken care of, Tony fully opened the door and started to step out into the hall. "See you on Friday, kiddo. I'll pick you up after lunch."

"Alright, see you then. Bye, Dad.", Peter said as he jumped up from the table and went to give the man a hug.

Returning the gesture, feeling reluctant to let go, Tony whispered in Peter's ear. "Later, Bud. Love you."

"You too.", Peter sighed out as Tony pulled away and closed the door behind him.

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The next two days were slow. May went to work her six-hour shifts and Peter stayed home. He'd lost the privilege of leaving the house, not even as Spider-man and Ned was in school. No one had said he couldn't play video games but he felt guilty doing so, so he didn't. instead, watched documentaries and read books. By the time Friday afternoon rolled around he was damn near stir-crazy.

When Tony arrived May was already home from work, having taken an early morning shift and they were sitting together at the table eating a late lunch. "Oh, thank God you're here!", Peter sighed out when the man walked through the door. "I've been in this apartment for three days straight."

Tony rolled his eyes but didn't say anything, because he and May had already talked about it. He wasn't going to be leaving the penthouse either. Save for a few self-control lessons in the gym. His
son was going to have to learn to better control his super-strength when he got pissed because this was high school and there would be more fights. He needed the kid to be able to defend himself without putting his alter-ego or classmates at risk. He couldn't help but feel like they got sort of lucky this time. Peter had sworn up and down that he'd pulled the punch there and Tony knew he had, at least to some extent, or the other boy would have been knocked out cold but he'd still injured him, it had been more than a playground shove. "You have your stuff ready?"

"I wasn't really planning on bringing anything.", Peter said with a shrug of his shoulders. There was no reason to. He had a fully stocked bedroom at the compound too.

Tony nodded in understanding and placed his hands in his pockets. "Well, whenever you're ready we can go.", he said with a smile. In spite of everything that had taken place that week, he was still eager to have his kid back in his home for the weekend. The fact that he got to pick him up early was a bonus that he wasn't going to bring up since the only reason that was happening was currently suspended.

Peter bounced out of his chair and grabbed his plate. Tony smiled when Peter subsequently asked his aunt if she was done and took her plate as well. After washing and drying both plates, Peter was back at May's side telling her good-bye and casually making his way to the door with Tony on his heels.
Peter talked for the entirety of the trip back to the compound. He talked so much that Tony wasn't sure where he was taking breaths, he seemed to be circular breathing. At some point, he'd started to tune out the chatter in favor of losing himself in his thoughts. He'd tried to call Steve again the night before but the number it dialed seemed to still be turned off. That meant they were all still discussing everything he supposed. From there, his mind drifted to what things would be like once they returned. Steve sounded open to reconciling. He wondered, too what that would look like. He couldn't imagine himself trusting him outright and he had no way of knowing if anyone else on that side of the fight had the same desire to make up. He assumed by showing up they would be indicating that they were but then again, who knows. It's not like they had proven to be super loyal or predictable. Then before he could get any further he felt a tap on his shoulder.

"Tony?", Peter asked in such a way that Tony could only assume that it wasn't the first time he'd tried to gain his attention.

"Yeah, kid?", he replied quietly as he continued to try and fully pull himself back to the present.

Peter sighed and looked at Tony calculatingly. "What were you thinking about?", he asked. "I've been trying to get you to answer me for the last five minutes."

Cringing at that information, Tony glanced towards his son. "Work stuff.", he replied simply. He didn't want to tell Peter that he was expecting Steve and Co. to show up unexpectedly at some point in the future. The boy had already made it clear that he was probably going to cause something of a problem when that happened, making him feel like he was going to have to go about that transition very carefully to prevent disaster.

"Oh.", Peter said in mild surprise. That had clearly been a non-answer. A vague reply that was meant to say 'I'm not telling you' and he decided to respect that and not question it any further. "Well, what are we doing this weekend? Did the seats you ordered for the car come in yet? Are we going to do that?"

"Nope. Well... yes they came in but nope we aren't working on that. You're still grounded. You'll be hanging out with me in the penthouse this weekend.", Tony reluctantly replied. He hated it as
much as Peter did really but May had insisted that they needed to be a united front. That meant that if she had grounded Peter from leaving the house until his return to school that he had to follow through with it. Of course, it would go the same way if Peter got into trouble with him. Though generally speaking, Peter was a good kid and Tony had only ever had to really punish him the once and that had been a while ago.

"Oh.", Peter said again but this time in disappointment. He should have expected that 'not leaving the house' wouldn't encompass the entire compound. If they didn't want him going to the arcade or corner store they weren't likely to want him to go to the pool or the lab. "I suppose that makes sense."

Tony hummed in response before thoughtfully adding that they would be taking a few field trips to the gym but not for the sake of sparring. Peter seemed to perk up at that but his enthusiasm died off with the explanation. "We're going to work on self-control. Knowing when to pull your punches and how much. It needs to be second nature, kiddo. You've got a lot of strength in you and we can't afford for you to be losing any amount of control."

Leaning back in the seat Peter held back his numerous complaints. He considered pointing that out as proof that he did have self-control but then decided that would be counterproductive. "Sounds super fantastic. Great.", he sarcastically replied knowing Tony was expecting some sort of response.

Giving Peter a bit of side glare at the attitude as he concentrated on driving, Tony shot back quickly. "Watch it, kid. You're already in trouble."

Raising his hand in aggravation, Peter let out a low growl. "I didn't do anything, Tony. All I did was say that it sounded great. What's wrong with that?"

"It was the way you said it, kid. Don't sass me."

Having never heard Tony seriously correct him for something like that, Peter was slightly taken aback. Typically they sassed and quipped back and forth on a regular basis. It was like sarcasm was their dialect. However, now might not have been the best time for that. He had gotten in an awful lot of trouble that week and the less than fun gym time was a result of that. "I'm sorry.", he finally mumbled not wanting to start the weekend with a disagreement.

"It's fine, Buddy.", Tony sighed out before amending. "Well, it's not fine. I don't want to you sassing me like that but I'm not going to keep riding you about it. Why don't you find something on the radio."
Smiling because he hardly ever got to be in control of the radio, Peter happily picked a station and leaned back in the seat.

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While Friday night had been filled with cheeseburgers and movies Saturday was a little less interesting. Tony had to spend a good bit of time on a conference call in the wee hours of the morning so he slept in and Peter wasn't allowed to leave the suite. That meant he couldn't hang out with Dr. Banner or work on his web fluid. He was still extremely stir-crazy despite the change in scenery and was itching to move about. He hadn't been mentally challenged or allowed to expend his energy in days.

Then suddenly an idea struck him and he didn't know why he hadn't thought of it before. The ceilings in the suite were twelve to fourteen feet depending on the room. Giddy with childish excitement he tucked his shirt into his sweat pants and started to climb the wall. He considered grabbing his web-shooters and swinging from wall to wall or setting up some sort of targets but decided that he should probably not make that kind of a mess in the living room. Instead, he hung upside down and proceeded to do a backflip down to the floor before repeating the process. By the time he'd perfected a triple flip that allowed him to land squarely on his back on the couch, FRIDAY was alerting him, as requested, that Tony was awake.

Grinning with glee, Peter climbed the wall and hung on all fours upside down by the hall entrance and waited. The moment he heard the door open he readied himself

"Pete?", Tony called out when the boy wasn't in his bedroom and he didn't see his head at the back of the couch. Then as he was getting towards the end of the hall, presumably to check the kitchen, Peter flipped down to the floor in front of Tony causing the man to shout out a string of obscenities. "Jesus, fucking, shit, Peter!", the man called out as he continued to pant and hold onto his chest. "Are you trying to kill me?"

The second the man shouted his actual name, Peter went from cackling to silent. Maybe he hadn't thought that through. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry.", Peter repeated as he held his hands up defensively. "It was a bad idea, I'm sorry!"

"No, shit it was a bad idea. Stay off my ceilings, will ya?", Tony grumpily uttered as his rapid heart rate began to fall back into a normal rhythm. "What were you doing?"
"I was, I was bored...", Peter cautiously answered. He knew that wasn't his best defense but he couldn't seem to come up with anything better so he went with the truth. He was bored. He'd been bored for days. Climbing around the room had seemed like a good way to pass the time, scaring Tony had been an impulse. 'A lack of self-control', he thought to himself miserably. So much for proving he wasn't impetuous.

Now calm, Tony placed his hands on his hips. "Bored huh? So bored that you had to crawl all over my walls and scare the shit out of me?", he questioned flatly.

"I'm sorry!", Peter repeated with passion because he was. He really hadn't meant to scare Tony quite like that. He thought the man would jump a little and laugh it off. Seeing him clutch his chest while his heart rate skyrocketed had been somewhat disturbing and he never wanted to see that again. "I won't do it again, Dad. Ever, I swear."

"Good plan.", Tony said sarcastically before lowering his defenses completely. "I'm going to eat, then we can go to the gym. Clearly, we have plenty to work with today."

Peter nodded vigorously and followed the man into the kitchen. While he had eaten hours prior, he was more than ready to eat again. "Do you want me to make you a sandwich or something?", Peter asked still trying to make up for his lack of judgment.

Cocking his head to the side as if he was calculating his son's offer, Tony huffed a laugh. He couldn't remember a time that the kid had ever offered to make his lunch for him and part of him wanted to balk at the idea before he realized that this was Peter trying to make up for what he'd done. "Sure, kid. Go for it."

As Peter set to work taking everything out and laying it across the counter, Tony and watched. It sort of amused him that Peter didn't even have to ask him what he wanted. He seemed to know exactly how much mustard and which kind of cheese to add without any kind of prompting. Then again, he knew the kid was observant. He wondered what else the kid knew about him.

Once they had both eaten through their early lunch they were heading down to the gym. "What exactly are we going to do, Tony?", Peter asked, leaving the man to wonder when or if he would ever be 'Dad' on a regular basis.

"We're going to spar. First with the suit, then without. See how easily you can switch back and forth. Later, Happy's going to stop by and do a little bit of boxing with you. Get you used to practice with a bag.", Tony easily explained. This wasn't about teaching Peter self-defense it was about teaching him how to control his power at will. Learning how to turn it off and on like a
Peter shifted on his feet in a show of mild anxiety. "You're not going to make me fight him though right?", Peter asked in trepidation. He'd seen Tony and Happy spar in the boxing ring and while it was fun to watch and Happy clearly had skill. He afraid of hurting him. More so than Tony but maybe that was because he'd been sparring with the man for so long that at this point that he'd gotten past that fear.

"Not if you don't want to, Bud but you might want to consider it at some point. It's good to spar with different partners.", Tony said as he guided the boy towards the gym doors.

But the time FRIDAY interrupted them two hours later insisting that they take a break, Peter had already gone back and forth between pulling his punches and using his full strength on the Ironman suit, several times. It turned out to be a lot harder than he thought it would be and he was suddenly questioning his ability to get it under control. "You're doing pretty good, kid.", Tony said as he started to ice his shoulder from when Peter had come in just a bit too hard after switching back to light sparring this last time.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you.", Peter mumbled as he began to sip at the water that had been passed to him.

"Eh. It could have been worse.", Tony shrugged, though he was questioning if he should have Banner look at it later. It wasn't dislocated but it was growing stiff the longer he sat. "Happy's going to be by in the next hour or so. You want to get something to eat?"

Nodding in the affirmative, Peter stood and began to cross the room towards the door and Tony sighed in relief when the kid was out of sight because that meant he could test out the rotation of his shoulder without freaking him out. He'd just started working it in various directions, cringing and biting back a few curses, FRIDAY started to speak. "Boss, the Unwelcome Mat Protocol had been activated. You have guests entering the East Wing. I have instructed them to go straight to the common floor per your previous request."

Tony's heart dropped. "How many? Who's here?" He hadn't expected the rouges to show up quite so quickly. The way Steve was talking it sounded like they planned to wait several weeks and when he'd check the burner line it wasn't working. In his shock and mild panic, he didn't even consider that Peter had hurried off to get a snack. Or that he was in the building at all for that matter. His mind was flooded with every possible scenario as he waited for a reply.

"Captain Steve Rogers and Master Sargent Sam Wilson, boss. They have inquired of your
"I'll go to them.", Tony hurriedly replied. In his haste to get a handle on the situation, he failed to implement any kind of protocol to keep Peter out of the mix.

Entering the common floor, Tony immediately laid eyes upon Steve, dressed down in jeans and a T-shirt while a baseball cap was pulled down low on his forehead. Sam was just behind him but unlike Steve, he wasn't smiling. He had his arms over his chest in a defensive posture.

After sizing each other up for more than a full minute, Tony spoke first. "Rogers.", he said nodding in the man's direction before addressing the other man in the room. "Wilson. ...what brings you to my neck of the woods? I wasn't expecting you for weeks."

Uncrossing his arms Sam stepped forward before Steve could speak. "That was the plan. The element of surprise. Less likely to fall into some sort of fucked-up trap."

Clenching his jaw in irritation, Tony was quick to respond. "There's no trap. God, do you really think that I'd throw you guys under the bus like that? If I'd wanted to find you sooner, I could have.", Tony nearly snapped.

At this point, Steve stepped in and placed a hand on Sams's chest, easing him back. "No one's saying that you would, Tony. We're here to feel out the situation. If it seems reasonable, we'll stay. Now, what can you tell us?", the larger man asked calmly as if he were addressing a small child.

Feeling patronized, Tony glared. "I've already filled you in on everything I know.", he said before calling for the AI to bring up a copy of the accords agreement. "There, you go. You can see it for yourself. Since you can't seem to trust me."

"It's not that I don't trust you, Tony. It's...it's complicated.", Steve hesitated as Sam nodded his head vigorously in the background. He hadn't expected an argument to start in the first five minutes but he supposed he should have. It wasn't like they parted on the best of terms. Though Tony had kept the burner phone and he'd hoped that was a good sign. Why keep a communication device if you never meant to use it.

"Complicated?", Tony spat, his voice growing tight with anger as he thought back to the reason for their parting. "This went way beyond complicated when you and your merry men decided to ignore every word I had to say before Germany."
"It wasn't like that.", Steve said placatingly, sagging his shoulders in defeat. He wondered if there would ever be a way to convince the man otherwise. It's not that he didn't want to listen, it's that they had different, pressing agendas at the time. Had Bucky's appearance taken place at any other time, it would have probably turned out very differently.

Tony rolled his eyes and threw his hands out to his sides, sarcastically. "Wasn't it though?", Tony asked with venom.

Now having a spark of anger of his own, Steve rose his voice to meet Tony's. "No! I had to protect, Bucky, you know that... and you weren't exactly keen to listen either!", he shouted out of frustration and defense.

"Yeah? ...but I didn't try to kill you!", Tony returned. Sure they had fought but mostly his goal had been to get Steve to comply. He's never been out for blood. It wasn't supposed to escalate the way it did. He was never out to kill.

Steves's face fell from anger to irritated confusion. "Is that really what you think I was doing? Tony, I was trying to get you off our backs. All I did was disable the suit.", he explained as if slamming his shield directing into Tony's armored chest was supposed to come off as gentle.

"You left me there! I could have died!", Tony strained. They'd taken out his defenses and took off with, leaving him in a completely disabled suit.

Steve shook his head firmly. "I knew you wouldn't.", he assured with such confidence that Tony almost wanted to believe him. Then again, maybe he just wanted to end the fight.

"Well, that made one of us...", Tony sarcastically suggested, no longer having the energy to keep the spat going.

Then before anyone else could say anything there was a small and shaky voice coming from the hall. "Dad?", Peter hesitantly called out.

"Shit.", Tony uttered under his breath. This was not the way he wanted them to meet. "What are you doing down here, Pete? You're still grounded. Penthouse and gym. Remember?", he said in an attempt to fluster the kid into leaving the room but it didn't go that way. When Peter didn't flinch he became concerned. "How long as have you been standing there?"
Peter took a few steps forward despite the fact that he was sure Tony didn't want him too. "Long enough.", Peter replied, his voice no longer wavering as his confidence built with every step.

"You need to go back to the gym, Pete. I'll be there in a bit.", Tony said in an almost warning tone but Peter didn't care at the moment.

By the time, Peter had crossed the room and was taking one last step to get directly between Tony and Steve, the latter was holding out his hand. "You must be Peter. Nice to meet you, son.", the captain kindly spoke as Peter began to glare.

Choosing to ignore the gesture, Peter crossed his arms over his chest. "I'm not your son and I'm not going to let you come into our home and talk to my dad like that. You shouldn't even be here. You already chose your side.", he stated with such a cool tone that you could almost feel the distant dripping from his words.

Tony placed a hand on Peter's shoulder and tried to pull him back but it was of no use. Peter had planted his heels and wasn't going to budge without some serious manpower. He was no doubt using his strength, or stickiness...or both and the fact that the boy would use either of those things in order to defy him was causing a bit of irritation to mingle with the already present concern. "Pete. Stand down.", he said as calmly as he could. "It's going to be fine. I've got this."

"I told you before that I wasn't going to let him hurt you and I meant it!", Peter said but this time it was with some heat.

Feeling the need to explain himself once again Steve held up his hands in defense. "I'm not going to hurt anyone, s--Peter.", Steve firmly replied. The last thing he wanted was to get into yet another argument but Tony already seemed keen on putting an end to this one before it even started.

From the background, Sam was looking on with interest. "He invited us. Why would be hurt him?", he asked out of curiosity.

"Well...", Peter began. "History has a tendency to repeat it's self and I'm not going to stand by and let that happen."

Tony sighed again and moved to get a hand on each of Peter's tense shoulders. "Kid... Pete, I need you to trust me. I've got this under control. No one is hurting anyone. We're only talking.", he
explained, feeling something between irritation that the kid wasn't listening to him and pride that he was so willing to take his side.

Taking a chance and looking over his shoulder, Peter's firmly set features morphed into soft concern. "Are you sure?", he asked somewhat uncertainly.

"I'm sure, kiddo. We're only talking but here, how about this... FRIDAY? If Captain Spangles or his side kick start anything, get the kid.", he said with a slight smile, knowing that he was going to redact that order the second Peter was out of earshot. ...and he didn't feel the least bit guilty about it. "There. Now, will you please go back to the gym and wait for Happy?"

Shifting on his feet with his face still scrunched up in worry, Peter nodded. "Alright.", he said sounding almost skeptical. "Are you going to meet up with us?"

"Of course, Buddy. I'll be down there soon. You stay with Happy until then, yeah?", Tony said story, reaching out to give the boy's shoulder a squeeze.

"I will.", Peter replied before glaring once more at the other two mean and heading out of the room.

By the time Tony had watched Peter disappear into the elevator and turned back around both Sam and Steve were looking at him in amusement. "What?", Tony barked, in stark contrast the tone he'd just been using with Peter.

"Nothing.", Steve replied with a smile. "It looks good on you. That's all."

"What does?", Tony asked as he squinted his eyes towards the other men in the room.

Smiling, Steve looked at Tony with a softness to his eyes. "Family life."
While Peter was in the gym with Happy, Tony was still on the common floor with Stever and Sam discussing the nitty-gritty details of the accords. A couple of hours later, once all of the business had been addressed and the committee had been informed of their arrival things started to become awkward again. At least this time no one was yelling.

"So... your, uh, your rooms are all still here and set up how you left them and the kitchen here is stocked with whatever Banner keeps handy. Anything else you want you'll have to talk to FRIDAY, though it's not in the plan for me to start buying your groceries for you as a habit. I'll get you set up though." Tony explained as he stood there rubbing his hands together.

Everyone remained completely neutral. Steve and Sam both nodded their heads in understanding. "Alright, I suppose we'll start getting our stuff together.", Sam said as walked towards the elevator, leaving Tony and Steve alone in the room together.

"I really am sorry that things turned out the way they did. I wish it could have been different.", Steve said solemnly

Holding his posture firm, Tony looked the other man right in the eye. "Me too.", he said simply deciding that, for the time being, that was as much of an apology as Steve was going to get. "Now, if you don't mind. My kid's waiting for me. Fury and some of the committee will be here Monday morning to go other everything and have you two sign. Probably set up some sort of a press event for Tuesday morning."

"Sure.", Steve replied. "Will we be seeing you again before then?"

Relaxing his shoulder's only slightly, Tony sighed. "Honestly, I don't know. Maybe Sunday afternoon after I take the kid home. I'm sure we still have plenty we could talk about."

Steve nodded his head in understanding and crossed his arms casually over his chest. "I'm sure we do.", he said knowingly. There were still a lot of past indiscretions to unload. There was no way
that one ten minute spat was going to correct all of that. It was going to take time and cooperation on both of their parts. So far it seemed like a reconciliation was a possibility. "I want to make this work, Tony. I really do."

"Me too.\textquotedbl", Tony sighed out because he really did. He'd made huge personal strides in the last year and wasn't ready to work his way backward by harboring anger. He didn't was Peter to see him like that and he didn't want anything to get between him and his relationship with Pepper and Peter. Stewing on an outdated fight wasn't likely to be conducive to nurturing a family. "I'll be around. If you really need something ask FRIDAY. Otherwise, I'll see you guys on Sunday."

"Sure.\textquotedbl, Stever said this time with a small smile gracing his lips. "See you then."

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When Peter got back to the gym, Happy was already waiting for him. "Hey kid, what's got your panties all in a wad?\textquotedbl, Happy asked when Peter walked in with his forehead scrunched up in annoyance and anxiety.

"Captain America's up there with Tony... and Falcon. I don't like it.\textquotedbl, Peter explained getting more annoyed as he spoke.

"Yeah? Well, How about we channel all of that into the bag. Come here let me get you all set up.\textquotedbl, Happy replied as he started to direct Peter to the corner of the gym that was set up with several weighted punching bags and dummies.

Following behind, Peter continued to inwardly seeth. "I don't get it. Why would the committee want to force this? It seems stupid to me. I mean a year ago, they were calling Captain America dangerous. I don't understand."

"You don't have to understand, kid. You just need to trust that Tony knows what he's doing. He's the adult.\textquotedbl, Happy simply replied before dragging Peter towards the bag and using his own feet to appropriately adjust the boy's into a solid stance. "Just like that. Now throw a light punch, we'll ease towards something stronger until we find the sweet spot. Tony said you were doing pretty good this morning at going between full strength and pulling back."

At those word's Peter suddenly remembered Tony's shoulder and cringed. "I hurt his shoulder.\textquotedbl, he said flatly unable to accept the praise when he'd screw up and injured his father.
"He's a big boy. He can take it.", Happy laughed. "Besides, he knew what he signed up for. It's fine."

"It's not fine! That's the second person I've hurt for no reason this week.", Peter nearly shouted in frustration with himself.

Sighing and taking Peter by the shoulder, Happy sighed. "Peter. Calm down. We're working on it. You've got this."

Nodding his head, Peter went back to concentrating on the instructions he'd been given. Hitting harder and then softer multiple times before Happy finally gave him the go-ahead to continue at the perfect level of strength. He was able to maintain it for a while but the more he struck the bag the more he started to think about what could be going on upstairs and he started to hit slightly harder that he was asked to do. Happy was quick to pull him back every time.

After having Happy tell him for the third time to ease back up it struck Peter that maybe he hadn't held back his strength as much as he thought when he'd pushed Flash. That only made him feel even more guilty which solidified his resolve to get it right. An hour or so later, Happy was telling him to stop and take a break and he did so willingly. Pulling his strength seemed harder than letting it flow through him naturally.

"You did good, kid. We're going to keep working on it. I'd like to see if Tony can get a bag that tracks PSI so that you can practice on your own some. There are a few already on the market but I bet he can come up with something much more reliable for you. You're a kid so you'll want to keep it around three-fifty to four hundred.", Happy said with a smile.

A few moments of thought later, Peter asked, "How hard do you think I hit full strength?"

"I don't Peter. I've seen what you can lift... that alone is pretty scary. You've done a really good job of keeping it mostly under control all this time. You know that right?", Happy stated honestly. It was amazing that the kid had gone from a scrawny to suddenly having superhuman power without hurting someone or tearing anything up.

Peter hummed a neutral response before looking towards the door. His adept hearing having caught Tony's footsteps coming their way. Once the man had walked in the door Peter automatically zeroed in on the fact that Tony was tensely holding his left arm against his abdomen and he knew that wasn't from anything Steve did. His heart sank a bit. "Is your arm okay?", Peter asked hesitantly as
Having not even realized he was nursing the sore shoulder, Tony tried to allow it to fall more naturally only to let out a small grunt as he did so. Sighing, he decided to be honest and hope that it didn't upset his son too much. "It's sore.", he said with a shrug of his shoulders which caused a grimace to cross his face for a moment. "I bet if I actually took some Tylenol or something it would be fine."

"I really sorry.", Peter replied with a sigh.

"Work in progress.", Happy said with a reassuring pat to Peter's shoulder.

Tony agreed and from there they spent several minutes discussing what they'd worked on and what would be next on the agenda before Tony decided that they'd done enough for one day. "Come on, Kid. Let's get upstairs and hit the showers. You stink."

Rolling his eyes, Peter quickly complied and followed the man to the elevator. "Are Captain America and Falcon going to stay here?"

"Yeah, Buddy. They're staying. It's all fine though. I've got it under control.", Tony explained softly. He considered mentioning that they didn't have access to the suite or the leisure pool that was pretty much Peter's but he decided to wait and see if it came up. Telling him there were restrictions might make him worry even more that something was actually going to happen.

"Are you going to forgive them?", Peter asked after a few moments of silence.

Tony didn't respond until they were out of the elevator and standing in the middle of the entryway. "I'm going to try my hardest. I don't want to fight anymore, kid.", Tony assured. Thought things would probably never go back to the way they had been before, they had to get better than they were now.

"I know. I just, I don't trust him.", Peter said with a bit of strain in his voice. It was hard to get the image of Tony looking so beaten and broken after having been extracted from Siberia out of his mind. When he later learned what had transpired there he'd been a bit shaken and that was well before he and Tony had grown any kind of close.
"You don't have to, Pete. You just have to trust me.", Tony said in return as he looked at Peter almost pleadingly. "Nothings going to happen."

"I trust you.", Peter affirmed with a nod of his head.

Going from soft to firm, Tony took Peter by the shoulder. "Good. Then when I tell you I've got it under control I need you to back off. You can't go attacking them. They live here now." He considered also pointing out that he didn't really appreciate the way the boy had used his powers against him but decided that could wait for another day.

"Fine.", Peter sighed out.

Nodding his head curtly, Tony gave the boy a serious look. "Thank you.", he said enunciating each syllable for emphasis.

"You're welcome.", Peter added in the same tone before they parted way towards the showers.

Peter made it back to the great room first and made his way to the kitchen and started digging around in the pantry, settling on his typical bag of chips. A can of soda later, he was sitting at the bar waiting for Tony to make a reappearance. After a moment he looked towards the ceiling and whispered, "FRIDAY? What are Captain America and Falcon doing?"

However, before he could get a real answer, Tony was walking around the corner. "It's not nice to spy on your neighbors, kid.", he said with a smirk as he continued to towel off his hair.

Peter startled slightly at the man's sudden appearance. "I wasn't spying.", he grumbled.

Laughing, Tony threw his damp towel over one stool before seating himself on another. "Right.", Tony replied with a smirk.

"Ugh. You do it to me all the time!", Peter said with mock annoyance but he knew from experience that Tony had often asked FRIDAY want he was doing.

Tony went from smirking to smiling. "That's different."
Rolling his eyes, Peter sighed. "How is that any different?", he asked flatly.

"You're my kid. I need to know what you're up to."

"Yeah? Well, one day you might not like the answer. What if I was--", Peter said as he firmly crossed his arms over his chest.

"--That's enough of this conversation. Thanks.", Tony said in horror as his mind incorrectly filled in the blanks before the kid could get his words out.

"Oh my God, Dad! I wasn't going to say-- I was... what if, what if I was, like, working on something that was supposed to be a surprise or something.", Peter said with something between a laugh and a mortified shout.

Laughing so hard that he could hardly breathe, at Peter's reaction, Tony had to take several minutes to calm down before he could say anything else. Peter half-glaring at him the whole time. "I'll tell you what... If you're ever 'working on a surprise', then you can tell FRIDAY to keep quiet about it."

As Peter's face began to burn bright red, he ran his hands down his face and groaned. "Dad...", he said in a drawn-out whine when the man continued to tease. "I thought you were done with this conversation."

"I'm done now. I promise.", Tony said with one last laugh. "I'm sorry, Buddy." He wasn't actually sorry though, he loved getting a good, short-lived rise out of the kid.

A beat later, FRIDAY was announcing that Dr. Banner was requesting their presence in his lab because he needed a bit more information on Pete's biology. Despite the fact that he had no idea what would be involved, Peter was elated. It meant he got to once again leave the penthouse. Tony seemed to notice and looked at him in mild annoyance. "What?, Peter asked almost cheerfully.

"It's not a game, kid. You're still grounded for basically lying to every single person who cares about you and letting things get out of hand. This isn't playtime. In fact, if it wasn't necessary for your medical well-being I would have said it could wait until next weekend.", Tony explained as Peter tried to school his face into something less amused. "I'm serious. In and out."
Bruce was in the lab waiting for them. "Hey, Tony... Peter.", he greeted with a smile. "I think I've just about got this but I want to get a touch more information about his metabolism. I want to do a finger prick to use as a control and then I'll have you take a couple of traditional pain killers. After that, I'll prick your finger again every fifteen minutes or so until it comes up trace.

"Blood?", Peter griped looking between Tony and Bruce. "Why do we have to use blood?", he practically whined as he crossed the room obediently towards the chair beside where the man was standing.

Bruce looked at Peter with sympathy and sighed. "Sorry. That's how it has to be. While we're at it I want to go ahead and draw a sample for some baseline bloodwork. It'll be good to have for future reference."

"Fine.", Peter easily conceded. He hated needles but he wasn't a baby and he wasn't going to throw a fit about it. "...for science."

It didn't take long for Bruce to get the blood work he needed and even though, Peter had his eyes shut the entire and seemingly had to breathe through it, he'd held still and didn't complain. Tony watching him the whole time. "I still don't get it, kid. How is it that I can sew you up but he can't prick you in the arm?"

"I don't know.", Peter defended. "It's just a thing. I've always hated getting shots and stuff. ...and to be fair I don't like to be sewn up either."

"Leave him alone, Tony.", Bruce laughed lightly before addressing Peter and handing over a can of Sprite and a couple of tablets. "You did great. Now, here swallow these."

Peter took what he'd been handed and looked around the room for a few minutes. Tony and Bruce were starting into a conversation about Steve and Sam being there and he didn't really want to be a part of it. Then he suddenly remembered the tests they had done the Sunday before. "Hey, Dr. Banner?", Peter called out in order to gain the other man's attention. "What happened with the spit test. Did my weird Spider DNA show up?"

Bruce gave him an excited smile and started pulling holographic data up before him as he crossed the room. "Actually that was really interesting. When I ran the gene test it didn't pick up anything
crazy. You're not Tony's biological son or anything. No surprises there. Then I ran a more detailed analysis and that's where it got pretty fun. You actually share about twelve percent of your DNA with the Missulena Occatoria... At twelve percent, there's actually chance that you could pass some of those traits on to your children one day."

"Whoa.", Peter said in something of a stupor. He'd never actually considered whether or not he could pass on those genes. Then again, he was thirteen when he'd been bitten... having kids wasn't exactly on his radar... not that it was now either. "That's really, really weird to think about."

"Tell me about it.", Tony said with a mock shudder. "I don't want to think about grandchildren at all... let alone ones that can literally crawl up my walls.", he added poignantly in Peter's direction. "In fact, all Spider-kids should stay off my walls."

