Summary

He scratched desperately at the hand pinning his throat, to no avail. What made him fight harder was that the grip wasn’t constricting - merely a method of holding him still as he was examined. The measured gaze made his skin crawl, and the unreadable expression in the piercing eyes was definitely not good news whatever it meant. Without his mask, Peter felt even more like a bug under a microscope; the barrier that made him Spiderman was gone, leaving only the unshielded Peter Parker.

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Or: During the battle on Titan, Thanos sees potential in Peter and takes him.

Notes

Tbh I wrote most of the initial draft whilst on the train home a little tipsy from a christmas themed June barbecue. It has since been soberly edited.
I also haven't written fanfic in yeeaars, the last time being in my early teens – now I'm in my 20s and hopefully a better writer, but who knows.

See the end of the work for more notes
Chapter 1

Bug lady, safe - muscly alien dude, safe - Footloose guy, safe-

One by one, Peter reached for the Guardians, stringing them up out of harm's way; flaming meteors and chunks of falling rock surrounded them in a seemingly endless rain - even his mask was having difficulty filtering out the dust and ash that was steadily obscuring his vision.

Where the hell were Tony and the Wizard?

The spider-legs of his suit - which he still couldn’t decide were either creepy or awesome - were gripping tightly to what he assumed were the remains of the space donut, but he didn’t care to find out for sure, as it worked as a high vantage point to scan the battleground. There was so much destruction everywhere. Beams of smouldering metal crashed to the ground like crumbling obelisks, and he could feel a familiar tightness in his chest as he tried desperately not to think about it’s weight crushing him-

He closed his eyes. Inhaled a shaky breath, in through the nose, out through the mouth.

Not now.

This was too important.

Mr Stark was somewhere out there, and by the sounds emanating from the clearing ahead, the battle was far from over. Peter checked on the webbed Guardians for the last time, they seemed a while from waking but shouldn’t be at risk for the time being, and swung towards the noise of battle. He landed as softly as he could, heeding the warning of his continuously prickling spider-sense, and crept with as much haste as he could without giving away his advantage of surprise.

The scene before him made his heart stop.

The three figures were in varying degrees of health; Dr Strange was on the ground, using his remaining strength to hold himself upright, leaning on the rock-face behind him, watching the proceedings with sorrowful, exhausted eyes. Tony was clearly holding onto the last scraps of his energy in vain – having descended to the floor, his bare hand was applying pressure to a stream of blood flowing from his side-

Oh god- no, no, no, no, no-

To Peter’s horror, Thanos towered over them, gauntlet held aloft, and five glinting gems reflecting the waning light of the sun.

He froze. Five.

The world slowed to a stand still. All Peter could do was watch as their enemy savoured his victory, examining the new prize as it’s power coursed through him.

“One to go.”

The statement was the spark that ignited the fire of anger and fear that rose inside him, overpowering any caution he had like a tidal wave. Instinct fuelled his path through the rocks and debris, sprinting full pelt and not stopping until his arms circled Tony’s shoulders - doing his best to avoid the blood coursing from the stab wound - and, the suit legs curled around them like a protective shell, rolled
them both out of Thanos' shadow. His momentum brought them skidding a few yards away, covered in dust and blood, his heart pounding hard in his chest and both his and Tony’s breathing ragged.

“M-Mr Stark, are you alright?”

At any other time he would have slapped himself because of how dumb that question was.

The other man was clearly not alright - having apparently lost the ability to keep standing, he’d remained on the floor, but had pushed through the pain into a kneel; what little remained of the Iron Man suit seemed to be shifting as the nanites were redirected to cover Tony’s wound that was still seeping scarlet onto the dusty ground.

"Kid... Go- get out of here, now-” a gut wrenching cough cut him off, a trail of blood trickling from his mouth to match bloodshot eyes. Peter took only a moment to look into his mentor’s eyes - which he didn’t notice before now looked remarkably like his own - before he turned towards the heavy footsteps he could hear approaching from behind.

The calm, contemplative expression on Thanos’ face was somehow even more terrifying than the fury he’d shown during the battle.

Peter tried to keep his breathing steady - knowing full well that he was the last Avenger standing. His shaking breath slowed to a measured pace, knowing all eyes – and all hope – was on him at that moment. He had to try, he owed his mentor that much. The amount of times Tony had been there for him, helped him, saved him, was beyond counting - and it was time Peter returned the favour.

Quick as a whip, he shot a series of webs in succession, all aimed at the gauntlet in hopes that it would at least buy him a few seconds before Thanos could use it.

It was futile.

Peter managed to dodge one of the hits sent his way, but a large hand gripped one of the metal legs still arched around him protectively and pulled him off balance. With a terrible crunching sound, it was ripped from the suit in a shower of sparks and splintered metal. In a single movement he was thrown onto his back, the lenses of the suit dilating rapidly as he squinted into the sun temporarily blinding him. A silhouette cut through the light, followed by a hand with at least double Peter’s strength that grasped the top of his head, tearing his mask apart and taking quite a large portion of hair with it. Eyes watering with pain, he attempted another roll but was halted by the unyielding hand now anchoring him to the ground.

“You have strength - for a child.”

He scratched desperately at the hand pinning his throat, to no avail. What made him fight harder was that the grip wasn’t constricting - merely a method of holding him still as he was examined. The measured gaze made his skin crawl, and the unreadable expression in the piercing eyes was definitely not good news whatever it meant. Without his mask, Peter felt even more like a bug under a microscope; the barrier that made him Spiderman was gone, leaving only the unshielded Peter Parker.

“You are different from the others.” Thanos’ tone remained calm and even, as if the prior battle hadn’t effected him whatsoever. “What are you?”

He stayed resolutely silent. He wouldn’t give this monster the satisfaction.

The slight frown in response felt like ice down Peter's spine, and he renewed his efforts to free himself even as the grip on him tightened and he was lifted from the ground. His brain was working
a mile a minute, trying to come up with any solution – his hands were now occupied with pushing at the inexorable grip in an attempt to stave off suffocation.

“Think of this as a trade, Stark. You killed one of my children, now I’m taking yours.”

His heart stopped. This couldn't be happening- just this morning he was on the bus, chatting with Ned about random topics, with MJ in the seat behind them pretending she wasn't listening to their conversation... It all seemed so trivial and unimportant now. But he wished with all his heart he could just go back to that moment and just stayed on the bus.

“You should be honoured - with me he’ll do great things, maintaining order in a grateful universe.”

Peter barely heard Tony’s yell before he was engulfed in blue light.
Holy shit, I am so overwhelmed by the awesome response this fic got! :D thanks to all who commented, feedback means the world to me, and I’m so glad people want me to continue - and so far I’ve planned out most of the fic, and duuuuuuudes I am hyped
Sorry this took so long, tbh I completely rewrote the entire thing – and for the first chapter I was working on it for a good few weeks, so this is the fastest I’ve ever written something
Here we go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was a long time before anyone spoke. The dust had long since settled, and Stephen Strange had brought himself shakily and slowly to his feet; wary of any signs of concussion, he took the few yards between him and Tony with careful precision - the battle had no doubt taken a toll on them all, and it would be arrogant to think he would be an exception.

In the distance, he could vaguely hear the Guardians gathering themselves, checking for injuries and spouting speculation about what they missed.

Stark was still staring at the spot Thanos had vanished with the boy. The nanites of his suit were still rippling, circulating around the wound that the man himself seemed to have forgotten about. His expression was unnervingly blank – the only emotion visibly shown being the searing wrath in his eyes.

“Why didn’t you do anything?”

It was barely a whisper, but in the quiet, barren landscape of Titan he heard it clear as day. He paused in his tracks – he knew that nothing could stop Stark's fury at this point, but he still needed to make him understand.

“You and your fucking ‘infinite wisdom’ - You knew this would happen.”

“I knew this could happen, there was no certainty-“

“Bullshit.”

Stark turned away, rising shakily to his feet, and walking towards where the torn remains of a mask lay, the scarlet almost completely obscured by dust and rubble.

Out of all he'd seen whilst using the Time Stone, this made things infinitely more complicated – but it also gave Stark motivation. Stephen knew very little of the relationship the man and boy shared, but the possible futures showed that it was imperative for the events to come.

He just hoped that this was the timeline that Peter Parker survived.
The room was dim, only just light enough for Peter to see the door that had remained impenetrable despite his best efforts; No matter how much he hit, it had remained unmarked and unaffected. He’d tried finding a lock, hinges, or any type of electrical panel - but there was nothing in the room but four blank metal walls lined with small lights near the ceiling. Climbing up to try and pry the lights out in an attempt to reach the wiring proved useless as well, only resulting in sore fingertips and substantially less energy than before.

When he’d first been pushed into the small cell – he could have been there for hours, but his sense of time had abandoned him a while ago – he had reflexively wanted to put as much distance between him and Thanos as possible, inadvertently moving further into the room. Looking back in retrospect, it was probably not the best idea he’d ever had - but facing his captor head-on seemed to be the only way of regaining any control of his situation despite looking directly into the measured expression being the very last thing he wanted to do.

*It was what Tony would have done.*

In fact, his mentor probably would have spouted some sarcastic rebuttal – probably a quip about the room’s décor – but facing him with his head high was just about all Peter could manage at that moment.

“Once I have the last stone, I will return. Then we shall-”

“You're not going to win.”

The words were out his mouth before he could reconsider them, his heart hammering fast against his ribs and adrenaline clouding his mental restraint. His gut twisted into knots when Thanos smirked in response.

“You have a lot to learn, young one.”

There was a brief pause along with a slight narrowing of his eyes – a moment of consideration that Peter couldn’t begin to comprehend - before he turned and exited back through the doorway, letting it slide closed, leaving him in the semi-darkness.

Once his escape attempts had been exhausted, he surveyed the state of his suit – what remained of it anyway; his mask was long gone along with any chance of contacting the others, and a smouldering tear across his back marked where one of the metal legs had been unceremoniously ripped from him with the ease of pulling wings off an insect. Luckily, that seemed to be the extent of the damage. His web shooters were in working order, although they too seemed to be of no help getting out. The entire situation seemed orchestrated to reinforce his defeat. Leaving him with the web shooters was no doubt a way of letting him know, that even with his weapons that had saved him countless times in the past, they would be of no help.

