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### 5 Times The Avengers Helped Peter With His Homework

by stardustandswimmingpools

**Summary**

And one time he helped them with theirs.
ohhhh boy. this is a behemoth. you guys are gonna really flip some shit when you see House Arrest lmao.

few things:
1. yes, i AM still working on house arrest. and yes, it will be done asap. and no, i don’t know when that will be exactly. and yes, i am sorry.
2. this takes place in the Peter Parker's Top Surgery Fund ‘verse, but it's before then. each chapter/section will have a little timestamp so you know more or less when it takes place.
3. the science in this fic is VERY fast and loose and hardly researched. please suspend disbelief. i hate science.

translations for French will be at the end. and please enjoy this fic, which i worked very hard on!
it is all done i'm just gonna post it by section because uhh it's long and i want to. but it's not incomplete. don't worry.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter Summary

Well damn.
“I- I do,” Peter manages, “just badly…”
“Well, he’s nothing if not resourceful,” Natasha mutters. Then she flashes a smile at Peter, who almost faints. “I can help. Come on, let’s sit.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He’s actually making a Quizlet with Karen when his phone buzzes. Grateful for any kind of distraction from this mind-numbing task, Peter tugs off the mask, snatches up his phone, and glances at the caller ID before hitting the green button. Tony Stark.

“Mr. Stark?”

There’s a huff of air from the other end of the line, which Peter takes to mean Mr. Stark is sighing heavily. “What the hell are you saying to your AI?”

Peter starts. “How do you — what?”

“Is it some kind of secret language I don’t know about? Do kids even have secret languages anymore? God, you make me feel old.”

“Are you eavesdropping on me?”

“JARVIS told me you were talking nonsense, I thought you were in trouble,” Mr. Stark says brusquely. “Turns out you just forgot how to speak English.”

“It’s French, Mr. Stark,” Peter grumbles. He’s glad that at least his face is hidden so he won’t have to turn this obnoxious shade of pink in front of his mentor. “I suck at it, so Karen is helping me make flash cards online.”

There’s a pause. “I don’t know what I heard, but I guarantee you it wasn’t French.”

“I didn’t say I was good at it!” Peter protests. He crosses his arms for his own benefit, tucking the cell phone between his ear and his shoulder. “I have a test on Friday, I’m trying to prepare.”

“You’re using the one-of-a-kind Artificial Intelligence in your multimillion dollar supersuit to study for a French quiz? Jesus.”

“Mr. Stark, was there something you needed from me? I need to…” He glances mournfully over at his French vocab sheet. “May said I had to finish studying before I go out patrolling.”

“Yes, there was something I needed from you. Two things. Starting right now. Number one: I’m
making your AI talk to you in French for the rest of the week. Number two: I need you up here at the compound.”

“Wh- is there a mission?” Peter jumps up and smacks his head against the plank under the bunkbed. “Ow, crap.”

Another sigh from Mr. Stark. “No mission. Just get down here. There’s someone I’d like you to meet.”

“Of—of course, Mr. Stark. I’m on my way.”

“What level French are you?”

“Huh?”

“I’m changing the language of your AI. What level French are you in?”

“Oh — two. French 2.”

“Put on the suit and get down here. I’ll see you in a few.”

“Right — right, yeah. See you.”

The line clicks as Mr. Stark hangs up, and Peter shimmies into his suit, then tugs the mask back over his head. As the fabric shrinks and clings to him, the AI in the mask lights up.

**Bonjour, Peter. Où allons-nous aujourd’hui?**

“Oh, Jesus,” he mutters. “To the Avengers compound.”

*_Pardon?*_

“What?” Peter says, aghast. He’s hanging out of his own window.

*_Je ne comprends pas. Peut-être essayer en Français?*_

“Oh no,” Peter whispers. He vows to give Tony Stark a piece of his mind before resigning himself to his rubbish French accent.

“Bonjour, Karen.”

**Bonjour! Comment ça va?**

“Superb. Nous allons au...compound...Avengers.” He winces at his own words. Maybe if he’d watched more French TV or something like that...no, it wouldn’t have done any good. Peter’s always had a rough tongue for new languages. Except Italian, for which he can thank his aunt.

**Calculant l’itinéraire le plus rapide.** There’s a pause. Peter slips out of his room and slides the window back down. _Route calculé. Vingt-huit minutes._

Peter groans. “Allons-y.”

“I can’t believe you did that to me,” he says loudly as he stomps into the Avengers Compound. Tony Stark isn’t in view yet, but no doubt he’s around here somewhere. Peter yanks the mask off his head.
“I don’t speak French that well! Do you know how many times I had to ask Karen to rephrase? Mr. Stark, I don’t know how to say ‘rephrase’ in French. That was, like, my worst nightmare.”

Someone appears from around a corner just as he finishes his diatribe, and thank goodness he’s done, because suddenly he’s speechless.

“You- you’re...” he stammers. “You’re not Mr. Stark.”

Natasha Romanov feels taller in real life, and she’s not even wearing heels. It takes Peter a moment to realize he’s actually significantly taller than her (and his little trans heart sings at the fact). He still feels very small. She’s giving him a perfunctory once-over, which gives Peter enough time to swallow his shout of YOU’RE THE BLACK WIDOW! THE ACTUAL BLACK WIDOW, YOU’RE LOOKING AT ME, WE ARE IN THE SAME ROOM! THE BLACK WIDOW!

“And you’re not an adult,” Natasha says at last. She affixes a sanguine smile to her face. Peter can tell it’s fake. “Tony and I will be having words. He’s in his workshop. You are?”

Belatedly, Peter remembers the suit. “Uh,” he says blankly. “I’m — I’m an intern.”

“An intern.”

“Yeah, I, uh...Mr. Stark called me here. I don’t know why...” Then, blustering, “Sorry, it’s just...you’re the actual Black Widow. You’re...you’re awesome.” He watches Natasha’s smile slowly grow genuine, and pushes through it. “I need to talk to Mr. Stark. I think. He wanted me to meet someone, he wouldn’t say what, I don’t really —”


Well damn.

“I- I do,” Peter manages, “just badly...”

“Well, he’s nothing if not resourceful,” Natasha mutters. Then she flashes a smile at Peter, who almost faints. “I can help. Come on, let’s sit.”

There are brownies. The Black Widow has baked brownies. Peter is so starstruck he almost bites off his finger. Natasha snickers.

“So,” she says, settling across from him and stealing a brownie for herself. “How much do you know?”

Peter hastily swallows. “Uh, well, I know how to conjugate and say basic phrases. You know. Bonjour. Comment ça va. Stuff like —”

“I’m gonna stop you there.” Natasha is making a face. Peter wants to shrink into himself and die. “We’re gonna work on your accent. Say bonjour.”

“... Bonjour?” Peter says hesitantly.

Natasha rubs a hand over her face. “Does your teacher roll her Rs?”
This is mortifying. He's being condemned for sucking at French by literal superspy and reformed assassin Natasha Romanov. A woman who could literally kill him is teaching him the language of love. Peter hates Mr. Stark.

He shrugs. “Yes?”

“Okay, then you should be too. Bonjour,” she says. The word rolls smoothly off her tongue like it's her first language. Frankly, it might be. Peter would have no way of knowing.

He takes a deep breath and tries to imitate the sound.

“Peter, you're here! Peter's my intern,” Mr. Stark says unnecessarily, entering the kitchen in grandeur. Natasha and Peter both look up.

“I've been here for an hour,” Peter says, glaring. “You set me up!”

“With a tutor,” Mr. Stark says. He crosses the room and yanks open the fridge. “Sort of. You're welcome.”

“With Black Widow!” Peter hisses.

“Are you two learning? Le croissant? Vive la France?”