By the fifth test post, tablets, Peter's blood was clear of all traces of the pills Bruce had given him. "Wow, so that was a six-hour extended-release and you blew through it in a little over an hour. I'm really curious about your liver enzymes.", Bruce said with absolute wonder and thrill. "This is going to tell us so much about you, it's very interesting."

"Just make sure it stays secure. I don't need anyone getting into his spider DNA and trying to replicate it nor do I want it to get traced back to Peter. Put it under lockdown.", Tony suggested. The more his friend spoke the more antsy he became about having that sort of information stored anywhere.

Bruces looked at Tony placatingly and assured that all information on Peter was being stored on his private server and under a false name. That was enough to help him feel a bit better about it at the moment. As far as he knew Spider-man wasn't even on anyone's radar. Peter had been doing an excellent job of keeping his alter-ego self from getting much national coverage. Nothing more than a local news story since Washington DC and that had been nearly a year ago.

"Should I take a look at that arm", Bruce asked, pulling Tony from his thoughts. He hadn't even realized that he was rubbing it as he sat.

"I haven't taken anything for it. It's probably fine.", Tony said calmly, watching Peter the whole time for a reaction. He knew the kid already felt guilty but then again it seemed to have been something of a motivator to get the kid to really concentrate on measuring the amount of power he was using.

Bruce sighed and started towards Tony. "Is it bruised?"
"Yep.", Tony curtly replied.

Bruce nodded. "Can you rotate it?"

"Good enough.", he replied causing both Bruce and Peter to give him a skeptical look.

"Swollen?"

"A bit. I put ice on it.", Tony sighed out, knowing where this was going. Then before for he could once again reassure both parties that he was in fact, just peachy Bruce reached out and pressed two fingers directly onto his collar bone causing him to shout. "Christ! Why would you do that!"

Bruce ignored the question and shook his head. "Oh, just let me x-ray for crying out loud."

"I'm telling you it's fine!", Tony groused, the pain still shooting through the spot that Bruce had prodded. "...As long as you quit poking at it."

Looking concerned for his father's wellbeing and guilty because it was by his hand, Peter pleaded. "Maybe you should let him. Come on, Tony, please?"

Sighing in defeat, Tony rose to his feet from the counter he'd been sitting on. "Fine.", he flatly replied as they all made their way down to the Medical Wing.
"Yep, it's fractured. Just a small hairline, should heal up in a few weeks. A sling might make it a bit more comfortable.", Bruce said as he removed his glasses and swiped away the image. "You want some the good pain killers for sleeping?"

"Nope. I'm fine. I might take you up on that sling though.", Tony replied tiredly. He could already see the wheels starting to turn in Peter's head and he knew a long conversation was going to follow. He was already contemplating what he could say to take some of the guilt off of his kid's shoulders. Then, once Bruce had left the room to obtain the sling, he immediately called Peter over to his side. "Come here, kid."

Peter hesitantly obeyed and was soon standing in front of Tony with remorse written all over his face. "I'm really, really sorry, Tony. You told me to pull back and I thought I did but--"

"--Stop it, Pete.", Tony said kindly. "You're learning. I knew there was a possibility that I might get clocked pretty good. That's why I told you to aim for center mass."

Peter took a deep shaky breath. "I broke your shoulder, Tony..."

"You heard the good doctor. It'll heal up just fine. I'm not upset about it and I don't want you to be either. ...Now, I'm injured and demand hugs.", Tony said, finishing with a smile.

Taking a deep breath and returning the smile, Peter leaned over and hugged the man as gently as he could. "It's been a really bad day.", Peter sighed out when Tony returned the gesture, kissing him in his hair.

"We'll make it better. After Lean Green gets me all patched up, we'll order some food and watch movies.", Tony said as Peter pulled himself back and Bruce came back into the room.

"Here, no lifting, no overextending and no roughhousing. Let me recheck it in a couple of weeks.", Bruce said as he tossed the sling in Tony's direction. "I'm going to head back up. I told Steve I'd take care of dinner."

"I'm sure they'll appreciate that. I wasn't expecting them to so up so soon. Did have time to stock anything and the Committee's supposed to be paying them so they can do all of that on their own
anyway. Monday, I guess. ...anyway. We'll see you around."

As Bruce began to quickly clean up the room, he nodded. "Of course, See you later, Peter. Don't let your dad do anything he shouldn't do and maybe try to get him to take some anti-inflammatories.", Bruce requested and Peter agreed before they parted ways.

The rest of the evening was spent in the penthouse. Not long after the copious amounts of taking out had been consumed, Peter was back inside of his head. It had been a weird few weeks. Moving back to Queens, getting used to switching between homes, press conferences, getting into a fight at school, having Steve and Sam show up and... breaking Tony's shoulder by accident. "I've changed my mind. It's been a really bad couple of weeks.", he mumbled towards Tony after some long thought. "When are things going to be normal again?"

Sighing, Tony looked down at his son and tried to figure out how to explain that this was the new normal. If Peter wanted to be an initiating part of his life then nothing was ever going to be normal again. It would hopefully slow down soon... but it would always be somewhat chaotic and evolving. "Things will settle down soon.", he said instead. With the business trip out of the way, the rouges starting to find their way home and the project with Bruce in its final stages all there was left to wait for the adoption process to really begin. Pulling Peter into his side, he kept his eyes on the screen. "Happy and I already been to your school. Next week will be better."

"Wait, when did you go to my school?"

"Thursday, Buddy. I thought you knew that. We went to the school and they were really quick to rectify everything. That kid won't be bothering you for a while. After some investigation, they decided to suspend him for a while starting this past Friday. He won't be back until next Monday. If he keeps it up, I'm not going to settle for suspension. I'm going to push for him to be removed from that school. He's to stay away from you from here on out. Period.", Tony stated firmly, knowing that Peter would hate the fact that they went to the school at all, let alone got a classmate suspended.

It surprised even Peter himself that he wasn't really upset that Flash had been suspended. It was quite the opposite really, he was relieved. He would have five whole days of not having to worry about Flash saying anything to him and with any luck, this suspension would be enough for him to keep his mouth shut for a while longer. Though, honestly, he could handle anything except the newest insults. If Flash could stop those, that would be enough.

Then questioned popped up in his head. Flash was on the decathlon team with him and he'd thought he might continue that this year but if he and Flash weren't allowed near each other... "What about decathlon?", Peter asked when he couldn't come up with a solution that didn't have one or the other of them not on the team. "We were both on the team last year."
"Then, whoever's in charge had better keep an eye on him.", Tony rigidly replied. He really wanted to say 'Sucks for Flash, guess he's not on the team anymore.' but he knew that would only prove to make Peter leave the team because he was just self-sacrificial enough for that. Even when it came to a kid who'd been picking at him for years. That was something else they were really going to have to work on at some point. That you can't make yourself miserable by trying to make everyone else happy. He would know.

"You're not going to make him quit the team?", Peter asked skeptically. He was already shocked that they hadn't had Flash expelled. Tony had also mentioned the threat of a restraining order but he guessed Pepper probably talked him down from that at some point.

"Not this time, Pete but if he doesn't stop we're going to have to discuss how we all want to handle it. If it were left to me he would already be expelled with a fifteen-mile restraining order and blacklisted from every University within a five-state radius."

"Well, I guess he should be glad it's not up to you then...", Peter said with a bit of a smile at the man's exaggerated response. "I don't want him to get expelled or anything. He's just a jerk."

"I know you don't, Buddy. That's why I didn't push for it... yet."

Peter leaned back on the couch and squinted towards the man. "...Well, you not wanting me to argue with Captain America is why I haven't hit him...yet." If Tony could be overprotective of him with Flash he should be allowed to be a little overprotective of him with Steve. He really did want to hit him square in the jaw. It was literally the least he could do after seeing what the soldier had done to his father.

"Peter Benjamin Parker.", Tony said threatening. "You had better not lay one finger on him. I swear I will never let you two in the same room together if you don't knock it off.--"

"--Good! I don't want to be in the same room with him. You shouldn't be either."

"Kid, for the last time. I'm trying to fix this. There was a lot going on at the time and... damn it... sometimes people say or do things they don't mean without thinking. We both did a lot of that. We did a lot of talking but no listening. I want to repair this, kid. He was my friend. I'd like for him to be that again. So, I'm literally begging you to stop with the hostilities and Trust me.", he haughtily explained. He understood why Peter would see things the way he did. When they'd been in Germany he'd taken the time to tell Peter how to best take the man out after insisting that he was a
dangerous threat. "Things are different now. Everything has calmed down and we can look at each other in a different light."

Slightly stunned by Tony's speech Peter sat there silently wondering what could have possibly changed between Germany, Siberia and the present. "I, I don't understand why you would want to make up with him. He hurt you.", Peter stuttered quietly as he avoided any kind of eye contact with the man.

At the risk of causing upset, Tony casually pointed out that he'd been hurt by Peter as well but he still loved him. There had been remorse that led to an apology. The apology turned into a discussion and then everything fell back into place. He knew, of course, that those circumstances were vastly different but it was something he hoped Peter could grab onto. "The past hasn't changed, kid. Just our attitudes towards each other. We're ready to apologize and move on. With time come clarity and the capacity to forgive. That's where we are, kid. Ready to make amends. To move forward."

Nodding his head, Peter swallowed back the argument he wanted to have about how he was Tony's son and Steve was a traitor but he knew what the man was getting at. He really was going to have to step back and If Tony trusted the other's enough to allow then in their home then he was going to have to trust that Tony knew what he was doing. "Can I apologize to them too?", he asked in defeat. "For today I mean."

Realizing that he had finally gotten through to the kid, Tony smiled. "Sure, kid. Tomorrow, though. I want to finish this movie."

Peter nodded and repositioned himself to where he was laying against Tony. He could hear his heart rate slowing and it was soothing. Despite his comfortable position and the somewhat late hour, he managed to not fall asleep. "Can we have cookies?", he asked as he looked towards the man beside him.

Quirking an eyebrow Tony looked back in question. "Do you think you deserve cookies?", he asked teasingly. The kid had scared the shit out of him that morning, argued and mildly threatened a super soldier and then argued with him about said soldier all in about twelve hours time.

"I guess not.", Peter sighed out suddenly remembering that he's been less than cooperative that day. "Can I get some apple sauce or something then? I'm hungry."

"Oh, go get the cookies.", Tony said with a roll of his eyes. "You're not five. I'm not taking away your dessert. ...you were kind of a little shit this morning though. No more ceilings." He'd added the last part to lighten the mood but it didn't seem to do the trick as Peter continued to look at him
"You're allowed to tell me 'no'. You do know that right, Tony?"

"Do you want me to tell you 'no'?"

"I mean... no? ...but kind of... You're supposed to be my dad. Dad's say 'no' sometimes."

"You're hard to say 'no' to, kid. You don't ask for much. What you do ask for is easy enough for me to give you.", Tony softly explained before a realization dawned on him. "Wait, I've told you 'no' before. I've told you 'no' plenty of times when it comes to your spidering."

Peter shook his head. "That's not the same thing."

"I grounded you that one time... and I've enforced May's grounding all weekend.", Tony continued to defend. "I told you no garage."

"Yeah but you can tell me 'no' about cookies and stuff too, Tony.", Peter suggested with a shrug of his shoulders. He didn't know why he was compelled to have this conversation. It probably sounded really weird having him practically beg to be told 'no'. 'Who does that?', he thought to himself in a mild annoyance.

"Ugh. Stop giving me parenting lessons and go get the damn Oreo's already.", Tony said while attempting to shove Peter off of the couch. "No taking them apart when you eat them, though! That's gross."

"Fine", Peter relented with a smile returning quickly with the package and two glasses of milk.

"See I can tell you 'no'.", Tony replied with a smirk.

Pausing as he dipped his first whole cookie into the milk he shook his head. "Doesn't count"

"You are really obnoxiously particular about this.", Tony pointed out as he collected a few cookies
"Thank you?", Peter questioned unsure of what to do with the man's last comment.

"It wasn't a compliment.", he teased back and while he had no idea where any of this was coming from but he was glad the kid was smiling again. However, he was a bit worried about how the kid was going to sleep that night. He wasn't stupid. He knew the kid still wasn't keen on the idea of Steve being there, he was being compliant. Tony'd asked him to stop being hostile so he offered to apologize. Hopefully, the tension would ease with time.

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As Predicted, Peter was awake and shaking before five in the morning. After raising the light levels a bit more, he got out of bed and went straight to his father's room to check on him. Knowing that it was a dream or hearing FRIDAY confirm that the man was alive and well was never enough. He had only gone to Tony's room during the night once and FRIDAY had informed him and Pepper that he was outside hesitating. This time, however, he easily opened up the door, strode in and climbed onto the free side of the bed. He wasn't his intention to wake Tony.

Despite how careful he was being, Tony could be a light sleeper and the movement beside him was enough to pull him awake. Knowing Pepper wasn't due home until late that evening he knew exactly who it was and he wasn't the least bit surprised. "You okay, Pete?", he asked quietly so as not to startle the kid who was obviously trying to not wake him.

"Are you?", Peter asked returning the question just as quietly.

Knowing full well what this was about Tony scooted towards the middle of the bed as best he could with a stiff shoulder. "I'm fine, kid. A little sore but I'm fine. Did you have a nightmare or did you just pop in to check in on me?", Tony asked teasingly but there was also a concern in his tone.

Sighing, Peter rolled onto his side and snuggled into his dad warm side. He took a few moments to calm to the beat of the man's heart before speaking again. "I dreamed that I hurt you. Like, really hurt you. You were in the hospital and everything, Dad. Then, then Captain America came in and undid all of the wires while Falcon laughed. You, you died."
"I'm right here, Buddy.", Tony said softly as he tried to reach over to get his left hand across him and into the kid's hair. When the movement turned out to be painful fruitless he sighed. "Everything's fine."

"I know.", Peter agreed. "...but I needed to see you. I can go back to my own bed now."

Not knowing if he was supposed to stop him or not, Tony lay still as he felt Peter start to sit up. "You don't have to if you don't want to. You know that right? Whatever you need."

Peter lay his head back down on Tony's good shoulder, cursing himself for being such a baby. He did want to stay there and he wondered if he would ever outgrow it. He liked the comfort of being so close to May or Tony when he was stressed out or coming down from a particularly bad nightmare. "I'm too big for this.", he admitted with a very small whine.

"Maybe.", Tony admitted. He knew Peter was sixteen and that this wasn't average teenage behavior. He also knew that Peter wasn't your average teenager. He was emotional, had been through more trauma than most kids his age and had an enhanced sense of touch that made physical reassurances more comforting than words alone. "...but you have to do what works for you. I want you to feel safe and happy. I can be whatever you need me to be... even a pillow." He smiled when he heard his son huff a laugh at his last words.

"I love you.", Peter said as he allowed the previous tenseness to flow out of his body.

"Love you too, Kiddo.", Tony returned hissing slightly when he tried to put his left hand behind his head as he usually did when Peter was occupying his right. When Peter made a move to get off of his right shoulder, Tony grabbed his shirt and pulled him back. "It's fine. I can sleep like this too."

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Later that morning after a late breakfast was eaten, Tony led the way to the common floor where he'd arranged to properly introduce, Peter to the others. "We're going to stay long enough for you to apologize like you wanted to do and that's it," Tony said just before the elevator dinged on the correct level.

"I know. I've got. I'm not going to be a jerk this time. I promise.", Peter grumbled, feeling a bit put out that his father didn't trust him to keep his cool as he's said.
Then the second the doors opened, they were greeted by Steve, Sam and Bruce all sitting in the living room. Bruce with a book in the recliner. Sam eating a bowl of cereal at on one couch while watching old cartoons and Stever doing a crossword puzzle. While he was used to Bruce doing things like reading a book with his feet kicked up. Seeing Falcon eat cereal while Captain America did a crossword puzzle in a pair of sweat pants felt unreal.

"Morning Tony. Peter.", Steve greeted once they come into view of the room.

Bruce looked up from his book and smiled. "How's the shoulder, Tony?", he asked noting that the man was still wearing the sling. He hadn't expected that to last more than a few hours before he gave up on it and tossed it to the side.

"I'll live. How are you two settling in?", Tony replied as he looked between Sam and Steve. Once they had indicated that they were good Tony grabbed Peter by the shoulder and pulled him forward. "Well, I wanted to properly introduce you to my kid. This is Peter and he has something he would like to say."

Shifting on his feet, Peter tried to push aside the images that still went through is head whenever he saw Steves face. If Tony could try to forgive him, so could he. "I, uh, I'm really sorry for being a jerk yesterday, Captain America and um, Falcon... sir. I shouldn't have yelled and um, threatened you. It won't happen again.", he quickly uttered in order to get it over with as soon as possible.

"It's alright, son--Peter.", Steve said with a smile, quick to correct the name the boy had adamantly balked at the day before. "You were trying to protect your dad. I can respect that.", he continued with a nod in Tony's direction, hoping the man would surmise the intended parallel. "I'm not hurting anyone. I want to help."

Sam stepped forward, unlike Steve who had remained a few steps back and held out his hand. "It's nice to meet you, Peter. You can call me Sam." Peter took his hand and shook it before having Steve's hand placed in front of him as well.

"Call me Steve. Captain anything is way too formal.", he replied simply as Peter nodded in agreement.

"Thank you... Steve. You too um, Sam. It's nice to meet you too.", he said quietly even though there was a small part of him that wasn't really. He was going to try though. He'd promised he would.
Tony laughed and rolled his eyes. "You know it took weeks of him living with me to get him to stop calling me 'Mr. Stark'," Tony said with a smile and nudge to Peter's shoulder. Though he could fully imagine a Mr. being attached to both names in the future. "...and Jolly Green over there is still Dr. Banner."

At that, Bruce pipped up from his chair looking Tony dead in the eye. "Peter can call me Bruce if he wants to." Then looking over at Peter he nodded and smiled. "Dr. Banner is fine if that's what you prefer."

Before the room could grow too quiet, Tony spoke up again. "Alright, so you've all met now. Maybe next weekend we can do dinner or something. Right, Kid?"

"Mm-hmm. Sure, Dad. Dinner."
You all continue to overwhelm me with your support! I am so thankful for every single comment, kudos, bookmark, and subscription. Those small gestures are what keep me going with this story. I have so much written and so much more to write and just... thank you. Really.

❤

After the brief interaction with the newly arranged Avengers, Tony and Peter went back up to the penthouse. It wasn't going to be much longer until it was time for them to start the drive back to Queens so that Peter could go to school the next day. Something that neither of them were really looking forward to. "You're sure you're going to be okay tomorrow, kid?", Tony asked for the third time that day.

"Yes.", Peter irritably replied. They'd had this conversation multiple times and frankly, he was tired of it. "Flash won't even be there and we both know that Happy's already demanded that someone watch me at all times."

Tony looked the boy over with concern because Flash wasn't what he was worried about. What he was worried about was the fact that his kid had hurt another kid and news like that doesn't go unspread. If he was shocked by the incident the rest of the school must have been too. People would be talking. "Kid, people are going to be talking about it. You're ready for that?"

"For the eighty-fifth time, Tony. I'll be fine. I promise not to lose my shit and hit anybody, okay!", Peter eventually snapped. "Relax about it!"

Closing his eyes, Tony took a deep breath through his nose. "First of all. Do not yell at me. I'm worried about you, kid. Second, I didn't think you were going to hit anybody. Last of all... I am relaxed. You, on the other hand, are tense as hell and biting my head off for giving a shit."

"I'm sorry.", Peter stressed. "It's-- We've been over this. I'm not worried about school--"

"--Then what is it because you've been uptight since you got up this morning."
Taking a deep breath of his own, Peter got up from the barstool he'd been seated on and started to pour himself a glass of water. He smiled a bit as he did so. That was one of the little things about being at Tony's house that he really liked. He didn't have to get a cup of room temperature water from the sink. There was always a cold filtered pitcher in the refrigerator. He could have sworn it tasted better that way. Once he had swallowed it down and gone to pour another half of a glass he sighed. "It has nothing to do with school. I was weird about going to see Capt--Mr. Steve and Mr. Sam. Then you're the one who's been all worried about school and now I'm worried that you're worried about it. It's like your worry is contagious or something."

Biting back a laugh at the predicted use of the names 'Mr. Steve and Mr. Sam', Tony replied, "I'm allowed to worry about you, kid."

"I know but when you keep asking about the same thing over and over again it drives me crazy and makes me nervous, like, maybe I should be worried."

Deciding that maybe that made sense, Tony crossed the room and placed his free hand gently between Peter's shoulder blades. "I'm sorry. I'll try not to do that anymore. I guess with Pepper not being here, I'm putting it all on you and I shouldn't do that."

Nodding his head and accepting the apology, Peter started to put the pitcher back where it came from. Then after a minute or so of hesitant thought, he was looking at Tony with something if a shy sort of smile. "Hey, Dad? Can I ask you for something?"

Quirking an eyebrow, Tony smiled. "You want to ask me for something? Like, to buy you something?"

"Mm-hmm. It's not a big deal or anything a-and you can say 'no'...", Peter said as Tony smiled at him with pleasure.

He considered reminding the kid that he was going to be setting up a bank account for him at some point during the week but was entirely too curious as to what he wanted to ask for. He could remind him of the account later. "We both know, I'm not going to say 'no'... unless it's something ridiculous like... I don't know, a tiger or something..."

Laughing, Peter held up his hands and took a step back so that he could lean on the counter. "It's not that. A puppy would be nice... but it's not that either! I was just wondering if, maybe you could, I mean if I could have one of those pitchers that filter the water and stuff like you have here for the apartment."
Holding back the desire to give the kid a very hard time about asking him to buy him a water pitcher, Tony nodded his head. "Sure, kid. Why don't you go ahead and take that one? I can get a new one in a day or two. There are some replacement filters under the sink, grab those too.", he said simply. He'd really thought, maybe even hoped, that Peter was going to ask him for something a little more... unreasonable. He enjoyed spoiling the kid. Then again maybe he already had he thought to himself with a laugh as it occurred to him that regular tap water was no longer good enough for his kid.

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As they pulled up to the apartment, Peter was eager to get inside which came as something of a surprise. It wasn't that he wasn't going to miss Tony during the week so much as he was ready to see May. Except for this time, there was no feeling of loss that came with the switch. Things were already getting easier. All of the various adults that now seemed to be in charge of him were always close by. A phone call, video chat or text away. Rhodes would send him texts periodically asking him how things were going and if Tony had done anything stupid recently. Pepper would send him pictures or articles of things she thought he might find interesting and whichever parent he wasn't with at the time would keep in touch.

While there were times that all of the concern was frustrating, like when they all wanted to ask him the same things over and over again but most of the time it was great. It felt nice to have so many people who cared about him. He used to wonder what being a part of a large family would be like and now he knew.

As he got out of the car, Peter turned to give Tony an awkward one-armed hug over the center console. "I'll call you after school but it's going to be fine.", he said with ease. He knew that word would have spread about his lack of judgment but he also knew that the teachers wouldn't stand for the gossip. They tended to get antsy whenever students talked too much about a fight that had taken place. Like they were worried it would start some sort of a revolution or something.

"Alright, kiddo. I'll talk to you soon. Love you to pieces.", Tony replied as he squeezed his son as best he could in the position they were currently in.

Peter smiled because he loved it when Tony typed those words out in messages but he'd never heard him say them out loud. When his uncle was alive he would say that he loved him to Neptune and it felt kind of like that. "I love you even more than that.", Peter said with a smile before relinquishing his hold and getting out of the car. "I'll see you on Friday."
May was happy to see him and Peter was eager to tell her about his weekend. They had talked briefly the night before so she knew that Steve and Sam were there and she knew that Tony and Happy were doing some training with him but she didn't know any of the details yet. As they sat on the couch drinking tea and eating cookies, Peter excitedly went over everything that had happened from accidentally scaring Tony to being in the same room with Steve and Sam. He left out the part about hurting Tony. He still felt horrible about that and wanted to push it back as far as possible but of course, she already knew.

"Tony said there was a little mishap during your training...", May mentioned cautiously. Tony had asked her to make sure that he didn't spend the week beating himself up over it but since Peter hadn't mentioned it she felt sort of bad bringing it up herself.

Closing his eyes, Peter dropped his chin to his chest. "Yeah, I, uh, screwed up a bit.", he grumbled under his breath.

"Hmm...", May acknowledged with a slight nod of her head. "He chose to get out of the suit, Peter. I'm sure he was aware that it might hurt. Besides, didn't you hit him all the way into a wall once?"

Peter smiled at the image. That had been a long time ago at this point. He'd completely freaked out as Tony had peeled himself off of the wall. Now that he thought about it he wondered how he didn't manage to hurt him that time. It had been a much harder hit. As he thought back to that day he paled. It hadn't been noticeable at the time but shortly after getting himself to his feet, Tony had made mentioned the time and said that he had a meeting to get to and for him to get some water and wait for Happy. Then he'd canceled the next Friday because of a last-minute business affair. It suddenly made sense. He'd hurt Tony that day too. "I did.", Peter whispered while still processing it all.

"He's a grown man Peter, he makes his own decisions and if he's not upset there is literally no reason for you to be.", May explained before deciding to change the subject altogether. "What do you want to do for dinner? I'm thinking Thai."

Happy for the change in subject Peter smiled. "Yeah. That sounds great.", he said before sighing deeply. "It's almost Monday and I haven't been out in days. Can I please go out and patrol until time to go? It's Sunday afternoon so it's not like it would be letting me off that early. Plus I'll be able to sleep better if I can, you know, get all my energy out and then I'll do better at school tomorrow so really it's win-win. I've learned my lesson, I swear."

Giving it some thought, May decided that it probably wouldn't be a complete disaster to let Peter off the hook a little early, especially since she was sure he had legitimately learned his lesson. It was also worth considering that he hadn't tried to get out of his punishment prior, had finished all of his school work and if she was being honest, he had a compelling argument. "I suppose so. As long as
you really understand how important it is for us to be able to trust you. We can't do that if you're hiding stuff from us.\textquotedbl", she sighed out and when Peter readily agreed she gave in fully. "Be home by seven and stay safe!"

"I will, May, don't worry!\textquotedbl", Peter announced as he took off towards his bedroom to get his suit. What he didn't account for was Tony not knowing he'd been given permission to go out before Monday after school. As such, he hadn't been out and about for longer than twenty minutes before Tony's face showed up in the corner of his HUD.

"Kid! What are you doing out? Last I checked it was still Sunday.\textquotedbl", Tony asked as he pinched the bridge of his nose. He'd not expected the kid to sneak out at four-thirty in the afternoon. Then again he's not expected him to sneak off at all. He'd been pretty adamant about punishing himself this go around. He hadn't been able to talk the boy into picking up a Nintendo controller all weekend despite the fact that no one had told him he couldn't.

"It's fine, dad. May knows I'm out. She said it was fine. I promise.\textquotedbl", Peter quickly spouted out before the man could get much further. He guessed neither he nor May had thought to let him know that the parameters of his punishment had changed and he'd been let off the hook a bit early. "I got off for good behavior or something..."

Blinking back a few times in confusion, Tony stared blankly into the camera on his phone. "Really? That's a thing?"

"Mm-hmm. I asked her if I could go out because it would help me sleep and be ready for school in the morning. She agreed and said it was fine as long as I got back by seven for dinner. You can ask her and everything."

"Alright, well, maybe next time you could let me know \textit{before} you go out so I can disable the 'Go to Your Room Protocol'\textquotedbl", he said with a smile because he knew the kid would hate the name. He hated most of the babyishly named protocols, which is exactly why he continued to use them.

Resisting the urge to roll his eyes, Peter sighed instead. "Do you have to call it that?"

"Yep.\textquotedbl", Tony replied, emphasizing the 'p'. "Tell you what though, You stay out of trouble and you'll never have to hear me talk about it again."

"It's not like I get in trouble all the time...\textquotedbl", Peter grumbled as he continued to survey the city from
his perch on the top of one of the taller buildings. Being early evening on a Sunday there was really much to do. So far all he had really done was take the time to enjoy the rush that came from swinging from building to building.

"No, you don't. I was just messing with you.", Tony replied softly. "Go do your Spider thing, I talk to you later."

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Peter was back inside well before seven so that he and May could go out to dinner. When they arrived back home, the evening was filled with board games and conversation up until Peter retired to his room to text his friends and get ready for bed. Finding sleep had been easy however staying that way proved to be a challenge as the previous night's dream came back full force. Growling to himself he checked the clock. It was still entirely too early to call Tony and at the apartment, FRIDAY wasn't there to offer any reassurances either. While he'd suffered from bad dreams since sleeping in the apartment again, none of them had involved Tony's death and he wasn't sure what to do.

Running his hands through his hair and breathing deeply through his nose, Peter tried to convince himself that all was well. It was a dream and he wasn't a small child. He knew the difference between reality and a stupid nightmare. However, he couldn't get the nagging concern out of his head and found himself tugging at his hair as a result. Sleep now elusive, he left his room and made a glass of chocolate milk, watching the numbers that were glowing from the stove slowly count up towards the five o'clock hour. By the time it read five o'four he couldn't take the tingling anxiety anymore and attempted to dial Tony's number.

"Pete? Are you alright?", the man asked after the first ring allowing Peter to let out the breath he'd been holding as Tony held onto one of his own.

Sighing in utter relief, Peter replied quietly. "Mm-hmm. I'm fine, Dad. Just needed to hear your voice.", he admitted, rubbing a hand down his face and across his tired eyes.

Already fairly sure of what would cause Peter to call him at all too early in the morning for the sole purpose of hearing his voice, Tony made a quick suggestion. "Nightmare? Do you want to video chat?"

Peter had been hesitant to request a video chat in what really amounted to the middle of the night so he was glad Tony suggested it. Hearing him was good, seeing him would be even better. "Yeah. Lets, let's do that.", he agreed with a vigorous nod of his head.
"Alright, two seconds.", Tony promised before, his face overtook the screen in Peter's hand. "There. See, I'm alright. ...and so are you."

"Sorry, I'm being stupid.", Peter said, still running his free hand through his hair or rubbing at his tired eyes.

Tony smiled and pulled the phone back so that his kid could get a good look at the lab behind him. "You're not. ...and before you say anything, I wasn't even sleeping. I've been doing some research and got caught up. So if anything you've saved me from Pepper's wrath. I can sneak into bed after we talk.", he explained as he turned around as if to prove he really wasn't sleeping.

"I wish you were here, Dad.", Peter nearly cried but he didn't really. While his voice cracked, no tears escaped. He considered that a win.

"I know, Buddy. I wish I was closer.", Tony sighed out in reply. He really did wish he was closer. Selling the tower was suddenly feeling like the worst possible decision he'd ever made. Part of him wanted to go beg the new owners to sell it back to him but he was pretty sure that would make for some insane headlines. There were other options. Pepper had an apartment in Manhattan but it was a small studio maybe at some point he would have to find a decent-sized penthouse apartment near Queens.

"Are they ever going to stop?", Peter croaked, interrupting Tony from his thoughts.

"I hope so, Buddy but until then you need to keep talking about it. It really does help. Though, we could maybe consider a therapist if that's something you want to try."

Already sure that he did not want to talk to a stranger, Peter was quick to decline. "I'd rather talk to you or May.", he rapidly spat out. He had plenty of people to talk to already. Even if he didn't want to go to Tony or May, he had Ned, Pepper, Rhodey and even Happy to talk to. The list of people he had to talk to had grown over the summer and he suddenly felt extremely grateful. "I actually have a lot more people to talk to now than I've ever had before. I guess I'm really lucky."

"I guess you are.", Tony assured before looking over at the time. "Look, you still have an hour or so before you have to get up for school, yeah? Why don't you try to take a nap?"