He leaned back against the cold metal wall – the only productive action he could do was to rest as much as he could. There was no telling when the door would open again, or even if it would at all. A small, pessimistic part of his brain reminded him that *there was a chance that no one would come.* That thought was quickly hoisted to the wayside. He shouldn’t be selfish – if Thanos never came back, then it meant *they won.* He would be defeated, half the life in the universe would be saved, and Peter would die happy knowing he helped bring him to an end.

A noise from outside brought him harshly out of his reverie. He sprung to his feet, no clue at all of *what to do;* the room was far too small for an ambush, not to mention that Thanos would be
expecting a certain amount of resistance – so the element of surprise was non-existent. A flickering ember of hope in his heart wished for the door to burst open to reveal Tony – perhaps accompanied by the Wizard or the Guardians – alive, with a tale of Thanos' defeat and a ship to take him home.

When the door finally opened, the ember was extinguished.

Thanos' silhouette blocked most of the light from the corridor beyond.

This was the hit that destroyed Peter's resolve. His legs completely gave out beneath him, and he slid down the wall behind him.

If Thanos was here, it could only mean one thing.

*They'd lost.*

The room seemed smaller than ever – a claustrophobic suffocation pressing around him from all sides, the imposing figure in the doorway only adding weight to the undeniable truth. His lungs didn't seem to be taking in enough air, what little oxygen they could get burning his throat – his mind stuck on a loop questioning *how it could have happened*-

He didn't even notice when Thanos breached the room's threshold, closing off what little space there was left in the already limited cell.

“*It'll become easier. Now the universe is balanced, as it always should have been.*”

Peter swung at him as hard as he possibly could.

It didn't make an iota of difference; his arm was caught with ease, and quickly held in a firm grip – not with an intention to harm him, but just enough strength to convey that Thanos was in complete control of the situation. Desperately striking with his other fist, he managed to collide with an armoured shoulder. Agony radiated from the point of impact, and by the alarming snapping sound he wouldn't be surprised if he'd broken his fingers – but at that moment he didn't care; All he wanted to do was to inflict as much *pain* as he could.

The six stones - gleaming from amidst the now twisted, blackened metal - came alight with a twitch of Thanos' fingers.

A vice-like pressure gripped Peter's entire body; ceasing his fighting, and he couldn't even make himself blink, eyes stuck staring at the monster steadily approaching him.

“You will calm yourself.”

Peter didn't try to hide the hatred that burned in his eyes.

With only a look of marginal disappointment, there was another flash from the stones in his peripheral vision. It took a moment to realise what he had done, but the fresh rush of panic was soon suppressed by a wave of *something*. It was almost indescribable; he could still string thoughts together, but they were... subdued. A fine layer of fog, just clear enough to find a path through but not enough to find clarity. Emotions were still in battle beneath his skin, but couldn't quite reach the surface.

“You will calm yourself.”

As if tethered by unrelenting cords, he could do nothing but follow in Thanos' wake. Multiple times he tried stopping, perhaps in search for an exit he hoped would conveniently materialise, but each
time he did his body betrayed him.

He was led down the corridor he caught a glimpse of earlier, the tall ceilings reminiscent of a church or a castle – only with a harsh, metallic cold that seeped into his bones.

The hall beyond was as imposing as it was vast; from what he could surmise by the distant ambient hum, they were certainly on a spaceship – a fact that would have immensely interested Peter, given any other situation – and seeing the grand chair on a raised dais in the centre of the room, he guessed this was the 'throne room' of sorts.

*More of a room to stroke Thanos' ego.*

The sight that lay on the opposite side of the room confirmed his theories; the wall was comprised entirely of a gargantuan window, gazing out onto the endless expanse of deep space. He'd overcome the initial shock of *'Holy shit, I'm actually in space'* during their time on the commandeered Space-Donut, but he didn't think he'd ever get over how terrifyingly boundless it was – he tore his eyes away. It felt like a lot longer than a few hours ago. The sight only emphasised how out of his element he was. There was no way to tell *where* in the galaxy they were – and even if he did somehow find out, he knew it would be next to impossible to locate Earth.

Rather than taking a seat in the chair as expected, Thanos instead settled on one of the dais stairs. The thought of attempting another escape flitted across his mind, only to be quelled by the power of the gauntlet as a firm, unyielding pressure on his shoulders forced him to follow the beckoning hand that pulled on the invisible strings, and he had no choice but to join him on the cold step.

The inspecting stare had returned, and Peter adamantly looked back.

“Peter... That was what Stark called you.”

Hearing his name said it the composed, at-ease tone was like being immersed in icy water. The well maintained wall separating his two lives was crumbling apart, and he could only sit by and watch. The fact that *Thanos knew his name* – something even some of the Avengers didn't know...

He focused on keeping his breathing steady. Finding *any* way out of there would require a clear head, but the unshakable cloud still muffled his mind; try as he might to form any kind of plan, his thoughts became tangled – so muddled that he could only focus on his current circumstance. Peter found his eyes drawn to the gauntlet.

*If he could find a way to get it, use it – even just one of the stones...*

“Superior beings to you have attempted holding the stones, they did not survive and nor would you.”

The blunt candour of the statement was yet another nail in the coffin that was rapidly closing around him.

“There will be a time when this won't be needed.” He examined the formerly burnished metal with a relaxed interest, the burnt gold now melted, warped and seemingly irremovable.

Thanos seemed to take Peter's determined silence in his stride.

“Your skills in battle are admirable, but I sensed... restraint. Stark saw your power, but instead of letting you fulfil your potential, he held you back.”

The anger inside reached a boiling point – surfacing from *whatever* the stone was doing to his mind - and this time he managed to get half way to his feet, fist clenched in preparation for a hit, before the
enveloping control of the gauntlet took over, returning him to his place.

Thanos merely continued as if nothing had happened., unphased by the one-sided nature of the conversation

“My other children before you all resisted, and they all learned in time. You have Stark's spirit, but your life before now is done. As I told him, with me you will do great things.”

“No.”

Peter spoke quietly but resolutely. His mentor's name sparking alight the ember in his chest once more. He would not just roll over like he was expected to – regardless of the apparently unlimited power his enemy possessed.

Villains were supposed to be fuelled by anger and violence, the reserved way Peter was being spoken down to – like a child – was a jarring contradiction. All the villains that he'd faced and heard about prior had been fuelled by their own personal mission – be it money, power, or revenge – but the hero’s goal was always the same: keep the bad guy from getting what he wanted. Peter would do the same.

*It was what Tony would have done.*

“I wont be another one of your children.” The word was laced with venom, Peter's now unwavering eyes – although shining with unshed tears he refused to let fall – fixed on Thanos'.

An almost undecipherable expression passed fleetingly across the latter's face – but still no anger, just ever enduring patience. He rose to his feet, a motion of his hand refastening the invisible force that forced Peter to follow.

“Come, it's time to test what you are capable of.”

Chapter End Notes

As much as I wanna rush into the good angsty stuff, it’s gotta start slow for development’s sake - but I promise things will start happening soon :P

Tbh I’m not as pleased with this chapter as the first, but now that uni is over I can dedicate more time to it, so just hold on - it'll get better I promise!

I’m planning of updating this at least once a week, maybe more - and lemme know what you think!
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Hi again people!
I am SO sorry for the delay - but this'll be the last time I'll run late cos ya boi's got a schedule now! … also I've got the week off and nothing better to do.

The chapter is also longer than the others, so hopefully that makes up for it somewhat :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The scratching at the door would probably haunt his nightmares for the rest of his life. Sounds of razor sharp claws digging at the metal began to trigger some fight-or-flight response whenever he was taken to the ‘training room’.

*Less of a training room, more like being thrown into a den of lions.*

The door in question stood at the end of what could only be described as a pit, behind which dwelt the horrors that Thanos had referred to as the Outriders; With seemingly no mind of their own, the conglomeration of limbs, talons, and teeth held together with dark, cracked skin, fought with a ferocity that was absolutely relentless. It also appeared to be their only purpose, to wait behind the door until it was time to tear something to shreds.

Each fight brought with it more challenges than the last. Sometimes it was a basic one-on-one, as it had been to begin with.

Peter had been unceremoniously thrown into the arena, which was he guessed was around half the length of an Olympic sized pool, he was given only a few seconds before the door opened.

The beast had knocked him down hard to the floor before he could even process what it was. The instinctual part of him took over, and he shoved with all his strength – propelling the thing backwards a few metres so he could get a look-

*Oh god, that's far too many arms.*

Barely a second passed before he had been accosted again, one set of arms colliding with his chest and the nails digging into his shoulder; Peter used it's momentum to his advantage, twisting to the side before the claws could draw blood, sending the creature careening off balance. It had recovered almost instantly however, spitting and snarling through sharp fangs bared and hissing strings of spittle. He had no idea where it's eyes were – if it even had any – so he resorted to sending rapid shots from his web shooter at it's face. It had reeled back, tearing at it's own flesh. Another couple shots hit their mark, these aimed at it's legs and effectively anchoring it to the floor. It roared in fury, taking a swipe at him that barely missed – it's strength proving a challenge for the webs to contain, straining them to capacity.

He didn't want to *kill it*, no matter how murderous the creature seemed to be – that was definitely a last resort. Throwing caution to the winds, he had dodged yet another strike and circled around it; a well placed kick had brought it crashing to the floor, but before it could rise again it was pinned with more webs – leaving it writhing like a rabid animal caught in a net.
Despite himself, he had looked up to where Thanos was watching from above; as expected, the expression on his face was still undecipherable.

He had only gestured with the gauntlet – the ragged snarls reaching a cacophony as another was brought forward.

_Each day had been the same._

Peter had no idea how long it’d had been; his rough estimate was just a bit more than a week, but with no visible daylight cycle the best he could do was count his moments of ‘rest’ - if he could even call it that. What brief time he was allowed by himself was in a blank room not very much bigger than the other cell – only this time being granted facilities along with an uncomfortable slab that jutted perpendicular from the wall that acted as a bed. The lack of escape routes persisted.