“Out,” Natasha says, pointing back the way he came. “We're studying.”

Mr. Stark grins. “I'm so glad to see the kid actually sitting still that I won't even comment on you kicking me out of my own kitchen. See? I'm learning. Pep- where's Pepper? Pepper!”


As farewell, Mr. Stark says, “Dont corrupt the kid!” He grabs a beer from the fridge, slams it shut, and whisks away. The cold air from the fridge dissipates. Peter shivers. He's got goosebumps, but logically that could easily be from watching Natasha talk to Tony Stark like he’s an impertinent child. Thrilling, really.

The French vocab sheet is between them. It's full of writing, Natasha's, in smooth cursive. Transliteration litters the page, alongside notes to remember — about pronunciation, Latin roots, conjugation, everything. Peter's accent, according to Natasha, is 23% better than it was when he'd arrived. At least he's rolling his Rs.

“Okay, again,” Natasha says. Peter's brain is close to melting, but he indulges her, and reads her sentence aloud. It feels clunky in his mouth, unlike when she says it, never tripping, as easily as English.

The words get easier as the sun gets lower in the sky, until Peter blindly grabs for a brownie from the plate and finds it sprinkled with crumbs but brownie-free. He looks up, surprised, and says, “Où s'ont-ils?”

Natasha laughs. “Now you’re getting it!”

It takes Peter a moment to realize his mistake. “Woah,” he says in a low voice. “Did I just...speak in French? By accident?”
“About brownies, no less,” Natasha says, nodding agreeably. “You’re right. We should make more. How about we pick this back up tomorrow? I’ll make more brownies, you’ll work on your accent by listening to French songs, and we’ll meet here at six to go over the vocab again. Sound good?”

“You promise to make more brownies?” Peter licks his fingers. “’Cause those were really good.”

“I learned from the best,” Natasha says lightly. “Mario Batali.”

“What? No way.”

“Yup.”

“That’s so cool! I don’t believe you.”

“Do you want it in writing? I can get it in writing.”

“You can’t have a direct line to Mario Batali. That’s crazy.”

“I don’t. Nadia Rivera, small-town chef from Venezuela, living on minimum wage until her parents won the lottery and sent her to America to follow her dream, does.”

“Oh my God,” Peter breathes. “You’re the coolest person in the world.”

Natasha smiles at that, and it doesn’t even look forced. “Tomorrow,” she instructs, reaching over to ruffle Peter’s hair. “Now leave. Isn’t it past your bedtime?”

“I don’t have a bedtime!” Peter argues, checking his watch. It’s nine o’clock now, meaning he barely has time to do any patrolling, but he feels surprisingly fulfilled as he heads out of the Avengers compound.

Devrais-je dire à Monsieur Stark que tu pars?

Peter sighs loudly inside his mask as he takes a leap and lands on the side of a brick building nearby. “Oui, merci.”

Ton accent s’est amélioré.

Peter can’t help but grin. “Je sais.”

He gets a 97 on the French test. When Natasha sees the question he missed, she laughs out loud so long that Peter worries she’ll pull a muscle. When she finally gathers herself in a gasp of breath, she says, “Seriously, Peter? You can’t spell spider?”

“Shut up! It was a moment of weakness!” Peter says, snatching away his test, but the laughter bubbles up in his throat too. Mr. Stark walks in just as Natasha is explaining, through breathless giggles, that the word araignée has two Es at the end and always has .

“It’s a nut house!” he says, throwing his hands up in exasperation, retreating to the kitchen. Peter doesn’t even care. He’s laughing with Natasha Romanov right now and everything in the world is okay.

(For weeks afterwards, French starts to slip into his daily language. His grade in French 2 skyrockets from an 86 to a 94. Whenever he talks to Natasha, it’s in French, to the great frustration of Mr. Stark,
who never bothered learning another language, despite Pepper’s many encouraging efforts.

He spills the story of his tutoring to Ned, who gets green with envy and insists on a private tutoring session with Black Widow, too. This request never makes it to Tony Stark.

When MJ asks where the expertise has come from after Peter correctly answers three France-related questions in AcaDec, he shrugs evasively and says, “Studying.” She doesn’t believe him, he’s sure.)

Chapter End Notes

FRENCH:

Bonjour, Peter. Où allons-nous aujourd’hui?: Hello, Peter. Where are we going today?
Pardon?: Excuse me?/Sorry?
Je ne comprends pas. Peut-être essayer en Français?: I don't understand. Maybe try it in French?
Bonjour! Comment ça va?: Hello! How are you?
Superb. Nous allons au...compound...Avengers.: Super. We're going to...the Avengers...compound.
Calculant l’itinéraire le plus rapide.: Calculating the fastest route.
Route calculé. Vingt-huit minutes.: Route calculated. 28 minutes.
Allons-y.: Let's go.
Où s’ont-ils?: Where are they?
Devrais-je dire à Monsieur Stark que tu pars?: Should I tell Mr. Stark that you're leaving?
Oui, merci.: Yes, thanks.
Ton accent s’est amélioré.: Your accent's improved.
Je sais.: I know.
The kid whirls around so quickly Clint expects him to tip over. He slings his backpack onto the floor and his eyes grow wide in shock. “Woah! Hawkeye! Do you just sit in Mr. Stark’s living room all the time?” Clint grinds his teeth. “Sometimes. Do you just barge into Mr. Stark’s living room all the time?”

Clint hasn’t had a moment to himself in weeks. And he’s eternally grateful that he has such a stellar wife and three awesome kids who love adventures and trying new things and going new places and *literally never sleeping*, but it also means that Clint hasn’t had a chance to sit in the last month without someone yanking him off his butt.

So yes, he is *glad* to have a stretch of quiet in the compound. He hates saying goodbye to his family, of course. They are the apples of his eye, the stars in his sky, et cetera. And frankly, he wouldn’t have left them, except Stark had called him in to take down some...someone, or some *thing*, terrorizing the streets of New York, and once he’d gotten in and the job was finished, he’d already practically reassimilated. Plus it’d been late.

Besides, Nat is here. It’s always a delight to see her.

So here he is, melting into the couch, perfectly content to read *I Am Jackie Chan: My Life in Action* (What? The guy’s an international icon) and drink the tea that somehow keeps appearing in front of him and do absolutely nothing.

What he does *not* want is to deal with a teenager stumbling in the doorway, somehow looking completely lost and thoroughly familiar with his surroundings at the same time.

“Mr. Stark?”

Clint sighs, setting the book over his face like a tent. He groans quietly. Then, after another baffled “Mr. Stark? Hello?” from the kid, Clint replies.

“Stark’s not here right now. Who are you?”

The kid whirls around so quickly Clint expects him to tip over. He slings his backpack onto the floor and his eyes grow wide in shock. “Woah! Hawkeye! Do you just sit in Mr. Stark’s living room all the time?”

Clint grinds his teeth. “Sometimes. Do you just barge into Mr. Stark’s living room all the time?”
The kid sways on his feet for a moment. “No, I…” He shakes his head like a puppy. Clint can’t help but picture this guy as a puppy, a very excitable, very confused puppy. “Uh. Sorry. Mr. Stark told me to stay here tonight, because my aunt’s going to a funeral out-of-state and I have school, and it’s far, and besides I don’t know the guy who died very well, so I’m staying here…”

The story is getting more bewildering every second the kid talks. The words-per-minute rate at which he’s speaking doesn’t help. Clint sighs and puts his book down. “Look, what’s your name?”

“Peter,” the teenager says. “Parker.” His mouth opens wide in a yawn that he appears to stifle immediately. “I, uh, well, I guess I should tell you I’m Spiderman.”

Clint blinks. He blinks again. And then he laughs, dryly.