"Mm-hmm.", Peter agreed with a nod as he rubbed his hand tiredly over his forehead. A nap was
probably a good idea. "You should go to bed too or Pepper's going get mad at you for spending the whole night in the lab again."

Tony huffed a laugh but he knew the kid was right. Pepper would be getting up in an hour or so also, he would be well served to be in bed beside her when she did so. "You're probably right. Good-night, Pete. I love you to pieces, alright?"

At those words, Peter smiled for the first time since the conversation had started. "Yeah. I love you even more than that, though."

"If you say so, kid but I'm not sure it's possible.", Tony returned with a smile of his own. "I'll see you on Friday."

After ending the call Peter could feel all of the tightness that had been in his chest relax with one deep exhale. Then, Knowing that Tony was right, he went back to bed and dreamlessly slept until his alarm woke him. Stretching himself out, he attempted to rise before rolling onto his stomach and closing his eyes back. Though, that didn't last too long as May was in the room not even fifteen minutes later pulling the blankets off of him. "Rise and Shine Spider-man.", she shouted with a grin. "Happy's going to be here in twenty and you haven't even gotten dressed yet."

Groaning, Peter pulled himself to the edge of the bed and started to rise because he definitely didn't want to keep Happy waiting. Then he figured that if got ready fast enough, he might be able to talk the man into stopping at McDonald's but he didn't have to because when Happy walked in he was already carrying a bag.

"Your dad sent me a message at stupid o'clock in the morning to tell me you would require two McGriddles this morning.", the man said as if he were completely exasperated but when Peter gave him a quick hug and a genuine 'thank you' he relented. "You're welcome, kid."
Chapter 77

School on Monday wasn't quite as easy as Peter thought it would be but it was by no means bad either. A few kids he didn't know congratulated him on getting Flash suspended while the ones that he did know patted him on the shoulder and welcomed him back. Both of which made his stomach churn with guilt and as suspected there was a teacher within arms reach all day long. In fact, it seemed like the only place he could go where there wasn't an adult basically watching his every move was the bathroom, which he was extremely grateful for. He tried not to be bothered too much. Especially since no one seemed to really notice, save for MJ who commented on it at lunch.

"What's with the constant tail? Daddy Stark got you under some sort of surveillance?", MJ asked as she slammed her tray down beside him.

"Sort of? It's not him though. Well, it kind of is... but it's Happy. He's in charge of my security or whatever.", he grumbled under his breath. He's thought no one had noticed at all up until that point and now he was slightly self-conscious about it. "Is it that obvious?"

"No.", she replied with a shrug of her shoulders. "I'm just observant. You were being watched when school started too.", she added with a grin. "They had pretty much backed off by last Wednesday though. I'm assuming that's how Flash was finally able to get to you.--"

"--He didn't ge--"

"--Which was completely valid! He was being ignorant, vexatious and crude. I would have punched in the face, personally, but you do you.", she said going back to her typical uninterested facade.

"She's right you know.", Ned piped up. "...and I would have punched him in the face too."

Peter looked at his friend skeptically and then rolled his eyes. "No, you wouldn't."

"You're right, I wouldn't. I'm a lover, not a fighter. I would have totally backed you up of you had, though.", Ned rapidly amended. "He kind of deserved it."

Shaking his head, Peter looked between his two friends. "Hmm-mm. No one deserves to get hurt like that. I shouldn't have pushed him.", he said but when both of his friends sort of faltered at his
logic, he let it go. It wasn't worth an extended conversation so he changed the subject. "I wonder if we could go to the arcade or something after school one day... we haven't done anything together since last May."

Not long after that, the bell rang and they were cleaning up their trays. The remainder of the day was as expected. With Flash bine absent, even the kids who normally followed his lead weren't bothering him. They gave him a few looks and mumbled a few pathetic remarks under their breath but those were all things he could manage. As such, by the time he walked out of school, he was actually in a pretty good mood. "Hey, Happy.", he said with a smile as he tossed his backpack on to the floorboard.

Happy looked back at him with amusement and laughed. "Well, aren't you in a good mood today. I take it you had a good day, then?"

"Yeah. It was fine. It was normal.", Peter emphasized with glee. "Hey! Speaking of normal. My friends and I want to go to the retro arcade after school next Monday, so you won't have to come to get me that day."

Eye's shooting up to look in the rearview mirror, Happy tried to decide if the kid was being serious or not. Apparently, he was. "Uh. Yes, I will and no you're not. Not alone anyway."

"What? Why?", Peter asked in irritation. It wasn't like they were going to a night club or anything. "We go there all the time, it's only four blocks over, we can take the subway and then Ned's mom can drive me home."

"Look, if you really want to go then, I'll take you. I won't follow you around or anything but I'll be there. It's too soon for you to be running around on your own like that. Especially with your friends.", Happy firmly replied causing Peter to frown back at him. "Don't give me that look. I'm not trying to ruin your fun but someone needs to be there when you end up trending on social media and all the cameras show up. *It's my job, Peter.*"

"Why can't we just take the subway?", Peter tried to bargain. "You could meet us there if you really want to."

Trying not to get exasperated, Happy sighed. This was all new to the kid and since he hadn't actually been cornered yet he had no idea what he would be risking by boarding a train. He would basically be trapping and then hand-delivering himself to every bit of paparazzi in the area. "Peter, the subway is the last place you need to be right now. We've been really lucky so far and soon enough, we'll ease off but right now, you need to let me make sure you're okay. Tony would kill me
if anything happened to you."

"I know. I just want to be able to go somewhere besides the bathroom without being followed. ", Peter grumbled arms crossed tightly over his chest.

"Trust me, kid. You'd rather have me following you than TMZ."

"I guess. At least, we get to go.", Peter said with a small smile as he resigned himself to the fact that Happy was going to be in his shadow for the next... well, maybe forever. "I've missed hanging out with my friends at the arcade."

Glad that the kid was being cooperative about the whole thing, Happy smiled. "I know and I won't bug you guys unless I have to.", Happy promised, to which, Peter happily nodded his agreement.

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While Peter was at school Tony was hauling himself downstairs to one of the conference rooms to meet with the committee and the compound's newest arrivals. He was surprised to see how cooperative Steve was being. To have been so antsy about the whole arrangement he had some good questions, suggestions, and general comments. He was even more surprised that the committee was listening to him. It had taken him and Rhodes months to get them to listen to their suggestions and most of it was still completely dismissed.

By the time they left the room, not only had a salary been negotiated but Sam had been given the okay to go back to his work at the VA. Some of the more noose like restraints were loosened and by the end, it almost felt like free will. They would still be required to report and any large scale missions would have to be given a green light but all in all, they had more control now than they'd had in the original agreements. Unable to keep his mouth shut, Tony eventually spoke up. "What gives? Rhodey and I tried to get you to consider some of this same shit and it was dismissed before we could even explain it.", he argued towards the head of the table.

"Yes, well, he asked nicely.", the man returned but that wasn't really it. More likely it was that them showing up at all was a show of goodwill. That and they had been willing to work with what they were given before throwing out ideas. Tony somewhat wondered if the nearly instant changes had been planned from the beginning. It still felt like there was an awful lot they didn't know but this he could work with. The new arrangements even left room to help out spider-man when he needed it without too many repercussions for either of them. ...as long as it didn't involve thousands of dollars
worth of property damage. Stepping in if he accidentally took on too much was now on the table. It occurred to him that he would maybe not tell Peter that right away though...

"So that's it. You're going to let us do our own thing...", Sam asked with skepticism.

"Within reason and with the proper paperwork to document your activities. An insurance policy if you will. We can't back you up if we don't know what you've done.", one of the women explained.

"Who decides what's within reason?", Steve asked looking from Tony to Fury to the committee. He was pretty sure they all had different definitions of the term, within reason.

The whole chain of command bullshit was gone over once more and Tony rolled his eyes wondering what had conspired to make then think that Nick Fury of all people was the one to serve for...or under them. It was another mystery that he really had no desire to sort out. All he wanted was peace and accountability and maybe to get his family back. His extended family anyway. He would always have Pepper and Peter. They were too important to lose.

For Tony, the remainder of the week would be filled with impromptu meetings around the common floor as they all tried to continue to work out their differences and determine their place in the new dynamic. No one was quite sure how things would go should they ever be called into action. Especially since Steve and co had been spending a good bit of the last year working under the radar. It would take some careful practice for them to begin working as a team again but forgiveness or at minimum, understanding had to come first. At least that was something they could all agree at the moment

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It was Wednesday after school, that Peter got his first real look at why everyone was being so overly tense about him being out on his own. Peter had begged Happy to take him to the McDonald's on the corner to get something to eat. There had been an assembly that day that rearranged all of the lunches and his ended up being much earlier than usual, meaning that by three he was practically starving. Happy easily agreed to eat inside with him. He would never admit that he liked spending a little bit of extra time with the kid. However, the second they walked in the door, they were recognized. At frist, it was Happy who turned a few heads, being in his SI polo. That and the fact that he had been photographed often alongside Tony many times in the past. From that, it was easy to put two and two together. He was with Peter. Tony's 'almost' son.

It wasn't anything serious, Peter knew a few pictures had been taken. He could see people pointing their phones in his direction and tried to ignore it. When the attention was unrelenting, he stepped a
bit closer to Happy who looked over his shoulder as he felt Peter's hand brush against his back. "You alright, kid?", he asked behind him.

"Mm-hmm.", Peter nodded. He was still slightly uncomfortable with the idea of strangers taking his picture but he was more hungry than bothered at the moment.

"Then get up here and order your food.", Happy replied with a tug of the boy's sleeve leading Peter to step forward and place his order. That way he could use his own body to block Peter from the cameras. Once their food was on a tray, Happy led them to a table in the corner. As they sat there several more people walked past to snap a quick picture. Peter found it almost amusing how they thought they were being sneaky. Do you want to move to the car?", Happy asked when Peter turned his head away from the third person to walk past the table in as many minutes.

"I'm fine. I can handle it.", Peter said with a smile. He was going to have to get used to it anyway and the last thing he wanted to do at the moment was to have Happy decide he couldn't go to the arcade. "We can eat in here. Besides, you told me I was never allowed to eat a Big Mac in your car ever again."

"That was a month ago, I think I can give you another chance.", Happy said with a laugh because he had said that. The kid had left little bits of slimy lettuce all over the seat. "Keep it in the wrapper so all the lettuce doesn't fall out."

Peter shook his head and went back to his fries. "It's fine. Just a few nosey people. Tony says to ignore them."

Happy smiled at the boy in front of him and sighed. "Yeah, but leaving is fine too. You don't have to let them take your picture. You have an option here. It's McDonald's. We can get it to go."

Peter stubbornly shook his head and they sat there for the next thirty minutes chatting about the school day and finishing their respective snacks. The problem was by the time they were finishing up, there was a couple of camera's waiting outside. They were mostly hidden by the bushed lining the parking lot but Peter's spider-sense immediately warned him that something was off. At first, he misinterpreted it as danger. He'd looked at Happy imploringly before opening his mouth. "Something's wrong", he said as his eyes began to scan the area for danger.

A bit startled by the boy's quiet outburst, Happy to began to search the area, though he was reluctant to leave Peter at the booth by himself. "What is it?"
"I don't know. This is different, I don't feel like we're in any kind of immediate danger. It's more like, maybe... someone's threatening? It's not pressing. It's annoying. Like a light buzz.", Peter tried desperately to explain. It was always difficult to explain his sixth sense to someone else.

Looking out the window again, Happy spotted some movement behind that the thinner bits of shrubbery. "You think it's that guy over there with the long lens camera?", he asked casually. He didn't want to freak the kid out with the fact that paparazzi was starting to show up.

Peter sighed. "Yeah. That's probably it. Which is weird because it's not really a threat, right?"

"It shouldn't be.", Happy assured with as much confidence as he could. "It can be annoying and they can get... grabby. ...but they shouldn't. That's why I'm here. They aren't allowed to touch you. Got it?"

Peter nodded and slurped down the last of his drink. "Maybe we should go now.", he suggested with a small smile.

The second they stepped out of the building there was a very small handful of people waiting for them. Happy walked in front and Peter trailed closely behind resisting the urge to childishly cover his ears as questioned started being shouted at him and Happy started demanding that they back off. Instead, he clenched his jaw and jumped into the car the second the door was opened.

The ride remained quiet for only a few minutes before Happy was questioning him. "You okay back there?", he asked as he watched Peter frowning out the window. The buzz in the back of his skull died down with the distance and he wondered why it had set off his senses, to begin with. Probably because he hated it far more than he hated the people with their phones, or maybe it was because he was being tailed at all. Nothing like that had ever happened before so he wasn't sure but it certainly seemed possible. That was something else he definitely planned on asking Tony about.

"I'm fine.", Peter finally answered towards the window but knowing the man was likely to press him for more he decided to elaborate. "I really, really hated that, though."

"I know, kid.", Happy sighed out. "That's why I didn't want you to go off with your friends next week by yourself. Imagine being trapped on a train with them."

"That would suck.", Peter agreed and for the remainder of the week, he made a point of not asking to stop anywhere. He'd grown slightly wary of being out in public now that he knew hat it was like to
have people bombard him. Happy had suggested that the entire event was minor in the grand scheme of things so even on Friday when Happy asked him if he wanted anything for the ride, he declined.

Deciding that the boy was still a bit on edge from the unwelcome attention a couple of days prior, Happy clarified that he hadn't meant for them to go in anywhere. "I'm not trying to hold up your little family reunion... We could get drive-thru, you know.", he said almost sarcastically to try and keep it casual. It must have worked because Peter huffed a laugh.

Peter smiled at the suggestion. "Yeah. Actually, that does sound good.", he replied, glad that the man seemed to have read his mind.

The second he got to the compound, Peter jumped out of the car and went straight up to the penthouse in search of his father. "FRIDAY? Where's my dad?", he asked and when then IA indicated that the man was on the common floor, Peter headed that way. As the elevator doors opened, he darted around the corner and directly into Steve's chest. Gasping, Peter took a step back already apologizing. He hadn't exactly been expecting to run into anyone and as such had probably done so with quite a bit more speed and force than he should have. "I'm sorry, Mr. Steve! I didn't see you there I wasn't trying to do anything, I swear. FRIDAY said Tony was here..."

"He is. He's in the kitchen.", the man said as he brushed his hands down his shirt, eyeing him with suspicion. "You're a lot heavier than you look, sport. That was quite a hit. Are you okay?"

Not knowing how to respond to the first part of that, Peter ignored it, hoping the man wouldn't think too hard on it later. "Yeah, I'm fine. Just, just looking for my dad.", he replied as he pointed around the man and towards the direction of the common kitchen. However, before he could get much further he could hear Tony approaching.

"Hey, kid! When did you get here?", he asked with legitimate surprise. He'd clearly lost track of time.

Smiling Peter, stepped around Steve and fell into his father's arms. "A little while ago. I went up first and then FRIDAY told me you were here."

"I'm sorry, Buddy. I wasn't paying attention. I should have been out front waiting for you.", Tony replied as he held onto his kid.
Peter laughed and pulled away. "You don't have to wait for me outside every time. I know how to get inside."

"I know that.", Tony returned with a roll of his eyes. "I like to meet you out front, kiddo. I miss you when you're not here."

Peter agreed and they started towards the common kitchen where Tony indicated that he should take a seat on one of the tall bar stools. Unsure of what they were doing there in the first place, he remained fairly quiet while the other men continued with light conversation. The longer they sat there, the more annoyed Peter became. He hadn't seen his dad in a week and had what felt like a million things to talk to him about. Yet instead of going up to the penthouse together, Tony seemed content to stay there. Just as Peter was about to volunteer to go up alone, Steve returned to the room and sat down beside him causing him to instantly stiffened.

"How was school?", Steve asked kindly, hyperaware that the boy had tensed up at his presence. "Tony says you go to a Science and Technology school? That sounds interesting."

Squeezing the glass of water that Tony had handed as they'd entered the kitchen, Peter forced himself to swallow back his negative feelings. He was meant to be trying. Though before he could get a word out he noticed the cup being tugged out of his hand. Tony must have noticed how he was gripping it and was attempting to prevent another shattered mess. Releasing his hold on the glass, he clenched his fist instead. "School was fine. I like it there.", he said casually but never turning his head to make eye-contact.

Tony had already made it clear to Steve that Peter was slightly reluctant to trust any of them. As such the soldier made an effort to be patient and not get terribly offended by the short answers. "What do you like about it. It's been a long time since I went to high school and it's completely different from when I was a kid."

Resisting the urge to ask the man what high school had been like for him Peter sighed and answered the questions. "My friends are there and it's a really good school. Science is one of my better subjects.", he said, easing up slightly by the end. He could talk about science and his friends all day long if asked. He wondered if Tony had told the man that. "I'm also pretty good at math and art class is a lot of fun."

"Art, huh? Tony never said anything about that. What do you do in there? I mean do you sketch or paint...?", Stever asked with genuine curiosity. He himself loved to sketch so maybe art was something they could bond over in the future.
"It's general art so we do different things as we study different artist. We started projects this week based off of the work of Louis Wain."

, Peter readily explained, already relaxing into the conversation. Between Steve's smile and genuine interest in everything he had to say, it was easy enough to forget that they'd been enemies not quite a year ago. He wondered if the ease would last but he wasn't counting on it.

Tony sat and listened for several minutes before deciding that he'd shared his kid for long enough. "I hate to interrupt but I have some things I need to talk to Pete about. We need to head upstairs. ...but dinner Saturday night, right? On me this time."

Steve, Sam, and Bruce, who had just walked in all agreed and with a small wave, as Peter was following behind Tony boarding the elevator. "See? Captain Spangles isn't all bad. Maybe you two can sit down and color together or something."

"I don't color, Tony. I'm not five."

"Sounded like coloring to me..."

"Well, it's not. Pastels are not the same as coloring."

"Hey, I'm not knocking coloring, kid. Pepper has those colored pencil coloring books with all the tiny lines in them. I don't have the patience for it but she loves it. Says it relaxing. See, even adults color."

, Tony defended as he looked at his kid's annoyed posture. It was almost funny. The boy was getting all worked up over being accused of coloring.

"I don't color."

, Peter indignantly reiterated just before the doors of the elevator dinged open.

"Okay, fine. I get it."

, Tony laughed as he led his suddenly grumpy son over to the couch. "Go sit down, Picasso. I have some things to talk to you about."
Chapter 78

Taking a seat on the couch, Peter looked at his father and sighed. He always hated it when an adult said they had 'things to talk about'. That was generally code for 'You're in trouble and you don't even know it yet.' "What did you want to talk to me about?", he asked with mild concern because he really couldn't think of anything he had done that week that would warrant a 'talk'.

"A few things actually.", Tony said with a shrug of his shoulders, only cringing slightly as the action tweaked his, still healing, shoulder. "First thing I want to talk to you about is your little outing with Happy on Wednesday."

"He told you about that?", Peter asked already knowing the answer. Of course Happy would tell him. Tony probably demanded a written report daily. It was kind of obnoxious really but he understood. Then he suddenly became worried that Tony was about to tell him he couldn't go out in public for a while. "I still get to go to the arcade on Monday, right?"

Tony sat down on the couch and patted the set beside him. "Of course, kiddo. As long as Happy tags along, your trip to the arcade next Monday is still fine... which will lead us right into the next topic but first... Wednesday. I was going to wait to see if you brought it up with me yourself but you never did. I let it go for a while but now that you're here we really need to talk about it.", the man explained before reaching over and laying his hand across Peter's fidgeting ones. "I know you hated it, Buddy."

"I was actually going to tell you about it today. I wanted to ask you about something..."

"Oh yeah?", Tony asked with curiosity. "What about?"

Hesitating slightly, Peter thought about the best way to word this without freaking the man out. "Did Happy tell you that my Spider-senses started going off while we were there?"

"He mentioned it.", Tony replied casually. This was actually on his list of things to ask the kid about at some point. It just wasn't the most pressing thing on his mind at the moment. However, if Peter had been waiting to talk to him about that part he must be concerned about something.

"Well, they've never done that before. Warned me of something that wasn't really a threat... You don't think... Do you?", Peter questioned, his voice trailing off as he spoke. It was almost as if he didn't really want to know the answer.
"That you were in danger?", Tony asked and when Peter nodded in the affirmative he smiled softly. "No. Not really. I think your super spider anxiety was warning you that you were being watched." He and Happy had already discussed it and that seemed like the most reasonable explanation.

Pausing to collect his thoughts, Peter looked towards his feet. "I thought that too but it doesn't warn me when you're watching me... or when the teachers at school are watching me..."

"Yeah...", Tony drawled out in consideration. "...but we're all watching you for good reasons. Maybe your weird Spideriness can tell the difference."

"I suppose that could be useful...", Peter replied. It would definitely come in handy if someone he didn't know or trust was ever tracking him for any reason. He just sort of hated it that it might happen every time the press was lurking around in the shadows. The sensation was annoying and made his whole body gear up as if it wanted to jump right into action. It made him feel fidgety and restless. "Do you think there's a way to test it?"

Tony had already been considering different ways to test the boy's sixth sense. They seemed to have on scratched the surface when it came to that particular power. "Maybe.", he mused as he continued to toy with different ideas in his head. "We can try a few things...", he started before a new realization hit him. "Hey... what about when we're sparring? I know you have quick reflexes but do you think that's linked to your spider-sense?"

"I never really thought about it.", Peter said with a shrug of his shoulders. That sounded possible though. Sometimes he reflexes were so fast he didn't even know what had triggered the action. Now that he thought about it, it seemed perfectly logical that those two things would be interconnected somehow.

"Maybe Happy can spar with this weekend and we--"

"--No!", Peter quickly interjected. He had no plans to spar with any other person until he was sure he had his strength under control. "I'm not sparring with Happy. I don't want to hurt him too." That was one of his biggest fears right now. Hurting people when he was meant to help.

"Okay...", Tony placatingly replied before racking his brain for a new solution. "Well, maybe I could design some kind of battle drone for you to fight..."
"That actually sounds super awesome, Dad.", Peter eagerly returned already bouncing himself up into a more upright position. That one sentence had sent an infinite number of ideas into his head and he couldn't wait to get them on paper. He just hoped that the man let him assist. "Can I help? I have some great ideas already!"

Laughing lightly, Tony reached over and patted his son on the shoulder. "Sure, kid. We'll work on that one day soon. Maybe we can start thinking about it tomorrow." Once Peter had calmed down enough for him to get another word in, Tony turned his body to better face his kid. "Now it's my turn to ask you a question, yeah?"

"Okay.", Peter said, smiling slowly fading as the man's posture changed from lighthearted to serious.

Giving the boy's knee a reassuring squeeze, Tony forced himself to smile. "After what happened on Wednesday, I was sort of worried that you would want to cancel your playdate.--"

"--not a playdate, Tony.", Peter interrupted without mirth. He wasn't three, he didn't go on playdates. It was bad enough the man had insisted on calling his art 'coloring'. He didn't need to be accused of going on playdates as well.

"Whatever.", Tony teased before dropping the subject completely. "Seriously though, I'm glad you're still going but I still feel the need to ask you if you're okay with all of this. I mean I know you're not okay with it but... are you okay?"

Now more aware of where this conversation was going, Pete felt a little more at ease. It wasn't bad news and he wasn't in trouble... his dad was just worried about him. "I'm fine. I knew it was going to happen. That doesn't make me hate it any less or anything but I still want to be with my friends."

"I want that too, kid.", Tony confessed. That short exchange had been enough to make him feel better about the situation. Part of him was worried that Peter would take off running once he realized how little privacy he was actually going to have as his son. That made the next conversation a bit easier. "Now for the last thing I need to talk to you about... I'm going to be picking you up from school on Tuesday so that you can spend the night here. The social worker is coming to talk to us on Wednesday--"

Happy to hear that the adoption was moving into the next phase Peter's face lit up. Then as he thought about what Tony had just said he wrinkled his brow in confusion. "--I thought they had to talk to Aunt May too...", he asked before the man had the time to fully explain anything.
"I wasn't done yet, kid. Zip it.", Tony said sternly but there was a smile on his face so Peter didn't take it to heart. "...Since they could get here pretty early in the morning so I would rather have you stay overnight. May is going to meet us here. The plan is for her to arrive around seven-thirty. I offered her a room but she said she wanted to get up at the crack of dawn to drive here. ...and I've learned not to argue with her."

Laughing at his father's observation, Peter nodded his head emphatically. "That's probably best..."

"Hmm.", Tony hummed non-committally before moving on. "So, the home visit and interviews all take place on the same day and they can show up at any time between eight in the morning and four in the afternoon. We just don't know.", he explained in sympathy because he knew that would send Peter's nerves through the roof just as much, if not more than his own.

"How long will it take after that?", Peter asked already feeling a bit anxious about the large window of arrival. He wasn't looking forward to speaking to the social worker but it would all be worth it once the papers were sighed and he was officially Tony's son. "For it to be done I mean. When will we get to sign the papers?"

As he smiled at his son's eagerness, Tony's heart soared. He too was eager to see Peter become truly and fully his. "I don't know but it sounds like the lawyer did his job by getting the state to move as quickly as they are. They had up to sixty days to complete the interviews and home study and it's only been two weeks.", he explained, "We'll find out what comes next after we get through this part."

"...but we're getting closer, right?", Peter asked with enthusiasm.

"Yeah, Buddy. We're getting closer."

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The rest of the evening went exactly the way Peter wanted it to. He and Tony finally made it down to the garage to install the new seats in the car, though Peter had to do most of the physical work. Then they began to create a checklist of what other components they needed to complete the job. There wasn't too terribly much to do and Peter was pretty sure he was going to be both excited and disappointed when it was finally done. "What color are you going to have it painted when we're
done?”, Peter asked as he spun around in the swivel chair relentlessly sipping through the tiny straw of his third Caparison.

Still somewhat distracted by the screen in front of him Tony never even looked up. "I was going to let you decide. We can paint it however you want, kid.", he mumbled through the hand that he had his chin propped upon.

"Awesome. Can it be, like, red and blue with spiderwebs and stuff?”, Peter asked enthusiastically, already picturing the possibilities in his head. "Maybe even paint a spider on the roof. You know, so you can only really see it from above. That would be so awesome."

That got Tony's attention and he started to laugh. "Seriously, Pete? We aren't creating the Spider-Moblie.", he said with a perfect mixture of amusement and disbelief. "Besides, it's not your car, remember? You had a hissy fit about it and everything."

Ignoring the obvious jab, Peter smiled because he suddenly had an even better idea. "You're right, Dad. We can just paint it blue. No spiderwebs.", he spoke, his excitement building with each word. "I'll save those for my motorcycle. Can you imagine Spiderman on a motorcycle? Oh my God... a Spider-cycle! It needs to be a thing."

"Motorcycle, huh?", Tony replied with a roll of his eyes. "You do realize that you don't even know how to drive a car yet, yes?"

"I know that, Tony.", Peter indignantly spat. "I didn't mean today. Just... eventually."

Raising his eyebrows, Tony smiled at his son. "You ready to learn how? We can go out tomorrow if you want to." Teaching the kid how to drive was something he was sort of looking forward to which seemed odd since the last time the boy had driven a car he'd totaled it. Though, in Peter's defense, he wasn't exactly being instructed at the time. Taking off with a practically stolen car to impulsively chase after what amounted to a super-villain wasn't exactly the same as learning how to drive.

"I don't think I want to drive any of your crazy fancy cars...", Peter admitted, scrunching up his nose in distaste.

"Why not?", Tony laughed. It wasn't like he didn't have cars to spare and frankly he could afford to buy more. It wouldn't be a big deal if Peter were to take one over. "They drive the same as any
"Well, what if I wreck it, Dad.", Peter practically whined, still rapidly spinning the chair around. The motion was almost calming and it kept him from having to look Tony in the eye as they discussed his reluctance to drive.

"Then I buy a new one... but you won't. I'll be right there with you, kiddo.", Tony explained with a shrug of his shoulders. It wasn't like he was going to let him press the pedal to the metal and speed through the compound. There wasn't much around to run into and there definitely weren't any other cars on the compounds private roads. It would be fine.

"Maybe another time. It's really not important.", Peter said as casually as possible. He really didn't feel like it was that important. He had web-shooters. The could get literally anywhere in the city faster than anyone in a car. Though it occurred to him that he might never be allowed to take he subway again... so, that was no longer and excuse.

Sighing, Tony stood up and cross the distance between them, hoping that by moving in front of the boy, he would stop with the fidgety swirling of the chair but he didn't. "What if I bought a less expensive car for you to learn in. Would that be better?", Tony asked softly, knowing his son well enough to realize that the cost of the car he would be learning in would affect his willingness to try.

After some thought, Peter sighed. "Yeah. Can it be used and everything?", he asked. May's car was used when they bought it and the plan had been for him to eventually learn and maybe even take over that car. There had been no real rush when they'd talked about it. It wasn't as though it were uncommon for teenagers in the area to hold off on getting their license. Cars were expensive and public transportation was plentiful.

"Can we fix it up?", Tony asked with a quirk of his eyebrow. One, because he wasn't about to let his son drive around in a beat-up, rusted car once he could drive on his own and two because they were going to require a new project soon.

Having already decided that he would be sad when this project ended, Peter smiled. "Yeah. That would be awesome, Dad."

"Perfect. Now, stop spinning around and come help me pick a car.", Tony half-shouted with enthusiasm and was thrilled when Peter readily acquiesced and scooted his now still seat up beside him. They spent quite a while trying to agree on a car but eventually, settled on a used Toyota sedan. Tony had complained that it was boring but made the purchase all the same. All the while, he was spouting out idea after idea of how to turn it into something more impressive.
"Dad.", Peter said essentially cutting the man off in his rambling. "I'm positive that I don't need a car with a supersport engine that has like twelve-hundred horsepower or something."

"Fine.", Tony sighed out in agreement. He'd not really intended on doing that anyway because once he'd thought about it, he didn't actually want his son driving around in a car that topped off at two-hundred-and-sixty miles per hour. Four cylinders were plenty. "I'm insisting on the backup and side view cameras though. Those are useful...and the speakers. You can't be a proper teenager without having a decent sound system in your ride."

Sighing, mostly because he knew there was no stopping the man anyway, Peter stood up and stretched. It was actually getting sort of late and they hadn't eaten yet. "It's after nine and I'm hungry.", Peter grunted as he continued to reach above his head.

"Alright, Spider-boy. Let's go get some food in you.", Tony said as he placed his hand on Peter's shoulder and led him back towards the elevator.

Dinner ended up being an odd assortment of leftovers combined with a salad that Tony threw together. "Why do you have all these leftovers, anyway?", Peter asked as he served himself a second helping of some cold pasta salad. There had been carton after carton of nearly every kind of food stacked up in the refrigerator. Some of it that had never even been opened. He'd not ever seen anything like it.

"Oh. When I order in, I tend to have FRIDAY repeat whatever the last order was. No matter where I order from, nine times out of ten, the previous order was from when you were home. Hence, enough food to feed a small army.", Tony said with a smile. "Worked out though. Now that you are here we have more than enough to put together a late-night dinner and still have more for lunch tomorrow."

Peter nodded in agreement but at the same time, he sort of hoped that this wasn't going to become a habit. He liked eating out with Tony and Pepper and ordering pizza was something he really only got to do when he was there. May tended to buy it frozen. It was cheaper that way. "We can still order pizza and go out to eat sometimes too right?", he finally asked when his nagging brain wouldn't let it go. "I mean, this is great. I just wondered."