The light hairs on his arms stood on end – _danger_ – his sense screamed, but he quelled the reaction as best he could, as he'd taken to doing when he heard Thanos approaching from the hall beyond. He stood from his place on the slab, having learned the hard way not to refuse leaving.

As expected, the door slid open, and the familiar feeling of the gauntlet's power covered him like a shroud. Not restricting his movement, just a reminder that it could.

“You've been doing well.”

The words seemed to twist the knot that had perpetually settled in his stomach – and was only exacerbated when he was led out the door and guided _left_ instead of the usual right. The warm feeling that Tony's _'You did good, kid'_ evoked when they worked together in the lab felt like another life, so far removed from his current reality.

“Although you are still holding yourself back, you adapt to enemies well.”

Peter resisted the urge to scoff.

“Not that you gave me much of a choice.”

Thanos seemed to look almost wistfully into the middle distance, though still continuing the trek to _wherever_ they were headed.

“My daughter, Gamora, would have had a similar notion.”

_Gamora..._ He'd heard the name before; her death was what sent the Footloose guy off the rails – and he recalled that Thanos had been responsible-

“Why did you kill her?”

They stopped abruptly, and Peter's heart leapt into his throat – but he kept his breathing as steady as possible. He had endured _enough_. The stony silence he had adopted could only be held up so long – and the part of him that managed his common sense had clearly crumbled along with his self control.

“Don't talk of matters you don't understand.”

The expression was _definitely_ readable this time – the displeasure clear and a warning not to carry on. It wasn't heeded in the slightest.

“I understand you murdered her. Her getting away from you really put a wrench in your plans, I bet.”
Deep in his heart, Peter couldn’t help but feel a fiery satisfaction that he was finally causing some kind of reaction – at that moment not caring what consequences the future bore.

He wanted Thanos to feel as angry as he was.

It wasn't even thwarted when his body was seized by the recognisable suffocation of the stone's power tightening around him as Thanos rounded on him.

“Watch your words, boy. You wouldn't be able to comprehend the sacrifice I made, the price that had to be paid to ensure a universe in balance.”

It was Peter's turn to narrow his eyes. For the first time, it appeared that the wall had dropped – the emotion showing plainly in Thanos' stare was unshielded and evident. It was a look he'd seen before – in Aunt May remembering Uncle Ben, in Tony on the rare occasions he spoke of his parents – Pain. Loss. Mourning.

“What you felt wasn't love.”

He didn't quite know why he said it – and he knew the words were a mistake the moment they left his mouth. Agony like he'd never felt before radiated up and down his body, travelling through his veins and permeating his blood with a burning heat that made his vision blur. It stopped as quickly as it had begun, and he knew he'd be a heap on the floor if not for the gauntlet's influence.

“You know nothing.” The last word was a hiss through clenched teeth, before he turned away once more “There is much you need to learn... improvements that need to be made.”

The gauntlet flashed, and Peter's vision faded to white.

Tony wondered if the ship was supposed to creak so much. The droning of the engine was expected, but the intermittent groan of the protesting metal that he and Blue had hastily patched together was bringing his anxiety – usually hidden with a veil of bravado – to a steady simmer.

Seven days travelling through the expanse of space wasn't helping much either.

He'd run out of things to tinker with, making alterations to the ship only going so far before he was doing more harm than good. They were in flight with a working oxygen system, and that was more luck than they probably deserved.

After the portal in New York, Tony really hadn't wanted to be in space again – yet here he was, stuck in a tin bucket travelling at a snail's pace through a cosmic void. The sight of a dark abyss speckled with swirling stars would probably incite awe in anyone else, but it was taking all his strength not to remember the darkness, the pressure on his chest as he tried to breathe-- He closed his eyes and turned away from the window.

At least he wasn't alone this time.

Nebula was sat at the small table when he walked in, her posture twisted slightly as she picked at a
small metal panel on her left shoulder; the screwdriver-esque tool she wielded didn't appear to be doing the job – occasionally a small spark would shoot from the exposed machinery, taking the current down to where her hand twitched with each adjustment. She flicked her eyes up to meet his gaze briefly, but otherwise continued pulling at wires.

He watched her for a couple minutes, and she blatantly ignored him.

It was pretty much their routine at this point.

“Need a hand?”

Nebula glared at him, and he stifled a smirk.

“No.”

She carried on prying the circuits up with the tool, sending her fingers into spasm.

They had both taken damage from battle a week prior – his wound was on the mend, thanks to his nanites and a surprising amount of aid from Blue-And-Deadly – but she hadn't griped about her injuries whatsoever, preferring instead to seclude herself and did whatever she did to hold herself together, but this was the first he'd actually witnessed.

Throwing caution to the winds, he took the seat opposite her – extending a hand.

“Don't be stupid. I know you can do this yourself, but you don't have to.”

She paused and looked up again, which he took as a cue to continue.

“You're with one of the smartest people from Earth, and possibly one of the only people who might understand these cybernetics.”

There was at least a full minute of contemplation before she shoved the tool into his hand.

Smug grin plastered on his face, he pulled his chair across to her side of the table.

Tentatively leaning closer to examine her shoulder, he started working. It wasn't dissimilar to the technology he used for his recent Iron Man suits, only a lot more intricate. In another time, he could
see himself almost respecting Thanos for the intelligence of the machinery – if he hadn't torn Nebula apart to add it.

He desperately tried to stop his mind picturing the same thing happening to Peter.

The silence was becoming unbearable; they had been quiet for the most part, mainly talking about repairing the ship and their plan to get off Titan, but at least it was some social interaction on an otherwise lonely situation. She was staring resolutely at a spot on the wall, posture stiff, and clearly on edge at him being so close.

He couldn't help himself – never being one for impulse control.

“What did Thanos do to you?”

There was a slight, almost undecipherable change in her demeanour. She met his eyes again, and he wished he’d kept his mouth shut. Her eyes said more than she could have put into words – the large dark iris' filled with the kind of pain that tears had long stopped quelling years ago.

*Hardened.*

“What do you really want to know?”

It was his turn to avert his eyes.

Not talking about it was how he was coping. It was how he was still managing to string thoughts together – divorcing himself with the reality of what was happening had been the easiest way of dealing with watching powerlessly as Strange and the Guardians faded into nothing but flakes of ashes that now was mixed amongst Titan's dust.

However, he had to know all the information he could. If his past conflicts had taught him anything, it was that he needed *all the facts.*

Tony nodded.

Nebula shifted in her seat – her arm, despite panels still open to exposed wiring, had stopped it's twitching and was mostly repaired – and she faced him from across the table. As if magnetised, his eyes were constantly drawn back to the cybernetics; As complex as the tendons of a real arm, the metal shifted with apparent ease as she closed up each small hatch – leaving the limb solid and strong.

Nebula sensed his gaze, which didn't surprise him – he wasn't exactly being subtle.

“The enhancements were only part of it.”
Her voice was cold; it probably hurt to dwell on those memories, but at that moment Tony didn't care. He could feel guilty later.

"Thanos taught us to fight. To kill. To become his prized weapons that he could use for whatever cause he thought worthy."

Tony's stomach flipped – he remembered Peter balking at the 'Instant Kill Mode' he'd put in the suit, picturing his earnest face as he ranted and rambled at him one late night at the lab.

'I won't need a kill mode Mr Stark! Why would you even have that as an option? I'm the friendly neighbourhood Spiderman-'

It wouldn't come to that. Peter had a moral compass that rivalled Steve's - sometimes to an exasperating degree. He doubted Peter even squashed bugs.

"With each of his children he finds the best way to manipulate them... Exploiting weaknesses, insecurities." She wasn't looking at him – her thoughts somewhere else entirely, absent mindedly turning the screwdriver-tool over and over in her hands. "He pitted my sister and I against each other. I wanted to please him, make him proud." She placed the tool back on the table "Thanos made sure I never could."

He nodded in rumination, leaning back in his chair.

*It was emotional manipulation at it's finest; make a child chase the approval that would never be granted. A guaranteed follower.*

"Your son will not be the same if you get him back."

He blinked, taken aback. Despite himself, a short but humourless laugh left him.

"He- I'm not his father."

She was unfazed.

"It doesn't matter anyway. Don't expect the same boy back."
“Peter’s stronger than you know. He's not—”

“Don't be a fool.”

This shut him up quicker than if she flicked a switch. She stood abruptly, the chair breaking the silence with a harsh shriek across the floor. Nebula didn't look angry – *Not that it was especially easy to decipher her facial expressions* – just the tone of her voice suggesting she was tearing off the band aid that were the facts he had to come to terms with.

“He *will* be changed, Stark. You have no idea how practised he is at this – I wasn't the first, and if we don't stop him the boy certainly won't be the last. Thanos gave me my first cybernetics within the first *month*, and by the end of the year I would do anything he asked me to.”

She rounded the table, taking the opportunity to look him in the eyes once more.

“Don't underestimate him. Now that he has the stones, it'll be a whole lot easier.”

As she stalked off towards the cockpit, he was left reliving Thanos' parting words like a twisted mantra.

*You killed one of my children, now I'm taking yours.*

Chapter End Notes

Hope you liked this one, let me know what you think, all your feedback is amazing

Also, to make up for the delay I'll be releasing the next chapter within the next couple days!!
If I fail this can you guys feed me to the outriders please
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

… ok so feed me to the outriders, I failed the two day plan – but good news is that I passed my uni degree! Sorry I've been busy as f

Also, I've updated the tags, as I wanted to warn you all just in case there's some stuff you'd rather not read x

Just a word of caution: this is where shit gets a little messed up

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Impenetrable darkness didn't surprise Peter any more, but it certainly wasn't a welcome experience when his mind roused into an attempt at consciousness – not quite managing it however. It was as if he had been severed from his body, no way of telling down from up. No eyes to open or close, no hands to try and suss out what was happening, no mouth to call out or say anything that would break the isolating silence that was somehow too loud.

A pinprick of yellow light broke through the blackness, and as fast as he could rejoice, he wished for the darkness to return. It seeped into his skin, spreading tendrils through his capillaries like poison hijacking his bloodstream; It sent a sting through what felt like his brainstem – if he even had one in that space - a presence exploring and scalding all that it reached. The light grew with immeasurable speed, a swirling mass of power that convulsed like it was living-

“What you got there, kid?”