“You’re, like, thirteen.”

“Fifteen, actually.”

“How can you be Spiderman?”

Peter frowns, tilts his head sideways, and then jumps upwards. In the blink of an eye he’s hanging upside-down from the ceiling, hands and feet clinging to the surface above Clint as he looks down. Like it’s the most natural goddamn thing. Color Clint surprised.

“I just am,” Peter offers.

A moment later he falls, crashing onto the couch and upending all the pillows. Clint just barely dodges getting smacked by a stray foot.

“Ouch,” comes the kid’s muffled voice from the cushions.

“Jesus Christ,” Clint says, abandoning all irritation as he pulls Peter out of the couch. “Everything alright, kid?”

Peter scrunches his face up and rubs his eyes. “Yeah,” he croaks, then clears his throat. “Healing factor. I’ll be fine. I just got dizzy for a second, that’s all. Anyway, I actually…I can’t believe I’m gonna say this, but I can’t talk because I really have to read this book for my English class tomorrow. We have a cumulative quiz and I haven’t read any of the book.”

If Cooper, Lila, or Nathaniel end up like this Peter, Clint is going to have problems. “When were you assigned the book?”

Peter winces. “Uh…last month?”

“How have you been passing the class since then?”

“SparkNotes.” Like it’s obvious.

Clint tries his best not to become Super Dad, but it’s a close thing. “Well, look, I’m not gonna stop you. Get to it.”

His words seem to pierce a thick haze between Peter's ears and his brain, so it takes a second for them to register. Clint frowns as Peter belatedly reacts.

“Right,” he says. He practically stammers himself off the couch, unzipping his backpack and pulling out his book. Clint is more than happy to let that be the end of it. He resettles against the plush cushions and reopens his book. Out of the corner of his eye he sees Peter collapse against the couch
as well, opening *1984* with the most bored expression imaginable. He yawns. Clint skims the page for the sentence he'd left off on.

For twenty minutes, the room is wonderfully quiet. Clint relishes in that silence before he realizes, begrudgingly, that he hasn't heard *anything* in five minutes — not a sigh, or a page turning, or anything. He looks over, and Peter is fast asleep. The book is resting face-up on his lap, and his head is tilted back against the pillows.

It's important to note how very little Clint Barton, alias Hawkeye, cares about this child he just met. A fifteen-year-old superhero? He can obviously take care of himself.

But Clint Barton, father of three, can't leave it alone.

He gives an almighty groan and heaves himself off the sofa. It's only a couple steps before he's standing over Peter.

He's debating what would be the best way to wake him up when the problem solves itself, and Peter jolts awake with a gasp.

“Mr. Barton!” he says breathlessly. “Sorry...did I...”

“You fell asleep,” Clint says tersely. “Dude, you can't fall asleep. You've gotta finish this by tomorrow.”

“I- I know,” Peter mumbles, turning bright pink up to his ears. “Sorry.”

Instantly, Clint feels badly.

“You can call me Clint,” he says hesitantly, taking a seat next to Peter. “Everything okay?”

Peter looks over, eyes wide. “Great! Yeah, everything is so great. Thanks for asking, Mr. Barton. Clint.”

“Kid,” Clint says, resisting the powerful urge to roll his eyes, “I'm a superspy. I know when I'm being lied to. You wanna try again?”

Peter’s face turns redder. “Nothing's going on, Mr. Barton. I swear.”

Clint doesn't correct him on the name front. Instead, he says, “I think we got off on the wrong foot.” He holds a hand out to shake. “I'm Clint Barton. You are?”

Peter takes his hand and shakes it. “Peter Parker,” he says carefully. “Is this a trap...?”

Clint chuckles. “Kid,” he says, taking note of the bleary eyes and dizziness and imbalance and low reaction time. “When was the last time you had a good night's sleep?”

Peter looks startled. “I- I always get a good night's sleep!”

“How many hours?” Clint asks. “Last night.”

“Ssssssssix…teen…?” Peter tries.

“Did you sleep at all?”

Peter groans and puts his head in his hands. He makes a very teenage sound, a weird moan-cry-laugh that Clint couldn't replicate if he tried. “No, I didn't sleep last night! There was a lot of crime, and I
had a lot of homework! But I have to read this entire book, so I'll just...I'll just sleep tomorrow night. I guess.”

Clint sighs. “Peter, that's not how it works.”

“Well, I mean, it's worked so far,” Peter reasons.

Clint rolls his eyes. The infuriatingly stubborn nature of this boy reminds him uncannily of Tony. What's the best way to get Tony to do something?

Well, frankly, bribe him. But bribing a sophomore is ethically unstable, so Clint decides against it.

Instead, he reaches out and plucks the book from Peter's hands. Peter huffs, reaching for it halfheartedly. “Hey, I need that!”

“What you need, right now, is to sleep for at least three hours.” Clint tucks 1984 behind his back and fixes Peter with what he really hopes is an intimidating fatherly stare. “You can borrow my room, or you can find a room somewhere — God knows there are too many in this fucking compound — but you're going to sleep, and in three hours I’m gonna wake you up and you’ll read this entire book in one sitting. Are we clear?”

Peter starts to say, “I don’t need to —” before a yawn interrupts his sentence. Clint watches him expectantly. When the yawn comes to an impressive end, begrudgingly, Peter concedes, “Maybe an hour.”

“Good man,” Clint says, sighing. Peter retreats, but only after he tosses a reproachful look towards Clint. Clint can deal with pissy teenagers. He used to be one.

He resettles on the couch and says, “JARVIS? I’m gonna need some strong coffee.”

Peter sleeps for two and a half hours. They are two and a half of the most peaceful hours Clint projects having for awhile.

He slides into the living room on socks and says loudly, “I need to read my book now, Mr. Barton!”

“Clint,” Clint corrects absentmindedly. He pulls the book out from behind his back and, blindly, tosses it in the direction of Peter’s voice. He hears it hit the kid’s hands and knows it has reached its target.

When the couch jostles, indicating Peter, sitting, Clint looks up from his book. His eyes level with Peter’s. “Alright, here’s what we're gonna do. I’m gonna order sandwiches from Katz’s and you’re gonna sit here and eat a sandwich and read your entire book. If you have questions, I'll answer them. Alright?”

Peter’s eyes are wide. “Yeah — yeah, okay. Thanks, Clint.”

Clint orders the sandwiches (Katz’s doesn’t normally deliver this late, but they make an exception) and falls back against the cushions to read. He’s pretty proud of his handiwork with the kid until he hears a phone buzzing consistently.


Peter’s head snaps up from his phone. “Hm?”
“Give me your phone.”

“It’s just my friend MJ, she’s —”

“I don’t care.” There is a line to be crossed with Clint’s patience for teenagers, and they are teetering on its edge. “Come on. Give it over. You can have it back when you finish the book.”

Peter hangs his head but does as he’s told. Clint watches the screen while Peter returns to his mass-reading.

**marmalade jar:** and frankly I don’t want to deal with it anymore

**marmalade jar:** dude

**marmalade jar:** are you ignoring me? don’t be petty.

**marmalade jar:** okay this isn’t a big deal bro

“What’s your password?” Clint asks, sliding right across the bottom of Peter’s phone.

“Why would I tell you my password?”

“Your friend thinks you’re ignoring her.”

A panicked look crosses Peter’s face. “Oh, god. MJ? She’s scary. Please let me answer —”

“Tell me your password and I will explain the situation.”

“Please just let me call her —”

“Parker. Sit.”


His birthday, then. Clint taps the passcode in and opens Peter’s chat with MJ.

Tempting as it is to scroll up, Clint knows many things about invasion of privacy — too many to do it to anyone else. Instead, he taps out a message.