"Of, course, Buddy.", Tony replied, looking at his son in mild confusion. "Whatever you want. I kind of thought you would think this was fun though. You can have lo mein, pasta salad and spaghetti on the same plate.-- which is weird but he way"
"It's not weird. It was an *option*.", Peter laughed as he realized that was exactly what he'd put on his first plate. "I was only asking because this is the only place that I get to really get pizza and May and I only go out to eat once a month or so."

"You don't get pizza at home?", Tony asked with an eyebrow quirked because that didn't sound right. Pizza was on the kid's top ten list. He would know. They'd eaten it at least once a week while the boy was living there full time. Pizza, hamburgers, and pasta.

"I do! It's frozen though. Not the delivery kind. That costs too much.", he said without thinking. It only took him a moment to start backtracking. "I mean, sometimes we fo carry-out... but delivery is different. It's--"

"--kid. I get it. Relax, will ya?", Tony said with a smile as he remembered that his son rotated between to vastly different lifestyles. "Actually, that reminds me. Hang on.", Tony added before hopping up and disappearing into his office for a moment. When he returned he was carrying a back card with Peter's name across it in boxy silver letters. "This is yours."

"Um... thanks?", Peter said hesitantly. He was sort of hoping that the man would forget about the whole allowance thing. However, he accepted the card and held it up to examine it. He didn't even want to ask how much was on it but then before he could think anymore about it he didn't have to.

"There's five-hundred on there right now. I'm having another hundred deposited at the beginning of each month. May knows you have it and we've agreed that it's yours to spend however you want to spend it. You can take your friends to the movies, order pizza for you and May or even buy yourself a brand new... I don't know, video game or something. It's yours."

"That's a lot of money, Tony.", Peter said with hesitation. Five-hundred-dollars felt excessive but he didn't suppose he should have expected anything less. If anything he supposed he should be thankful it wasn't more. The man could have easily deposited several thousand dollars into that account without a second thought.

"Should come in handy at the arcade on Monday.", Tony said with a smirk.

Having not even considered that Peter's head shot up from where he was looking down at the shiny card. "Oh! I was going to use my birthday money for that."

"Birthday money?"
"Mm-hmm. Ned's mom always puts ten dollars in the card she gives me. I still have that."

"You've been holding onto a ten-dollar bill for a month?", Tony asked with near admiration. He didn't have a lot of experience with that but he sort of imagined that most kids Peter's age would have spent it the next day.

"Yeah... I always hold onto it until I'm absolutely sure I know what I want to spend it on.", Peter explained carefully without going into much detail about how birthday and Christmas money was typically all he really got. Outside of that, he relied on May to provide him with everything he needed and if he wanted something he could maybe ask... or, more likely, work towards it.

Smiling fondly towards his son, Tony sighed. "I guess that's a pretty good habit.", he admitted as he was once again reminded of how differently Peter had been raised. Coming from so little to so much was an adjustment but Peter was slowly but surely starting to adjust. He didn't fight Tony buying him things with the same venom he that he used to and he starting to occasionally ask him for things. Small things... but things all the same. "You're going to be a great owner and CEO one day. You know that? You're going to save the company all kinds of money while inventing the most interesting technology on the market. Just don't start cutting corners... Quality is imperative."

Peter smiled and nodded his head in agreement. "...but I won't have to do any of that for a really, really, really long time.", Peter said as he pulled his feet up onto the couch and leaned onto his father who, in return, leaned in to kiss the top of his head.

"That's the plan, kiddo. That's the plan."
Chapter 79

On Saturday morning, at noon when Peter still hadn't emerged from his room, Tony came waltzing in without warning. Not even a courtesy knock was issued but it was fine because Peter was still asleep. Which seemed odd seeing as he'd sent the kid to bed at eleven and that was over twelve hours ago. After a check with FRIDAY relieved that there had been no nightmares and that the boy's vitals were all within a normal healthy range, he'd decided to go investigate. Having been completely expecting to be yelled at as he barged in, he rolled his eyes when all he got was a few light snores. "Kid!", he mirthfully shouted as he yanked the top blanket right off of his sleeping child.

"W-what?", Peter flinched as he bolted up still half asleep. "Dad?"

"Yep.", Tony replied with a smirk. "Why aren't you up? Did you not go to bed when I told you to?"

Yawning and stretching, Peter attempted to sit up against the headboard. "I got in bed... I just didn't sleep.", Peter said before realizing the repercussions of his choice in words. "I mean, I fell asleep eventually, obviously. It just took a long time."

"Something on your mind, Kiddo?", Tony asked softly. Sometimes this kid was so like him it was shocking that there were no biological ties.

"Mm-hmm.", Peter hummed while pressing the heels of his hands into his eyes. "The whole social worker thing. It's not fair, you got a list. I have no idea what they're going to ask me and it's making me nervous. So I stayed awake last night made up some questions and then practiced how I would respond to them."

Sighing, Tony sat down on the edge of the bed. "Kid... Pete... You don't need to worry about that. They are going to ask you easy stuff. They aren't interested in how fit you are to be my kid.", he laughed. "They're interested in how happy you are. Just be yourself."

"Yeah, yeah I can do that."

"Yep, you can.", Tony said with utter confidence. "Now, you need to get up and meet me in the kitchen in the next five minutes for lunch. You already skipped breakfast. Capisce?"
"Capisce.", Peter yawned, even though he really wanted to go back to sleep. It was Saturday for crying out loud. Weekends were meant for sleeping but, then again, he was hungry so up he got.

By the time Peter was sluggishly making his way into the kitchen, Tony had already made him a full plate of leftovers. "You took too long, so I made your plate for you. Note that there's only one variety of noodle, accompanied by two vegetables. Keep that in mind next Wednesday.", Tony said with a smirk as Peter dropped down into the chair across from him.

"I'm not sure if potato skins and fried zucchini really count as vegetables, Dad.", Peter mumbled across the table. He hadn't gotten to sleep until after three but having not been woken until noon, he should have gotten more than enough sleep. He felt fine... just tired. As such, he ignored the glass of water Tony had poured him and got up to retrieve a caffeinated soda from the refrigerator. As he popped the top and began to noisily slurp the first sip out of the can, he could feel the man's eyes on him. "What?"

"Nothing.", Tony said as he attempted to direct his attention elsewhere. "I was trying to figure out why you're so tired that's all.", he added before a daunting realization hit him. "You're not sick are you?"

"What? No. I'm fine. I went to bed late and I've only been awake for twenty minutes."

Nodding his head in agreement, Tony allowed himself to relax. The kid was right so he close to drop the subject for now. "Other than dinner with the team tonight, we have no plans today. Anything you want to do?", he asked instead.

Peter was slightly stunned by his father's casual use of the word 'team' when it came to the other men currently residing in the building but he tried not to show it. The man had made it extremely clear that he wanted all of them to get along. He was just about to tell him that he hadn't really thought about it and didn't care what they did when Pepper came through the front door. "Pepper!", he shouted with glee as he hopped up from the table and crossed the room to greet her. He'd not asked Tony where she was and he'd not mentioned it so he sort of assumed she was out of town. Not living there full time left him feeling somewhat out of the loop at times. "I didn't think you were going to be here this weekend."

"I had to work late last night but I wasn't going to miss out on seeing you.", she said with a smile as Peter wrapped his arms loosely around her neck. "How's May doing? I've been so busy I haven't spoken to her recently. She still doing short shifts?"

"Yeah. The doctor said she can start doing longer ones soon as long as it doesn't cause any pain.
She says she's one-hundred-percent fine, though.

Tony had smiled as he'd watched his son eagerly greet his future wife at the door but he'd only given them a moment before he was crossing the room to greet her as well. Then as Pepper prepared herself some lunch Peter followed along behind answering all of her questions and telling her all about his week at school. For a while, they all three continued to sit around the kitchen table talking and everything felt right with the world. He'd was just starting to allow his mind to drift off towards the future when he heard Peter calling him.

"Dad...", Peter said before reaching out to grab the man's good hand. When Tony finally acknowledged him, Peter smiled. "Can we start working on it?"

Embarrassed that he'd not been paying attention to the conversation, Tony sighed. "Working on what, Bud? Sorry I, uh, was thinking about something else."

"The cool battle drones we talked about for training!", Peter enthusiastically explained. "We're still going to do that right?"

"Yeah. We can still do that. The drone itself should be pretty straightforward. We'll need to talk about function."

"Awesome.", Peter claimed as he started clearing the table without being asked. "Can it shoot lasers?" He had big ideas and he could picture himself swinging thought the large gym dodging lasers and flipping about in an attempt to web the thing to a wall. It sounded like fun.

Squinting his eyes, Tony looked at his son as if he were trying to decide if was being serious or not. "No."

Completely unfazed by the dismissal of his first idea Peter moved onto the next. "Can it have spinning blades or something?"

"Absolutely not.", Tony replied in horror. He wasn't out to create a literal death machine. Just something for his son to use as some sort of moving target practice.

Suddenly feeling slightly exasperated, Peter sat back down in his chair. "Well, what can it do?", he nearly whined earning him a laugh from Pepper.
"Fly... and maybe shoot ping pong balls or something."

"That is not awesome.", Peter said without feeling before dropping back into a whine. "Come on, Dad, we can make it so much cooler than that."

"I'm not designing a drone that's going to try to kill you, Pete.", Tony strained from across the table before taking a moment to glare at his still giggling fiance.

"I won't die! I Promise.", Peter said with a laugh before trying to come up with some sort of compromise. A drone shooting ping pong balls at him sounded like a toy. He wanted a real training drone. Something that would make him have to really work. Then an idea struck and he had it out of his mouth within seconds. "Okay. Okay, how about some mild, small repulsors. Just enough to knock me over?"

"Maybe.", Tony relented. That sounded doable and less likely to actually injure anyone. He would be willing to toy with an idea like that. Especially if it made the kid happy. "That sounds less... like death. I can work with that."

"Yes!", Peter hissed through his teeth as he pumped his arm in the air with childish excitement. "Can we go work on the design now? Please?"

"Sure, let's go.", Tony said with a shake of his head as he followed the Peter through the door.

They spent the next several hours putting together a holographic design. Peter continued to suggest new ways for the done to kill him while Tony continued to veto them. "Kid, I think this is good enough. It has seventeen flight patterns and three different levels of repulsors, one of which I'm pretty sure I will never let you use. It doesn't need EMP's, knives or bullets."

"Rubber bullets, Tony. They won't kill me.", Peter helpfully explained. "I know it doesn't need real bullets."

"No!", Tony reiterated within frustration. "We're done. This is what you get, now go start building me some motors."
After that they set off to work, Tony worked on perfecting the repulsor design while Peter started getting the motors they would need together. He enjoyed watching his kid work out of the corner of his eye. The boy was sitting on the floor biting his lip in concentration as he rapidly put together the first of the four motors they would require and by the time FRIDAY was announcing that it was time for them to take a break, Peter was already halfway through the third.

"I'm going to go up to make some nachos, you want some?", Tony asked casually as he started to examine Peter's progress. It was amazing how quickly and accurately he'd gotten them together.

"Mm-hmm.", Peter hummed hopping up off of the floor with ease. "I love nachos."

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The remainder of the day was spent working on the drone. It took some trial and error to get it heavy and sturdy enough to not take too much damage when struck but after several tried they had the structure pretty much nailed down. All that was left to do was to add the repulsers and code it to function as they'd discussed. With Tony's shoulder, the progress was slow. It wasn't going to be ready for use that weekend but Tony promised he wouldn't do anything else to it without Peter's there.

With everything cleaned up and properly stored it was time to get ready to eat dinner on the common floor and Peter wasn't exactly looking forward to it. Not that he was dreading it...he was eager to see Bruce but he was still somewhat wary of the other two men. Though, he did take notice of the fact that his spider-sense was quiet around them. Not even the smallest hum was present or tingle was detected when in their presence.

"What are we eating for dinner?", Peter asked as they started towards the common floor.

Pepper, who Peter was happy to find out would be joining them, smiled. "I've been down there already today, making lasagna. Three huge pans because I heard it was pretty good."

Now more excited than ever to get to the dinner table, Peter smiled and gave pepper a quick hug. "Thank you so much! I love your lasagna."

She hugged him back and he was soon practically skipping out of the elevator towards the kitchen, where everyone was waiting on them.
"Hi there, Peter!", Steve said with a smile as he gestured towards the already set table. "I just finished getting everything ready. Sit wherever you like."

Hesitant to be the first to sit down, Peter stayed close by Tony's side. He really didn't want to end up having to sit beside Steve or Sam but he also didn't want to say that. When Tony took a seat at the head of the table, Peter was quick to seat himself beside him. He'd hoped pepper or Bruce would take his other side but Steve was quick to fill that place while Pepper, Bruce, and Sam all sat across from them.

Peter's plan had been simple. Stay quiet and enjoy his lasagna while all of the adults did the talking. As such, he quickly loaded up his plate a large serving of lasagna, salad, and garlic bread while making an effort to keep his eyes on his dinner. That only worked for so long before he was being drawn into the conversation.

"I was thinking we could watch a movie or something after dinner. There's still a lot I haven't seen.", Steve said in Peter's direction. "Tony said you might have some good suggestions."

Resisting the urge to glare at his father, Peter sighed. "I guess I don't know what you've seen and what you haven't seen."

Smiling in earnest, Steve shrugged his shoulders. "It doesn't actually matter too much. It's been a while since I've sat down to watch any movie. What's your favorite?"

"Star Wars.", Peter answered easily. That had been his favorite since he was little. He could only assume Steve had already seen all of those, though. They would more than likely be fairly high on the must-see culturally relevant films list.

"I've seen a few of those. I know there's more. Maybe we should watch the first one tonight so I can get caught back up.", the man suggested.

As Peter was debating whether or not to clarify if the man meant release date or chronological date, Sam spoke up. "The first one or the first one...?", he asked, looking towards Peter with a wink before gesturing towards Steve's confused look.

"I don't know what that means...", the other man replied in question which led both Sam and Peter into a detailed explanation, leaving Pepper and Tony to look on with amusement as Peter almost instantly began to warm up. He hoped it would last but he was almost sure it wouldn't.
Once dinner was done, Peter had offered to clear the table and Steve had offered to help. That left the two of them alone in the kitchen. At first, Peter wasn't sure how he felt about that but the soldier made an effort to simply get the job done without demanding too much conversation. He really wanted to make this all work and he knew that he could never be normal between himself and Tony again if Peter hated him. He knew one day they would probably all have to sit down together and air everything out but right now he would be content with a few friendly conversations and a movie night.

As the first movie ended and the next began, Pepper excused herself in favor of going upstairs to read. That left room on the large couch for Peter to pull his legs up and tiredly lean onto Tony. It wasn't terribly late and he had definitely slept in but between the large dinner and the popcorn being passed around the room he was more than full and comfortably content, laying with his dad watching his favorite movies. It felt almost normal and he was thankful.

Tony was also thankful. Peter had made it all the way through dinner without so much as a glare in anyone's direction and seemed perfectly at ease on the common room couch. Before he could think much more about it he heard Peter whispering towards him.

"Hey, Dad? Can I go get a blanket?"

Noticing how his son was tightly wound up beside him with his arms pulled into his sleeves Tony laughed. "You cold?"

"Mm-hmm. It's freezing in here.", Peter hissed quietly before snuggling deeper into the man's side. No longer tucked tightly between Tony and Pepper the cold air blowing through the room was getting to him.

It was cooler in there than they tended to keep the penthouse but Steve seemed to like it that way and looking around the room no one else seemed to mind. He really wondered how this kid survived in the winter. He was already imagining him wearing seven layers of clothing and still shivering in the snow. "Let me up, I'll go get one out of the closet. down here.", Tony suggested but Bruce seemed to have overheard and offered to get it for them since he was getting up anyway. However, Tony suspected that it had more to do with the fact that Peter had been reluctant to leave his warm position and Bruce had been more than willing to accommodate that more than anything else. It seemed like Peter could get absolutely anyone to love him.

Once he was warmly wrapped in a blanket and had Tony's arm around him, Peter's eyes started to drift closed only for him to snap them back open again moments later. He refused to fall asleep before midnight on a Saturday but he ended up lightly snoring by eleven-fifteen all the same.
Sure the boy was completely out, Tony looked over at Steve and Sam and they all met eyes. "That went, well, I think.", He quietly uttered in their direction.

"Yeah, it did.", Sam agreed, while Steve silently nodded his head. "Things are coming together."

"Yeah.", Tony said with a small smile. "They are. I'm really glad you guys are back. I mean, I know we still have a lot to work through and my kid being all defensive and shit isn't exactly helping but I really am glad you're here."

Pausing the movie that had begun to roll through the credits, Steve smiled at the domestic sight before him. "You're his dad and he watched us hurt you. He's going to be defensive."

As Tony's eyes shot up at those words as Bruce's rolled his at the reaction. "What do you mean. He didn't see anything. He heard stories. That's all. I mean it was all over the news. That why we had to do the whole hand-shake/apology press conference thing. To show the world we're working together again--". Tony rambled in an attempt to protect his kid's identity from the newest residents of the compound. Not that it was going to stay secret for long but he'd wanted Peter to be the one to share that information.

"--Give it up, Tony. They know. It's pretty obvious really. I'm not sure how everyone doesn't know.", Bruce said from his place in the recliner.

"How?", Tony suttered in response.

While Steve continued to smile broadly, Sam huffed a laugh. "Kid didn't exactly keep his mouth shut during that fight, Tony. All that chit-chat and you thought we wouldn't recognize his voice?", Sam asked.

Sighing because that was definitely true, Tony looked at all three of the other men in the room. "His secret should remain his secret. Don't let on that you know. Let him come to you. ...and don't you dare tell one singular soul about it.", Tony said before clenching his jaw. "Please."

"Sure, Tony. We can do that.", Steve dutifully replied. "You're right. It's his secret."
"Thank you.", Tony breathed out in relief. He'd been worried he was going to get some sort of speech about how irresponsible he'd been to drag his kid into that fight in the first place but it seemed that wasn't going to happen. He couldn't be sure that it would come up again later but he was grateful to not be having that conversation right that minute. Not when everything seemed to be going so well. At the moment, things were feeling... right and he wasn't ready to let that go just yet.
Chapter 80

Rather than spending Sunday in the lab, Peter insisted they the three of them do something together. After some quick debate, they were all down by the pool because they may as well use it while they still could. Fall would be arriving soon and with the cool weather, swimming outdoors would no longer be an option. Pepper spent the majority of their time on the sidelines, laughing as Tony and Peter lounged in the water teasing each other the entire time, leaving her to be the barrier of bad news when it came time to clean up so they could eat lunch and have Peter home at the prescribed time of two in the afternoon.

Feeling completely contented with her place in this new family dynamic, Pepper rose from her chair and grabbed a couple of towels. "Boys!", she called dutifully across the water. "It's eleven-thirty. Time to get out." The standing at the water's edge she tossed one towel towards her fiance and readied herself to wrap Peter in the other once he emerged.

"Can't we just pick up lunch on the way there? Then we could have like, ten more minutes.", Peter asked from where he still stood, knees bent in the water so that only his head and neck were exposed.

Looking at Pepper who was smiling and shrugging her shoulders in his direction, Tony laughed. "Sure, kid. We can pick something up but I'm not getting back in."

"That's fine.", Peter chirped, content to relax in the water and watch as Tony and Pepper chatted back and forth in lounge chairs. However all too soon, his additional ten minutes were up and he was being beckoned to the tile by Pepper who just as before, had a towel in her hands. Allowing himself to be engulfed in the fluffy warmth, Peter sighed. "Thank you."

"You're welcome, now you two hurry up an shower. You don't want to keep May waiting."

"Are you coming with?", Tony asked his fiance, as he got himself to his feet and stretched as best he could without hurting his shoulder.

"No, I think I'll stay here. I have a few things I need to go over for tomorrow. I have that trip coming up you know.", Pepper replied without hesitation. She had already decided that she was going to stay behind when Tony left to take Peter back to Queens. As much as she would love to sit down with May, she had things to do. "Besides, that opens you two up to getting junk food for lunch.", she smirked, knowing that without her there, lunch would undoubtedly be far less healthy than if she tagged along.
"Can we get Taco Bell, Dad?" Peter piped up at the mention of food. His stomach was already growling and he knew that Taco Bell was the absolute closest place with a drive-through even though Tony tended to claim that Burger King was. Mostly because that was what he preferred.

With her face crinkling up in mirth, Pepper laughed and looked towards her future husband. "As I said... junk food."

If Peter hadn't been so busy keeping the towel wrapped tightly around his shivering body, he would have crossed his arms over his chest indignantly. However, since he was unwilling to relinquish his hold on the warmth he half-heartedly glared instead. "Hey! There are lettuce and tomatoes on the taco supremes! That's two vegetables..."

"Kid, I'm pretty sure that once you add that to the high sodium meat product and copious amounts of cheese and sour cream... that no longer counts.", Tony said with a laugh. The kid had spent a good part of the weekend teasingly explaining to him how frying vegetables or covering them in cheese defeated the purpose of eating them at all.

"Says the guy who counts potato skins as a vegetable.", Peter retaliated with a small smile. He could hear Pepper laughing in the background.

Smirking and waving a hand in the air, Tony was quick with his own return. "Yes, well, that's before you schooled me on how vegetables work. You can thank yourself for this, kiddo.", he said with a laugh.

Opting to ignore the man's accusatory defense, Peter gave his father this very best pout. "So, no Taco Bell?"

"I'm just messing with you. We can go to Taco Bell.", Tony said softly, walking towards his son in order to wrap his good arm around him for added warmth. He knew the only reason the kid had picked that place, in particular, was because it was admittedly the closest and he was probably starving after all of the activity.

The second they were showered and ready to walk out the door, Tony walked into Peter's room to make sure he'd grabbed all of his books and spotted the debit card he'd been given on the dresser. Snatching it up he walked into the living room where Peter was saying good-bye to Pepper and placed it in his hands. "Don't leave that lying around, kid. Put it in your wallet."
Looking at the man in confusion, Peter slipped the card into his back pocket. "I don't have a wallet."

"How do you not have a wallet? Where do you keep your learner's permit and SI-ID?", Tony questioned in disbelief. He knew the kid didn't carry around a lot of cash but he did have identification cards to keep track of.

"In my backpack. I put them in my pocket when I need them.", Peter explained with a shrug of his shoulders. He'd never really seen any reason for him to have a wallet when he had plenty of pockets. Though he supposed he could see the man's concern when it came to a bank card.

In a matter of seconds, Tony had dumped the entire contents of his own wallet onto the breakfast bar and was demanding that Peter go retrieve all of his cards. When Peter returned with everything in hand, Tony slid them into the appropriate slots before remembering the kid also had the ten-dollar bill he'd been hoarding. Once that too was safely stashed away he handed it back to Peter and demanded that it go directly into his pocket. "Do not lose that, kid. The SI card isn't easy to replace and I don't want you loosing that bank card. Yeah?"

"I won't lose it. I promise!", Peter said in return. He hadn't lost the SI-ID yet and his learner's permit had only gone missing once or twice... but he always found it. He wasn't completely irresponsible. He had to admit that having a real leather wallet in his back pocket made him feel pretty important. Though, he tried not to think about how the wallet alone probably cost more than eighty dollars.

After that was all situated, Peter watched as Tony slipped his license and one card into his pocket despite the fact that he'd gotten onto him for doing the same thing. He considered bringing it up but thought better of it. The man had just handed over his own personal wallet so that he would have one. With that in mind, he said thank you and they both walked out the door.

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When they finally pulled up to the apartment, Tony grabbed Peter by the arm before he could dart out of the car. "Wait a second, Kid. I want to talk to you."

Already fairly sure that he knew what this was about, Peter sighed. "I need to get upstairs we're already late.", he tried even though it was no more than ten minutes past two.

"You'll be fine, this will only take a moment.", Tony replied assuming Peter was just in a hurry to get inside. When Peter settled back down in the seat, he took a deep breath. "That, Thompson kid is
going to be back tomorrow--"

"--I know, dad.--"

"--I'm not finished talking, kid, zip it. I just want to make it very clear that if he says one singular word to you, you are to report it to the school... at least to Happy. Capisce?", Tony demanded in a tone that seemed to dare anyone to defy him.

"Yes! I get it, I promise, Dad.", Peter agreed even though he had no plans to follow through with that particular instruction. Not like that anyway. He would probably say something if Flash continued with the same line of insults. He wasn't planning on causing a fuss over one word. That seemed a little over the top. "Can I go now?"

He knew Peter wasn't going to want to hear that and he wasn't going to want to hear it in the morning when Happy repeated it but it seemed like an important conversation to have. Especially since Peter had kept quiet about it for so long the first time that he'd lost his cool. However, now that he had said what he needed to say, he softened his voice to something more pleasant. "Yeah, Buddy. I'll see you on Tuesday after school. I love you, alright?"

"Mm-hmm. Love you too. ", Peter returned with a smile before climbing out of the car and ran towards his apartment.

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Tony had been right, Peter was not impressed with receiving the same speech about telling someone if Flash came near him. He understood their concern to a degree but at the same time, he couldn't help but feel like they were being excessive. He'd learned his lesson and wasn't about to let Flash get to him again. There was also the fact that if things were anything like they were the week before, he didn't even think there would be a way the other boy could get to him. He'd have eyes on him at all times. It was annoying but in this case, maybe it was slightly welcome.

As expected, Ned was waiting for Peter when he arrived already talking up a storm about their afternoon plans. They quickly caught up with MJ in the halls and soon they were all three bouncing from locker to locker getting their things ready for the day. By the time they were separating to get to their respective classes, Peter was somewhat surprised he hadn't run into Flash. Especially since their lockers were in the same hall. He briefly wondered if maybe he was out sick or something but he didn't actually possess that kind of luck.
It was between the third and fourth period that he saw Flash for the first time that day. When Peter had stopped by the bathroom on the way to class, Flash had quickly followed him in without notice. Even Peter had no idea that he was in there until he was finished with his pressing business and noticed that his spider-senses were buzzing. Looking around it didn't take long to figure out what the problem was. Flash was there and leaning against the wall between two of the sinks with a scowl on his face.

"You're new daddy's got you on lockdown huh? This is the first time I've been able to get near you all day. You know they moved my locker and everything? Into the freshman hall! As if it does me any good over there. It's a load a crap and I blame you.", Flash rapidly spat as Peter proceeded to quietly wash his hands, all the while, telling himself to keep his mouth shut and just get out of there. That didn't really work out though, as Flash stepped in front of the door.

"Flash, we need to get to class.", Peter mumbled under his breath, unwilling to raise his voice towards the other boy. If any kind of altercation came out of this, Happy would find out, meaning Tony would find out and he really didn't want that to happen. As it were, he appreciated the fact that he wasn't being followed into the bathrooms but he could see Tony demanding that he have a chaperone if he ever found out about this.

"I don't give a flying rats ass about class right now, Penis and you better not touch me because next time I won't be so forgiving, I'll punch you myself.", Flash stated as a threat but they both knew that he hadn't been being generous at all that day, he'd simply lacked the ability to rise from the floor quickly enough to strick back. It nagged in the back of Peter's mind to call him out on that but he restrained himself.

"Then what do you want?", Peter sighed out because he did give a flying rats ass about class. His next period was science and he would get to work with Ned.

Flash continued to glare as if he hadn't actually prepared any words or maybe he was just waiting to see if Peter was going to get annoyed enough to push him out of the way. When he finally did speak it was low and threatening. "If you ever lay one hand on me again, you're going to get it do you hear me? I don't care who you're daddy is--"

"--Look Flash, the only reason I pushed you is because you couldn't keep your stupid mouth shut. Kind of like right now--"

"-- are you threatening me? Because--"

"--It's not a threat! I'm only pointing out that you're the one who started it! ...and by the way, you're
super lucky you only got suspended because Tony wanted a restraining order and for you to be expelled. Look, let's just make a deal that if you leave me alone, I'll leave you alone."

"Whatever, Penis.", Flash growled, only giving in because he'd already been warned to stay away from Peter and couldn't afford to get expelled or have any legal ramifications. That his parents would notice and he wasn't keen on switching schools. "Better run along to class."

"Better run along to class.", he menacingly added once the bell rang. "You don't want to be too late."

It wasn't exactly shocking when Peter left the bathroom and was immediately stopped by a teacher. "Everything okay?", she asked with concern. "The bell rang, you're going to be late."

There was absolutely no time to explain anything before Flash, was walking out as well and the teacher's attention turned towards him instead. "I know, I was--"

"--Flash Thompson! Stop right there we need to talk.", she shouted essentially cutting Peter off mid-explanation.

In a mild, panic Peter started whispering quiet pleas for her to let it go because nothing serious had happened. He really didn't want this to get back to Happy or his dad. "Please don't tell anyone. It's fine. I'm fine we didn't fight or anything, I swear."

The teacher looked at him sympathetically but didn't seem eager to hear him out. "Peter, I can't allow--"

"--it's fine! I'd tell you if it wasn't!", Peter attempted to promise because honestly, he would have, had it been as bad as it was before. Given that the two of them had basically agreed to stay out of each other's way, he could handle this.

Sighing in defeat because she knew she was obligated to report the incident to the administration at minimum, she ushered Peter down the hall. "Go to class, Peter. Tell them you were with me and I didn't have time to write you a pass they can contact me about it later if they're like."

"Yes, ma'am.", Peter huffed before hurrying down the hall, annoyed that he have to spend his last few classes worrying about that rather than looking forward to his time with his friends. It didn't seem fair.
Later, when the last bell finally rang, Peter was at least satisfied that he hadn't been called into the office. He hoped that meant that nothing had been passed along. Though the moment he got outside, with his friends in tow, he could already see the tight look on Happy's face when they locked eyes. "Hey, guys, why don't you go ahead and get in the back. I need to have a word with Peter, really quick.", Happy said without ever breaking eye contact.

Peter watched as his friend excitedly piled into the back of the large car before once again looking towards Happy. "Nothing happened.", he said with a shake of his head before the man had a chance to get a word in.

"According to you, nothing happened during the first week of school either.", Happy flatty replied before softening his tone. "Look, kid. I just want to know what was said. The administrator said that Flash was able to speak to you at some point but that nothing major happened. I want to hear it from you. How did he even get to you? Should I be upset about that?"

"Well.", Peter said with a nervous swallow. "Flash sort of followed me into the bathroom", Peter continued quietly but his voice raised the second Happy's eyebrows did. "Please don't make me someone watch me go to the bathroom!", he added having not realized that the way he'd said that made it sound way worse than what he'd meant.

Laughing, Happy, placed a hand on Peter's shoulder. "I'm not planning on it. I think we can both agree that would be completely inappropriate. I would like to know why Flash was allowed to follow you in there, though."

Glad to hear that he could still have some privacy, Peter sighed in relief. "I don't know how he did it but mostly he was mad that his locker got moved and that I hurt him in front of everyone. I told him that he needed to leave me alone because Tony wanted him expelled and then we agreed to stay away from each other. That's it. I swear."

"So, no threats, no wild accusations?", Happy asked with some amount of disbelief. It was hard to imagine that a kid who had been giving Peter a hard time for so long would just up and stop.

"Nope. Not even one.", he lied, mostly because the threats hadn't been legitimate and they really had come to an agreement.
"Kid... I swear if you're lying to me--"

"--I'm not! It's fine. If he messes with me again, I'll tell you.", Peter strained, eager to get out of this conversation and into the car with his friends who were waiting for him. "Can we go now?"

"Yeah, get in there. You can Tony can talk more about this tomorrow.", Happy replied with a sigh. So far, it seemed like the school was right and nothing major had taken place. He could deal with that.

"What!", Peter shouted as he caught Happy by the sleeve when he turned. "You can't tell him!

Pulling his arm out of Peter's hold, Happy frowned. "Oh, I can and I will. It's my job, Peter.", he explained once again. He was starting to think that he might need to have those words printed on a t-shirt or something.