Peter almost leapt out of his skin, the palm-sized metal gadget cradled in his hands slipping as his fingers jerked – leaving him floundering and batting it about in attempts to regain a grip. A familiar, warm hand caught the web shooter easily before it tumbled to the floor, Tony Stark holding it aloft in his fingertips and squinting at it inquisitively.

“Did you use the coils from a titanium scalable class-G semiconductor to make the web-fluid casing?”

“Uhh, no- I mean, yes- Mr Stark, it worked so much better as a container to hold the electric webs – the old one always jolted me a little bit, plus there was one left over from when we worked on your suit and I just thought-”

“That's genius.”

He couldn't help the blood that flushed his cheeks – no matter how much time he spent with Tony, he didn't think he would ever get over the fact that Tony Stark thought he was smart.

“Though those 'left overs' were going to be used on the essential life support systems on my new suit, but I'm glad they're useful for something.”

The blood immediately drained from Peter's face and he looked up, stumbling over his words.
“Oh my god, Mr Stark I'm so sorry I had no idea-”

He stopped short when he saw the mischievous grin on the other man's face.

“You suck.” He couldn't help his growing smile in response “You were the one who left the stuff lying around.”

“Yeah, on my workstation where I put them. FRIDAY, remind me to nail everything down in future lest it be turned into a pair of spider-leggings.”

He placed the shooters back on the table that was littered with tools, wires, and loose screws.

“I'm glad it's getting some use – to be honest I'm surprised you made anything out of it. Now, you-” he pointed a finger at him, looking over his signature sunglasses in a manner that was clearly supposed to be parental. “Need to get home to your Aunt.”

Peter frowned, pulling back his sleeve – slightly singed from the small fire he may have caused (and contained!) earlier – revealing his watch that showed under partially cracked glass just how late he was. Getting from the Upstate compound to Queens would take a few hours at least, but if he left right away he'd arrive just before curfew.

“Happy's waiting for you outside, and you've gotta talk to May about her ban on sleepovers.”

Peter was snapped back to the empty space. He couldn't even raise his hands to block the ever increasing brightness – not that it would have done any good, his physical body was clearly of no use here – wherever here was. Unable to look away from it's epicentre, the yellow light was burning it's way into his core. He wanted to return to the memory more than he'd ever wished for anything in his life-

**The crushing disappointment in the words as Tony demanded the suit be returned. Peter's mind reeled with anger, shame – “People could have died tonight” ringing in his ears, the sting of failure hurting more than any injury ever could.**

“I just wanted to be like you.”

“...And I wanted you to be better.”

More memories, and the hurt was now pulling at his regrets as well as his nerve-endings. Each time he was dragged back to the light's void it was like emerging from a migraine-induced nightmare, only to be pulled back under by claws that raked through his entire being. He didn't have time to focus before-

“With great power comes great responsibility.”

The sound of a gunshot. Running across the street towards where Uncle Ben lay, the rain plastering his shirt to his body – the drops soon mixing with blood and tears.
Another flash, another shock of pain shooting into his brain. The light had reached a crescendo – he could feel it's heat everywhere, each coil of it's power gravitating towards his mind.

In the lunch hall with Ned, laughing together over some humorous quip, Peter sneaking a look at MJ who stood in the cafeteria line – he moved his bag off the seat beside him just in case she wanted to come over. He hoped she did.

It was all-encompassing. Unending. The flashes of the past, even the good ones which had previously brought solace, now stung with the regret that he should have stayed on the bus. He should never have gone on the school trip. He should never have got on that fucking space ship.

The crushing weight of solid concrete – pressing against his chest and preventing his lungs from expanding. Weakly calling for help but no one within earshot or what used to be the building.

A painful sob escaped his throat, which felt raw from screams that he figured must be coming from him.

He could only watch as Tony bled out, the scarlet pooling at his feet and mixing with Titan's dust. A wrenching cough brought more blood spattering onto the ground as his mentor's legs finally gave up and he sank to the floor. His face was pale, all the colour now seeping out through the wound still gaping in his side – each breath difficult to take in.

“You will watch as he dies, boy.”

Wait. This wasn't right. Thanos hadn't said-

The blade was still protruding from the torn flesh, red glistening in the waning sun that hung like a silent spectator over the carnage, staining the hands that attempted to stem the flow and pull out the jagged metal.

With one last shuddering gasp - one Peter could have sworn was punctuated with his whispered name - Tony fell to the floor, unmoving.

No. No, no no, that wasn't what happened. Tony had been alive, at least he was when Peter had been taken-

The corpse joined the others on the burning pile – he could see remnants of a scarlet cape, a strange mask with red circular lenses, flames burning from within the Iron Man helmet - the heat warping
The sight broke a dam that before then had seemed unyielding.

“Get out of my head!”

Breaching the surface of consciousness as if being dragged forcefully from the depths, Peter finally managed to tear his eyes open and drag in several turbulent breaths – the air brutal on his sore throat as it relieved his lungs. His mind was still reeling from the barrage of memories that had been pulled on and toyed with. Peter suppressed a shiver. The sideshow of his life only proved to hammer in just how trapped he was; He’d take Tony’s disappointment a hundred times over if it meant seeing him again – at least he could do something then, be better. Here he just felt useless.

The first thing that came to his attention was that he couldn’t move an inch. Not that it surprised him much, as it was becoming an all-too-familiar occurrence.

The pain radiating up his wrists wasn’t though.

From what he could tell, he was being suspended on his back – if the cavernous ceiling he was stuck staring at was anything to indicate – his arms extended to the side in a sick mockery of crucifixion. Willing his limbs to move more than just twitching meekly, he scanned the parts of the room he could see – trying to get a lay of his surroundings; Like the rest of the ship, the walls were comprised of the same metallic, cathedral-esque pillars. Along with the ever-present humming of the ship’s engines, Peter could hear a tinny crackling – involuntarily bringing up memories of Tony carefully tinkering with an electrical circuit with a soldering iron.

“Stark and I were not so different.”

Thanos’ sonorous voice cut through the quiet ambience abruptly, and would have made Peter jolt with shock if not for his current state. He strained his eyes to the side in an attempt to locate him, but the best he could do was guess that Thanos was somewhere to his left, doing god-knows what that was making his hands hurt so damn much. His breath quickened and he used every muscle in his body to stifle a whimper – only managing to limit it to a sharp intake of breath.

It took a moment to absorb what had been said, and another to get a grasp on his furious confusion.

“He's nothing like you.” He spat back, muscles fighting with all their worth against the invisible force keeping him immobile. Part of his mind held onto Thanos' use of were – but he pushed it aside for the time being.

An arc of white-hot agony sped up his arm from his fingertips to his shoulder, and that time he couldn't quite suppress a gasp of pain.

“W-What are you doing?”

Panic spiked considerably within him when his question was ignored completely, accentuated by the fact that he still couldn’t see where his captor was or what was happening.

“He took you in, trained you, advanced your power. I do the same with my children, the only difference is that I don't waste their potential.”
Peter could sense more movement, his senses going haywire and fuelled by trepidation and barely contained dread.

“Stark’s ideas were commendable, but lacked ambition - Afraid to take the next step.”

With a lurch, whatever mechanism that had been holding him aloft was disengaged. Being lowered to the floor was a relief Peter didn't realise he had needed; being in the same position for so long had tightened his muscles into a giant knot – his back protesting as he struggled to sit upright without putting too much pressure on his hands, which still hurt like hell.

As he shifted, a small glint of light caught his eye.

Fear became a tangible, living force that crept over him like an impenetrable shadow, immobilizing him with a force to rival the gauntlet.

With his heart in his throat and a vicious dread coursing through him, he slowly turned his hands over.

Surrounded by red, raw skin that was in the process of knitting itself back together, were metal panels.

Two on each hand, the larger ones were set into his forearm – the veins that had previously occupied the spot now seemed to be diverted around the intrusion. He quickly swallowed back bile as he tried not to imagine what the process had been. On the surface was some sort of mechanism that his panicking mind couldn't fathom – a circular silver disc laying flat against the skin, embossed with crisscrossing patterns along with a tiny opening.

The smaller was embedded into his lower palm. This one triangular, and well within reach of his fingers – moving slightly with his touch like a button.

*Just like his web shooters.*

With a shaking fingertip he traced the cold metal, unmoving as if anchored to the bone. The light touch soon devolved into digging his fingernails into his palm, though he could get no traction on the smooth surface. The button depressed, and he reeled back as midnight black webbing shot out with the speed of a bullet, hissing with electricity and colliding with the wall – holding fast and it's current burning where it struck.

“Be glad I didn't do more.”

The threat barely registered.

He could no longer control his hands; they were shaking in an odd trembling rhythm that could have matched his thrumming heart beat. The pit in his stomach had opened into a chasm and he was now in free fall. It wasn't even like he could distance himself from the horror it evoked, every movement sending light reflecting off the inexorable metal, along with his muscles uncomfortably working around what they sensed were foreign objects.

*A constant reminder.*

*The consequence of disobedience.*

““You hold the same fighting spirit as Stark.”

It was like the world had been unpaused – time catching up to him, and only then sensing Thanos'
measured gaze that had no doubt been watching him for god knows how long.

“Though it is a chaotic force that needs disciplined. With him, it was left unchecked – which ultimately led to his fall.”

Peter found himself reaching for the phrase that he used when he was at a loss – one that he was using all too frequently in recent days:

*What would Tony do?*

However, a shroud of doubt doused it like a wave. He didn't even know where his mentor was – he bit back a quivering breath – *or even if he was still alive.* The vision from earlier resurfaced, and he blinked rapidly to try and rid himself of the memory, a few tears falling from his eyelashes and down his face.

“... become better than he was.”

The words hit him like a weight – a wrecking ball that struck the wall of his resolve. Thanos using that phrasing was no accident. The malignant gleam in the eyes that bore into Peter's was evidence enough.