**peter:** Hi, MJ, this is Clint Barton. Peter is binge-reading 1984 because he was a lazy ass and decided to leave it all to the last minute. He’s not ignoring you, just irresponsible. Do your homework. Goodnight.

To her credit, there’s an instant reply.

**marmalade jar:** why the hell do you have peter’s phone? did you kidnap him?

“Does MJ know you’re Spiderman?” Clint asks idly.

“Yeah,” Peter mumbles, squinting at the book.

**peter:** No, he actually willingly showed up here, believe it or not. Funeral out-of-state that he’s not invited to. Or something.

**marmalade jar:** yeah I know that
peter: I confiscated it so he’d read faster. It’s working. He’s very focused.

marmalade jar: adults just keep getting weirder

marmalade jar: well tell him to tell ned to not be such a baby

marmalade jar: and good luck with his reading

peter: On it.

“Tell Ned to not be such a baby and good luck with your reading,” Clint obligingly reads aloud.

Peter ignores him. Clint feels like he probably deserves that, but whatever. The kid’s reading. The deed is done, and Clint tosses Peter’s phone to the coffee table with a sense of accomplishment.

Getting teenagers to read books for classes. What’s next? Getting Tony Stark to show up to a meeting on time? Ha.
Government (late sophomore year)

Chapter Summary

“And we’re learning the amendments,” MJ continues. “Well, you’re learning them. I know them.”
Ned and Peter both stare at her.
“If you’re protesting the government, you have to be able to argue their defense,” MJ explains. Like it’s the most ordinary thing to memorize 27 amendments.

Chapter Notes

officially out my wheelhouse, i never learned the amendments. thank you google.
trigger warning: peter got stabbed. it is not graphic but there's mentions of blood. if that triggers you then skip the beginning!
also, there's something in here about T - if it's inaccurate please let me know. i did research and have tried to make peter's trans experience accurate but if it's wrong please inform! i am very much open to learning new things and the last thing i want is to misrepresent or spread false information. thank you.

“It’s no big deal,” Peter gasps. Conveniently, his vision blacks out for a second, and when it returns he’s kneeling, although he specifically remembers having stood up to make the call.

“I’m coming to get you right now. Don’t move. Are you still in danger?”

Peter glances around and then winces as another current of agony slices through his side. “No — I’ll heal fast, Mr. Stark, seriously — ah.”

“Peter, listen to me. Do you have anything fabric. A t-shirt, socks, I don’t care. Find anything and press it to the wound, okay? Keep talking.”

Peter feels the concrete under his knees leaving indents in his skin. The palm of his hand is starting to feel slippery, and anxiety pulses in Peter’s veins, overwhelming. His breathing starts to stagger. His eyes scan the alleyway desperately. “I don’t think I have anything, Mr. Stark.”

“Jesus. Shit — okay. Just sit tight, alright, kid? I’ll be there in three minutes. Tell me about your day.”

“My day?” It’s getting really difficult to think. Peter’s vision tunnels on the discarded knife, the tip bloodied and rusty. Rusty. That was in his body. Oh, man. That can’t be good.

“Your day, Peter. Did you talk to Ed? What’s his name? Ned?”

“Ned,” Peter says — gasps, because words are starting to feel like mountains to overcome. The ground keeps getting closer and closer to him. Several feet away, a sloppily webbed-up, unconscious thug lies. Peter feels his heart ramming against his ribcage. “Y-yeah, I did.”
“What about that girl you like?”

“I don’t like MJ,” Peter says weakly.

“Why not?”

“What?”

“Just keep talking,” Tony says impatiently. “Come on, tell me about her.”

“You know about her.”

“Not personally.”

Peter closes his eyes. He can feel the blood between his fingers, trickling down his wrist…

“She’s — smart, really smart. Um...she calls me loser. I don’t know why. She calls everyone loser.”

“Good,” Tony says, although he sounds vaguely far. “I’m almost there, kid, keep going. How’s Decathlon? Stay with me.”

“G- ah,” Peter hisses. He wants to press into his stomach with his fist until he can’t feel, but every time he tries it’s just immeasurable pain. “Good. We — we’re good. Winning. We will be winning. Are you...are you almost here?” he adds meekly.

“Just a minute away,” Tony says. “Come on, stay awake.”

But the pain. Behind closed eyelids, Peter can practically hear his heart thudding.

No, shit — that’s not his heart —

His eyes fly open just in time to see the previously knocked-out thug, free from his bonds, knife swinging down at Peter’s leg.

When the door opens for what feels like the thousandth time, Peter squeezes his eyes shut again. If Mr. Stark tries to ask how he’s feeling, Peter’s going to fake his own death.

He appreciates the sentiment, but all he wants is sleep. Sleeping, at least, kills the nagging pain for a minute.

“I told you he’d be asleep,” says a voice, critically, one that is much too young and familiar to be Tony Stark. There’s a snorting noise.

“He’s not asleep. Wake up, loser, we brought your homework.” Yeah, that’s MJ. Peter cracks open his eyes and is relieved to see his two best friends taking seats beside his bed.

“Oh, thank god,” he sighs.

“You look like shit,” MJ says. She drops a stack of books onto a table beside his bed. “Lucky for you, you can distract yourself with the joys of sexist literature by old white men.”

Peter glances at Ned, who supplies, “We started Taming of the Shrew in English.”

“Oh.” Ned looks tired, and Peter feels guilty, because it’s probably his fault. If he’d just acted
“quicker”, if he’d tied up that thug before the thug got to him, if he’d done something differently...

“And we’re learning the amendments,” MJ continues. “Well, you’re learning them. I know them.”

Ned and Peter both stare at her.

“If you’re protesting the government, you have to be able to argue their defense,” MJ explains. Like it’s the most ordinary thing to memorize 27 amendments.

“You’ll catch up quickly,” Ned says. “We figured you wouldn’t want to miss anything.”

Peter feels a rush of gratitude for Ned. MJ, too. “Thanks, guys.”

“So…” Ned glances at the IV drip with unease. “Are you, you know...okay?”

“Yeah,” Peter says. It feels someone is repeatedly punching his stomach and thigh, but there’s no reason for Ned to worry over nothing. It’ll heal. It always does.

“Guess your hair didn’t get the memo,” MJ says coolly. She seems reserved, almost irritated, and something else is hiding behind her eyes, but Peter’s too weary to dissect it.

He reaches up and flattens out what must be a bird’s nest of hair, blushing.

“Also,” Ned says, “I brought you contraband.”

“Drugs,” says MJ.

Peter beams when Ned tugs from his backpack a small drawstring bag declaring *I had fun at my Six Flags Summer!* The bag is a makeshift but effective cover for what’s concealed inside, which are his T shots. Though inside there’s only the one, and Ned whispers, “I figured you would get off-schedule if you waited ‘til you got out, so I just brought one. I figure you’ll be out by the time you need another, right?”

“Right,” Peter echoes. He frowns. “I usually do it in my leg, but I guess that’s out of the question.”

“Maybe the pain would cancel out,” MJ offers dryly. Because MJ is just hilarious. “Or you could do it in your arm, like a thousand other trans guys.”

Well. There’s a reason MJ is the brains of the operation.

He’s about to say something else, though he’s not sure what — thank them, or apologize, or something — when a nurse comes in. Quickly, Peter tucks the shot under his pillow.

“Time’s up,” she says curtly, fussing with the blanket on his bed. “Peter needs rest to heal quickly.”

MJ shrugs. “We’ll come back later.”

“Yeah,” Ned says. “Just text us and we’ll be here.”

Peter doesn’t miss the *we*. The inclusive pronoun. The one that turns Peter-and-Ned into Peter-and-Ned-and-MJ, that turns a half of them into 1.5, that turns a pair into a trio. It’s never been anything other than Peter-and-Ned since forever.