"I don't want him to go overboard.", Peter practically whined because he really didn't want to be responsible for anyone getting expelled. Even Flash.

"I won't let him.", Happy gently placated. "I think you've got this right now but if it gets out of control again, we'll have to step in. You know that right?"

Hoping that he could take the man at his word, Peter tried to smile. "Mm-hmm. I know."

"Good.", Happy replied with a smile. "Then let's get going. The quicker we get to the arcade, the quicker we can leave."

Peter only nodded as Happy opened the door for him to join his giggling friend's in the back seat. The ride there was quick and light and when the arcade came into view Peter smiled because he'd been looking forward to this. A normal day with his friends.
Chapter 81

For a while, the arcade was everything Peter hoped it would be. The three of them had pooled their cash together and ended up having enough to play most of the games they wanted to play and buy a medium pizza to share if they all drank water. It crossed Peter's mind several times that he had a card in his pocket that could more than pay for them to do literally whatever they wanted to do but he was hesitant to pull it out. He still felt somewhat weird about the idea of having a bank account with his name on it, it didn't feel like his money.

By the time Peter and his friends had eaten their pizza and taken off elsewhere, Happy had settled himself into a corner of the cafe area with a newspaper and a cup of mediocre coffee. He could see the majority of the small arcade from where he sat and had no desire to follow the group of teenagers around. Partially because the dim lighting would serve beneficial in keeping people from recognizing the kid right away. He would look like any other high schooler out with his friends. However, it would only take one person figuring it out for people to start snapping photos and plastering them all over the internet.

After an hour or so of playing, the three friends were nearly out of game credits and people seemed to have caught on that he was there. As before, it started with a bunch of nosey people and his spider-sense wasn't bothering him too much but after a while, the buzzing began. As soon as it began to bother him, he made an excuse to separate from his friends and head back to the cafe for a moment. Casually walking up to the table where Happy sat, Peter slipped into the booth and allowed his head to fall forward onto his folded arms. "They're here, Happy.", he mumbled out grumpily.

"Who's here?", Happy asked glancing around. "The cameras?" When Peter nodded his head Happy sighed and stood up. "I'll take care of it.", he said with a smile. He had suspected it would happen at some point he just sort of hoped that it wouldn't. "You go hang out with your friends. I'll go outside and run them off."

Peter did as he was asked and rejoined Ned and MJ who were viciously facing off in some sort of racing game. After watching them play for several minutes he went back to feeling at ease and soon felt a heavy hand fall on his shoulder. Turning around quickly he saw it was only Happy and smiled. "They're gone aren't they.", he said as a question more so that an observation.

"Mostly.", Happy replied in earnest though he was glad to hear that the kid wasn't feeling as anxious. "They just aren't inside and I had the employees pull the blinds. They'll be more out there when we leave, I'm sure."

That was enough for Peter to calm significantly. He thanked Happy profusely and readily went back to spending time with his friends. Though, from that point forward, the man seemed to wander around the crowd, periodically looking through the windows rather than going back to his paper.
Peter would occasionally stop what he was doing to watch Happy as he made his rounds and smile. He was really glad that the man had insisted on tagging along and was thankful that it didn't feel like babysitting as he'd feared it might. True to his word, Happy made a point of not interfering and Peter was able to enjoy an entire afternoon with his friends without feeling patronized.

Once all of their money had been spent, Happy pulled around to the back and all three teenagers were escorted through the docking bay door so that they could get away without being spotted. Ned half-heartedly lamented that he was being deprived of his only opportunity to trend on the internet while MJ complained about celebrity stalking.

"It doesn't make any sense.", she said once they got back in the car. "Who cares what Selena Gomez ate for breakfast.", she said before squinting her eyes towards Ned. "I don't even care what you ate for breakfast."

Happy who, oddly enough hadn't closed the screen between them laughed. "People are nosey and when they find someone even remotely interesting they suddenly want to become an expert on all things, that person."

"Our society is hopeless.", she declared after no more than a seconds thought. "When what Tony Stark's kid does after school becomes a bigger trend than the wildfires that are completely destroying the Amazon, then we have a problem."

No one disagreed and soon everyone was being dropped off at their respective houses. Happy, of course, dropped Peter off last. Before he got out of the car, Peter, who had been invited to come to sit up front, leaned over the center console to hug the man. "Thanks for coming with us today.", he said as Happy causally reached around the pat his back. "I'm really, really glad you were there."

Happy laughed a bit and playfully pushed the kid off of him. It hadn't exactly been how he'd wanted to spend his afternoon but he was thankful the whole thing had gone well. Nothing disastrous had happened and the only pictures that made it to the internet were a few amateur shots of Peter playing pinball while his friends cheered him on. "I'm glad you had a good time with your friends.", he replied in earnest because Peter was a good kid and he deserved to have those 'normal' moments in his life.

Walking in the front door, Peter was still smiling. May had long since been home at this point and had been eagerly awaiting his arrival. "Hey there, Sweetie. You have fun at the arcade?"

"Yep.", Peter replied with a smile before going into a detailed explanation of everything that had done. "It was really awesome. I haven't done anything like that in a long time."
"Sounds like everything worked out and you had a great time.", May said before her voice turned a little more serious. "...but you're home now, funs over. Go start your homework."

Pouting, Peter picked his backpack up off of the floor and tossed it over his shoulder. "Wow. Way to be a destroyer of fun. Thanks."

"Yep.", May said offhandedly while walking over to the freezer to start contemplating dinner. "That's me. Complete killjoy. It's a good thing you have your dad...", she replied over her shoulder. "...he can keep you entertained while I keep you in line."

Two things struck Peter about what May had just said. Firstly, that she had just called Tony his dad. It wasn't that that was weird in itself so much as he'd never noticed her calling him that before. The second was the fact that he felt like she was indicating that they treated him differently. Which he thought was absolutely ridiculous. He had fun with both of his parents. While the way they enjoyed their time together was different the sentiment was the exact same. Mostly he was focused on the way she made it sound like Tony never got on to him about anything and that really wasn't true. "He keeps me in line too, you know...", he replied, trying to sound casual.

May who hadn't meant for Peter to overthink her statement, set the bag of chicken nuggets she's pulled out onto the counter and crossed the room. Once she was close enough to get a hand on Peter's cheek she smiled. "I know, Peter. I was just messing with you."

Suddenly realizing that May would never actually mean anything like that, Peter tried to laugh it off. "Yeah... I know. I was... I was too."

"Hmm... if you say so.", May said with a twinkle in her eye. "Now go get that homework done. I'll have this all heated up in less than an hour."

"I don't have that much to do anyway.", Peter sighed out as he marched towards his room. "I hope they don't give us much tomorrow either."

"Hey! That reminds me.", May called out causing Peter to pause in his steps to listen. "I emailed your teachers to have them set some assignments aside for you since you won't be there on Wednesday. Make sure you get them. You'll have plenty of time to do it while you're at the compound."
Peter stood shocked still in the hallway. He had managed to forget about the pending date with the social worker up until that moment. Between the incident with Flash at school and the thrill of going out with his friends, he'd allowed it to fall to the back of his mind. With the sudden reminder, he became somewhat anxious. He still wasn't super clear about how the day was going to go or what anyone was going to ask him. Tony and May had both reassured him several times that all he had to do was be himself but that seemed awfully vague and he really wished they had given him a little more direction. He tried to look it up online but it seemed that his situation was utterly unique.

When May called him for dinner he realized he hadn't actually done any homework what so ever. That would mean no patrolling and he was less than thrilled about that. It would have been a welcome distraction.

"Are you going out after you eat?", May asked casually as she watched Peter load up his plate for the second time.

Having just popped an entire chicken nugget into his mouth, Peter began to talk around it. "Uh... no. I, um, I still have some homework to finish.", he mumbled around the food in his mouth.

"Better not let Tony catch you doing that...", May said with a laugh, tossing Peter a napkin from across the table. "I thought you said you didn't have much."

"I don't. I just didn't actually start it yet. I got distracted.", Peter admitted with a small smile. He knew he didn't have to say anything else. May would know exactly what was on his mind.

"You're still worried aren't you.", May predictably replied and when Peter nodded his head she smiled softly. "Well, stop it. It's going to be fine. You'll see."

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Peter really wanted to believe that everything was going to be fine and May telling him it would be worked for a while but he still couldn't seem to get his mind to shut up about it. As such he didn't sleep great making school a bit harder than it should have been. He was having trouble concentrating and forgot to ask for his work from his first two teachers of the day. Thankfully Flash stayed true to there agreement and stayed out of his way.

By the time he'd reached his last class, Peter felt himself becoming more an more wound up with
apprehension. The second the final bell rang he was shoving his things into his bag and running back towards his first two classes in order to collect the work he'd been meant to receive. Assignments in hand, he was soon out the back door and tossing his overfilled backpack into Tony's waiting car.

"Hey, kid. What took you so long?", Tony asked with a smile when Peter finally made it out to the car. "It's after three-fifteen."

Sighing, Peter started putting the last of the papers he collected into his bag without even looking at them. He didn't plan on working on any of it right then anyway. It could wait. "I forget to ask a couple of my teachers about the work I was supposed to be getting for tomorrow so I went to go see them after school."

"They give you a lot to work on?", Tony asked out of curiosity. The kid's bag looked pretty well packed. Then again, he probably had to bring the majority of his textbooks home since he would have an entire school day's worth of work to do.

"I don't know. I didn't even look at most of it.", Peter replied with a shrug of his shoulders. Schoolwork was the last thing on his mind at the moment. "Can we talk about school work later? Please, dad?"

"Hmm.", Tony replied noncommittally because he was actually pretty curious how much work he was going to have to make the kid do later but he gave in anyway. "You hungry?"

Thankful for the change in subject, Peter nodded his head and Tony pulled into the next decent drive-thru where Tony ended up parking in the very corner of the lot for them to eat. Peter hadn't even made it halfway into his sandwich before he was turning towards his father looking as though he had a million questions sitting at the tip of his tongue.

"What is it, kid? What's going on in that big brain of yours?", Tony asked softly once it became clear that Peter was holding something back.

Swallowing the food that had been in his mouth, Peter twisted his mouth and bit his lip because he wanted to tell the man that he was still worried about the visit that was taking place tomorrow. However, at the same time, they had already had that conversation on numerous occasions and he wasn't really sure if he should bring it up again or not. The thing was, Peter didn't actually have to say a word for Tony to know what his kid was thinking about. He'd asked out of courtesy mostly. To give Peter the chance to bring up his worries in his own time and for a moment he thought the boy was going to keep quiet about it but eventually he broke down and started talking. "I'm still
worried about tomorrow, Dad and *I know* you said I shouldn't worry about it. May did too but I can't just not worry."

Sighing because he wouldn't have expected any less from his kid, Tony tried to smile reassuringly. "What part are you worried about, Buddy because they aren't going to say 'no'. We've gone about everything the right way. I've dotted all of the I's and crossed all the T's. We're good. This is a formality."

"I just wish I knew what they were going to ask me. I know you and May both keep saying that it won't be a big deal but what if they ask me something really simple and I say the wrong thing, Dad? ...and then there's that too. Do I call you Tony or Dad while they're there? What it I--"

"--Okay, Pete. I'm going to stop you right there because you're overthinking this.", Tony said as he reached over, without thought, to place a hand on the boy's bouncing knee. It was shaking the entire car. "You can call me whatever you're comfortable with while they're there and you can't possibly say the wrong thing if you stick to the truth... well, that and the story we've been using for who we met... but I know you can do that, kid."

"I know it's dumb.", Peter grumbled under his breath before sighing and gathering up the numerous wrappers and napkins. "Since we're still sitting here, I'm gonna go to the bathroom. I'll take the trash too. Be right back."

Rolling his eyes because he really thought they were past the use of this particular avoidance tactic, Tony grabbed the back of Peter's shirt before he could get the door all the way open. "Kid. It's not dumb that you're worried about tomorrow and you're not getting out of talking about it. You know that, right?"

"*I know.*", Peter said in mild annoyance because he wasn't sure what the problem was all he wanted to go was go throw away their trash and use the damn bathroom. "I'll be back in like, five minutes, though. I need to pee. We can talk about it on the way home. I want to go home, Dad."

Now taking *actual* notice to the boy's jittering leg, Tony realized his mistake and quickly apologized before watching Peter walk away from the car, leaving him to his thoughts. He didn't know why the kid was so nervous about being asked a few general questions. It's like nothing he or May said could convince him that he was getting the easy end of this interview but by the time Peter had made it back to the car, he already decided what he needed to do and wondered why he hadn't given in and done it earlier.

"Let's go home, yeah?", Tony said with a smile once Peter was settled back into his seat. Then as
the started down the road the flickered his eyes towards Peter who was still looking tense beside him. "You want me to ask you some questions and you can practice answering them?", he asked with a small smile but when it looked as though Peter's entire body relaxed at that question, his smile grew.

"Yes! That would be awesome."

Laughing at the boy's enthusiasm, Tony asked the first thing that came to mind. "How long have we known each other?" He was nearly positive that one would come up. It only made sense.

"Um. We met when I was fourteen. Through the, the, uh, September Foundation and you were really impressed with my design so you came to meet me. Then, then you made me your intern and you and May become friends."

"Mm-hmm. What was your design for?"

"Oh. I proposed that we could use drones and, um, other robotic designs to clean up the local beaches. You thought it had merit.", Peter diligently recited. That really had been an idea he'd had at one time, just not back then. It had come later but Tony thought it was a good project for them to lean on for the story. They even had designs and prototypes to back it up if anyone ever bothered to pester them about it.

"How do we get along?", Tony asked with a smirk because he remembered when Peter had first moved in and they didn't exactly see eye to eye. There had been a good bit of yelling... mostly on his part but it had definitely gone both ways.

"We get along really well. We, we have a lot in common and we've gotten pretty good at listening to each other?"

Tony laughed at the boy's tone. "Are you asking me or telling me, kid?"

"Telling, definitely telling.", Peter laughed in return, already feeling more comfortable with the whole idea. Tony asked him a few more basic day to day questions before stating that they were done and he should start his reading before they got back. Peter did as he was asked and in what felt like no time at all they were pulling into the garage.
Walking into the penthouse, Peter felt completely at ease. Having Tony take the time to play twenty questions with him seemed to help quite a bit and he hoped that the calm that he’d found in the car ride would last until morning. However, he figured there would be little hope of that. His brain rarely allowed him to let things go quite that easily but if nothing else he knew May and Tony would both be with him during the interview to help him feel comfortable and, at the moment, he chose to focus on that.
Chapter 82

The evening was spent in the lab. Tony felt as though Peter needed a distraction and typically giving him a lengthy task did the trick. That worked for quite a while as they focused on their respective tasks and playfully chattered across the room. It wasn't until FRIDAY warned them that it was time for a break that things started to drift back into more anxious territory. Tony opted to make dinner but it was so basic that there wasn't much for Peter to help with so he ended up sitting at the breakfast bar, waiting.

Not actively assisting left more than enough time for Peter's mind to wander and it didn't take long for it to drift back to the conversation he'd had with Happy the day before. The man had implied that Tony would more than likely want to talk about the encounter with Flash when he saw him. Realizing that his father had yet to bring it up, Peter almost wondered if maybe Happy'd had mercy on him and not mentioned it. However the longer the sat there the more he stupidly wanted to talk to Tony about it.

By the time they were making plates and sitting at the table, Peter couldn't hold it back anymore. Not knowing if or when they were ever going to have that particular conversation was currently outweighing the anxiety that stemmed from the next day's events. So after taking a deep breath, Peter rested his fork on the side of his plate. "Did Happy tell you about Monday?"

"Yep.", Tony replied simply, never taking his eyes off of his plate. Happy had in fact talked to him about Monday. He'd also advised him not to give Peter too hard of a time about it because it sounded like it had been handled alright and that it wouldn't hurt to wait and see how this all played out. Of course, he had plans to bring it up anyway, he was just trying to get through the stressful home visit before laying that on the kid too but if Peter was ready to talk about it now he would certainly do so. "He told me you and Flash spoke. That you got cornered."

"Are you mad about it?", Peter asked hesitantly. The man didn't sound mad at the moment but in the past, Tony had threatened to get Flash expelled or worse and hearing him say that Flash had 'cornered him' made it sound worse than it was. Though to be fair he supposed he was somewhat cornered. It wasn't like he could have simply walked away. Flash was blocking the door and he wasn't willing to lay his hands on him again just yet.

"I am. He was specifically told not to come near you and he did. Worse, whoever was watching you allowed it to happen.", Tony said with surprising calm considering how pissed he'd been the day before. Maybe it was because he'd had time to think it through. "I really want that kid out of that school... this state... maybe even this country. You know, with very little effort I could get his dad a job offer in... I don't know... France. Then again, that feels like I'm rewarding him for having an asshole for a son but at the same time it gets the little shithead away from you so I'm torn."
Peter nearly smiled at the dramatics. Nearly. He did have some sense of self-preservation. "He didn't say anything bad. Well, he started to but I told him to shut up and that you wanted him expelled and he stepped back a little.", Peter explained before farrowing his brow in thought. "You know he's just jealous of me right?" He was pretty sure that had never come up in any of their discussions on Flash. That was part of the reason he hadn't fought him in the past was that he actually felt kind of sorry for him. "His parents don't do anything with him. They never come to the school for anything and they've never gone to any of our decathlons meets. He has like a nanny or butler or something."

Sighing because he could somewhat sympathize, Tony gave his son a small smile. "Kid, you know I was basically raised by our butler, right? My mom taught me how to play the piano and how to speak Italian but my dad didn't give me one second of his time. I acted out because of it. I tried really hard to get his attention in the worst possible ways. Made some of my lowest decisions because of it but you know what I never did? Tormented another person. I'm sorry that his home life sucks but you can't allow him to walk all over you because you feel sorry for him, yeah?"

"I'm not!", Peter defended even though he knew that at times, he'd done just that. "I wanted you to know why he does it. That's all."

"You're such a good kid, Pete and I know you care about everyone. Even the person who's been hurting you the most but I'm asking you to stop putting his feelings above your own. It's not making him any happier or changing his situation any by allowing him to treat you like shit."

"If it's not me then it will be someone else.", Peter mumbled under his breath. He knew his dad wouldn't appreciate the sentiment there but it was true.

Glaring at his kid from across the table, Tony resumed eating his dinner before it got cold. "The self-sacrificial attitude stops now. That kid's not going to bother you or anybody else because I've just decided that I'm getting him expelled--"

"--You can't do that!", Peter gasped. "I've already handled it! I stood up for myself exactly like you all wanted me to and he's leaving me alone. Why can't you just trust me?"

"Trust you? Pete... he spent an entire week accusing you of... God, I can't even say it... and you told no one. Not one singular person. Forgive me for having a bit of trouble trusting that you won't do something like that again."

"I'm telling you now because I wanted to! ...and I told Happy everything as soon as he asked me.", Peter said hoping that the administrator hadn't mentioned that he'd begged them not to call. "I'm not
hiding anything like that anymore. I want you to trust me."

Softening his features Tony once again abandoned his plate. "I trust you with a lot of things, Buddy. I just don't trust you not to put his wellbeing above your own. I need that to stop.", he said before faltering slightly. "I'm asking you, for the sake of my own sanity that you please allow me to get that kid away from you."

"You can't expel every kid that ever picks on me, Dad.". Peter pointed out because it was true. If that was how things were going to work then he was pretty sure he would be basically homeschooled by his senior year. Even he and Ned picked on each other sometimes. It was normal.

"I know, kid. This one's different though, he's been bothering you for so long and he said... those things... then he blocked you inside of the bathroom and I can't help but imagine what he'll do next."

Resisting the urge to say that that was exactly how he felt about Captain America Peter took in a long breath through his nose. "Please. If he does anything else then I won't stop you but... please let me try to fix this myself. I'm not a baby and I'm not stupid."

Clenching his jaw, Tony frowned but relented. "Alright, kid but this is his absolute last chance.", he replied and he meant it. If found out that this kid had so much as made an ugly face at his son he was going to use every ounce of pull his position allowed to put as much distance between them as possible.

Peter nodded in satisfaction and went back to his dinner feeling relieved that his dad had listened to him. He just really hoped that Flash kept up his end of the bargain and stayed away from him because he couldn't risk keeping it a secret if anything else happened. Losing Tony's trust would tear him to shreds more so than Flash losing his place at Midtown.

The second dinner was over, Peter hopped up to clear the table and Tony went into the pantry to retrieve their go-to dessert. "When you're done, come join me on the couch, yeah? I've got the oreo's and I've already cued up the next episode of How it Made.", he called behind him with a smile. He really wanted the evening to be as light as possible because he knew the next day was going to be hard on everyone.

From there they watched television and ate snacks until Peter was leaning heavily onto his side at nearly midnight. Eventually, the steady yawns turned into heavy sighs and Peter was announcing that he was tired. "I think I'm going to go to bed."
Slightly surprised that the kid's mind was quiet enough for sleep, Tony smiled. "Sure, kid. I should probably go to bed too. We'll need to be up kind of early if May is really going to get here by seven-thirty."

Peter nodded and laughed. "If she said seven-thirty then what she meant was seven-fifteen. She's always early for everything."

"Oh, goody.", Tony sighed out but in reality, he was wondering if either of them were going to sleep through the night. He certainly hoped Peter did. "Then I'm defiantly going to bed."

Then they both walked down the hall together, neither of them bothering to clean up the table. Tony paused by Peter's door and pulled him into a hug, something he usually missed doing during the week. "Goodnight, Pete. You know where to find me.", Tony murmured into the boy's hair. "I love you to pieces, kiddo."

Smiling, Peter squeezed the man a little more tightly and sighed. "I love you too, good-night. I know where to find you."

Then just like that, they parted ways and while Peter slept through the night no problem, Tony was anxiously awake a few short hours later. He wasn't terribly upset about it, though. He had plenty to do to occupy his time.

Later that morning, when Peter finally got up he was surprised to see that Tony was already in the living room picking up. He stood there for a couple of minutes watching with interest as the man rearranged a few pillows, dusted off the bookshelf and wiped down the coffee table. He'd never seen Tony cleaning up before. Not like that anyway. He'd seen him wipe up spills or pick up out of place items on his way past but he'd never seen him actually clean. Though, he supposed he must... the place was always spotless. Eventually, he spoke up. "What are you doing?"

"Huh? Oh, tidying up a bit. We're having company and all that.", Tony replied casually as he continued to straighten a pile of magazines and science journals that usually took over one of the end tables.

Realizing that maybe this was a nervous gesture, Peter smiled. He was glad he wasn't the only one who was feeling slightly unnerved by the upcoming appointment. "Can I help?"
"Nah. I've got it. It's fine. You should eat some breakfast.", Tony said with a smile.

Peter sighed and started going through the pantry only to find that nothing sounded appealing. Moving on the refrigerator he considered microwaving some eggs but then his eyes fell on a package of bacon he smiled. "Will you make me some bacon?"

"You know I will.", Tony said with a small laugh, he figured that was just as good of a distraction as cleaning and he was actually fairly hungry himself. He'd been up since the wee hours of the morning and had nothing other than a few cups of coffee. "...but you're washing the pan."

"Deal.", Peter hurriedly agreed, grabbing the jug of juice from the fridge and pouring himself a glass to hold him over until breakfast was ready. Though the second he had emptied the glass, Tony was reminding him that May would be there in the next half an hour. Further suggesting that he go ahead and change into his clothes for the day and by the time he had returned there was a plate of bacon with a few eggs sitting in his place at the table. "Thank you!"

"Mm-hmm.", Tony replied while continuing to prepare the large packet of bacon and piling it on a plate beside the stove. He knew that his kid could eat his weight in any food but bacon, like cheese and pasta, seemed to be high on his list.

It wasn't much longer until FRIDAY was announcing May's arrival and she was walking into the suite. "Morning, boys.", she said with mild enthusiasm before crossing into the kitchen and snagging a piece of bacon off of Tony's plate rather than from the pile still sitting by the stove.

"Would you like some bacon, May?", Tony asked mildly with a smile and roll of his eyes. Not that he cared or wasn't going to offer her any. It was more for show really.

May laughed and sat down across from Peter. "Nope. I'm good. I made a cup of coffee and a grilled cheese sandwich for the drive over."

After breakfast was eaten and Peter had cleaned up as promised, the adults took over the couch while Peter spread his schoolwork over the kitchen table. He could have completed it at the desk in his room but he felt like being close to everyone else at the moment. It also gave him plenty of opportunities to complain about the workload. "This is stupid. I already know how to do all of this. Why do I need to do it thirty-one more times?", he complained as he worked on an exercise page in his math book.
"...because practice makes perfect.", May supplied from the couch while Tony rolled his eyes. Mostly because he was quietly siding with the kid on this one. Peter was too smart to be being reduced to repetitive equations. He kept quiet about it though. His kid took his grades seriously.

"I'm already perfect.", Peter quickly returned, only he'd meant he was already perfect at the math. When both adults started laughing it took him several seconds to figure out why. "I didn't mean it like that! I meant I already know how to do this math. It's review stuff."

"Nope. You already said it. You can't take it back!", Tony laughed, crossing the room to stand beside where Peter sat and reaching out to pinch his cheeks. "Besides, you're not wrong. You're cute. Practically perfect in every way... like Mary Poppins."

Glaring in the man's direction as May laughed from the couch, Peter snapped his head away from Tony's grasp. "Ugh. Don't call me that!", Peter protested with a frown.

"You're right.", Tony replied with a grin that screamed that he wasn't done teasing yet. "I forgot... you're like a puppy.", he added as he proceeded to pat the boy on the head.

"Dad!", Peter shouted this time but with no real heat. "I'm trying to work over here. Do you mind?"

Though, Tony didn't have a chance to answer because FRIDAY announced that the social worker had entered the building and was being escorted to the private elevator.
Chapter 83

Chapter Notes

O.o I just realized that I have been writing this story for six fricken months. O.o

Thank you, everyone, for reading and keeping up with all of the nonsense that pours through my head on a daily basis. It's been a journey and I am so glad that you have made it this far with me.

Seriously, I love having people to share this with. My other stories are fun to write and I enjoy them as well but this one, this is my outlet. This is the one I think I pour the most into. This is the one that plays in my head like a movie whenever I'm still.

So, again, THANK YOU!

Tag Adds: Protective Tony Stark

The moment FRIDAY announced the arrival of the social worker the atmosphere in the suite went from causal and lighthearted to stiff and uncomfortable. Tony gave Peter a reassuring smile and encouraged him to get up from his school work to join him at the door. Taking a deep breath he did as he was asked and followed loosely behind his father. Taking a half step behind him right before the man opened the door.

Upon first glance, Peter deiced that the man looked just as he would have expected. He was dressed down in some khaki slacks and a polo with a name badge clipped to his collar and a large bag in his hand. The hand that wasn't holding tightly onto the case was being held out to Tony. "Hi there, you must be Anthony Stark. I'm Arnold Davis from the New York Department of Family and Children Services."

Accepting the hand being held out to him, Tony immediately switched into his business persona, offering his preferred name and turning towards Peter with the intention of introducing him. Only the other man cut him off before he could get the words out. "Nice to meet you. It's Tony and this is--"

"--Peter Parker," the man finished for him as he glanced down at his paperwork before looking past Tony to lay eyes on May who was standing further into the room. "...and are you May Parker?"

Taking a few steps forward, May offered her own hand to the man. "Yes, it's nice to meet you, Mr. Davis."
The very first thing Peter noticed about the man was that he seemed to be a no-nonsense kind of guy. He didn't seem interested in pleasantries and hadn't even really acknowledged him at all, outside of making it clear that he knew his name. In fact, he'd jumped right into business the second he'd confirmed everyone's identities.

"Alright, well how about we get started here. Do you have all the paperwork that was sent over to you completed, Mr. Stark?", Mr. Davis asked as he looked through what appeared to be some sort of checklist that he'd pulled from his bag. Then upon taking the items, Tony had collected for him, he looked towards May, who also seemed to have her paperwork at the ready. "...and you Ms. Parker? ...Perfect. We can do the interview or the home inspection first. Which do you prefer?", the man asked no one in particular though, Tony seemed to have taken control of the situation.

"Why don't we take a seat and talk first. Can I offer you something to drink?", Tony asked politely as he gestured towards the large couches and chairs of the living area.

Once Tony, Peter, and May had all sat down along the couch, with Peter in the middle, Mr. Davis sat in a chair catercorner to them and was already pulling out a pen and several sheets of paper. "I'm fine, Thank you. Now, as you have no doubt been informed I'm going to be asking you all several questions regarding your relationship."

"Of course.", Tony said with a winning smile. "Ask away."

The man seemed to be ready to get down to business and turned towards May, pen in hand ready to make notes. "Ms. Parker, who initiated the idea of a second parent adoption?"

No one initiated, so to speak. There was an open dialogue between all of the adults. We discussed options, leaving things as they were, guardianship and adoption and then allowed Peter to have the final say. *He* chose adoption.", she answered without hesitation.

The man then flickered his eyes over towards, Peter who had yet to say one word since his arrival. "Is that right, Peter?", he asked quickly as his pen continued to scratch across the paper.

"Mm-hmm. Yes, sir.", Peter readily replied but the man didn't acknowledge him outside of a small nod of his head and for a moment he thought he wasn't going to be asked anything else. Then the social worker looked up from his paper and he could feel his heart rate quicken. He just hoped that whatever the man was about to ask would be simple.
"Can you tell me how you and Mr. Stark met?"

Despite the fact that the question he'd been asked was one he'd practiced over and over again, Peter stumbled. He felt on the spot and there was no mask to hide his face. Everything he wanted was riding on this interview and he suddenly forgot how to breathe. Tony must have noticed because he reached his hand over and patted Peter's knee, whispering a quiet, 'calm down, Pete. You're alright.' and that seemed to be enough for him to take in a sharp breath and begin answering. "I, I uh, I applied for the September Foundation Grant and he, he liked my idea and came to meet me in person. I became his intern. He and my aunt became friends and, um, when she got hurt over the summer in a car accident, I, I stayed here."

That line of questioning went on for some time. Every single, meniscal detail of how they had all come together. The social worker seemed particularly interested in the fact that Peter had been the one to call Tony for help when May was in the hospital. Though, to Peter's relief, most of those questions had been directed towards the adults. He was just starting to get comfortable when the social worker again addressed him.

"Are you happy here, Peter?", the man asked, taking Peter slightly by a surprise. That seemed like an odd question to be asking him. Then again, he supposed he hadn't smiled once since his arrival and he was suddenly worried he'd given the wrong impression.

Eager to correct any assumptions he may have led the social worker into believing, Peter forced himself to smile. "Yes! I'm really happy here. I mean, I'm happy with my Aunt May too but I like it here.", he returned with maybe a bit more enthusiasm than was necessary but both May and Tony seemed to take it a show nerves as they both reached out to him. May grabbing his hand and Tony once again resting his on Peter's tense knee.

"Ms. Parker, you're okay with this arrangement as it is?"

Smiling softly in her nephew's direction, May easily answered, "As long as Peter's happy. I'm happy."

From there all of the social worker's questions seemed to be aimed towards Tony. He'd readjusted his position in the chair so that he was more squarely facing him rather than the group as a whole and sighed. "Mr. Stark, you're a well-known man. What's your plan as fas as Peter's safety is concerned?"

Of course, Tony was more than prepared. His lawyers had made sure of that, so he was able to answer without a second's hesitation. "His security is of utmost importance to me. Always has been
but since the recent recognition by the media, we've gone a step further. I now have someone who's sole job is to make sure he stays safe from harm and protected from the press."