His memories, the primary source of his hope weren't safe. Nothing could be hidden. Retreating into recollections was how he had kept himself sane during the time in his cell, and now even that was a risk. Imperative information – strengths and weaknesses, the blueprints of the suits, all details of their lives – would be readily available with a sweep of the gauntlet. Peter's mind may as well be a book on 'how to defeat the Avengers'.

If they were alive.

The earlier vision only cemented the fact that he couldn't trust memories any more – already finding difficulty in deciphering the true events in his disoriented mind.

“Come.”

Peter flinched like he had been struck as he felt something touch his arm. The familiar force of the stones were absent, instead being guided to his feet by a large hand with a firm grip. Still in a state of shock that seemed to have disabled all ability to think clearly, he let himself be directed out of the chamber – his legs, though still weak from lack of use, on autopilot.

He had no idea where he was being taken, and for the first time he couldn't bring himself to care.
more, and I really really appreciate you all xx
Landing the ship wasn't exactly the most graceful thing Tony had ever done. They had managed to set a course for the Avengers Compound in the slowly dying computer, which kept flickering and sparking despite constant maintenance, but for their descent they were relying on gravity.

The past few weeks had quickly become unbearable; only so much time could be spent planning their next move, which left ample time to dwell on everything he'd fucked up.

No matter how far he looked back, it was undeniably his fault - even tracing the blame back to bringing Peter to Germany. He had been a normal kid. Yeah, one with spider powers who stopped muggings in his free time, but Tony had gone and dragged him into something bigger. Vigilante justice may not have been the safest hobby, but there was no denying it was undeniably safer than battling a tyrannical alien set on wiping out half the universe. Taking Peter under his wing had been a driving force of motivation for the time Tony had known him – he resisted thinking one of the best things that ever happened to him – but he would give it all back in an instant if it meant the kid would be safe. He should be at home, the only worry being coming school tests or the decathlon – not lost within the depths of space, wherever he was, not knowing that Tony would fight tooth and nail to get to him.

Besides the occasional conversation with Nebula, those thoughts were his only company.

They were going far too fast when they broke through the clouds, each of them scrabbling to secure seatbelts and brace for a rough impact. Any efforts to steer were hampered by the dark of the night, and – having keyed in the coordinates as best he could – they could only hope that they had enough luck not to plow directly into a building.

Fortunately, lady luck had thrown them a bone.

With a deafening resonance, they struck the ground – feeble landing thrusters doing their best to slow the descent. He gripped the arms of the chair with white knuckles, regretting having not donned what was left of his suit as his head was whipped backwards upon impact.

Tony was still blinking stars from his vision when he saw in his peripheral a now familiar metal hand.
unclip the harness that held him to the seat. With a surprising gentleness, she pulled him to his feet – and upon realising that he could barely hold his own weight in his weakened state, she stayed by his side and slowly walked them both across the uneven floor.

The training field outside the compound hadn’t fared well during their arrival; A large portion of the ship was now embedded in the ground – and although they’d managed to land without considerable damage to the vessel, putting the lawn to rights would take a lot of work. They were lucky the exit ramp still lowered, even if it was at a worrying angle.

Tony barely registered Nebula's attempt to keep him upright – her arm around his waist, guiding him onto the grass.

Grass. Dirt. Earth.

He let out a shaking breath he didn’t realise he was holding.

The knot in his stomach didn't release, but he reckoned it loosened just a little.

In the distance he could see the compound flurrying with activity; Running figures were silhouetted against the interior lights as they sprinted towards them on the now decimated field.

Crisp night breeze blew through his hair – a refreshing change from the artificial recycled air of the ship – and he stumble forwards on shaking legs.

Tony gave himself a moment. Just one moment.

Several deep breaths brought with them the smell of recently disturbed dirt and burning foliage, no doubt caused by their entrance. The condensation on the blades of grass sealing the clumps of upturned earth together – so different from the loose dust of Titan, which would swirl in a gust with every movement.

A hand met his shoulder, which jolted him back to the present.

“Tony?”

The word was like a shot of sedative.

Rhodey.

His friend was embracing him before he could begin to process the rest of the people now surrounding them. They stayed that way for what felt like minutes, before they both pulled back – Tony taking stock of the remnants of the Avengers.

His heart plummeted at just how few of them were left. Behind Rhodey he could see the pitifully
small group, and he could only pray that there were others that had stayed in the compound because *they couldn’t be all that was left.*

There were six that he could see, though he tried to convince himself he’d miscounted; All of them seemed like ghosts of their former selves in the light of the moon.

Steve stood at the forefront, blue eyes alert despite the grey circles under them. He seemed at a loss for words, his expression one of a man who was trying to hold onto some semblance of strength – though the undertones of a beaten hero was noticeable behind the facade.

Bruce was by Tony's side shortly after he and Rhodey separated, his focus trained on the gash across his head along with the dried blood that had seeped from the healing wound on his side. Tony tried to brush him off, a few murmured assurances doing nothing to quell the look of concern on the other man’s face. Natasha stayed towards the back of the congregation; As always, she seemed poised to take action if the circumstances demanded, but otherwise opted to give them space. She looked equally as exhausted, though was doing a better job of hiding it than their resident super-soldier – and, unless he was mistaken, he could sense relief in her expression.

A lone figure stood a few meters away, someone that Tony didn't recognise whatsoever; she was looking onto the scene with a concerned yet pensive stare, her blonde hair catching the cold breeze and brushing against her shoulders. She appeared content as an observer, but her stance was that of a coiled spring – tense and primed for a fight.

Tony's moment of reprieve was over. They had work to do.

He couldn't care less about the mystery woman at that moment, and he pushed speculation to the back of his mind. – getting the run down of what happened was imperative. The glimmer of hope he still held thought that maybe, if there was the slightest chance that Thanos had brought Peter with him to get the last stone, then just *maybe...*

“What happened?”

The silence that followed acted as another knife in his side. He moved on; there was no point in waiting for anything, he'd already wasted enough time on that god-forsaken starship and, for all he knew, heading in the wrong direction from where his kid was *suffering-*

“Well, where is he? Where's Thanos?”

By the looks on their faces, he knew precisely what the answer was. Despite himself, his irritation
grew, taking the place of the hope that now shattered and faded – he needed information and he needed it now. The longer they spent messing around avoiding difficult subject, the longer Peter was at that monster's mercy -

“Was there anyone with him?” The urgency in his voice increased, the words quickening along with his breathing “I know he had his army, but was there anyone... Did he-”

The boiling fury was directed at himself this time; He'd spent weeks planning exactly what questions to ask - but now that the time came they caught in his throat.

“Did you see Peter?”

Their looks of utter confusion would have been hilarious given any other situation, but then it was only gasoline being thrown onto the fire of his anger.

“What, that intern kid?”

Tony wasn't even sure who said it, his mind running a multitude of plans along with desperately trying to keep a lid on his temper – he ran a hand through his hair to keep them from doing something he'd regret.

“Yes, the intern-”

“You've got to get some rest, Tony.” Steve's irritatingly calm tone was what made what little patience he had break.

“I've been resting for weeks, Rogers. I'm sick of wasting time, and if you're just going to dance around my fucking questions-”

“I think it's best if we took you to the medbay,” Bruce spoke for the first time, cutting him off and approaching in true Doctor mode, “Looks like you have a concussion, you're dehydrated, malnourished, and who knows what effects long term space travel in a broken ship can have...”

“Could he be delusional?” Natasha's voice only fuelled Tony's frustration.
“I'm not delusional. He had-” He cut himself off this time.

There was a metaphorical fork in the road ahead.

Peter was immensely protective of his secret identity, to the extent that all of the Avengers merely knew him as 'Peter Parker, Stark Industries Intern' – the kid that could chat to them for hours about suit enhancements, and had what someone had dubbed a 'nerd attack' when he'd been introduced to them. He had stressed multiple times that 'though your “I am Iron Man” moment was so awesome, Mr Stark’” he was determined to remain anonymous even to the people he held in highest regard.

If he loosed the secret, he'd be breaking the promise – the trust – that they'd shared since their first meeting.

Although he could see few other choices.

If what happened on Titan taught him anything, it was that he'd need the team – no matter how few they were – if they were to pursue Thanos.

*However...*

Bruce had a point, not that he was delusional, but that he needed a drink.

*Preferably something alcoholic.*

For a short second he considered that he *could* be delusional – for he swore he spotted an upright walking raccoon speaking quietly with Nebula as they made their way back inside the compound – but he dismissed delusions as wishful thinking.

“Steve, briefing room. Ten minutes. There's something you need to know.”

A short time later, with a glass of whiskey and an IV drip trailing into his arm – the latter at Bruce's insistence – he sat amongst the empty chairs in the briefing room, as if any moment the rest of the team would take their seats at the long table.

He had taken a place near the head of the room, engrossed in the process of hooking up his tablet to the display screen on the wall. The other's dispersed to their preferred mourning spots; Bruce retreated back to the lab, firmly stating that Tony should come by afterwards for a full medical check – though both knew that the order would unlikely be followed.
By the look that Natasha had given him shortly before disappearing into the night, he had no doubt that she had put the pieces together already – hell, she probably knew who Peter was before he’d ever set foot inside the base. He’d likely hear her thoughts on the matter later.

From what he’d garnered from the scattered retellings of events, Thor had left shortly after the battle was lost; When Thanos had vanished once more to god-knows-where, the only sight of the god was a figure walking into the distance across a dusty battlefield, leaving scorches where lances of lightning crackled in his wake.

On the arduous journey across the ruined training field, Rhodey had filled him in on what happened – who they’d lost.

Tony tried to block out the memory of Strange and the Guardians falling to ash before his eyes – only a step away from imagining his teammates suffering the same fate. To his immense relief however, he’d been assured that Pepper had been one of the lucky ones – and though she was on her way to the compound, her ETA was unknown; Travelling across the fractured city would take a great deal of time and careful manoeuvring, and he’d rather her be safe but across the city than... he shut down that train of thought.

He couldn't lose anyone else.

He looked up when the glass door to the room slid open, Steve entering with slight caution. Despite himself, Tony's irritation spiked - he wasn't some wounded animal.

Steve took his place by the table's centre – his usual seat if he remembered correctly. The fact that he didn't take an absent member's place a clear statement on how the Captain was handling their losses.