Without even realizing, MJ has made herself indispensable. Peter wonders if she even knows that.

“I will,” Peter says, ignoring yet another ache that seems to climb from his abdomen to his heart.
“See you guys.”

He lifts a hand in farewell as they trail out of the room. Ned leaves first, and MJ lingers a second while the nurse adjusts his IV.

“Hey, loser,” she says. He blinks at her. “Just...get better quickly.” She pauses. “We need you at AcaDec. I had to put Flash in, and he makes me want to vomit.”

Peter chuckles as she disappears out the door.

Peter is just about to jump out of the hospital bed and track down a thug to kill him for real when the door swings open and Sam Wilson walks in.

Peter drops his textbook onto the bed with a thud. “Mr. Wilson.” He straightens up. “Uh, what, uh, what are you doing here?”

“A little birdie told me you had to memorize a few amendments,” Sam says. “Figured I could help.”

Peter stammers. “I don’t need — I’m good at memorizing.”

Sam raises his eyebrows. “Really, Peter? 27 amendments? You plan on just reading and repeating?”

Well, actually, yes. Sam makes it sound stupid.

“I guess not,” he mumbles.

Sam drags a chair to the bedside. “How you holding up?”

The stab wound still stings, although considerably less. The one on his stomach is worse, according to every doctor, nurse, and surgeon who’s been by, plus Mr. Stark. Peter is astonishingly relieved to see a new face. Even though it’s Falcon, to whom he’s spoken maybe four times in his life, and officially met only once as Peter Parker.

This, though, isn’t Falcon; it’s Sam Wilson, military vet. If anyone can help him with the amendments, it’s Sam.

“I’m great,” Peter says. “Just great. Healing nicely. The doctor says I’ll be good to go in a week, maybe less.”

“That’s good,” Sam says, nodding. “Did you make flash cards?”

It takes Peter a second to acknowledge the abrupt non-sequitur. “N-no,” he says. “I don’t have any index cards. Or a pencil.”

Sam stands. “Be right back. Don’t go anywhere.”

“Ha-ha,” Peter mutters as Sam leaves.

“14.”

“Due process?”
“Good. And?”

“Uh...equal protection. And citizenship. And…”

“Privilege —”

“Privileges or Immunities Clause!”

“Good. When was it ratified?”

“Shit. Uh…”

“I'll give you a hint; it’s after the Civil War.”

“186...6?”

“Close. July 9th, 1868.”

“July 9th, 1868. Got it.”

“You’re doing great, Peter. 6.”

“...Unenumerated rights?”

“No, that’s 9th.”

“Oh — right to a fair and speedy trial by jury!”

“Good. Which includes what?”

“The right to be notified of the accusations, to a lawyer, to...summon witnesses? And the right to...confront the accuser.”

“Exactly right. Four for four. Ratified?”

“September 25th...1789?”

“Nicely done! Wanna do one more?”

“...Can we take a break?”

“Fine. Ten minutes.”

“Thanks, Mr. Wilson.”
When they enter the floor, Steve and Bucky are on the couch, watching the TV set very closely.

“Hey,” Peter announces. They both look up, and Steve pauses whatever's on the screen. “I brought Ned.”

“Hi!” Ned says brightly. “I'm Ned.”

“We need to install locks,” Bucky grumbles.

“Hey,” Peter announces. They both look up, and Steve pauses whatever's on the screen. “I brought Ned.”

“We need to install locks,” Bucky grumbles.

“This is going to kill me,” Peter groans, dragging his feet out of the APUSH classroom. Ned pats his back sympathetically.

“Me too, bro. Let's have a joint funeral.”

Peter nods. “Let's write on your headstone, 'RIP Ned Leeds, alias Spiderman'.”

Ned laughs. “Dude, that would be so funny. Can we put 'Guy in the Chair' on yours?”

“Definitely,” Peter says. He lifts up the assignment page and the rows of empty lines glare back at him, threatening. “Man, how am I going to do this.”

“We can work on it together,” Ned offers. He falls suddenly silent. Peter looks suspiciously at him, because when Ned falls silent it means an idea is brewing that he doesn't want to suggest.

“What,” he says. “Spill. I know you're thinking something.”

“Well, it's just,” Ned begins, a grin spreading across his face, “we’re kinda at an advantage with this.”

“How?”

“Cause,” Ned says slyly, “you know two vets.”
“Hi!” Ned says brightly. “I'm Ned.”

“We need to install locks,” Bucky grumbles.

“Nice to meet you guys,” Ned continues, dropping his backpack haphazardly on the floor. “Big fan. You guys are so cool. You're like, totally badass.”

“We do what we can,” Steve says dryly. His focus shifts to Peter. “What's going on, Peter?”

“Well, um…” Peter shifts, feeling shy. He doesn't like to ask Steve about his past. If Peter woke up seventy years in the future and all his friends were dead, he'd probably never want to think about it. Still...

“We have this assignment for APUSH,” Ned jumps in. Peter sees Bucky exchange a confused look with Steve.

“AP U.S. History,” he explains. “It's an advanced history class. And we've been doing a unit on...on World War II, and we have to write this...journal entry. From the perspective of a World War II soldier.”

“And you need our help,” Bucky supplies.

Peter nods. “You don't have to,” he says quickly. “If you don't wanna talk about it, I totally get it. I probably wouldn't want to if it was me, so you don't —”


“Yeah,” Bucky says. “I'll do whatever the Captain does.”

This earns him an elbow to his shoulder from the Captain.

“What're you guys watching?” Ned asks, peering at the screen.

“Robin Williams,” says Bucky. “Apparently he's a great actor. Rhodey recommended him. We're doing a marathon. This is Good Will Hunting.”

“Oh, man,” Ned says sagely. “That one'll get you. Peter cried when we watched it.”

“I did n— Ned!” Peter hisses. The damage is done; Bucky laughs. “Anyway, please can we get started?”

“Sure,” Steve says, ever the mediator. “Bring your papers over here, let me read the instructions.”

“We had those!”

“Yeah, because you stole them! You can't write that on a kid’s paper, it has to be historically accurate!”

Bucky gapes. “Steve, we are history! We're historically accurate by default!”

“You can't write about weapons we weren't supposed to or allowed to have!” Steve retorts.

“I can if it's true!”
“Officially, it's not!”

“Okay, but Steve, the whole point is to be realistic! It says in the instructions, be as realistic as possible!”

“How is he going to defend that claim if the teacher asks him, huh? He can't exactly bring us to school!”

“Teachers don't do that shit!”

“Maybe not in 1932 they didn't! Now they do!”

“Hey you guys!” Ned yells, effectively shutting up both parties. “I hate to break up this scintillating, seriously fascinating shouting match, but this is only the third sentence. Let's just forget the whole thing and move on.”

Peter sighs in relief. It's kind of awesome to watch Steve and Bucky argue over history, but it doesn't help them get anywhere.

Steve and Bucky lock eyes and Peter sees both of them mentally concede. “You're right,” Steve says. “Sorry, we got a little carried away.”

“It was cool,” Ned says bluntly. Peter agrees privately. “Anyway, what were the weapons you guys definitely had? Like, ones you were given? Legally?”

They barely make it four sentences before they're at it again.

“It was Junior,” Steve says bracingly. “He came to me and gave me the idea.”

“Because he got it from Dum Dum!” Bucky argues.

“Dum Dum wasn't even there when Junior suggested the name!”