Nodding his head the man pushed on. "In most situations, things like this wouldn't really come up but you have a very open lifestyle and some of that has led to a few concerns. I need to ask you about your past relationship with alcohol.", the man stated, the question was implied. 'Do you still drink yourself into oblivion every chance you get?'

"Haven't had more than a social glass of wine or cup of ale in years and not even that since June. You can look around. There's nothing here.", Tony replied still sounding business-like but Peter could hear the slight edge to his voice at the implication.

"We'll get to that part, I assure you.", the man quickly returned. "What happened to your arm?", he asked nodding towards the sling Tony was still using some during the day. He probably could have removed it for the interview. Goodness knows he was using it more than he should have been anyway but didn't think it would matter.

"Is that really on your checklist? What happened to my arm?", Tony asked with an eyebrow quirked. He wasn't trying got be contrary as much as he felt like the man was invading his privacy enough. He's already had to endure a physical exam, including a fucking echocardiogram and a goddamned stress test. This line of questioning seemed over the top.

Glancing up from his papers the man sighed in annoyance. "Mostly, it was conversational curiosity but the fact that you feel the need to duck the question makes me skeptical. Did it have something to do with Peter's well being? Anything I should know now or am I going to have to find out about later on the news?"

Setting his jaw, Tony looked the man right in the eyes. "No. It happened at the gym. Just an unfortunate mistake. Nothing to do with Peter.", he said firmly enough for the social worker to let it go. Thankfully he didn't notice the flash of guilt that crossed Peter's face at Tony's lie.

Moving on, the social worker looked back at the stack of papers in his hands. "What about the other members of the household. The paperwork indicates that you share this home with your fiance, Virginia Potts. Is she not here today?"

"We were told that her presence was not necessary since we aren't yet married and her name isn't going on the adoption papers. She's currently in California on business but I assure you that if you needed to meet with her she would be here as quickly as possible. All of her information is in the packet I was asked to fill out.", Tony said already preparing himself to send a plane to pick her up if
"No, it's fine. I have everything I need here.", the man casually stated while riffling through a few more papers. "Peter, why don't you show me your room?"

Immediately tensing up at the question, Peter looked pleadingly between the two adults he was currently sandwiched between. "Just, just me?", he asked hesitantly because it sounded like he was wanting to talk to him alone and he'd not been prepared for that. From the look on Tony's face, he hadn't been prepared for it either but he urged him on.

At this point, the social worker seemed to have felt Peter's unease and lightened up a bit, offering Peter a smile. "That's the idea. I want to ask you a few questions and I would love to see where you stay when you're here.", he said with more kindness than he had anything else since walking in the door.

Still not prepared but seeing no way out of it, Peter glanced once more between the two familiar adults and stood up to lead the way to his room. Once they were inside, Peter sat on his unmade bed as the man looked around. "You like Lego?", he asked as he examined the few builds Peter had displayed on his shelf. "I saw another in the living room. I suppose that one's yours also."

"Um, yes, sir. I like Lego. I did that one with my friend, Ned and the, the one in the living room I put together with Tony."

"There's a lot picture on your wall. That's nice. Can you tell me about them?", the man asked as he walked a few steps closer to the desk that anchored the wall of photographs Peter had framed.

Smiling in earnest for the first time since the man had walked into the suite, Peter crossed the room to point them out. He went through each one identifying who was in each of the photographs and giving some sort of anecdote for each. The man seemed genuinely interested and nodded his head as Peter spoke. It was after he was done with is explanations that Peter realized he'd been led into a false sense of security as he was completely thrown off by the next question.

"Peter, Mr. Stark is a household name and not everything everyone says about him is good. That could reflect heavily on you. Are you sure this is what you want? I don't want you to feel like you have to go along with this if you don't want to."

Unsure of what the man was implying Peter held his breath. "I, I don't understand...", he said as he
considered darting back out the door and into May and Tony's waiting arms.

Sighing, the man took a step forward in an attempt to get Peter to look at him. "I want to make sure that this isn't a stunt of some kind. That this is really about you and not about money or media coverage. It's my job to make sure this is a fit situation for you. You can tell me if this isn't want you really want."

As the man's words began to sink in Peter found himself getting angry but he tried not to let it show. "It's not about either of those things. Tony, my dad... he loves me. He loves me and May loves me and this is what I want. They asked me and, and I chose this. It's not a stunt or, or a whatever you think this is it's nothing like that. They, May and Tony, they want what's best for me and this--" He hadn't even realized his voice was rising with every word until he was being interrupted.

"--Pete?", Tony's voice called quietly into the room. He'd heard Peter's voice start to raise and refused to just sit there as it happened. his kid was upset and he needed to go check on him. May agreed and that was that. "Everything okay in here?"

"No.", Peter said as his eyes began to water. "I mean, yeah. I, I'm sorry."

Ignoring the fact that the social worker was watching them very closely Tony walked right past him, discarding the sling so that he could wrap both of his arms around his crumbling child. "You're alright. I've got you.", he said softly as Peter took a deep shaky breath at the contact.

"I was being dumb. I didn't mean for you to have to come in here.", Peter said before addressing the social worker. "I'm sorry. I just... this is what I want. I'm sure."

After taking a moment to glare at the man who'd upset his child, Tony gave Peter one last gentle squeeze before releasing his hold. "You don't have to be sorry, Buddy and you're not being dumb. You're fine, yeah? I've got you.", he assured once more before the social worker spoke up again.

"It wasn't my intention to upset you, Peter. I'm just doing my job but I've made extensive notes here to indicate that you are very much in favor of this process moving forward. With you being sixteen, that's something that will be heavily considered during the decision-making process.", the man said kindly before turning towards Tony who was now having a very hard time being pleasant with the man. "That's everything I need for the interview if you could show me around the rest of the house, we'll be done here shortly."
With a curt nod, Tony lead the way back towards the kitchen and stood back as he watched the man rifled through the pantry and cabinets. He was sure he'd never felt this far under the microscope before in his life and that was saying something considering who he was. It was as if he was waiting for something to happen but it didn't. Once the man was done in the kitchen he did a quick walkthrough of the rest of the home and was soon packing up his things.

As the man was saying his good-byes, Peter couldn't stop himself from speaking up. "Mr. Davis? What happens next? Are we done? Will we get to see the judge now?", he asked in rapid succession but for several moments, the man only looked at him with amusement.

"Next we review everything. It could take up to ninety days. Someone will be in touch.", the social worker stated before walking towards the door with Tony and May right behind and as soon as the door shut it seemed like all three of them let out a sigh of relief.

"Well, I think that went well.", May said with a smile as she wandered back towards the living room.

Tony looked at her frowning. "I suppose. I don't like the way he took the kid into his room by himself to question him like that though. Didn't even ask if we were okay with it.", he grumbled. "Isn't that illegal or something? Questioning a minor with a witness or something? I calling the lawyer."

"I'm sure it's perfectly legal. Not that I loved it, especially when it seemed to upset him but I'm almost positive the social worker knows what he is and isn't allowed to do.", May said with a small laugh. "Though I am curious...", May said directing her attention towards Peter who was now sitting at the breakfast bar with a glass of juice. "What did he say to you?"

Sagging his shoulder, Peter sighed. "He was asking me if I'm really sure that this is what I want and that I wasn't just agreeing to it because you guys wanted me to. Something about publicity or money or something. He called it a stunt."

"That's it. I'm definitely calling the lawyer now.", Tony fumed while May, more reasonably, settled down beside Peter to comfort him.

"No, you're not.", May said calmly in Tony's direction because she could see where people could think those kinds of things. Tony was a rich man and she and Peter... weren't. "It was a valid question and you know it. It might not have been one any of us were prepared for but even you have to admit it makes sense."
"I most certainly, do not.", Tony replied petulantly because he wanted to be angry about it. The man had upset his kid and that wasn't acceptable. That thought bringing his attention back to Peter. "Are you okay now?"

"Mm-hmm. I wasn't ready for that. I mean, I guess it makes sense but it also sort of made me mad that he would suggest it. It's not like that at all."

Tony smiled and sat down on the seat beside Peter's. "No, it's not and I guess he knows that now, yeah? You made sure of that."

Laughing for the first time since the man had entered the suite, Peter replied, "Yeah. I guess so."

The remainder of the day was spent with Peter doing his homework while Tony hovered and held back his complaints as he watched his kid working on things he was pretty sure he'd been mastered in middle school. It wasn't like it would change anything. The kid was stubbornly determined to remain at Midtown. He did make a mental note to challenge him a little more in the workshop, though.

Later, after Peter had finished his homework he helped Tony prepare dinner and they were soon sitting at the table together. "Do you think it will take ninety days?", Peter asked as they began to set the table.

"I doubt it, kid.", Tony said reassuringly before a realization hit him. "Either way, I'm pretty sure I'll be starting the new year with you as my legal son. I'll take that."

Peter smiled but he was really hoping it would be before that. He was eager to have the process completed even though he knew it was nothing but a formality. Though it did come with a new name that he was excited to take on. "I hope it's before Christmas. I want to sign all of my Christmas cards Peter Stark.", he replied with a grin before realizing that he'd never talked to May about that, though she seemed unfazed by it.

"Peter Stark, huh?", May asked with a smile. "When did you decide that?"

"Oh. Um... I guess I didn't talk to you about that. You, you're not upset. ...Right? I mean I don't have to change my name! I could still be a Parker. Not that I--"
"--Peter!" , May laughed. "I'm not upset. I was curious. What name did you pick?", she asked genuinely. She really didn't mind if Peter wanted to change his name. She knew it was a possibility and really, she had somewhat expected it. Of course, he would want to take on his adopted father's name. It felt natural.

"Peter Benjamin-Parker Stark. With a hyphen between Benjamin and Parker. I didn't want to give up a name but I didn't want two last names either."

May smiled softly. "I think that sounds great, Peter. Everyone gets honored and you're still you no matter what so I'm happy if you are.", she said honestly because it was perfect. Peter would still be Peter while carrying his uncle's first name and both of his father's surnames. It couldn't be more perfect or fitting and she was proud of him for being so considerate in his choice.

Smiling Peter looked lovingly between his parents, gaining the attention of both. "I'm very happy.", he whispered sighing when both adults leaned hin to hug him.
That evening, on the ride home, Peter was quiet which May knew meant that he had something on his mind. "What are you thinking about, sweetie?", she asked after a good thirty minutes of comfortable silence.

Bringing his attention away from the window and back to his aunt, Peter sighed. "I was thinking about the interview. I hope I didn't say anything wrong. That's all."

Nodding her head in understanding because that sounded very much like something Peter would worry about, she reached a hand over to quickly pat his knee before returning it to the steering wheel. "You did fine and I'm sure everything went well."

"I yelled at him.", Peter stated flatly. "He asked me a question and I yelled at him. I'm pretty sure that didn't look great."

May just laughed. "You did get a bit defensive but I wouldn't have expected it to be any other way. You should have seen Tony's face when he heard you raising your voice. I thought he was going to call for a suit.", May laughed before getting back on track. "Anyway, the man asked for an answer and you gave him a very clear one. If nothing else he knows how seriously you want this to happen.", She said with a smile. "Now, stop worrying."

"I'm not worried, worried. I'm just thinking about it.", Peter defended with yet another sigh. "Do you think it's really going to take all ninety days?"

"I'm almost sure that Tony's lawyers will be riding them to push it through. Goodness knows they got them to get the interview going quickly enough."

Looking at his aunt, Peter suddenly felt a bit guilty. "You really are okay with all of this right? I mean, you're not upset that I want Tony to adopt me or that I want to take his last name?"

"Of course not Peter!", May said with a slightly surprised laugh. "Sweetheart, I wouldn't have suggested it if I was going to be insecure about it. I know you love me and you'll still be my nephew and my responsibility. I actually love the fact that Tony can step up and be the man in your life. Whether you know it or not you need that. You deserve that and he's a good fit. You two have so much in common and he loves you like you're his own. I couldn't ask for a better co-parent."
"What if you get married again? Then what?"

Cringing a bit at the question, May answered as carefully as possible. "That's not something I plan on ever happening Peter. I'm not saying it could never be a possibility. It's just not something I'm seeking. However, if by some twist of fate I met a man who could accept the fact that he will always be my second love and will love you and accept you for you then, I'd consider it. ...but to answer your actual question. Should I ever get remarried, nothing would change between you and Tony. The same way that when he marries Pepper nothing will change between us."

"Do you think, I'll have to call Pepper mom after they get married? I mean, since I call Tony dad sometimes..."

May and Pepper had already briefly discussed that. Mostly because Pepper was worried that Peter would feel he was obligated to call her such. Not that she wouldn't appreciate the gesture. She'd said she would be honored if it ever came about but she'd made it very clear that she never wanted Peter to feel forced into calling her anything. "Honey, she doesn't care what you call her as long as you know she loves you and will always be there for you. No one expects you to call her mom. Though, should you ever chose to, no one would be upset."

Nodding his head, Peter lay his head back down on the window. "I'm tired.", he said with a yawn and when May suggested that he take a nap he allowed his eyes to close, not opening them again until they had reached their small apartment at just after eleven.

That night, Peter went back to sleep in his bed with surprising ease considering the amount of anticipation that was lingering in the back of his mind. It was like they were so close to being through the process that he was getting impatient. He wondered if Tony was too and considered calling him to ask but decided he would be better served to try to get back to sleep.

The next morning he woke up to several texts from his friends and realized he hadn't looked at his phone one time the day before. Mostly they seemed curious about the outcome of the social worker's visit but the most recent one, from Ned, sounded worried. 'I'm fine, man. The interview was fine. Didn't check my phone yesterday.', he quickly replied before adding and additional, 'Sorry.' They continued to text throughout breakfast until Peter finally had to tell him it was too much to type and he would be talking to him in less than half an hour. Then at about the same time, Happy came waltzing through the door.

"Hey, kid. Traffic was good this morning so I'm here early. I see you've already got breakfast but if you hurry up, I'll take you to get some coffee or something.", he said casually but Peter was suspicious. Partially because he'd never had an adult offer to take him to get coffee before. Not that he never drank it, he'd gotten a frozen latte with his friends here and there but going out for coffee was not a thing May or Tony had ever offered to do with him. 
"You want to take me out for coffee?", Peter asked with an eyebrow raised in question. "I mean, I love a good frappuccino but I usually only get those with my friends..."

Smiling towards the absolutely flummoxed looking teen, Happy decided it was an excellent opportunity to give him a hard time. "Are you implying that we're not friends?"

Peter's eyes shot up into his hairline at the question. "No! I mean... maybe? I guess I never really thought about it that way...", Peter rapidly defended. Not that he didn't like or appreciate Happy but he didn't really think of him as a friend. When he had thought about it, he decided that he would describe their relationship as more of an uncle-nephew sort of thing. Not the same as the one he'd had with his Uncle Ben, though. Ben had been something between and uncle and a father. With Happy, it was more like what he would expect an uncle to be like. Sort of strict but also kind of fun when he wanted to be. While he was deciding whether or not any of that was appropriate to say out loud Happy started laughing.

"It's fine, kid. I'm not offended. I know I'm old.", Happy replied with a smile. He knew what Peter had meant. He wasn't a playground buddy or anything but he would like to think that there was some sort of relationship between them. He liked the kid an awful lot anymore and he was pretty sure the kid liked him too. Goodness knows they'd been through a lot together in the last few months alone.

Feeling somewhat defensive all over again, Peter blushed and tried to smooth things out. "I never said that, Happy! I love hanging out with you and--"

Rolling his eyes at how quickly he could get the kid riled up, Happy patted him gently on the shoulder. "--Do you want the coffee or not?"

Suddenly realizing that there wasn't anything to actually feel defensive about, Peter relented with a smile. "Yes, please.", he practically chirped before hopping out of his chair and cleaning his dishes before running to tell May that he was heading out early.

By the time Peter was back in the living room, Happy was holding his bag out to him. "Hurry up and get your stuff together. There's a Starbucks on the way."

Despite the fact that the drive-through was practically wrapped around the small building, Peter arrived at school early. Which worked out because Ned was early also and Peter had bought him a drink as well. Happy had offered to cover it with their order but Peter had insisted on buying it
himself, with the card that Tony had given him. It felt odd at first, handing the card over to Happy so that he could complete the second order at the window. Then when he was having it handed back to him along with a receipt he suddenly felt sort of... grown. Not that he typically felt overly childish but there was something about using a bank account that made him feel exceptionally responsible at the moment. He knew Tony got an alert any time he used the account and wondered, at first, if he would be upset that the first time he used it was to buy a four-dollar iced coffee for his friend. Eventually, he decided that the man probably didn't care what he'd spent the money on because he would be far too focused on the fact that he'd used the account at all.

Obviously, Ned had been pleased by the gesture and Peter was happy to have been able to make his friend happy. As they sat down at a table in the back of the library so that Peter could go over the events of the day before he decided that the morning couldn't have possibly started off any better. Happy had basically admitted that he liked him, which he already knew but it was sort of nice to hear him say something to imply it. Then he'd been able to make Ned smile and he'd had time to sit and chat with him for a while before the bell rang.

Thankfully the rest of the day went by just as well. Flash, as hoped, still wasn't trying to confront him and thanks to May's foresight to get him some assignments to work on he wasn't the least bit behind in any of his classes. Even lunch had been an exceptionally good experience. He and Ned had sat together watching Youtube while MJ continuously commented on their dependency on brainless media sources. "You know that kind of stuff rots your brain right?"

"No it doesn't", Ned said with squinted eyes and a small laugh before hesitating slightly. "Does it?"

Rolling her eyes in return, MJ sighed. "Not really. There's such thing as screen addiction, though. Keeps you from being active and social. Some scientist found links between screen and gaming addiction and ADHD. They all trigger the parts of the pre-frontal cortex and the striatum that deal with reward processing. It's also been compared to drug addiction but instead of cocaine it's dopamine.", she said casually before going back to her book, leaving both boys with their mouths gaped open.

After several seconds of quiet, Peter finally blinked himself out of his stupor to defend himself. "I'm not addicted to a screen. I didn't even answer any of your texts yesterday, thus proving that I wasn't on my phone."

"Technically I never said you were. Just giving you the facts, Parker.", she said as though she were already bored with the topic before lifting her head from her book to give him a once over. "Now that you mention it. Why didn't you answer any of my texts yesterday? How did the whole interview thing go?"

That led into another explanation of the previous day's events though in less detail as time was
running short. "Anyway, both May and Tony think it's fine. All we can do at this point is wait and see.", he finished with a shrug of his shoulders as if he weren't the least bit bothered by the wait.

"Sounds like you didn't screw it up too bad. I'm sure it'll be fine. Besides, the person trying to adopt you is Tony Stark. I'm sure his high dollar lawyers wouldn't allow it to be anything but fine.", she reasoned as she began to collect her trash on the tray. "...and I doubt it will take the whole ninety days. My cousin just finished going through the whole second-parent adoption thing with her daughter. It only took a little over a month."

"I thought you said she had the baby over the summer? Why would she adopt her own kid?", Ned asked in confusion because MJ had shown them pictures of the baby during the first few days of school and made no mention of adoption.

"She didn't have the baby. Her partner did but they had to do a second-parent adoption so she could be the baby's other mom.", she said with a shrug of her shoulder's and suddenly it made much more sense to both boys. "I suppose that's a little different but I would assume the process would be similar."

"I had never considered how that worked...", Ned said, still obviously in thought. "That's actually pretty cool."

"You learn something new every day, Loser.", MJ said with a small smile as she abruptly headed towards the trash cans. "Later, boys."

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The remainder of the week went just as well and Peter couldn't have been happier to see Happy's car sitting outside the school on Friday. "Hey Happy!", he greeted, immediately noticing that he was standing outside of the car leaning on the hood rather than waiting in the front as usual. "What are you doing?"

Happy just smiled and waved his hand to urge Peter to hurry up. "Nothing. Waiting for you.", he said before gesturing towards the back door. "There's a bit of a surprise for you in the backset though."

Peter perked up at those words as curiosity started to take over causing him to grin with excitement. "Is it food because I would not be opposed to food. I'm starving.", he said as he approached the car,
pausing for a response before opening the door.

"It's not food.", Happy said with a good-natured roll of his eyes. "...but we can stop to get some. Just get in."

Opening the back door, Peter was indeed surprised. "Rhodey! When did you get back? I haven't seen you in forever. Did you get the text I sent you the other day from the arcade? Tony said you used to be really good at pinball and that you could beat my high score no problem. How long are you staying? Do you think we could go to the arcade so I can watch you play? Wha--"

"--Kid!", Tony finally shouted over Peter's exciting line of questioning. "First of all. Hi. Nice to see you too. Second, can he answer the first twenty questions before you ask the next one?"

"Yeah! I'm sorry. I'm really happy to see you too but Rhodey hasn't come by to visit in weeks. I think I'm allowed to be excited to see him.", Peter said with a smile. While he and Rhodes had been texting regularly ever since he'd gotten his number in Washington, he hadn't seen the man since just before school started.

"Yeah, Tony. The kid's allowed to be excited to see me.", Rhodes cut in with a smug smile. "I'm the fun uncle and you're the boring dad."

Peter's eyes went wide at that. Partially because he'd already decided that Rhodey was sort of like a fun uncle. He'd thought about that around the same time he decided that Happy was like the strict but sometimes fun uncle because they both tended to worry about him. Although they did so in different ways but mostly he was slightly shocked that Rhodey would call Tony boring because he was anything but. "He's not boring!", Peter quickly defended. "He does cool stuff with me."

"See, I'm cool.", Tony declared with a smirk. "...and I'm pretty sure that in teenager land cool is better than fun. I can live with that."

"Right.", Rhodes said with a grin before looking back at Peter who looked seconds away from rebuting Tony's assessment. "If he's so cool then how come you were complaining to me that he wouldn't let you install a gun on that battle drone you guys are working on, hmm?"

Tony rolled his eyes. "Oh, please. Like you would have let him. Fun uncle or not I'm pretty sure we can both agree that anything that shoots bullets at the kid is a bad idea.", he said before quickly adding, "Even rubber ones!" before Peter could protest. He drew the line at projectiles of any
variety. He would rather not have any sort of heart attack while watching the boy train. What he had allowed was bad enough, though even he could admit it would be a good workout. He'd even considered making a few more once they had this one perfected.

It was about that time that Happy finally spoke up from the front. "I realize no one asked my opinion but I'm going to have to agree with Tony on this one. I would rather not have any kind of bullets flying towards the kid. I put a surprising amount of effort into keeping him safe and allowing a drone to try and kill him kind of defeats the purpose.", Happy said with a wink. "That and I kind of like him. He's grown on me. ...like a fungus."

"See?", Tony gloated. "Even Happy's on my side. There's no way you're disagreeing with me. I repeat you wouldn't have let him install that either."

"You're right. I wouldn't.", Rhodes replied, making Peter practically pout. For a moment there, he'd thought the other man would be on his side. "Now, to answer a few of the bazillion questions I was just asked... I've been here since Thursday morning. I'll be here until next Tuesday. I don't know about the arcade, that's up to Tony."

While all of this was going on, Peter couldn't seem to get a word in and just when he thought he could, Tony predicted his next question before he could get it out. It would have been way more annoying than it was had it not also been somewhat impressive.

"We can talk about the arcade later, kid.", Tony said before the question could even be posed. "For right now, how about we pick you up a snack and get home."
Chapter 85

Once they got back to the compound, Peter immediately sat himself down at the kitchen table to work on his homework while Tony and Rhodes sat in the living room going over some sort of paperwork. For a while, Peter didn't pay them any mind, choosing to concentrate on his math instead. He was only in there rather than his room because he enjoyed the proximity. However, when Tony said, "We need to start training together.", he was listening. "I'm going to bring it up on Monday. I want to get something in while you're still in town." At first, he wasn't sure if he should say anything or not because maybe he wasn't supposed to hear it. Then again, Tony knew he had enhanced hearing so, surely he wouldn't have brought up anything he wasn't supposed to know in the same room as him.

"Training?", Peter asked unsurely. He was still a little wary that maybe that was a conversation he shouldn't have been listening to even if he only heard the one part.

"Yeah. As a team. We've been spending all of our time bonding or whatever but now it's time to get down to business. Don't worry. Weekends will still be for us.", Tony replied, assuming that was why the kid was questioning it.

Wrinkling his brow in mild confusions, Peter asked, "What about me? Shouldn't I train too?" It made sense that if everyone was training together then he should be training too. Sure, he wasn't an Avenger or anything but he was a superhero and Tony was always telling him he could use a little more instruction. Besides, it would be a good excuse to fight Steve. He couldn't miss out on that opportunity. Tony had told him not to lay a finger on him but if they were sparring... well, he would have to and the idea was probably more appealing than it should have been.

"You're not a part of the team, kiddo. ...that and the whole secret identity thing you've got going on.", Tony said casually. Peter still didn't know that the newest additions to the newly reformed team already had him figured out and Tony wanted to keep it that way for a little while longer. He hoped that would be deterrent enough for the time being to keep the boy from wanting to join them in the gym. He wasn't quite ready to see his kid go toe to toe with a super-soldier.

Realizing that he had a point, Peter sighed. "I guess so. Are you ever going to tell them?", he asked out of curiosity. He wondered if his dad would ever trust them enough with that information. Even if they were working towards forgiveness.

"I sort of figured that eventually, you might.", Tony said with a small shrug of his shoulders.

"Do you think they should know? I mean, do you think they would ever tell?"
Smiling softly, Tony rose from the couch and moved to sit beside Peter at the table. "I think they can keep it a secret but there's no rush."

Nodding his head, Peter went back to work for only a moment before looking up again. "Once they know, can I train with you guys?", he asked because if that was the case he might actually consider doing that sooner rather than later.

"Eventually. For now, we'll keep working on that battle drone.", Tony said as if it were no big deal.

Peter smiled at the thought. He was still really excited to finish that project and start actually testing it out. With Tony shoulder being so sore the week before they hadn't made it as far into the project as they would have hoped before it was time for him to go back to Queens. Then a thought occurred to him."Wait... how are you going to train if your shoulder is still hurt?"

Rolling his eyes, Tony made a point of slowly rotating his shoulder to show that it wasn't near as painful as it had been. "Do you see me wearing a sling? I'm fine.", he said a small scoff. It really was already feeling worlds better. He wasn't going to be doing any pushups anytime soon but it was bearable.

"Already? It's only been like, two weeks.", Peter replied skeptically because he was pretty sure that even a hairline fracture took longer than two weeks to heal in a normal non-enhanced person. Then again, he should have expected that Tony wouldn't take it easy for the entirety of the healing process.

"It's good enough to fly around and dodge hits. I won't go overboard.", Tony promised with a sigh. He felt somewhat hypocritical. If it were Peter who was still healing he wouldn't let him anywhere near any kind of strenuous activity but then again, the kid could have healed a hairline fracture in seven days. Tops. "I'm going into my office for a bit. You finish your homework and then we can talk about dinner.", he said before looking towards Rhodes who was still lounging on the couch watching them. "I suppose you're staying?"

"I'll hang around for a while. I might eat dinner downstai--", Rhodes began to explain only to be cut off by a drawn-out whine.

"--Awww! Why can't you eat with us?", Peter complained from the kitchen table. He'd sort of expected the man to stay and hang out with them. The idea that he would choose not to was
disappointing and a tiny bit irritating but he didn't say that.

Smiling at the question, Rhodes made a few suggestions. He knew from talking to Tony that Peter still wasn’t really in love with the idea of the other’s being there but had been making an effort to be friendly. Which he completely understood. While he and Tony’d had almost a year to come to terms with everything and decide what they wanted, Peter had been left out of the mix. Reconciliation probably came as a bit of a shock. "I suppose I can if your dad doesn't mind. ...or you two could come eat with everyone else..."

"Dad? Can Uncle Rhodey eat dinner with us?", asked quickly, ignoring the idea of joining the others. He knew he was going to have to do that again at some point and it wasn't like it was horrible but he would avoid it whenever nessesary.

"Who, now?", Tony asked with mirth before shaking his head as if that would make the question any clearer. Not that the question wasn't clear, he just never heard the kid call his friend anything but Mr. Rhodes or more recently Rhody. The uncle part was new. "Did you just call him Uncle Rhody?"

"Uh... Did I?", Peter asked, trying to think if that was indeed what he'd said and deciding that he really did need to start thinking before he spoke. Things kept slipping out of his mouth without thought and he was pretty sure that could lead to a few problems. That and it was sort of embarrassing. "I mean...ugh. That's what he put on my contacts list when he gave me his number and then you guys were talking about it the car and--"

"--it's fine, kid.", Tony said with a laugh, essentially cutting the boy off mid-explanation. "Hilarious... but fine. God knows he may as well be my actual brother."

When Rhodes continues to look between the two of them with absolute glee, Peter sighed. "You're never going to let me call you anything else ever again, are you.", he deadpanned causing both men to laugh.

"Nope. I only answer to Uncle Rhodey from here on out."

Once the laughter had died down, Tony took a deep breath and brought his face back to neutral. "Alright, as much fun as this conversation is. I told Pepper I would email her these revised proposals this afternoon and it's almost six. Be back shortly and yes, Uncle Rhody can stay if he wants to." After that, he disappeared down the hall and Rhodes got up to come sit beside Peter at the table.
After a while, Peter closed his books and looked seriously at Rhodes. "Are you really okay with them being here?" He knew the question was forward but no matter how much he tried, he couldn't seem to let what Steve, in particular, had done in the past go.

"Who? Steve and Sam? Yeah. I'm okay with it. We were all really good friends at one time, Peter and we have an opportunity to repair that.", Rhodes carefully explained. He wasn't sure what Tony had already told the kid but he decided he may as well put in his two cents. Maybe hearing it from someone else would help. "I know this all sounds crazy to you because you came in right in the middle of the fight and you didn't spend any time going over accords amendments. It probably never crossed your mind that us all being friendly again was a possibility but it is and I think Tony would like to think that his kid got along with his friends and didn't just play nice."

Sighing, Peter tried to make sense of everything he'd just been told. Logically he knew they'd been friends once. Then it crossed his mind that maybe making up wasn't as easy as they were making it sound. He wondered if it was really more complicated than that but no one wanted to discuss that part with him. He tried to imagine he and Ned fighting to that caliber and making up so easily. "I guess.", Peter replied noncommittally before trying to think of the last real fight he and Ned had actually been in.

His mind drifted to the time that he and Ned had actually stopped talking to each other when they were younger. It was stupid really. Ned had invited him over for a sleepover and then canceled the next day because he'd been invited to another friend's birthday party. While Peter had seen it as a betrayal, Ned had reasoned that his other friend only had one birthday party a year and he and Peter spent the night at each other's houses all the time. They didn't talk for weeks because every time they tried it turned into another argument with more hurt feelings. It had taken his Uncle Ben and Ned's mother sitting them down together to repair it. With their help, they'd been able to hear each other out and forgiveness became possible.

While that incident hadn't been nearly as dramatic as the highly televised fight between the Avengers, it was suddenly easier to see both Rhodes and Tony's point. Then he decided that maybe he needed to try a little bit harder himself. Not that he was being actively hostile. He'd promised that he would try and he was but maybe he could try a bit harder. Rhodes was right. Tony would want him to get along with his friends and if he ever wanted another chance to be a real Avenger he was going to have to accept the team for what it was.

"Peter?", Rhodes finally called out when Peter remained silent for several minutes. "Are you okay?"

"Mm-hmm. I'm sorry. I was just thinking. ...you're right. I need to try harder."

Rhodes sighed and looked at Peter with an almost hopeful expression. "You know what your dad told me when we first started negotiating the accords?", he asked and when Peter shrugged his
shoulders he smiled. "He said, and I quote, 'Turns out resentment is corrosive and I hate it.' ...now between you and me, I think Pepper probably said it first.", he added with a wink. "... but no matter who came up with it, it's true. Think about that. Okay?"