“What do I need to know?”

He had to respect him for getting straight to the point. It was the kind of directness Tony needed at that moment, no screwing around and wasting time – just needing the facts.

Trying not to dislodge the itchy needle of the IV that was pumping much-needed nutrients into his system, Tony reached forwards and retrieved the tablet from the tabletop – tapping a few keys that brought the display screen to life.

“I'm only going to explain this once, so keep up because we haven't got a lot of time.”

He gave a brief second for the other man to take this in – receiving only a small nod in response – then continued, tapping another couple times on the tablet; a new image was cast on the large screen – the photo, taken directly from a high school yearbook, showed Peter grinning to the camera.
Averting his eyes from the picture seemed to be the only way to keep a handle on the guilt that kept crawling into his heart.

“We failed on Titan – and by the sounds of it, the same happened here.” He pressed on, despite the shadow that fell on Steve's face. Just like all of them, he was doubtlessly carrying the blame on his shoulders – regretting every action that could have led to their downfall. Every possible thing they could have done differently.

“But how could he have Peter? It was just you, Strange, and...” Steve stopped himself short, meeting Tony's eyes directly – the blue laced with incredulity.

The penny had dropped.

A whispered curse broke the tense silence. The other man rose to his feet, pacing the room with restrained steps, mouth in a solid line and apparently choosing his next words very carefully.

“How old was he, Tony? Fifteen?”

He couldn't formulate a reply – the blaming eyes of both Steve and Peter's photo burning him.

Steve's pacing reached a halt, deciding instead to lean on the table, shaking his head in disbelief as if that would somehow negate the revelation.

“You brought a kid into a war?”

Something in him snapped. He'd thought telling Steve would be the fastest way of getting something done, but it had instead landed him in exactly the situation he'd wanted to avoid – repeats of the same regrets that played on a constant loop in his mind.

“You're not saying anything I haven't already told myself, Rogers.” Tony had risen to his feet without realising, shaking legs barely holding him up and resorting to hold the IV stand as an
improvised crutch.

“He shouldn't have been there in the first place. This is on me.” To his relief, this seemed to silence him – though didn't cool the tension that crackled around the room like static.

“Why only tell me? Surely the rest of the team need to know who he is?”

Normally, he'd bat back a snarky quip – probably something highlighting an exaggerated comment on the others' intelligence – but he was just tired. Tired of being sick to his stomach wondering what torture Peter was going through, tired of explaining the direness of the situation, tired of Steve's apparent lack of urgency.

“Because I don't know what to do.”

To Tony's surprise, the admission was like a weight off his shoulders. Lying to himself for all those weeks, pretending he had a plan – when in reality they had no leads, no way of tracking Thanos, and an entire world that would take a long time recovering.

They sat in silence for a long moment before Steve spoke – clearly on a similar thought pattern.

“Everyone has lost people. There's a lot of mess to clear up on Earth before anyone can go chasing into space.”

The anger still boiled in Tony's chest, but was doused by the reality that, in a way, Steve was right. Not that he'd ever admit it out loud.

In the fury's place, helplessness seeped in – out in the galaxy, somewhere Peter was waiting for him – if he hadn't lost his hope already. Fuck, he didn't even know how many weeks it had been-

“... And I'm not going to pretend I agree with your choices, but all I know is that those people are gone – and if what you're saying is true, Peter isn't.”

Their eyes met abruptly.

“... there are some people that can help. Come on, I'll introduce you.”
Hope you liked it! Thought Tony needed a chapter on his own too – but dw the chapters will go back to the split perspectives

also I've learnt not to promise a day for the next chapter, cos it never seems to work out - just know that I'm aiming for some time next week :)

Chapter End Notes
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

y'all are so sweet I can't deal
The comments on the last chapter were so awesome, I'm really glad you're enjoying this as much as I enjoy writing it

I'm Charlie btw, in case anyone wanted to know, I shoulda said so before :P

Thanks to Taekwondo_Queen for the prompt for this chapter :) I hope you like it, the second part of the request will be in the next chapter xx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Peter's body had started waking itself naturally whenever he heard a noise at the door. It was a jolt of adrenaline, fear, that brought his heart into his throat – prompting a small voice in his head that told him to stand, to be ready, because it wouldn't incur any punishment. Another voice, getting quieter by the day, appealed to his perseverance – adamant that he would not comply. The second sounding uncannily like Tony.

No matter how hard he gripped onto the second voice, he could feel it dissipating as he watched.

He sat up, expecting and bracing himself to meet the familiar feeling of his body being commandeered.

Nothing happened.

Listening intently, barely breathing in his alerted state, he reached out for any evidence of movement – that the usual painful routine would begin once more.

Again, nothing.

With tentative steps, he made his way to the door. Although there was still no way of determining the time, his internal body clock had quickly adjusted.

Great - it got used to a routine of torture, but had he ever woken up in time for class? Nope.

He stopped short when he reached the door, his mind running a mile a minute.

It was open.

A stream of light seeped through the gap, the heavy metal barrier standing ajar. The hopeful voice took over his brain, rejuvenated at the thought of escape, his shaking fingers grasping the edge and pulling steadily – cautiously.

He was torn between moving slowly, making stealth and not getting caught a priority, or going as
fast as he could – he had no idea when Thanos would appear, the thought of his wrath almost making him retreat.

The stubborn voice overruled.

Cold metal floor numbing his bare feet to the bone, he crossed the door's threshold into the hallway beyond. The single step had seemingly tripled his heart rate – repeatedly looking up and down the corridor, still anxious for any sign of movement, he put his hopes on a left turn and started walking with the quietest footsteps he could muster.

He knew that the abhorrent throne room lay in the other direction, as he had been led through it enough times on the way to the 'training' arena; the stones could have always brought them there in a second with a simple gesture, but Peter figured the journey past the monolithic chair and the view upon the vast expanse of space acted as a reminder of his inevitable defeat – his enemy's victory.

He had started mentally mapping out the labyrinthine ship in his mind – but he'd found that, since his last encounter with the Mind Stone, his subconscious had deemed certain types of information unnecessary.

Steeling himself, he looked furtively around the next corner – his stomach twisting in disappointment at what he saw; Several large doors lined the walls, very much like the one to his cell – he could only hope that one of these would be open too.

What little time he had was surely running out – there had to be something to make this risk worth taking.

The first three he tried remained impenetrable, but just as he was losing hope, the fourth slid open with a jarring smoothness. His heart rose tentatively once more at the sight of what appeared to be a control room – from what Peter had deduced from a lot of sci-fi films anyway. It had the same obsidian floor and walls as the rest of the ship, but the room's centrepiece was a panel mounted on the opposite wall – a holographic screen floating a few inches from it's surface.

His approach woke it from it's dormant state, a flurry of blue symbols floating across it at a speed too fast to take in.

Peter cast another look to the door, straining his senses to discern any sound that wasn't his own nervous breathing. Part of him wished he heard any sign of Thanos – just so he knew for sure he wasn't lurking in a shadowy corner ready to catch Peter red-handed in his disobedience.

The silence remained undisturbed.

Despite how wary it made him, he turned his back to the door to face the panel. He began to raise a wavering hand, but stopped midway as the patterns on the screen warped; more of the incomprehensible symbols flitted past, a few halting and organising themselves in a short list at the corner. His eyes jumped from one place to another in an attempt to make some sense of it all – his
distress only growing. If he couldn't even understand the language, there was no way-

Stop. Think.

The second voice was back, along with the calm that he desperately needed.

He closed his eyes, taking a breath.

This was just like one of Tony's interfaces that he used all the time at the lab, maybe a little more alien, but the same basic premise.

Nothing to freak out about, kid.

Eyelids opening again, he continued his hand's path towards the console – although his fingers still shook, they were a great deal more stable than before. Hesitantly, he brushed his index finger across the hologram. The glyphs stilled immediately.

If this were anything like the lab's interface, the list to the side would have to be a menu of sorts – to determine what section of the program should be run.

He tapped one at random – a collection of intercrossing lines that resembled no earthly language whatsoever.

The screen cleared, a fresh set taking their place accompanied with what appeared to be adjustable sliding dials that raised slightly above the rest. He stopped short – changing any of these, whatever they did, he guessed would alert Thanos. Peter's best bet was to look for some ship schematics and search for an escape pod of some description, or even some way of sending a message – a call for help.

Swiping vaguely to the side of the screen, he was thankful when it returned to the previous display. He worked through the next couple options of the list in a similar manner, neither garnering much useful information, just more gibberish he didn't understand. The fourth looked more promising; he took a few steps backwards as the hologram expanded, showing a grid scattered with small dots. His heart leapt, resorting to standing on his toes to peer over the display – finally something that almost made sense.

From what he could surmise, it was a map of their sector of space. It almost resembled an old-school radar scanner, several stationary dots that could have been planets being circled by smaller, faster ones.

Other ships.

Other people.

His heart began to race, a shaking hand trying to tap a ship as it zipped past – they wisely appeared to be giving Thanos' ship a wide berth, steering clear of any inevitable confrontation should they cross the Titan's path.

He could only hope that one of them was brave enough to help him.

There had to be a way of communicating with them, sending out a distress call, anything-
Barely containing his trepidation, he rapidly tapped the display – as if that would somehow make it work faster – until a small window opened containing a rectangle with a fluctuating line running horizontally across the centre.

He let out a shaking breath.

The line rippled, stopping when the room fell into silence once more. Reacting to the sound.

Peter couldn't help the joy that flooded his system, such a foreign sensation after such a long time.

In a state of semi-disbelief, he pressed the symbol.

“H-Hello?” he began before briefly checking the door again, his voice unnaturally loud in the quiet of the ship. He returned to the console – this could be his only chance.

“If anyone can hear this, my name is Peter Parker – I-I need help. Fuck I don't even know if anyone will understand this- I'm on Thanos' ship, if someone's out there, he still has the stones and I don’t know what he plans to do... I-I don't really know how this communicator works but please send this message and location to Earth, to the Avengers- Hell, even the, uh-” he trawled through his memory for what Footloose had called his team, “-the Guardians of the Galaxy, they-”

His neck was alight with sharp pinpricks, the hairs standing on end – danger.