“He didn't suggest it five seconds before!” Bucky seethes. Peter and Ned look at each other. They recognize the names from a passage in their textbooks about the Howling Commandos. Neither of them want to say it, but Peter knows Ned is thinking what he's thinking: Steve is right. It says it in their textbook: The Howling Commandos, named appropriately by combatant Jonathan “Junior” Juniper…

But neither of them is about to put themselves in the crossfire.

“Fine, then when?” Steve challenges. Bucky throws his hands up.

“The day before!”

“Maybe we could just put your name,” Ned suggests. Both men turn and look at him at the same time, and Peter gets the impression of two hawks watching prey.

“What's?” they say at the same time.

Ned looks like a deer in headlights. “Uh...both?”

Bucky smirks and Steve smacks him over the head. “Bucky had no hand in it. If you’re going to put
anyone’s name, it should be mine.”

“Wh- Steve!” Bucky exclaims in mock outrage. Steve chuckles and shakes his head at Peter and Ned both.

“I’m joking. Forget it. Just put…”

“Put Steve,” Bucky says. “He was the one who officially gave us the name.”

“Or,” Peter offers, “we could just pretend like our made-up fake soldiers came up with the name.”

Bucky shrugs. “Sure. As long as we’re lying about the weapons we had, we might as well make shit up.”

“Language,” Steve mutters. “And we aren’t lying about the weapons. We’re just sticking to the...approved story.”

Bucky sticks his tongue out. Peter elects to go with his idea and puts the pencil to his paper.

The third time a fight breaks out, Bucky whacks Steve with a pillow, and from then on it’s all-out war. Peter watches in fascination and horror as Steve gasps, grabs a couch cushion, and launches it at Bucky. Bucky catches it with a grip so tight he rips a hole in it.

“Shit,” Peter whispers.

“I can’t believe you just did that,” Steve says. “We’re not children, Buck.”

“Says the supersoldier who just threw a cushion at me,” Bucky retaliates. He tosses the cushion back at Steve, who replaces it on the couch.

“You hit me with a throw pillow!”

“You said we never drank!”

“You can’t write something like that on a kid’s paper!”

“Are you trying to censor history, Rogers?”

“There’s a difference between censoring history and omitting from an assignment certain details that don’t need to be included!”

“Steve, we all got wasted every night. Erasing that is pretty much ignoring the foundation of the Howling Commandos at all! We worked in drunken terror! If you fought fully sober you were crazy!”

“I fought fully sober!”

“Yeah, right, like you wouldn’t have gotten drunk if you couldn’t’ve.”

“That’s not the point, Bucky! You can’t write about a bunch of drunk guys on a paper about soldiers at war!”

“I bet every kid in that class knows all the soldiers were drunk, all the time.” Bucky points at Peter, who draws back instinctively. “Don’t they? Come on, Parker. If I went up to any kid in your class
and asked if they thought we were drunk at war, what do you think they’d say?”

Peter, who would very much like to be excluded from this narrative, thanks very much, glances at Ned like *what do I do?* Ned shrugs, *I don’t know, man. One of them is gonna kill you either way.*

*Draft a will?*

Now both of them are watching Peter expectantly. Peter scans the room for any emergency exits — this is Sergeant Bucky Barnes, most paranoid soldier alive, there must be at least two — before taking a breath.

“Uh...I don’t think they’ve really ever given it much thought, to be honest.”

Steve, breathing very heavily, breaks into a grin. “Jeez,” he says. “Sorry, kid. I haven’t thought about this stuff in awhile. Not on purpose, anyway.”

“I think about it every second, but not, you know…” Bucky gestures vaguely. “To help.”

Steve puts a hand on Bucky’s shoulder. “I think we’ve done enough for you two,” he says benevolently. “God forbid we get into another shouting match.”

“You were wrong on every count,” Bucky mumbles.

“Thanks a lot, you guys,” Peter says sincerely. “We really appreciate it. I mean, really. Thanks for — thanks, you guys are — thanks.”

“Yeah,” Ned says. “What he said. You guys are the coolest. You should rewrite our textbooks. They’re full of lies.”

Steve smiles wryly. “That’s very kind of you, but if we tried to do that we wouldn’t get past the first page.”

“That’s okay,” Bucky says. “I can write it without Steve.”

“Bye,” Peter says, throwing his backpack over his shoulder. “Thanks again.”

As he and Ned take their leave, they hear bickering in the background and grin at each other.
“JARVIS?”
“Yes, Mr. Parker?”
“Who invented algebra?”
“Which aspect of the mathematics are you thinking of?”
“Logarithms.”
“The discovery of logarithms was made by Scottish mathematician, physicist, and astronomer John Napier, circa 1614.”
“Oh.” Peter rolls over onto his back and stares up at his ceiling. “Well, fuck that guy.”

I’ll let him know you say so,” JARVIS says in the dryest voice an AI can summon. “Are you struggling with your homework?”
Peter scoffs. “No.”
“Would you like me to summon Mr. Stark or Mr. Banner? If you need help, I am certain they would be happy to provide.”
“No no,” Peter says quickly. “Don’t tell Mr. Stark. I don’t need help. It’s just,” but he doesn’t get very far into his lament. There’s a knock.
Peter frowns. “Hello?”
“May I come in?” Wanda’s voice says from behind the door.
Peter sighs with relief. “Oh, yeah, yeah, come on in.”
The door swings open and in walks Wanda Maximoff in a t-shirt that reads Bitchin’. Peter grins. “Nice shirt.”
“Thank you,” Wanda says lightly. “Natasha gave me it.”

Peter laughs.

“I was thinking of going out to dinner tonight,” Wanda says. “With Bruce, and Pepper. Want to come?”

Peter groans and flops backwards onto his bed. “I have stupid logarithms.”

“Logarithms?” Suddenly Wanda sounds interested.

Peter nods. “Wanda, I think God Himself created logarithms just to mock me.”

“They are not so hard.”

“Yes they are! What? Wait. What?”

“Let me help,” Wanda says. There’s this gleam in her eye, this spark Peter doesn’t see from her a lot. She pats his calf. “I can help with your logarithms and then you can pick the restaurant.”

“Oh my god,” says Peter, sitting up. “I know a really good —”

“Logs first.” Wanda fixes him with a stern look.

“But you…”

“Math, it is the same everywhere,” she tells him. “Where is your work?”

Okay, so this is new.

“I didn’t realize you could do this kind of thing,” Peter mumbles. He slides his worksheet over towards her, and she pulls a chair up with her magic aura and sits.

“The way I always imagine them is as a circle,” Wanda begins. Peter leans over the paper and stares, trying hard not to zone out.

“You see —” she snatches up his pencil and scribbles on his problem, and when her hand moves there are arrows around the printed text. “This number,” around, “to the power of this number,” around, “equals this number.”

“Huh,” says Peter. His teacher had explained it the same way, but when Wanda does it, it sticks. “Yeah, that — that makes sense.”

“Try this one.” She taps his first problem. Heaving a sigh, he takes the pencil and considers the question.

“Three?”

Wanda beams. “Exactly right. Now write it like a regular equation — two cubed equals eight.”

Peter does this. Something about the arrows Wanda drew makes him feel like his handwriting should be better. He works hard at making it look nicer.

“If you rearrange this equation and add the word log, it will be exactly the same,” Wanda tells him.

“So this part of the logarithm is called the base. That is the number you're multiplying. And this one is called the parent — the number you are trying to get. So the question is always, base to the power of what equals parent?”

“Two to the power of three is eight,” Peter tests.

“Right. Like that. Here, skip these for a moment. Are you familiar with the common and natural logs?”

Jesus.

Peter shakes his head no.

“A common log means that a logarithm is written with an implied base of 10. It is not explicitly written, usually, so it looks like...this.” She points, and the problem reads log100=x. Peter gets the point. Wanda continues, “Write this down: if the log has no specified base, the base is ten. That is the default base for any logarithmic problem.”