After that, the mood lightened. Peter taught Rhodes how to play Super Smash Brothers and Tony came out of the office not long after that. Soon they were all sitting around eating pizza and playing games together. All talk of forgiveness and friendship set aside for another time in favor of enjoying each others company. Rhodes excused himself to go to bed at eleven, claiming himself too old for this shit, leaving Peter and Tony alone for the first time that day.

"You know, I didn't even ask you how the rest of your week went, kiddo. Everything good?", Tony asked after setting his control aside and turned off the television so that he could give Peter his undivided attention.

"Yeah, it was good. I got all my work turned in from Wednesday and Flash hasn't said anything else to me. I barely even see him."

"That is exactly what I wanted to hear.", Tony said with a nod of his head before pausing to reconsider. "I think ...I still kind of want to be able to have him expelled but at the same time I don't want him to mess with you again... I'm really very torn about this.", he added with a shake of his head. "What else happened?"

"Not much. I pretty much tell you everything when I call you.", Peter replied because he did. They generally had fairly extended conversations on the phone every single night. Sometimes while he was on patrol, other times while he was laying in bed late in the evening. On the rare occasions that he would wake up from a nightmare involving the man, they would talk then too. They remained close even when they were apart. "What are we going to do tomorrow?"

"I figured you would want to finish up the drone. I got all the design work done we just need to piece it together."

"Awesome. Can we test it too?", Peter eagerly inquired. He'd been hoping his father would suggest finishing that particular project. Everything about it was exciting. "I mean if we get it done?"

"Absolutely. I bet Uncle Rhodey would love to watch that.", Tony replied with a laugh, mostly because the whole Uncle Rhodey thing still had him slightly tickled.
Peter didn't even fight it. There was no point and if he was being honest, he kind of liked it. He'd already been thinking about how nice it was to have such a big family and then he felt Tony's arm wrap around him, pulling him closer. After that, he half-expected the man to turn on some kind of television show or something but instead, he started talking. The words that came out of his mouth were almost whispered and Peter found himself surprised by them.

"I really wish you could have met my mom. She would have loved you. She was... pretty amazing, really. My dad, well, I suppose he would have loved you too. Probably wouldn't have ever said it though. You know I didn't really know that he loved me until I was... gosh... almost forty. He never actually said it to me. Not to my face. Not even once. That, that's why I tell you that all the time. I know you probably get tired of hearing it--"

"--no I don't. I won't ever get tired of hearing it. I promise.", Peter replied earnestly. Unlike the environment Tony had apparently grown up in, he was used to hearing I love you all the time and couldn't imagine it being any other way. "I love it when you say you love me, Dad."

"Yeah?", Tony asked before pulling Peter in that much closer. He wasn't sure how the conversation had taken such a serious turn but he welcomed the openness. Usually, conversations involving any kind of feelings only took place in the dimly lit bedroom but he supposed a dimly lit living room was just as good of a place as any. "Well, I love you."

Grinning not only from the words but also the affection, Peter asked, "To pieces?"

Tony huffed a laugh because he hadn't realized that had become a recurring thing let alone that the kid had picked up on it. "Yeah. I do. I love you to pieces."

"I like that.", Peter said with a smile as he readjusted himself so that he could lay his head in his dad's lap, practically purring when the man's hand instantly made its way into his hair. "Ben used to tell me that he loved me to Neptune.", he added before laughing lightly. "Sometimes May says she larbs me."

"I'll say that more often, then. ...you ready for bed or something?", Tony asked as Peter snuggled more deeply into the couch.

"Maybe.", Peter, hummed but made no move to get up. "Can we stay like this for a few more minutes?"
"Sure.", Tony replied with a laugh. The same kid that had been worried that he was too old to be in his dad's bed was now asking to stay snuggled up on the couch as if that were any different. ...and he was sort of happy about it. He'd not had the pleasure of raising a little Peter so if the kid wanted to snuggle with him until he was thirty, he'd take it. "Can't think of anything else I would rather be doing."

Several hours later, Tony woke up with a cramped neck, a stiff back, and a head still in his lap. Looking down at his soundly sleeping kid, he felt sort of guilty for waking him. However, he knew if he didn't he would regret it later. So, he started to alternate between scratching the kid's scalp and rubbing a hand vigorously up and down his arm. At first, the only reaction he got was Peter trying to bury himself even further into the couch by rolling towards the back, tucking both arms in so that they could no longer be messed with. Tony rolled his eyes, as started shaking the kid's shoulder until two brown eyes were blinking up at him.

"Dad?", Peter croaked, sleep still taking over his voice.

"Obviously.", Tony said with a laugh. "You need to get into bed so I can get into bed. I can't stay like this all night." Peter nodded and sat up long enough for Tony to rise to his feet but rather than heading off down the hall, he flopped back down and stretched out over the couch. "I guess you're staying here then.", Tony said with a shake of his head. It wasn't a question, the kid was already back to sleep. As such, he grabbed a pillow to maneuver it under the boy's head and a blanket to toss over his back. "Sleep tight, kiddo.", he said before leaning over and kissing the boy's temple, smiling at the way it made his heart swell. "I love you to pieces."
Chapter 86

When Peter woke up at six in the morning still on the couch, it took him a moment to realize why he was there. He remembered he and Tony talking and he remembered closing his eyes and asking to stay up a little longer but he had no recollection beyond that. All he could assume was that at some point Tony had gone to bed and decided that it would be easier to let him sleep there. That was probably fair. He knew he wasn't always the easiest person to wake up.

After stretching himself out he went to put away the pillow and blanket before getting himself ready for the day and eating breakfast. "Is Tony up?", he asked the AI as he put his bowl into the dishwasher. Slightly disappointed that his dad was still asleep, Peter moved on to see if anyone else was up. When it sounded like the only other person in the entire building that was awake and not running was Bruce he quickly got permission to join him in his lab.

When Peter entered the lab moments later, Bruce looked up and smiled. "Hi, Peter. What are you doing up so early? I thought teenagers slept until noon on weekends."

"I don't know. I just woke up. I'll probably regret it later.", Peter said with a shrug of his shoulders. He wasn't sure when he'd gone to sleep but he was assuming it was around midnight. That would mean he'd gotten no more than six hours of sleep. At least it was Saturday. If he wanted to nap later, he could. "What are you working on?"

"Nothing much. Messing around with a few outdated ideas.", Bruce replied with something of an unreadable expression before rapidly changing the subject. "Did your dad tell you I finished your medication?"

"No. That's really cool, though.", Peter replied with a sigh. He was grateful the man had put so much work into something just to help him but he was also sort of disappointed that his question had been dodged. He was hoping for something fun to get into. "Anything I can help with?"

"Not that I can think of.", Bruce replied honestly. He wasn't really working on anything as much as he was going over some of his old research. Research that had since been completed by others. The world of science didn't stop just because he wasn't there and having been gone for five years had left a huge gap that needed to be filled. He wondered if he would ever be able to do anything relevant again. He supposed at some point inspiration would strike. That or he could take Tony up on his offer for a position at SI. He wanted to make a difference. Then, looking at Peter he decided that, to an extent, maybe he already had. "...but you're welcome to hang around. I can pull up your DNA analysis if you want to look at it."
"That would be completely awesome!", Peter nearly shouted with glee. He didn't know a whole lot about reading DNA but he figured with some research he could sort through it easily enough. It was both fascinating and challenging so he spent the next half an hour researching DNA and looking through the information Br. Banner had highlighted. Then when he ran out of things to compare he broke the silence and began to tread carefully into a new subject. "So... is everybody getting along and everything?"

"Depends on what you mean by getting along.", Bruce said with a smile. He knew where that question was leading to but not feeling up to a serious conversation at the moment he tried to make light of it. "If you're asking if anyone is actively fighting then the answer is no. However, if Steve lectures me one more time about my breakfast choices I might actually consider bringing out the big guns."

Having been completely sidetracked by that comment, Peter looked at Bruce in utter confusion. "What do you eat for breakfast?"

"Strawberry frosted Pop-Tarts.", He replied with a shrug of his shoulders.

Having expected some sort of insane response Peter couldn't help but laugh. "What's wrong with that? That's a breakfast food and they're fortified."

"I think it's more the fact that I butter them. ...apparently sugar and artificial colors covered in butter is not a healthy way to start your morning. Personally I think he's just annoyed that I don't want to join them on their morning run."

"So does that mean you're not happy they're back?"

"Oh no, I'm happy their back.", Bruce insisted. "It's an adjustment but really, I enjoy the company most of the time. When I've had enough I go back to my apartment."

"Oh.", Peter replied sounding slightly disappointed. A small part of him had sort of hoped that someone else was having as hard of a time accepting everything as he was. Someone to commiserate with. "I guess I was kind of hoping that... well, never mind."

"You were hoping that I didn't want them here, weren't you.", Bruce said knowingly. While he'd been avoiding any heavy conversation it seemed like they were heading that direction all the same.
"Maybe. It's weird knowing that they're here and I already know that Tony wants me to be nice and that they were his friends and he wants me to get along with them and I am trying. It's not like I want to be difficult but I can't just forget what they did and I don't really understand how he can but I want to make him happy... this is all just really hard.", Peter rapidly explained leaving him slightly out of breath.

"You only see them in small doses. It might take a while.", Bruce sighed out. He hadn't been around for the big falling out so he didn't really have as many feelings invested into it as everyone involved did. Things had been going nicely he thought. He'd seen Peter interact with the others in what had appeared to be a comfortable manner but maybe it wasn't really that easy after all. "Maybe one of these mornings you should go run with them."

"I don't even like running.", Peter blandly replied.

"Maybe you like running with other people.", Bruce suggested. "I only suggested it because it's something they do every day. It's predictable and easy enough to join in on. I know you can run."

"Maybe.", Peter sighed out. Just like all of his conversations with Tony and his latest conversation with Rhodey this one had left him feeling like he wasn't doing a very good job of letting go. What Bruce had said about small doses sounded reasonable and to be fair, every time he'd interacted with the others he's had Tony there as a buffer. Attempting to do something with them alone sounded worth a try. "I'll think about it."

Before either, one of them could say anything else FRIDAY's voice rang through the room. "Mr. Parker, the boss is insisting that you return to the suite in an immediate fashion."

Paling slightly, Peter swallowed. He'd considered leaving a note or something but had decided that Tony could ask the AI where he was and that seem sufficient enough at the time. He was now questioning that decision. Especially since when he thought about it, anytime he's woken up alone in the suite, there had always been a note on the counter for him. "Uh... I'll be right there.", he quickly replied before turning towards Bruce who looked sympathetically at him. "I'm sorry. I gotta run. I see you later!"

Walking through the front door, Peter was met by Tony who was standing there with his arms crossed loosely over his chest, his mouth in a tight line. "What did you think you were doing, taking off like that?", he asked in frustration. He'd gotten up to find no kid and no note anywhere. He'd searched the entire penthouse, concern, and panic rising with each empty room. It hadn't been until he was out of places to look and his heart was up in his throat that he's thought to ask FRIDAY. While he'd been glad to hear that Peter was safe with his friend he was beyond aggravated that the kid had taken off without so much as a word about it.
"I, I didn't think it was a big deal, Dad. I mean, FRIDAY knows where I am all the time. I thought... I thought she would tell you.", Peter guardedly explained. Clearly he'd thought wrong. His dad looked pissed.

"Kid. I got up and you weren't on the couch, in your room, the kitchen or bathroom and there was no note anywhere sight. I had no idea where you'd gone. It wasn't until after I'd checked the balcony, my office, and the ceiling, that I thought to ask FRIDAY. By then, I was already coming up with every worst-case scenario!"

"Like what?", Peter asked stupidly because all at once he realized he had no idea why he was in trouble. It wasn't like he wasn't allowed to leave the penthouse. He'd done so dozens of times before. While he did usually say he was going somewhere, he didn't always.

Throwing his good arm up in frustration, Tony growled. He hadn't really come up with any actual scenarios other than 'Please don't let him be arguing with Steve' and he didn't exactly want to voice that one. "I don't know.", he half-shouted before taking a breath and easing up. "Just leave a damn note next time. ...Did you eat?"

"I had cereal.", Peter replied. He was glad Tony didn't seem mad anymore but at the same time, he was still sort of confused as to what had just happened. "Are, are you mad at me? Am I in trouble?"

"You're not in trouble. If you were you'd know it.", Tony snapped. The truth was he'd not had a great night. After going to bed himself he'd woken up several times to some less than desirable dreams, something that hadn't happen in a while. It had left him feeling tired and irritable and even though he knew he shouldn't be taking it out on his kid he was having a very hard time biting his tongue completely.

Peter nodded and stood there for several seconds wringing this hands together before attempting to speak again. "I, I'm sorry, Tony. I'll, um, go to my room for a little while.", he said quietly and as soon as Tony nodded his head, he ran off down the hall.

Instantly realizing he'd screwed up, Tony clenched his fist and resisted the urge to scream. The kid who had been nearly consistently calling him dad for a week now just reverted back to Tony. Looking at the clock it was only seven-thirty and Pepper wasn't going to be there until late. There was still time to try to sleep but he wasn't actually sure he could. That was at least half of the reason he'd gotten up in the first place. That and his kid had wanted to work in the lab with him that day. However, at this point, he'd scared him into his room.
Several minutes of contemplation and a cup of coffee later, he decided that before he did anything else he needed to talk to Peter. At least attempt to explain his reaction. The kid deserved at least that and deep inside, he knew Peter would forgive him. He always did and he wasn't sure what he'd ever done to deserve that.

With a deep sigh, he started down the hall. When he noticed the door was cracked he didn't bother to knock, choosing to peek inside first. It looked like Peter was fast asleep with his back to the door. That didn't seem terribly surprising, the kid had apparently gotten up early despite having not really gone to sleep until midnight. Then an impulse took over and he found himself slowly walking into the room and lowering himself onto the opposite side of Peter's bed. The plan had been to lay there for a moment and then go back into his own room but instead, he ended up falling asleep right there beside his son.

When Peter woke up some time later he was surprised to find a warm body in the bed beside him. It took him somewhat by surprise and caused him to quietly gasp. That alone was enough to wake Tony up as well. The man opened his eyes and blinked a few times towards the ceiling. He'd definitely not meant to fall asleep in there. "What time is it?"

Glancing over at his bedside table clock, Peter said, "It's almost ten."

Sighing because honestly, the solid power nap seemed to have eased off some of his irritation, Tony looked towards his son and smiled. "Good. The day's still young. Are we working on your drone today?"

"Only if you still want to, Tony.", Peter replied, still sounding just as meek as he had before he'd left for his room making Tony's heart clench.

"I do. I'm sorry I snapped at you, Buddy. I didn't sleep well last night and overreacted.", he said softly before groaning and pulling himself to his feet. "I guess you were still pretty tired too, huh, kiddo?"

"Mm-hmm.", Peter sighed out. "I guess I got up too early."

"Well, what do you say to an early lunch, late breakfast kind of thing and some lab time? "

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It only took a couple of hours for Tony to walk Peter through getting the drone ready to test. "Alright, kiddo. Suit up and we'll take it to the open gym."

I took Peter all of ten minutes to get changed and meet Tony in the gym. Though, when he walked in Tony did a bit of a double-take. "Pete. Keep the mask on. Someone else could walk in. It's not like they're barred from being in here."

"Oh! yeah.", he said as he pulled it down over his face. About that time, Rhodey walked in already smiling.

"I hear you young man are about to get your ass kicked by a robot. I needed to witness this for myself.", the other man announced without greeting.

"I'm not going to get my a-- butt kicked.", Peter groused, eyeing Tony to see if he was going to call him out on his near slip-up. It seemed he was too busy going over the code once more to have even noticed.

"Alright, kid. Get in position.", he called out and once Peter was at the ready in the middle of the large open room, Tony yelled, "and... go!"

The drone took off in a zig-zag pattern that before immediately locking on to Peter, who was flipping through the air narrowly dodging the drone's repeated attacks. He swung from the ceiling and landed a kick onto the side of the drone throwing it off its flight pattern for a moment allowing him to nearly web it up. The entire program seemed to pick up some speed and he had to readjust his approach. He actually managed to get knocked over by the repulser at one point causing Tony to pause the program. "Dad! Why would you stop it!", he shouted towards the man before realizing his mistake. At some point in the last half-hour, he'd gained an audience. "I mean, Tony... Mr. Stark!", but it was too late.

"Give it up, Spider-man.", Tony sighed. "They know." He should have suspected that would happen. He was really going to have to talk to the boy about how much of a problem that would be should they ever go out into the field together. Not that he ever planned on that happening but... the kid's outburst had been... reckless. "When Spider-man calls, Iron Man, Dad, I think it's time to just come out with it."

Sighing in defeat, Peter removed his mask, exposing his sweary hair and pink cheeks. "Uh, Hi guys.", he said to Steve and Sam who were standing there smiling in his direction. "Um. I'm
"I see that.", Steve said without much enthusiasm before brightening up. "That was looking pretty good, Queens. You almost had it, if you would have shifted your weight into that turn just a second or two sooner I think you would have been able to dodge it completely."

Suddenly feeling defensive, Peter just stared at the man for several seconds. "I know.", he finally said before turning his attention over to his dad. "I think I'm done for now. Maybe we can do it again later?"

Looking Peter over, Tony sighed. "Sure, kiddo. Let's pack it up. That was a really good first run."

He had sort of wanted to go over the boy's mistake and try it again but Peter seemed eager to get out of the gym now that nearly everyone was there. Not that he was surprised.

"I'm sorry, Peter. I didn't mean to offend you.", Steve said gently. "I was trying to help. I got sort of carried away I guess. I should have kept my mouth shut."

While Peter didn't answer, Tony did and it was with some heat because the man had ruined the good time he was having with his kid. "You damn well should have. I'm training him, Captain Nosey. Not you."

"I'm sorry, Tony.", Steve added holding his hands up in defense. "I saw him fighting and I wanted to see what he was capable of. He's amazing."

Unable to ignore the genuine complement the man had offered towards his son, Tony relented. "He is. He really is amazing.", he said with a small smile. He knew the man had meant no harm it was just frustrating that Peter was still acting so coy around them. He'd taken it out on the wrong person but rather than apologize he changed the subject. "I'm considering making a few more of these bad boy's once my shoulder is up to it. Think you could take one out Cap?"

"I could certainly try.", he replied with a smile before turning to head back over towards the practical gym where the punching bags were.

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The rest of the weekend went by far too quickly for Peter's liking and soon he was in Tony's car.
heading back to his apartment. "Hey, Dad?"

"Yeah, kiddo?"

"It's almost Halloween."

"...and..."

"...and it falls on a Friday this year. I'll be with you but I want to go with Ned to the City Howl-o-ween Festival. I was hoping that maybe you could go with us instead of Happy."

"Sure, kid. I'd love to. Sounds right up my alley.", Tony said with a roll of his eyes but really he was sort of thrilled that Peter wanted him to go. Then another thought occurred. "That actually reminds me. There is a big Charity Mascadrade Ball coming up. I have to go so you have to go. I've decided. If I have to suffer you can suffer with me."

"Great. I don't even know what that means. Is it like on TV. Everyone is in fancy suits and masks?", Peter asked with genuine curiosity. He really didn't know much about those kinds of things. It seemed like one of those rich people things that he would never have to worry about. ..until now.

"Sort of. Everyone is in tuxedos and carries a mask because no one actually wears it. Okay, that's a lie. Some of them do. Not me."

"A tux, huh?", Peter said, twisting his nose in distaste. He really didn't want to own a tux but now he was about to be Tony's son so he couldn't actually fight it.

"Yep.", Tony replied, thankful that Peter wasn't acting too antsy about it. He'd been sort of worried about mentioning it but he really wanted his son there. It would be a big deal.

"When is this thing?"

"Two weeks.", Tony replied with a smile. "We've got two weeks to get you fitted for a tux. Maybe one day after school"
"That's right! I forgot!", Peter nearly shouted making Tony jump a little. "May starts back to full-time next week. Can I come to see you at work after school when you're there? Please? She won't be getting home until after six-thirty anymore. I could go see you for a while and do my homework and then patrol on my way home."

After some thought, Tony agreed. Part of him knew he should have checked with May but he had a hard time believing she wouldn't be okay with it. He would run it by her later for sure, though. "That sounds great, kiddo. I'd love to see you some during the week."
Monday was May's first day back on the job full time and it actually made Peter a tiny bit anxious. He wasn't sure why. She was more than ready. She'd been released by the Physical therapist weeks ago and her surgeon had signed off on her return to regular hours the week before. She was healthy and capable of doing everything she had been capable of doing before the accident without any hindrance or pain.

Though it didn't seem to be that he was worried about her being at work so much as he was dreading coming home to an empty house every day. He'd sort of gotten used to being around people anytime he was at home and doing his homework with someone nearby. That was what had led him to ask Tony if he could do his homework at the office. So when Happy picked him up that afternoon the first thing he asked was whether or not Tony was at the SI building. When he Happy said that he was, Peter was elated. "Tony said I could do my homework with him when he was there so can you take me?"

"Sure, Kid.", Happy said with a laugh. Tony had mentioned that the boy might be interested in stopping by the office but he hadn't seemed overly confident that it would happen. This would be a nice surprise for him he guessed. "What time do you need to be picked up?"

"Oh. I was going to, you know, spider home before May got back. That's okay isn't it?", Peter asked. His plan had been to sneak out the back of the building, change into his spider suit and ditch his backpack somewhere closer to the apartment. No harm no foul.

"Is Tony okay with that?", Happy asked unsurely. It didn't sound particularly safe but then again, it never did. The kid was amazing, sure but he was still fifteen and it felt weird letting him galavant all over the city at night stopping robberies.

"I guess. I only sort of mentioned that as my plan.", Peter added with a shrug of his shoulders. He was fairly certain that his dad wouldn't mind. He went out and patrolled on a nightly basis. He didn't know why it would matter.

"Well,", Happy began as he stopped the car in the large garage, "You can call me if you end up needing a ride. I'm not going far."

"Thanks, Happy!", Peter happily replied as he hopped out of the car and started to dart towards the secure door. This would be the first time he ever used his SI-ID to get around the building on his own and practically beamed with pride when the door clicked open after he'd scanned it. While he hadn't been there in a while, People seemed to recognize him and no one questioned his presence.
He had sort of assumed they would try to stop him at some point. He was a high-schooler and he looked the part, in jeans and a hoodie with a backpack on his back. He didn't exactly look like he belonged there.

Once he made it to the elevator without any incident, he sighed a breath of relief. All he had to do now was get to his dad's office. Only it wasn't that easy. The doors opened on the correct floor a man he didn't recognize started looking him over. He was wearing and SI badge so he knew the guy was from security but since he had his own ID he wasn't terribly worried.

"What business do you have up here, son? This is the cooperate floor.", the man said not completely unkindly but serious enough that it made Peter feel sort of nervous.

Resisting the urge to tell the man that he was not his son, Peter pulled out the wallet that Tony insisted he carry at all times, he handed over his SI-ID and tried to explain. "I'm here to see Tony Stark. He's expecting me." It was weird saying his dad's full name, like that but he didn't think it was appropriate to say he was there to see his dad because that would probably lead to more questions than he cared to answer at the moment. Though, he was somewhat surprised that the man didn't recognize him or his name.

"Peter Parker.", the man read before looking him over. "You sure he's expecting you? He doesn't typically get visitors, let alone visitors who are teenagers. How did you get this ID anyway.", the man mused as if the fact that he had permission to be there was both interesting and problematic.

"Pepper Potts gave it to me so that I could get around the building without having to wait for Happy or someone to take me places. I'm supposed to be here. You can ask any of them.", Peter said as he started to feel legitimately concerned that he was about to get into some real trouble despite the fact that he knew he was allowed to be there.

Looking at Peter as though he had a grown a second head the man, slipped Peter's ID into his back pocket and asked to be followed down to the security offices. Panicking slightly, Peter considered darting down the hall towards his father's office. It was only a few doors down. He could see it and it wouldn't take much effort to get away from the man but without his card, he couldn't open the door. "Sir, I really am allowed to be here. Please give me my ID back so I can get where I'm supposed to be."

"We'll sort that out downstairs. Let's go.", the man proclaimed as he grabbed Peter by the upper arm.

Feeling as though he had no other choice, Peter started walking, hoping and praying that Tony
would step out of his office before they made it all the way into the elevator. However, that didn't happen. Resigning himself to having to walk through the building with security, he sighed. Then, his phone buzzed. Using his free hand he reached for it only to be stopped.

"Now is not the time to be checking your Facebook notifications."

"I'm not.", Peter assured as he continued to pull his phone out. He could see 'Dad' flashing across the screen and tried to quickly open up the message but the man took the phone from his hand. "Hey! That's mine. You can't take that!", he shouted in frustration. "My dad is going to be pissed."

"I'm sure you're dad will get over it. I'll give it to him when he comes to get you. Unless you really are supposed to be here in which case, I'll give it back to you once we have this straightened out."

Feeling more than annoyed, Peter looked at the man and glared. "Why don't you just call my dad right now! I'll give you his number." When the man rolled his eyes and agreed Peter recited Tony's personal number. He really, really hoped he picked up. He was rewarded not five seconds later when a look of horror crossed the security personnel's face. As the man looked at him Peter smirked. "I told you I was supposed to be here."

About the time the man started sputtering about having 'some Peter Parker kid' with him, Tony's office door opened and he was walking towards them. You would have thought all of this would have been enough for the man to let go of Peter's arm but he didn't. Looking back and forth between the man's face and the hand that still had a firm grip on his son's arm, Tony seethed. "Let. Go. Of my kid."

When the man finally released him, Peter couldn't help but feel just a little bit sorry for him because Tony looked far more pissed off than he'd thought he would be. He didn't say anything, though. He just rubbed his arm where the man had been holding it and approached his dad's side. The entire situation had been ridiculous. He had a valid ID card that he'd handed over the moment he was asked for it and he'd been perfectly polite up until the moment the man started treating him like he was doing something wrong and snatched his phone away. So, he stood directly beside Tony with a smug look on his face. He could honestly say this was the first time he had ever taken advantage of the fact that Tony Stark was basically his father and it felt sort of good. Like, Peter Parker might be just as important as Spider-man.

When Peter told Tony that the man had taken his phone and ID Card, the man demanded they be returned instantly. The security guard, who had now gone from looking shocked to looking scared shitless, practically threw Peter's phone and ID card into Tony's outstretched hand. "Now", Tony added threateningly as he typed something into his own phone. "You can give me your ID and your badge and go home."
Peter wanted to argue that it hadn't been that big of a deal but it really kind of had been. He had some very mixed feeling at the moment. "I'm sorry, Dad.", Peter said once the still shocked man had left them alone in the hall.

"Why are you sorry, kid? You didn't do anything wrong.", Tony laughed before growing serious. "That won't happen again, though. I'm going to make sure Happy goes over what happened today at his next security meeting. That guy either wanted to piss me off or lives under a damn rock if he didn't recognize at least your name. That and he had to be some sort of an imbecile to think that anyone could make a fake SI-ID that actually worked. Let alone that would get you this far into the building."

While Peter kind of agreed, he didn't say it. Instead, he followed Tony back down the hall and into the office where conversation fell to a minimum. It wasn't until Peter was stretched out across the couch reading a book that anything else was said. Well not so much said as much as Tony started giggling from this desk. "What are you laughing at?", Peter asked once his curiosity got the best of him.

"The security footage from earlier.", Tony said wth a smile. "The look on that guy's face when you told him your dad was going to be pissed-- which you were right, but the way-- was great but the look on his face when I answered the phone was even better."

Unable to hold back his own smile, Peter agreed. "Yeah. It was pretty funny, I guess. I'm just glad he let me give you your number and actually called you. I so did not want to be taken down to the security office. That would have sucked. Being in the hall with a security guard holding onto me was bad enough, I'm glad I didn't get paraded across the front lobby."

"Like, I said, Buddy. It's won't happen. Between Happy, Pepper and I, we'll make sure that nothing of that nature transpires every again. Also, I'm pretty sure once your ID says Stark it'll be a completely different story."

"I guess that'll be big news, huh, Dad. Like, bigger than you saying that you're going to adopt me."

Tony closed the holographic video feed and looked at Peter seriously. "You're already on your way to being a household name, kid. You know how many times a day my phone gets pinged because a picture or article about you was released?", he asked, probably rhetorically but Peter responded all the same.
"You actually look at every single thing posted about me?", Peter asked, somewhat surprised. After the press conference, he'd given up on even trying to see what everyone was saying about him or his relationship with Tony. Especially once he'd found a few less than desirable articles. None of them topped what Flash had tried to say but they certainly weren't all good. There were people who had some very strong opinions on the matter, most of them about Tony.

Tony was sort of surprised to hear that the kid who was typically glued to his phone in his downtime wasn't tracking what was being said about him. "Most of it. FRIDAY only alerts me if it's a new picture or the article's title is unique... it's sort of a complicated algorithm... never mind... You don't? Keep track I mean?"

"Not anymore.", Peter said with a shrug of his shoulders. "I only look at the stuff I happen across... or Ned tells me about. I don't go looking for it anymore."

"That's probably for the best.", Tony said softly. Not everything that was out there was good. Nothing so far reflected poorly on Peter but there was a good bit out there that wanted to discuss how unfit he was to be a parent to anyone. Let alone an impressionable teenage boy. He didn't care but he was worried that Peter might. That didn't seem to be the case and he was grateful. "How much homework do you have left? It's already four."

"I'm basically done. I can go patrol from here, right?", Peter asked as he went back to the book he'd been highlighting in.

"Sure. Just be home in time for dinner with your aunt."

"I know. I will.", Peter promised. He already knew better than to be late for dinner with May but he didn't plan on arguing. "Hey, Dad? Can I stay here until four-thirty?"

"Of course, kiddo. I don't have anything else until five.", Tony said with a smile. He'd sort of expected the kid to take off the moment his homework was done but that didn't seem to be the case. He'd actually been somewhat surprised that the boy had shown up at all. He'd half-expected him to decide to go home and enjoy being home alone before heading out into the city but nothing could have made him happier than having Peter be there just because he wanted to be. "I love you, Buddy."
Peter ended up going to do his homework in Tony's office again on Wednesday and as promised, there were no more issues with security. Apparently, Happy had held an emergency meeting with the entirety of the security department the next morning, complete with Peter's picture being taped to a wall in the security room. He wanted to be sort of mortified that the staff was being forced to memorize his face but he decided it was defiantly better than the alternative.

Friday came quickly and Peter was surprised when Tony, not Happy picked him up from school. "What are you doing here?", Peter asked in surprise when he'd opened the back door only to have his dad wave him to the front.

"Uh. I'm picking you up from school, kid. That's a thing dad's do, right? Pick their kids up from school?", Tony replied with a laugh. He didn't think it would be that surprising that he picked him up. His office was only thirty minutes away. It's not like it was a stretch for him to occasionally be the one to come and get him.

"Well, yeah but usually Happy drives.", Peter replied with a shrug of his shoulders. He assumed his dad had much more important things to do than to pick him up from school. Not that he thought Tony didn't deem him important or anything, it had just never come up. Not out of the blue like this anyway. "Not that I'm not happy to see you! I'm really glad you're here, Dad. I just, why?"

"Though we would go out for some celebratory ice cream...", Tony casually suggested with a wave of his hand, reveling in confused look on Peter's face.

"Huh?", Peter asked, after several seconds of thought. He couldn't come up with anything they would need to be celebrating. It wasn't report card time, it was no one's birthday and he was pretty sure nothing noteworthy had taken place during the week. "What are we celebrating?"