The hologram vanished, the room darkening as it faded into nothing. Peter whipped around, maybe if he could make it back to the cell-

A hand circled his throat in an unyielding grip.

“You continue to disappoint me.”

Hands scrabbling uselessly at his neck, he focused on trying to draw breath through the constriction – to no avail.

Thanos towered over him, the gauntlet remaining unused on his other hand and preferring instead to relish in using his own strength to inflict pain.

“I gave you a chance, an opportunity to prove yourself. It seems my trust was misplaced.”
There was no measured tone this time, only words brimming with fury that sent a cold chill down Peter's spine.

_It had been a test._

He could have hit himself, _of course it had._

It was stupid to think that the door had just been left open – a 'technical glitch' – when it was obvious now that it had been bait. One that he'd fallen for hook, line, and sinker.

“It seems we have more work to do than I thought.”

He had been wrong when he thought his situation couldn't get worse.

Peter had been unceremoniously thrown back into the cell, the door closing resolutely behind him. His hands had immediately flown to his throat – the choke-hold having lasted for an immeasurable amount of time, and he could feel it already bruising despite his accelerated healing.

_That had been a few days ago, at the least._

Food, which had previously been some sort of unidentifiable 'bread' and water, had stopped coming – leaving his body in a state of perpetual weakness, his stomach twisting in pain so frequently he wished it'd go numb. The lights had apparently also been a luxury; the encompassing darkness was absolute, even his enhanced vision couldn't distinguish a single thing in the inky black.

He half-hoped he'd go into a meditative state, like those stories he'd heard of people going into shock and loosing time. _No such luck._

He was left with only his own thoughts for company.

_And the hope that someone heard the message._

A noise sounded from outside.

Jolted from his reverie, he looked up in what he assumed was the direction of the door – unsure if he should investigate, not that there was much he _could_ do. He just stayed where he was, although his
mind began accelerating once more – the small spark of inextinguishable hope acting as fuel.

It happened again; whatever the sound was, it was getting closer. Peter couldn't quite identify what it was, just that it was loud and headed his way.

Subconsciously, he had risen to his feet – his head tilted to better hear the unknown. Having grown accustomed to the steady thrum of the ship's engines, and growing to recognise Thanos' footfalls, he could ascertain that this was definitely something new.

Once more, the din sounded – Peter's hands moving to block his ears as it reached the hallway outside.

Stumbling backwards and barely recovering his balance, he instinctively retreated to the back wall – only guessing what the commotion could be.

He didn't have to guess for long.

The door slid open abruptly; Shielding his eyes against the blinding light that stung his retinas, he squinted through his fingers.

Silhouetted against the light now streaming into the dim cell, stood Tony Stark.

Overwhelming, palpable relief flooded through his system like a tranquilliser; his mind couldn't quite process the emotions rampaging through him. It was over. This hell had reached its end, and even if they hadn't taken down Thanos – Peter would be able to go home.

Back to evenings with May, chatting over hospital gossip – Back to weekends at the lab with Tony – Back to school, something he'd never thought he'd miss.

All he seemed to be able to do was let out a thin laugh – possibly verging on hysteria – and try not to let his legs give way, despite that his muscles had left him as soon as the door had opened.

The man's eyes scanned the room, squinting as his eyes adjusted to the gloom – widening slightly as he recognised it's occupant.

“Peter?”

Peter's restraint crumbled – he staggered forwards as if drawn by magnetism, his weak knees doing nothing to help as he fell into his mentor's arms. Although having no idea how long it had been – Weeks? Months? - the lack of human contact had taken a toll. Though the metal of the suit was cold against his skin, he couldn't help but clinging on. To hold someone real-
He was ripped from the moment when a metal hand pushed him back firmly, insistent that he keep a distance.

“M-Mr Stark, you're here – you're actually here, oh my-”

“What the hell were you thinking?”

The sharp statement brought Peter's relieved stammering to a halt. His mentor's expression was one he'd never seen before, the intense brown eyes boring into his own – all humour non-existent and brows low in what could only be perceived as a glare.

“What-what?”

Letting loose a short, mirthless laugh that sounded more like a scoff, Tony met Peter's eyes – he was taken aback at what he saw; the gaze was laced with unreined anger. A dark fire simmering behind them.

“I told you to get off that ship – to leave the important things for the grown-ups to handle.”

Despite the stinging truth to the words, he couldn't help but be taken aback. He thought they'd spoken about this on the journey to Titan, when he'd been made an Avenger...

Still trying to wrap his head around the situation, and in an attempt to salvage whatever this rescue mission had turned into, Peter cut in – hating all the while how meek his voice sounded.

“Can we talk once we're out of here? I think we-”

The suited hand was back, this time brandished in an accusatory point.

“Oh no, you have to hear this – it's been a long time coming, kid. We all thought you were dead, so I'm gonna say this while I still can. Who knows what other idiotic choices you'll make; I might not get another chance...”
Tony started to pace in what little area they had, shaking his head in a manner that Peter knew was him barely containing his fury.

What the hell was happening?

He had no idea how things had escalated this quickly. The relief at seeing his mentor in the threshold had been quickly replaced with confusion and guilt that stung with every word.

“Can we just-”

“It's like last time – you take on this shit by yourself like you think you're some god-damn hero, except this time a can't take the suit away because now you've proved me wrong, you are nothing without it.”

Tony's voice was now a shout, but thoughts of being found by enemy forces were far from Peter's mind. He stood, shell-shocked – only noticing the tears when they fell down his face and onto the cold metal floor below.

He shouldn't be surprised – isn't he just saying what Peter already knew all along?

It still stung. Hearing the truth said aloud was a pain that penetrated his core, settling alongside the guilt that it paired with.

“Not to mention,” Tony rounded on him again, “I trusted you to stop them from taking Strange – turns out I can make stupid decisions too, as look how well that turned out. That led to this: the whole team has been put in jeopardy to get here – to get the stones. If you've been here the whole time, why haven't you done something?”

Any responses got caught in Peter's throat – answers that he was now realising were excuses. He'd tried to fight Thanos, but there was no way of defeating him whilst he held the stones – at least no way for someone as weak as he was.

He should have done more.

Peter was always asking himself what Tony would do in a situation, but the answer hadn't stuck until now – hell, Tony had even told him.

Be better.

“I've gotta call the team back, it sounds like they're getting slaughtered.”

Tony's attention was directed behind him, down the corridor and listening to the sounds of ongoing
battle that had slipped Peter's mind.

“I-I can help, we can-”

“Oh, you've done enough.”

The last statement seemed to numb Peter's entire being. Upon reflection, this beration shouldn't be surprising; Tony was right, it was a long time coming – the amount of times Peter had fucked up, caused more problems than he solved, being a burden, pathetic...

With a gasping breath – his lungs seized with a tight knot of despair and abandoning any capacity they had – he let out a final whisper.

“Please don't leave me.”

The other man's expression changed, going from anger to a mix of irritation and distaste - disgust. He gave a subtle shake of his head, barely resisting a dismissive eye-roll before beginning to turn away. A child that had gotten in over his head was the least of his worries.

No. He couldn't end things like this-

Peter started forwards, not really knowing what his plan was but determined to get Tony to stop and listen – reaching out a hand that met a shoulder.

The metal fist collided with his cheekbone so fast it was hard to believe it happened at all if it weren't for the pain still arcing across his face. Peter's own hand rose to meet where his mentor had struck, subconsciously backing away further into the shadows of the cell.

He couldn't take his eyes off Tony's face.

Given how the rest of the confrontation had gone, rage was expected – even the disappointment that had been present when he took the suit away – but what he saw instead was pure disdain.

Like he didn't even care.
Without a single word, only a brief glance towards the boy now recoiled in the corner, the door slid shut once again.

Peter couldn't even form a single sound, as much as he wanted to shout for his mentor to come back, to save him, he was frozen in place. His knees gave way at long last.

Crumpling to the floor, he listened to the sounds of battle getting further away, incomprehensible shouts fading into the distance until all finally fell silent.

He couldn't do anything except repeat the prior scene in his head. Reliving the hurt that he knew was warranted.

In the distance he registered the familiar sound of heavy footfalls – and although they didn't enter the cell, he merely accepted that Thanos had been victorious once again.

Peter was too blinded by the steady stream of tears blurring his vision to see the glowing red light that rippled across the room like a wave.

Chapter End Notes

I had waayyyy too much fun writing fake!tony and now I feel bad – sorry petey boi

Yooo this time I actually had a reason for taking so long – I got a second job!! now hopefully I can keep living in my flat :P

Hopefully there'll be another chapter within a week, things are ramping up and I'm super excited to write more xx
“What the hell were you thinking?”

Bruising had began to develop where he had been struck; It was a dark stain that conveyed Tony's view as well as the words did – the reproval yet another reminder that was stuck on repeat in Peter's thoughts.

“-it's been a long time coming, kid-”

Kid. A moniker he now realised was just a way of showing how little he had been taken seriously.

The hours, possibly days, he'd been left in the cell had given him plenty of time to trawl through his memories of Tony – each interaction under scrutiny in a search for any signs of dislike, scorn.

Looking back, he'd been so stupid not to see it before; It was as if a veil had been lifted, what had seemed warm and friendly before now was unmasked. Encouraging pats on the shoulder he remembered fondly were souring – the patronising attitude the older man had shown now clear as day.

*Had he just been a project, akin to the suits? Or perhaps the regular days working in the lab had just been a way of keeping him in check, couldn't have another enhanced running amok with no supervision...*

He'd been fucking blind, vision clouded by the famous, legendary Tony Stark taking an interest in him.

Attention roused faintly by the sound of footsteps, he barely reacted to the door sliding open. He
hadn't risen from his position on the floor until the familiar envelop of the stone's control forced his body to cooperate.

“What happened to them?”

He'd risked the question, a weak voice escaping before he could think better of it; His need to know outweighing any punishment that could lie ahead.

“...it sounds like they're getting slaughtered-”

A contemplative silence followed, and he knew better than to ask again. If he was to know, it would be under Thanos’ terms. Aside from the usual, he hadn't yet received the repercussions for his disobedience – trepidation a constant companion, dreading what would come.