Peter’s head starts to hurt. He obediently copies down Wanda’s lesson.

“Do you understand?” Surprisingly, she sounds patient, understanding. Peter glances over at her and his resolve strengthens.

“Yeah, I'm good. I got this. I'm listening.”

Wanda smiles with all her teeth.

- 

He's scratching out answers while Wanda sits idly by, scrolling on her phone through social media.

After he answers log 4 64=x (the answer is three, but Peter still thinks the whole system is bullshit), he puts his pencil down.

Wanda looks up. “Finished?”

“No, I just...where did you learn this stuff?” He scrunches his nose. “No offense. It's just kind of...complicated. And I sorta thought you...”

“That my early life did not leave room for formal education,” Wanda finishes dryly. She quirks a smile at him, which makes him feel better about underestimating her. “It's fine. I am not offended. When I was younger...” She swallows, smiles more weakly. “Pietro and I, we would stay in many different places after our parents...and before Hydra. Often we would end up in libraries — they did not turn us away. The nature of libraries is kindness.”

Peter starts to wonder if he should maybe prepare some tissues.

“I could not read very well, and Pietro neither,” Wanda continues. Her eyes have a faraway look. “So we read the books that had mostly numbers. It made sense to us both, much more than any language did. Numbers just were, no matter what.” She shrugs. “So we read books upon books and taught ourselves math. Pietro was a bit slower. I liked to help him with the hard problems. It made me feel useful.”

Peter realizes, like a bucket of water to the face, that Wanda is not only remembering; she's comparing.
He is Pietro, today. He's the one who's worse at math, the one who needs Wanda's help. It doesn't help that Pietro is literally Peter in Italian. Wanda is reliving her past. Peter's just a cast member.

“You're being super helpful to me,” he assures her, and her eyes seem to zoom back in to the reality around her. “Obviously all that math reading paid off.”

Wanda chuckles. “It was boring, but I did not know it when I was reading it.”

“You want some good books?” Peter offers. “I mean, now that you're, you know, literate? And not...on the run?”

If nothing else, Peter likes to think he has good taste in books. He likes to read, likes to form opinions, to immerse himself in fiction. MJ tells him he should have a more critical viewpoint of literature nowadays, but sometimes all he wants is to curl up with a good novel about robots. It occurs to him that Wanda might not exactly appreciate his taste in books. Maybe he should ask MJ.

Wanda points at his worksheet, and Peter groans. “Homework first,” she instructs over Peter’s protests. “Homework, then restaurant. And then…” She scans the contents of his room and then her gaze falls back onto him. “If you would recommend some books, I would like that very much.”

Peter feels distinctly like he's somehow acquired an older sister.

It doesn't suck.

Chapter End Notes

is Peter Parker good at math? canonically, yeah, almost definitely. but unfortunately for you guys, i am NOT good at math, and therefore i am making him pretend to be bad at it so that i can feel better about myself.
also i am not sure you learn logs in precalc but i seem to remember doing them in the beginning of the year so my canon explanation is they're reviewing and that's the tea.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

The door shuts, and Peter is alone. He glances sideways at the beaker a few tables away. Then he looks around quickly. Definitely alone. Well, alone except for him and JARVIS.

“Hey, J,” he says cautiously. “How, uh, how dangerous is that solution?”

“At the moment, it is technically neutral. However, I would strongly advise against touching it. Sir is very particular about his work.”

“Yeah yeah, sure,” he says. “And should I, you know, wear safety goggles?”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Peter actually likes Dr. Banner a lot. And he likes Mr. Stark, too, a lot. And the fact that he even gets to work near them is a dream his five-year-old self would have laughed at the reality of.

So he's grateful, he absolutely is, it's just.

Sometimes they won't stop bickering.

Currently:

“You think I got my PhD in, in, in making stuff up, Tony?”

“No, it just seems to me like you don't really understand what's happening on this table, and it's something you should —”

“You're so full of it! You learned about biochemistry on a whim!”

“At least I'm not the kind of idiot who thought this would work!”

Peter groans.

Mr. Stark immediately looks over at Peter, and then back at Dr. Banner. “See what you did? You made the kid cry.”

Peter frowns. “I'm not crying!”

Dr. Banner glares at Mr. Stark, then turns to Peter. “Sorry,” he says. “Tony and I are just…”

“No, it's cool,” Peter says quickly. “I just, I think maybe arguing...isn't...going to help?”

Mr. Stark tosses a rag at Peter. He catches it, confused. “What he said. Stop arguing and just accept that I was right and you were wrong. ”

Dr. Banner splutters, scoffs, and then throws his hands up. “You are unbelievable, Stark,” he says, which is how Peter knows they're about to take a break. Whenever Dr. Banner calls him Stark, it's time to cool off.
All things considered, it's a good thing no one's Hulked out. Peter will have to compliment him later on his control over the Other Guy.

Mr. Stark rolls his eyes. “Fine, take five,” he says. “Pete, don't stop on our account. Brucie and I are gonna cool off. Just a lovers’ spat. Don't sweat it.”

Peter swallows back several witty retorts. “I'm good,” he answers.

His AP Chem work is looking less and less appealing by the second. Mr. Stark retreats to probably go fuck around in his workshop, and Dr. Banner nods apologetically in Peter’s direction before leaving the room.

The door shuts, and Peter is alone.

He glances sideways at the beaker a few tables away. Then he looks around quickly. Definitely alone. Well, alone except for him and JARVIS.

“Hey, J,” he says cautiously. “How, uh, how dangerous is that solution?”

“At the moment, it is technically neutral. However, I would strongly advise against touching it. Sir is very particular about his work.”

“Yeah yeah, sure,” he says. “And should I, you know, wear safety goggles?”

“You should wear safety goggles whenever performing any manner of chemical experiment,” JARVIS says. “Might I stress again the —”

Well, look,” Peter cuts in. “I mean, maybe they were too worked up to...you know, actually figure it out. What the heck is this?” He approaches, careful, and grabs a pair of safety goggles from a table as he goes.

JARVIS seems to hesitate before replying. “Sir and Dr. Banner are currently attempting to engineer a painkiller that will work effectively on enhanced beings such as Captain Rogers, or yourself.”

“Seriously?” Peter raises his eyebrows. “That's what all the fuss is about? Jeez.”

“Dr. Banner suggested adding an opioid, and Sir seemed to find that this would not have the desired effect.”

“Why not?”

“They are seeking a way to decrease pain, not a way to nullify it,” JARVIS says. Peter tilts his head, thinking.

“Right. Opioids are like liars, right? They’re like ‘yeah, you’re fine, nothing to see here.’ And NSAIDs are the ones who actually do the work.”

“A very inspired and concise definition, yes,” JARVIS says. Peter almost detects praise. Which is silly — JARVIS isn’t really capable of praise — but if he were, this would be that.

One glance towards his homework solidifies his resolve. “Fuck that,” he mutters. “Alright, uh, let’s see. Okay, so what’s in this?”

When JARVIS says warningly, “Mr. Parker, Sir is on his way to the lab,” Peter jolts upright so fast
his elbow nearly knocks a pair of tongs off the tabletop.

“Shit! Uh, okay, um, I’m not doing anything wrong,” he mutters to himself. “Mr. Stark said to make myself comfortable or some shit like that.”

He’s still mumbling reassurances to himself when the door swings open.

Mr. Stark stands, framed in the doorway by the light from outside the room, and raises his eyebrows. “Whatcha doin’, kiddo? Messing with my toys?”

“N-no, Mr. Stark, I wouldn’t dream of it, I mean, this is your work, I’m sure it’s really, you know...top secret, confidential stuff,” Peter babbles. “Just, I’m just mixing some web fluid. You know. Staying on top of my game.”