"Oh, nothing big.", Tony replied in the same nearly bored tone. "Just the fact that the lawyers called me today. Apparently, as of October thirty-first at nine AM, you'll officially be my kid."

At those words, Peter perked up significantly. It had only been a week and a half and they already had an answer. He was... shocked, to say the least, but it was a good kind of shock. One that left and excited tingle coursing through his body. "Are you serious right now? This isn't a joke, right Dad?"

"I would never joke about that, Pete. We have a court date. On Halloween of all days.", Tony laughed. He'd considered requesting a date change but decided against it. He didn't want it to end up being put off and he hadn't realized the coinciding holiday would get as much of a thrill out of the kid as it seemed to. "Pepper already has a press conference scheduled for early the next morning."
"Halloween is awesome.", Peter declared before elaborating. "Now it will be like, doubly awesome because it'll be our familiversary."

Smiling at the kid beside him, Tony huffed a laugh. "Did you just make that word up?"

"No! It's a real thing.", Peter insisted as he began to rapidly type into his phone so he could show Tony that the word did actually exist. "See? Some people celebrate their adoption day and call it that. I think it's pretty cool and I like the name."

"Well, then I suppose you're right. Halloween will have a double meaning now. You can celebrate how scary it is that Tony Stark adopted you and you survived another year of being his kid."

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Well, then I suppose you're right. Halloween will have a double meaning now. You can celebrate how scary it is that Tony Stark adopted you and you survived another year of being his kid.

"Tony teased but in reality, he was already thinking about how they would celebrate their first Familiversary. Maybe he could finally take the kid to Europe or Disney Land or hell, anywhere really. Maybe Euro Disney. Either way, he would insist that it be an over the top celebration.

Bigger than Christmas. They would all be together, Him and Peter, Pepper and May. Maybe even Happy and Rhodey. It would be great, might take a whole year just to plan.

"Come on, Dad. You're awesome and I would have a much harder time surviving without you."

Peter insisted.

"You think so?"

"Mm-hmm. I know so.", Peter replied with his biggest smile because Tony had already saved him so many times and he was sure the man would continue to save him in the future. He felt incredibly lucky that he was going to have Ironman for a dad. Between him and May and all of his other honorary family members, he knew he would always have someone to take care of him and that kind of security felt amazing. "I love you so much, Dad and I can't wait to sign the papers."

"Me either, Buddy and I love you too. ... to pieces."
"Hi, Peter.", Pepper said as soon as he came bounding through the front door.

"Pepper! You're here! I didn't know you would be here.", Peter called out in return as he crossed the room to hug her. "Did you hear? I mean, I guess you did but you know about the date right?", Peter eagerly asked, excited to share the news with someone. He'd planned on calling Ned and MJ once he got to his bedroom but with Pepper there, he easily changed course to celebrate with her first.

"I did. I was there when he got the call. I don't think I've ever seen him quite that eager to get out of a meeting and that's saying something.", she said with a laugh because the moment the Tony had seen the lawyers name pop up on his caller ID he'd raced out of the room only returning moments later in order to drag her out into the hall to quietly announce that the adoption was approved and that he was taking off early. She hadn't argued. It was big news.

Smiling between the two adults, Peter pulled out his phone and glanced down the hall. "I'm going to go call Ned and MJ if that's okay.", he said before darting down the hall with permission.

Once he was lying across his bed he initiated a group call with his two best friends. "Guys. You'll never guess what I found out today."

"Your adoption was approved.", MJ replied without missing a beat.

After frowning momentarily because he'd not expected either of them to actually guess, Peter laughed. "How did you know?"

"Because I couldn't think of anything else that would have you group calling us today.", MJ explained with a verbal shrug.

Before either of them could say anything else Ned seemed to have been able to find his words and was nearly shouting with excitement. "When's it going to be official? Are you going to go to the press conference about it? When will your name change? You did say you were changing it, right?-

"Ned!", MJ shouted. "How is he supposed to answer any of your questions if you don't actually
"It's fine, MJ.", Peter assured with a laugh. "The date is the best part! I am going to have the coolest adoption day ever.", he said before pausing for dramatics. "Halloween. we get to sign the papers on Halloween."

While MJ issued her congratulations, Ned went quiet. "Are we still going to be able to go to the community Halloween thing?", he asked carefully. "I mean I am super crazy excited for you. I'm just wondering." They went to the festival together every year and while it wouldn't be a disaster if they had to miss it, it would still be disappointing. They only had another couple of years before they would really be considered too old to be dressing up on Halloween and going to the free events to collect candy.

"Yeah, man. We're still going and my Dad said he would come with us instead of Happy. Do you want to come with us this year MJ?", Peter asked out of consideration. He was already pretty sure that this kind of outing was not MJ's style.

"Nope. I don't do dress up.", she blandly replied. "...and if I want candy, I'll go buy it from the corner store, thanks."

"You're no fun.", Ned interjected as Peter sighed. Part of him has sort of hoped she would come anyway. He'd have fun with Ned though. They always had fun.

"Yeah... in this case? I'm okay with that. You to have a blast, though.", she replied before sighing. "That's really great news Parker but I need to go get started on an essay that's due on Tuesday. Talk to you later, I'm out.", she finished, ending the call before Peter or Ned could answer her.

The two boy's continued to laugh and draw up plans for what costumes they wanted to wear this year. Ned adamantly wanted to go the superhero route while Peter was fairly set on them being zombies. They playfully bickered for what felt like ages before Tony was knocking on the door.

"Hey, Kid. You have homework to do. Let's go.", he said as he ducked his head in the door.

"I will, just a minute.", Peter replied before going right back to talking to Ned. He had every intention of getting off in the promised minute but somehow he ended up being drawn into a whole new subject. As such, Tony was standing in his doorway not, ten minutes later with his arms crossed tightly over his chest.
"Pete. I mean it. We're eating dinner soon and you haven't opened one book", Tony said with annoyance. He knew Peter would be mad about being corrected in front of his friend but he'd already asked him nicely to get off the phone and clearly that hadn't worked.

Ned sort of looked at Peter through the screen and grimaced. "Sorry, dude. I didn't mean to get you in trouble. You can call me back later."

"Sure. Later", Peter grumpily replied before looking over at Tony. "Sorry. I got distracted.", he grumbled before pulling himself off of his bed to go find his backpack. However, Tony stopped him at the door.

"You're not in trouble, alright? I just needed you to get off the phone so you can get your stuff done and we can eat.", Tony said almost placatingly. He didn't want to start an argument. Not after such a great afternoon filled with such good news.

Peter sighed and stepped around his dad into the hallway. "I know. I already said I'm sorry. I'm going to get my bag now."

Holding his hand up in defense, Tony followed Peter down the hallway. "Alright, I just wanted to make sure you understood."

"I understand.", Peter strained. He did understand and knew his dad was trying to avoid an argument. Being as he didn't want to argue either he forced himself to smile. "It's fine. I'm going to do my homework at my desk. It's not much. I can come to set the table in a little while."

Mostly satisfied, Tony nodded his head and went into the kitchen where Pepper was putting together some sort of side dish and periodically peeking into the oven. He watched her for a while, cutting up the salad fixings that had been set in front of him before smiling. "You know, two months ago he would have screamed at me."

Humming non-committal, Pepper opened the oven to pull out the food. "He would have screamed at you tonight too had it not been for the good news from earlier.", she said with a smile. "He doesn't want to argue with you today."

Knowing she was probably right, Tony huffed a laugh. "I would much rather believe that we are past the screaming, thanks.", he said as he started to pick at the bits of carrot and lettuce still strewn
across the cutting board. He knew there would inevitably be more fights but for the moment he wanted to pretend that there wouldn't be.

As promised Peter came out to set the table without having to be asked and they were soon sitting together eating, laughing and enjoying each other's company. It was everything Tony had come to love over the last several months. Hearing Peter talk on and on about his day, while Pepper laughed along with him. That combination was the most beautiful things he'd ever hear, he was sure of it. "Let's play a game", he spontaneously suggested without any sort of thought.

"What kind of game?", Peter cheerily asked because he'd only ever played the occasional video game with Tony. He wasn't even sure what kinds of board games they owned other than chess, checkers and the pack of Uno cards he kept tucked away in his room for when Ned was there.

"Monopoly.", Pepper instantly replied while smiling at Tony almost devilishly.

Clenching his jaw, Tony squinted his eyes towards his fiance before glancing casually towards Peter. "I don't know if that's such a good idea--", Tony said warily but Peter cut him off in his own excitement.

"I love Monopoly. I play it with May all the time. I always win.", Peter readily supplied. "Where is it? I'll go get it."

It only took about ten minutes of gameplay to realize why Tony had been acting so antsy about that particular game. As it turned out there seemed to be something of a rivalry between him and Pepper. They were both quick to purchase property and things escalated quickly whenever one of them prevented the other from completing a monopoly. Negotiations were comically intense and Peter was left quietly playing along as he watched the two of them fall into an all-out war by the end of the hour. "Guys.", he amusedly called out when Tony started cursing about having to pay rent on a property that he'd decided was supposed to have been his. "It's just a game. You know that right?"

"Of course, I know that.", Tony nearly snapped as he mortgaged another card. "...but she's cheating."

"It's not cheating if you accept the offer, dear. You wanted both utilities. You got them.", Pepper said with a laugh as Peter rolled his eyes. At this point, he'd basically ducked out of the game and was watching the two of them bicker and haggle. He even made a point of taking a few short videos of it because the world needed to have the pleasure of seeing Tony grumble about going broke as Pepper gloated. Of course, neither of them knew what he was up too until he started
"What's so funny?", Tony groused when Peter went from giggling to fully laughing.

"Nothing.", Peter said innocently before having his phone snatched out of his hand. He was almost worried he was about to get chewed out but thankfully that was not the case.

"Really, son? You're going to throw me under the bus like that? You just better be glad your account is private.", he said as he watched the short compilation of clips, Peter had spliced together and posted on his Instagram. "Hashtag Family Game Night Woes? Hashtag Tony Stark Is A Sore Loser? I am not a sore loser, kid."

"You kind of are, Dad. You and Pepper have been playing for over two hours and she's kicking your butt. You should just resign before you land on Park Place again."

"Yeah, Tony.", Pepper mocked playfully. "You should just give up."

...but Tony did not give up because apparently 'Stark men don't just give up. They lose with honor' and all Peter could do was laugh because he was two weeks away from being a Stark himself and he'd folded over an hour ago when he landed on one of Tony's properties and was left with a grand total of three dollars.

Looking over at the clock, Peter was surprised to see that it was only eleven. He'd been yawning since the game started and at this point watching the two adults hash it out was no longer interesting enough to keep him awake. "I'm going to bed.", he announced before scooting his chair back and leaning over his dad's back to hug him goodnight.

"G'night, Bud. Love you.", Tony said almost distractedly as he began to count out his newly acquired cash.

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When Peter woke up the next morning the game was still strewn across the table and it was obvious that Pepper had won. He wondered how long it had taken for her to finally wipe Tony out but seeing as it was six-thirty and not even Pepper was awake he could only assume it had taken quite a while. shaking his head, he ate some breakfast and asked FRIDAY who all was awake. As
expected Steve and Sam were up and Peter could only assume they were out running the track as Bruce had said they did that daily. It didn't take him long to decide to take a chance and join them. Though this time, he *definantly* left a note.

Once he was out on the track he watched the two men round the end closest to him and was actually sort of surprised when Steve paused. "Morning. I didn't expect to see you out here. Did you want to join us?"

Trying not to fidget where he stood in the larger man's shadow, Peter sighed. "Yeah, I think so. I mean I don't usually like running that much but, um, I thought I might give it a try or something." He kept telling himself that this was a good idea and he could only hope that he was right.

"Sure.", Steve replied with a genuine smile before waving Peter onto the track. "Try to keep up, Queens."

Of course, Peter did keep up. He more than kept up and every time he lapped the man, it seemed to make Sam laugh a little bit louder. Eventually, once the sun was high enough to take the lingering chill out of the air, the three of them paused under a tree by the track. "You did good, kid.", Sam praised with a smile across his face. "Nothing could have made me happier than to watch you lap the old man over and over again."

"Yeah, yeah... can it.", Steve said with a smile of his own. "Seriously, though, you did good, Peter. You should run more often."

Peter shrugged his shoulders noncommittally and leaned heavily against the trunk of the tree. Moments later, Sam announced that he was going to hit the showers because he had a VA meeting to head up, leaving Peter alone with Steve. He considered getting up and going back to the suit but something in him was urging him to stay. *To try.* The problem was that for someone who generally never has a lack of things to say, he couldn't seem to find anything to talk about. Thankfully, Steve took up the slack.

"I want to thank you for coming out here this morning. I know you don't really like me very much right now but I hope that we can change that in the future.", Steve said with seriousness about him but there was nothing but kindness in his eyes.

Peter nodded, sighed and sat up a little taller against the tree. "It's not that I don't like you. It more that... well, I can't seem to forget... you know... what happened.", Peter replied quietly because after a lot of thought he decided that's what it really came down to. It seemed like he could only put the images of his beaten and broken father out of his head for so long before they came back to him and
he was once again having to convince himself that had to trust Tony when he said he wanted to make amends.

Steve looked at Peter and took a deep breath. "I can understand that but, look, Peter... I'm really sorry that things turned out that way. We all made mistakes. All of us. Even me, especially me maybe. I don't know. You were there and I suppose I owe you an apology too. Things were never meant to get out of hand like that. So, I'm sorry. I never wanted to hurt you and I certainly didn't mean to hurt your dad the way that I did. I don't expect you to forgive me right away but just know that I mean it. Tony says you're a good kid and I'd really like to get to know you."

At those words, Peter suddenly realized that maybe that had been his problem. It seemed like everyone else involved had already gotten together and talked about everything but because of his secret identity, he'd not been in on any of those discussions. No one had ever said they were sorry to him. He'd been told over and over again that everyone was working together to make things right but no one had considered that maybe an apology was something that he needed to hear as well because those simple words seemed to have calmed his lingering unease. He wasn't a bystander anymore. He was a part of the healing process. "I'm sorry too. I wish that things had been different. I don't actually hate you. I, I used to like you a lot actually, when I was younger I had your posters in my room right next to my Iron Man ones."

"Is that so.," Steve said with a laugh before slowly rising to his feet. "Well, Spider-man, I'm glad we had a chance to talk. Maybe you can join us again sometime."

"Yeah, maybe.," Peter honestly replied. Running hadn't been his favorite but the conversation that followed had been... insightful and for the first time in weeks, he felt like it was okay to allow himself to interact with Steve and maybe Sam too without feeling so conflicted. Then standing up himself, he held out his hand to the man and smiled when he shook it. "Either way, I'll see you around."

"Of course."

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When he got back up to the penthouse it was after nine and there was still no one up. When he got out of the shower and returned to a still empty living room, Peter sighed. "FRIDAY? Is Dad really still asleep or are they being gross?", Peter asked before rapidly rephrasing the question. "You know what? Skip the second part. Just tell me if they're awake."

When the AI indicated that both adults were awake and getting ready for the day, Peter smiled.
Then on a whim he went into the kitchen and started to pull out the large pan Tony used when he would make eggs. He'd never actually cooked them in a pan before but it didn't look super hard so he decided to give it a try. Then the first few eggs started to stick FRIDAY jumped in and recommended he start over and butter the pan. Thankful for the advice, he quickly scrubbed the pan so that he could start over. The next go around was better. He was pretty sure he did something wrong because they weren't as fluffy as the ones Tony made but they were eatable.

Then, after dividing them up onto three plates he made some toast and started to pour some juice into three glasses, finishing just in time for both adults to enter the kitchen.
Alrighty, so apparently I double posted the other day. I posted one, couldn't remember if I had done so or not and rather than questioning it further, I just posted the next one on the list. Hence it had not been read through. Not even once, since I originally wrote it out. Something I generally do before posting.

Anyway, my point is, I apologize for the multiple, large mistakes. I've since gone back and corrected most of them. I realize I will never ever get a chapter perfect because, well, I do this for fun... but I will try to pay better attention to what I post and when.

Thanks for your patience and what not. :)

Tag Adds: Driving Lessons

Both Tony and Pepper had been a bit surprised to find Peter in the kitchen with three full plates, waiting for them. As they sat down together, Tony was slightly hesitant to try the eggs. The looked dry and... flat. Once he had the first bite in his mouth he was pleasantly surprised that other than the slightly chewy texture they were at least decently seasoned. So, after piling it onto some heavily buttered toast, he was able to finish the plate. "Thanks, kid. That was really sweet of you.", Tony said once he'd finished off the last of his coffee.

Peter looked at his father indignantly. "I am not sweet.", he said flatly. "Babies are sweet. Little girls are sweet. kittens are sweet. I am none of those things."

Tony laughed at the boy's solid stance before getting up to collect the plates from around the table. "Sure thing, Tough Guy but I'll tell you what, since you made breakfast, I'll be sweet and do all of the cleaning up."

Pepper joined him in the kitchen and Peter sat at the bar. As he did so his eyes fell on the note he'd written that morning. Suddenly realizing that Tony never needed to know where he'd been he tried to surreptitiously grab it. However, Tony doesn't miss much. It was kind of annoying really.

"What've you got there, kiddo?", Tony asked, holding out his hand. The second Peter had reached
for it he noticed it had 'Dad' written at the top and he sort of wanted to see what it was. It had his name on it so asking for it to be handed to him seemed fair.

"It's nothing!", Peter said as he crumpled it up in his hand.

Rolling his eyes, Tony reached over to try and pry the now balled up piece of paper out of his kid's hand. "Just give it to me. You obviously wrote it for me, why don't you want me to see it now?", Tony said before squinting his eyes. "Unless of course, it's something that's going to get you in trouble... Is that it? Is that why you won't give it to me?"

Not wanting to get in trouble for literally nothing, Peter roughly shoved the paper into his dad's hand. "Here. You happy now?"

"I don't know yet.", Tony teased as he tried to smooth out the note. "I haven't read it." Then after giving the boy one last smile he looked down at the paper and his smile fell slightly. "You went out looking for Rogers and Wilson?" He wasn't angry, he was just very surprised.

Looking between Tony's perplexed features and the back of Pepper's head, as she seemed to be trying to stay out of it, Peter sighed. "I, I wanted to have a chance to talk to them on my own. You know, without, without... I don't know. It seemed like a good idea."

"...and was it?", Tony asked mostly out of curiosity. He already decided nothing bad could have happened. FRIDAY would have alerted him immediately.

Peters shrugged his shoulders. "I mean, yes? He apologized to me.", Peter replied because of everything that had been said. That's what had struck a chord with him the most. Steve, Captain America, had apologized to him. It felt almost childish how much that one small gesture had affected his ability to see the man in a different light. "It's a lot easier to forgive someone when they actually tell you that they're sorry. That's different than hearing it from everyone else."

Softening his features, Tony reached across the bar and placed a hand on, Peter's cheek. He didn't know why he'd not considered that. They'd all spent weeks licking their wounds and apologizing but since Peter's identity had still been sealed, he'd not been invited into any of those discussions. He'd been so focused on keeping Peter away from the accords committee and his identity under wraps that he'd not even considered that maybe Peter... Spider-man... needed to be apart of those reparations. "I suppose it is. I should have realized that was something you needed."
Again, Peter shrugged his shoulders. He was ready to be done talking about this. "I didn't even know it was something I needed so don't worry about it.", he replied before rapidly changing the subject. "What are we doing today?"

Taking the cue, Tony dropped the previous subject. "My tailor is coming by today to fit you for a tuxedo sometime around three and the car we bought has been sitting in the garage for almost a week, so I thought we might at least go look at it."

"That sounds great.", Peter said with a smile before amending. "I mean the car sounds great. The meeting with a tailor sounds shitty."

Tony glared at Peter's choice in words but didn't say anything. He knew the kid would be less than excited about the appointment. He seemed to hate anything to do with shopping anyway and this going to be tedious. ...and expensive. He's already warned the man to not mention any prices around Peter. It was obvious enough that the endeavor was going to be pricey, he didn't need any numbers planted in his kid's head. "Well, how about as soon as we're cleaned up here, we go take a look at that car of yours."

It wasn't much longer until they were walking into the garage and Tony was leading the way towards the car they had decided on together. When it came into sight, Peter was decidedly more excited about it than Tony was. Tony had already looked it over upon delivery to make sure they got what had been advertised and had taken a quick peek at the engine at the same time. All in all, it seemed to be in good, drivable shape. It just wasn't what he'd ever imagined himself teaching his kid to drive in but it seemed to make Peter happy. "Do you want to drive it?", Tony asked once the kid had enthusiastically looked over every inch of the vehicle.

"No. Not yet.", he said but there was a hesitation in his voice because now that he was looking at it, he actually did sort of want to drive it. He and May had been talking about it off and on since Tony had made the purchase. She wasn't pressuring him to learn and really Tony wasn't either. The man never looked disappointed when he declined a lesson. Sometimes he would give him a little bit of a hard time about it but he never complained. However, the enthusiasm that spread across his father's face when he'd said he would pick a car wasn't missed. Tony wanted to teach him how to drive and he was eager to do so. "Well, maybe."

Not wanting to force the kid into anything he wasn't ready to do, Tony smiled and made a suggestion of his own. "How about I drive it, first. We can loop around the compound." When Peter agreed, he grabbed the keys and hopped in. The seats weren't near as comfortable as the ones in any of his cars and the features were lacking but even so, it seemed to be a pretty nice car. "Foot on the break, Push the button to turn it on.", Tony said casually as he began to give something of a basis play by play as he back out of the space and drove through a few of the empty compound roads. "I know you already know most of this stuff but look, this right here? This is your park button. You don't have to put it into park before you turn off the car but it's probably a good habit. Some cars you do
have to shift into park first. Capisce?"

"Capisce.", Peter repeated. He'd not realized that the car he'd picked didn't use an actual key. Tony had a few cars like that. He sort of associated that kind of thing with luxury cars. He just liked the way it looked and that it had a hybrid engine. That and it was well within the price range that he had deemed as reasonable for a first car. Then after a moment, he realized that his dad was looking at him.

"Do you want to drive it back?", Tony nonchalantly asked expecting to be declined. When Peter took a deep breath and gave a small nod, he smiled. They quickly swapped seats and Peter immediately looked towards his father as if he were waiting for instruction. "Do you know what you're doing?"

"Of course, I do!", Peter testily replied before shying because even though he did have a basic idea of what he was supposed to be doing, being reminded of the steps seemed like a good idea. He didn't want to come right out and say that, though so he chose his words carefully. "...but you could maybe tell me what to do if it would make you feel better."

"Hmm.", Tony hummed, holding back the laugh that was building in his chest. The kid thought he was being clever. Asking for help without asking, turning it around on him. "You know, I think it might.", he said with a small roll of his eyes that he couldn't quite hold back. "Foot on the brake, put it in drive."

After what had to have been the slowest ride around the compound in the history of the compound, Peter finally pulled up outside of the garage entrance. "I don't want to park it.", he announced as he hit the break a tad bit harder than he'd meant to. Driving on empty roads was one thing. Driving past all of Tony's expensive cars in the garage was another.

Loosening the seat belt where it had dug into his chest, Tony nodded. "Alright, well, let's switch then.", he said without judgment. He was sort of happy he got the kid to drive at all. Then as Peter started to undo his own belt, he felt the car start to glide forward. "Put it in park, Pete. You've got to put in park. Hit the breaks.", he called out trying to hold back the small amount of anxiety that was gripping him.

When Tony started insisting that he put the car into park, Peter realized his mistake and in his hurry to rectify it he hit the gas instead, causing them to surge forward. Peter let out something of a terrified grunt as he lifted his foot off of the pedal only now his brain was a bit fuzzy and he couldn't decide which was the brake and which was the gas anymore. "Which one? Which one? Which one?", he repeatedly called out, not allowing any time to really register the directions Tony was trying to shout over him.
The whole ordeal could have ended in complete disaster but thankfully there was an upward incline going towards the garage which slowed the car significantly faster than if there had not been. As such the car slowed back down to a snail’s pace shortly after Peter had taken his foot off of the pedal. That, however, didn't prevent them from hitting the wall beside the garage entrance. It wasn't much. Just enough to jolt them forward on impact but not enough to cause any serious damage. However, Peter immediately fell into instant disarray.

"Shit. Shit. I can't believe-- I don't know-- I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Shit. Are you okay? Oh, my God, I'm so sorry--", Peter panted as his eyes darted between his father and the wall before them. This was exactly why he didn't want to drive one of Tony's cars. It was the first time they'd taken the car out and he'd already wrecked it. His thoughts were going nearly ninety-miles-a-minute and he couldn't get a complete thought out. He didn't even notice when Tony reached over to cut the engine.

Tony in his mercy quickly cut his son off in his frantic rambling. "Pete, Pete!", he repeated before grabbing the boy firmly by the shoulder to get his full attention. "It's alright. It was an accident. We can fix this. Calm down, kiddo. ...Let's get out okay.", he said as calmly as he could. He knew his heart was racing at the moment and he needed it to slow before Peter picked up on it.

Once they were out of the car, Peter was instantly in Tony's arms. "I'm really sorry.", he whispered into his father chest.

"Hey, it's fine. I'm going to take a look at the damage okay? Step back so I can back the car up some.", Tony said once Peter had let go of his neck. He was pretty sure that it wouldn't be much more than a dent but he wanted to look and either way, the car was going to need to be returned to its space in the garage. He backed it up a few yards and stepped out to find exactly what he'd expected. One side of the front fender was collapsed where it had done its job and the engine was absolutely fine. "Come here, Buddy. Look, see? The engine is fine and this fender can be replaced easy peasy."

Except, Peter didn't come to there. He was too busy staring at where the car had hit. There was a cluster of small cracks that looked almost like an unkept spider web right where the bumper had struck. "The wall. What about the wall?", he asked quietly

Lengthening his stride so that he could get to where Peter was starting to get upset all over again, Tony sighed. "I'm sure it's fine, kid. Even if it's not, we can fix it. ...or have it fixed. I'm not worried about it." Then when he saw it he actually smiled. It wasn't really worth fixing. The cracks were barely noticeable if you didn't already know they were there. He decided right then and there that he was never going to repair it. It would sit there for an eternity as a reminder of the first time tried to teach his kid how to drive. "Oh, kid. That's not a disaster. I'm not even going to bother
Peter took a deep breath because he'd yet to shake all of the anxiety that had come from the last fifteen minutes but the fact that Tony seemed completely unphased was comforting. No one was hurt. It was all fixable. Tony had said so and he desperately wanted that to be enough. So he shook his head and swallowed back the nagging anxiety that was still gripping him so that it hopefully wouldn't show. "Okay."

"Okay?", Tony repeated as he wrapped his arm around Peter's shoulders. He'd have expected a bit more drama from his son but he was glad there wasn't any. He still looked a bit shaken but not overwhelmingly upset. Maybe the kid was finally starting to realize that when he said things were fine... that they were. "I'm going to go park your car. You can ride with me or you can go ahead and go back home. It's up to you."

"I'm going to go home.", Peter replied. Not that he was avoiding Tony so much as he didn't want to get back into that car right then. The panic had marginally abated, leaving room for him to start feeling sort of disappointed in himself. All he wanted to do was go wallow in that for a while and hoped he didn't run into anyone on the way to his room. However, the second he slinked through the front door, Pepper was sitting at the table doing some work.

"Hey, Peter. How was the car? Did Tony talk you into driving any?"

"I don't really want to talk about it", he grumbled quietly under his breath. Even though he knew in reality that everything was fine he wasn't eager to discuss it just yet. When she let it go he was grateful and hurried down the hall to lay on his bed.

Not even fifteen minutes later, Tony walked through the door. "Hey, Pep. The kid in his room?", he asked almost sadly.

"He is. Came in a little while ago. I asked him how it went and he disappeared. What happened?", she asked as Tony took a seat beside her.

Sighing, Tony looked over at his fiance and tried to smile. "It wasn't a huge deal. He drove a bit and then wanted to switch places so I could park the car in the garage. Only, he didn't put the car into park first and then when I reminded him, he sort of half panicked and hit the gas by accident. That scared the shit out of both of us and then he couldn't seem to sort out which pedal was the brake so the car ended up hitting the outside of the garage. Well, more of a love tap, really. The building is fine, the engine is fine, just need to fix the front fender.", he explained as Pepper nodded along.
"Why didn't you turn the car off? It's a button not a key, right?", Pepper asked in confusion. It seemed like that would have been the most reasonable solution.

Now, frustrated with himself, Tony dropped his head back. "I don't know. I didn't think of that. He was freaking out and that was freaking me out."

"Oh, stop being so dramatic.", Pepper teased. "I'm going to go start making some lunch. We should go out for dinner."

While Pepper was making lunch Tony continued to give Peter some space. He wasn't sure if that was the right call or not but it seemed reasonable that the boy would want some time to himself. The incident had clearly upset him and even though he seemed much calmer before they had seperated he was sure the boy wasn't completely over it. He just hoped that this experience wouldn't make his son give up on driving altogether. They were going to have to talk about it at some point.

Much to his surprise, that point ended up being during lunch. Tony and Pepper were finishing up as Peter was making a second plate. When the boy sat back down he sighed. "I'm sorry I messed up the car."

"Kid.", Tony replied with a bit of a laugh. How the boy could possibly think he wasn't forgiven yet was beyond him. "You've already apologized for that. At least six times. It was an accident, you're learning and to be fair, I could have turned the car off instead of losing my shit right alongside you. I'm the adult.", he said before making a split-second decision. "Now, we're going out to dinner tonight. Let's take your car and you can drive us the end of the private road the compound is off of." It was only a handful of miles but it would get the kid right back into the saddle so to speak.

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Shortly after lunch was cleaned up, Pepper disappeared into Tony's office to make some phone calls and Peter flopped down all the way across the couch. "When did you say the guy was going to be here?", he asked when Tony shoved his legs over the side to sit down beside him.

"In the next hour or so.", Tony said after a glance at his watch.

Peter groaned and picked his feet up so that his lanky legs were now draped across his father's lap. "So, no time for a nap then, huh?"
"Nope. Sorry, Bud.", Tony chuckled as he patted one of Peter's shin. "Did you get up too early?"

"Maybe.", Peter sighed out. "I'm tired and I'm not looking forward to this."

"I know, kiddo. It won't take too long. Less than an hour and then I can finish it up.", Tony replied and Peter agreed, though he still didn't look overly thrilled.

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As promised, Peter's part didn't last terribly long and the tailor was actually sort of funny. He made a point of telling stories about some of the more ridiculous request people had made. His favorite was when the man was telling him about a couple who wanted their three dogs to be in tuxedos at their wedding. He'd taken on the job just for fun and was surprised when he actually had more people coming in, to request he do the same for them.

Tony and Pepper both smiled as Peter giggled along with the stories and Tony made a mental note to give the tailor a very large tip. When the man had told him he was good with children and that Peter wouldn't be a problem, Tony had scoffed. Mostly because Peter wasn't a small child, he was a teenager but also because Peter was fairly averse to anything that required him to be still. If he ever was still, it was because he was either completely knocked out or in critical need of a bathroom. Then he was suddenly struck by the fact that he could tell when his kid needed to pee and decided that parenting was weird.

The tailor was gone by four and Peter would be the proud owner of his very own tuxedo by Thursday, just in time for the masquerade. After the man had left Tony went into Peter room to tell him that he was going to be working in his office until dinner but the kid was sound asleep. Apparently he'd been very serious about that nap he'd wanted to take. Laughing lightly, he closed the door and got to work. He'd wake him up in time to get ready for dinner.

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