Mr. Stark squints at Peter. “You’re lying.”

Peter makes to disagree, but then Mr. Stark says, “If you won’t tell me, JARVIS will. Hey, look. I’m not mad. Okay? If I didn’t want you to see it I wouldn’t be working on it in here, I’m not a Bond villain.”

Fair enough.

“It’s your work, Mr. Stark,” Peter says, cheeks reddening in shame.

Mr. Stark waves a hand at him and blows air through his mouth dismissively. “Eh, mine, yours, Banner’s, who cares. None of us have it figured out yet, what’s the difference? Forget it. How’s your homework coming?”

Yeah, I haven’t done any of it.

“I…” Peter pauses. “I think I found a solution to your problem?"

“They’re your problems, genius, it’s your homework, not mine.”

“Not that. The, the painkiller.” Peter tries for a harmless look, like, who, me? I’m just a kid from Queens. I don’t want no trouble. It comes out like a grimace, but oh well.

Mr. Stark stares at him for too long, and then scoffs. “That’s cute. You had me going. Come on, hop to it.” He gestures towards the other table, where Peter’s neglected homework may as well be collecting dust.

Peter sighs. “I wasn’t trying to mess up your stuff or anything, Mr. Stark, I swear. I just, I was listening to you and Dr. Banner argue —”

“Tony, hey,” Dr. Banner says, as the door opens and he walks in. “Look, that was...let’s start over, alright? I had an idea, here.”

“Wait, Dr. Banner.” Holding Mr. Stark’s attention is hard enough. “Just — okay, look. I was listening to you and Mr. Stark arguing and I remembered what Aunt May tells me a lot, which is if you go in expecting to fail, you will.”

“I think that’s a samurai thing,” Mr. Stark murmurs, but finally, his attention is at least on Peter alone. So Peter takes a breath and goes on.

“I was thinking since you two were really going at it that maybe you just weren’t really expecting to actually...succeed? Like maybe there was a really obvious solution that you were missing.”
“Peter,” Dr. Banner says gently, “this isn’t just grade-level chemistry, you know. This is —”

“I know, Dr. Banner, will you just listen?” Jesus Christ, scientists are hard to deal with. Peter crosses over to the lab table with the painkiller formula. “After you guys left I tried to, uh, well, help. I guess. Look. Ibuprofen inhibits prostaglandin synthesis, right? And that works fine on a normal human, so all you have to do is essentially just make a stronger ibuprofen. Like ibuprofen bass-boosted.”

“Yeah, but too many doses can be lethal,” Mr. Stark interjects. “We tried that.”

“That’s not what I’m saying. Ibuprofen — iso-butyl-propanoic-phenolic acid — is a chiral molecule. So it has an optical isomer. There’s S+ and R-. Right, Dr. Banner?”

Dr. Banner’s eyes widen, and Peter hears angels sing.

“Wait,” he says, but Peter is not waiting now when he’s on such a roll.

“S+ does what ibuprofen is supposed to — it suppresses prostaglandin synthesis. But R- doesn’t, and over-the-counter ibuprofen, the regular kind, is sold as a mix of both. Because humans have an enzyme that converts the R- to the S+ to make it work.”

One day, Peter will tell his kids, I still remember what it felt like to have the captivated attention of two grown-ass men: one of the world’s leading scientists, and one of the greatest engineers known to man. Unfortunately, at the moment, he’s a little caught up. He lifts up the beaker he’d been using. “I thought maybe, if you could synthesize ibuprofen exactly the same but instead of half S+ and half R- you just made the whole thing S+ —”

“Holy fuck,” Mr. Stark mutters.

“So I had JARVIS run it through that science simulation and he said it would work. He said it would work, Mr. Stark, Dr. Banner. Here, punch me. Really hard.”

“What?”

He’s lost them.

“Punch me,” he says impatiently. “If you punch me really, really hard, enough that it’ll hurt and bruise, we can test out the formula. I made it, see? I wore goggles, though, don’t worry.”

“I’m not — what the hell, Pete, I’m not gonna punch you,” Mr. Stark says. “Just be quiet, okay? For a minute.”

“But I —”

“Yeah, good work. I need to go over this. We need to go over this. JARVIS, run this for me.”

Peter rolls his eyes but falls silent. He sits on a rejected bench, leaning against the wall and watching the two men analyze the formula.

He knows it will work. He can feel it, the way he feels his Spidey-sense when someone’s coming.

“I must confess I did not expect Mr. Parker to come up with such an apt solution when the two of you were unsuccessful, but I ran the compound several times upon his request. Theoretically, it ought to be effective on most enhanced beings. It is possible that certain individuals, such as the Hulk, may require a more particularly engineered formula, but for the Captain, my tests have all confirmed that it would have the desired effect.”
Peter does a miniature fist pump.

Dr. Banner gives a sort of involuntary head jerk towards where Peter is sitting, and Peter smiles hesitantly when their eyes meet.

“You really solved this,” Dr. Banner says, as if to confirm.

Peter nods. “I wasn’t trying to show you up,” he adds, hastily. “You’re one of the most brilliant scientists in the world, Dr. Banner, your picture is up in our science lab —”

“It is?”

“Look, please don’t...please don’t be mad. I just wanted to help.”

Finally Mr. Stark turns on his heels, and he has an expression on his face Peter doesn’t recognize.

“Kid. Stop downplaying this. This is some next-level chemistry. Way more advanced than whatever BS biology you’re doing.”

“AP Chemistry.”

“You know what I meant.” Mr. Stark approaches and says, “Stand up.”

Peter wonders if he’s about to be punched really hard. Mr. Stark has a tendency for trial and error, and the only enhanced being present that wouldn’t accidentally level the room is him.

He gets to his feet.

“Bruce, hand me, uh, something sword-shaped.”

“What? This is a science lab, Tony.”

“Just — something long! And sort of straight!”

“What are you — like a fireplace poker?”

“Do we have one of those in here?”

“No, Tony, this is a science lab!”

“Fine, whatever. Forget it.”

“I don’t understand —”

“I said forget it, Brucie. Would you — ? I’m trying to have a moment with the kid here, okay. Just stand next to me.”

Peter squints.

Dr. Banner gives a heavy sigh and steps forward until he’s shoulder-to-shoulder with Peter. Peter tries to convey a questioning look, but it doesn’t go through.

“Okay, kiddo,” Mr. Stark says. He takes his hand and taps it on Peter’s right shoulder, then his left, and then the top of his head. “You’re officially a science bro.”

“Did you just knight him?” Bruce says.

“Did you just knight me?” Peter echoes.
Mr. Stark glares. “I said, you’re officially a science bro. I think you’ve more than proven yourself worthy, wouldn’t you agree, Doctor?”

Dr. Banner nods emphatically. “This was really, really impressive work,” he says. “I don’t even know how you learned so much about painkillers.”

“I like to read science journals,” Peter says, blushing.

“And that is why you are now a part of this awesome club.” Mr. Stark claps him on the shoulder. “Really great work, kid. But you still gotta keep your grades up.” He points at the discarded homework.

Peter groans epically. “Can’t I just turn in the formula and see if my teacher will give me an A for the year?”

Dr. Banner laughs. “I’d like to see that, but no, you definitely have to do your homework.”

“Fine,” Peter huffs. He points accusingly. “But just for the record, I totally just helped you guys with your homework.”

Chapter End Notes

tony stark: nerd elite tm.

End Notes

thank you for reading! i’m on tumblr @vivilevone where you can find me to discuss all things Peter Parker, because he is a king and I adore him. leave a comment if you liked it! or if you didn’t! and i will catch you all later!

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