No words were spoken, even when he was thrown into the pit and heard the chilling sounds of Outriders contained behind the barrier. It opened so fast that Peter barely had time to regain his footing.

There were too many – one after another, after another came scrabbling from out of the door, tumbling over each other in their attempts to reach fresh meat before it's kin. Every maw glistening with saliva and bloodlust, snapping sharp fangs and hissing, tasting his scent on the air.

Despite knowing it would yield nothing, he looked to where Thanos stood – a monolith silhouetted above on the raised side of the fighting arena, expression unreadable.

A snarl that was too close for comfort brought him hurriedly rolling backwards, fingers automatically primed on web shooters. The fixtures still sent a chill up his spine, but at that moment he would take any help he could get.

Sending out two shots – both striking their targets and sending them sprawling backwards – he continued to back away as more Outriders crawled from the dark like worms out of woodwork.

There had to be at least ten, forming a clawing mass that was converging on him as each second passed. If there was a way he could separate them, take them on one at a time...

They were upon him before he could finish the thought.
Working from pure instinct, Peter leapt to the side in an attempt to circle them – learning from past battles that, if he could get behind them, he was mostly hidden from their field of view which would give him the advantage.

He sent a quick shot out to the wall of the pit, the crackling web striking the metal with a resounding echo; A couple of the Outriders reared their heads towards the sound, though he was unable to use the opportunity to his full advantage as another swiped its talons in his direction.

The claws embedded themselves in his flesh, catching under the skin and raking across his abdomen. It wasn't too deep, but he was still taken aback by the blood now coursing from the wound that stung in the air.

Peter stumbled back again, though was careful not to back himself into a corner. He dodged another swipe, however the competitive animosity between the creatures was gone – instead joining forces and advancing as a unit.

In a last-ditch attempt to gain any sort of ground, he sent out a flurry of webbing, managing to pin one of them to the floor where it snarled and scratched at the binds with it's remaining limbs.

_That was the last stoke of good luck he had._

His balance was snatched away abruptly; One of the creatures had struck low, sending his already weak legs collapsing from under him. They wasted no time in descending on him.

Relying on innate reactions, he defended himself as best he could. Protecting his head was his top priority – his hands pushing at the jaws that lunged at him, digging his fingernails in to where he had deduced their eyes were. An animalistic satisfaction rose as a few of them retreated, but was soon engulfed by panic and _pain_.

He couldn't restrain his scream – the teeth and claws were sank deeply into his right leg, and he could feel them scraping across bone before snapping them easily into splinters.

Stars erupted in his vision, choking on his own breath through gritted teeth.

His guard dropped but they didn't surge forward, though his mind was too occupied to wonder what happened.

It may have been the shock and adrenaline coursing through his veins, but all he could do was lie back – leg now numb and his blood dripping through the floor grates with a steady rhythm.

Though he could feel his body making it's best attempt at knitting the shredded skin back together, he knew deep down he was too far gone. He'd been injured before – quite badly to May and Tony's apparent concern – but he could sense this was different.
He lay his head back to rest on the floor. It felt oddly light, brain not really processing his surroundings any more; Around him swam only lights and flickering warped shapes.

Deep from the recesses of his thoughts a realisation floated it's way to the surface.

This was it: the end.

When he'd considered his own mortality in the past, it had been with a sense of dread. Leaving May and Tony behind had been what pushed his mind to keep fighting – he couldn't disappoint them, let them down.

Now though?

He didn't know if May was even still alive – Tony's words of “We all thought you were dead” a strong implication that, if she had survived, she would be long past mourning.

Tony... a last flicker of guilt flitted across his decelerating mind.

The man he had considered his mentor was gone, along with any perceived notion that he had cared if Peter lived or died.

The bruising on his cheekbone answered that question.

Then why was he even trying?

Though he was aware of a change in surroundings, he was well past the point in taking in new information, his vision slowly fading into a black vacuum.

Introductions to the newcomers had been impersonal and brief, at Tony's insistence. He didn't have time to waste on getting to know them – nor the energy required to figure out whether their allegiance was genuine, if it was patriotic or self serving.

The blonde woman – Carol, as he had been informed – seemed pleasant enough if not a little terse, but he reckoned none of them were especially brimming with conversation. She was a super-fuelled space warrior or something of the sort, and had apparently been an old friend of Fury's – despite the fact the director had possessed more functional eyes than people he trusted, so Tony couldn't help but be a tad sceptical. Steve could deal with judging her reliability, as he no doubt needed something to occupy himself – not to mention Tony didn't have time to process anything that wasn't bringing him closer to getting Peter back.

The Raccoon was different to say the least.

It had sauntered up to him, arms folded across it's chest and looked up at him with narrowed eyes –
the intelligence behind them blended with judgement and suspicion.

“So your plan is to shoot off into space in my ship, to go after a guy that you have no way of finding – to grab some kid and hopefully loot the stones in the process. That right?”

Tony had blinked, nonplussed and burying the twinge of anger that had risen at 'some kid.' There was no derision in the tone however, just an air of measured scrutiny like he was in the midst of being analysed.

In a normal state of mind – though fuck if anything could be considered normal any more – he figured he'd make a few jokes at it's expense, because fucking hell he was talking to a raccoon, but at that moment the bizarreness of the situation was at the bottom of his list of concerns.

He decided to reciprocate the bluntness. Finally someone who just gets to the point.

“Yeah, that's right.”

It nodded slowly, contemplating – ears flicking in a manner Tony was too tired to decipher.

The constant eye contact may have been an attempt at intimidation, but frankly he didn't care; Whether the raccoon agreed with the plan or not, it was going ahead regardless.

He looked back, unperturbed.

“Sounds as good as any of Quill's plans...” It muttered, almost to itself, before snapping it's sight back to Tony's, “I'm in. Any plan is better than no plan, especially if it comes to getting the other half back.”

With that last statement still processing in Tony's mind, it had abruptly walked past him and up the ramp into the shadows of the ship.

It had taken marginal damage, but was well on it's way to being fully functional; It had lasted well enough ferrying its two passengers across deep space, but the fuel and life support systems were shot – and it was apparently a miracle they made it back to Earth at all.

After an immeasurable amount of time only conversing to exchange minimal engineering technobabble, they finally bothered to learn each other's names.
Rocket's direct approach didn't end with words, diving straight in to fixing a fuel leak along with tackling the sparking technology that had been just too alien for Tony to approach without efficient research.

Though Tony worked persistently with merely a vague sense of time, his companion vanished on occasion; from his spot on the underside of the ship near the landing gears, he swore sometimes he could hear the muffled dulcet tones of Blue Swede echoing through the empty vessel.

There was no denying though, Rocket was a damn good engineer.

Adding a few names to the roster wouldn't make up for what they'd lost, but if they were willing to pitch in when it mattered they could do whatever the fuck they wanted.

They had a ship to fix, which made it even more irritating when they kept being interrupted – whether it was Bruce checking his vitals, imploring that he at least try to take a break, or Steve bringing empty 'progress reports' that were clearly his good conscience finding an excuse to stop Tony from driving himself to a premature death.

*It was apparently the latter's turn again.*

Steve could be damn quiet when he wanted to – either that or Tony was so focused on aligning circuits to notice a six-foot-something super soldier pick his way through the numerous electrical paraphernalia scattered around the ship to come to a halt beside him.

The man's eyes still held the exhaustion that had only become more evident as the days passed – however it was now joined by a steely undertone, a wall against the turmoil of grief building behind it. Tony had built a few of the same walls in his life, though at that moment his own was more akin to a dam.

“You need sleep, Tony.”

He barely suppressed an eye roll.

Realising this conversation would merely be a 'healthy habits' lecture, Tony turned back to the dormant machinery with a multitool in hand.
“Did Mama Bruce put you up to this? I already told him I made sure to eat my packed lunch.”

It was a weak attempt at his usual jibes and they both knew it.

In his peripheral vision, he saw Steve cast his gaze over the half-eaten meal along with a mostly full bottle of water. Correctly assuming that Tony would just continue to distract himself with repairing the ship, he risked breaching the other man's personal space, leaning against the hull next to him.

*Why was he always so fucking stubborn?*

“Seriously though, you-”

“You think I'm *not* being serious?”

Brown eyes met blue. Both determined, both fatigued despite their best efforts.

When he spoke next, Steve's tone was low in his best *support group* tone – though Tony would rather that than the patronising manner from the PSAs-

He winced, pushing back memories of Peter becoming ecstatic when he realised *the Avengers didn't know about the videos*-

“I know you want to help Peter, but you're not gonna do that by killing yourself.”

Tony looked away again, continuing his work and talking over his shoulder.

“I've worked for longer than this before – Haven't you ever pulled an all-nighter? I didn't think you stuck to the rules *that much*. Is this when I find out your bedtime is 8:30?”

Steve's look of concern was gradually transforming to one of slight exasperation.

“It doesn't mean you *should.*”

When this didn't garner a response, he pressed onward.
“We all need you at your best, Peter needs you at your best-”

“No, what he needs is to be saved from the intergalactic dictator that wiped out half the universe – but my mistake, I guess I got my priorities wrong.”

They fell into a quiet moment, Steve re-evaluating his approach and Tony resolutely keeping his attention on his work.

“Did he have a family?”

There was a pause in the sustained clink of metal on metal. Tony avoided Steve's eyes that he could feel like the heat of a spotlight.

“He has an Aunt. Parent's died a while back.”

Any gaps in the wall were closing fast, so Steve pushed.

“Does she know?”

With a clatter the tool in Tony's hand was placed a little too forcefully down on a small table, before he loudly pulled a box full of assorted gadgets towards him and began to rummage through it.

“No.”

In truth, he had selfishly put off contacting her; He knew she survived – the many missed calls he'd skimmed through upon his return being evidence of that. The voicemails had been hard to hear, the first being May in a state of tearful panic.

“T-Tony if Peter's with you, please please get him to call me- People are just vanishing, I need to know if he's alright, please-”
After a few more of a similar sort, they gradually devolved into despondent pleas, as if reaching out the branch of contact was the only connection to Peter she had left.

“I know you’re probably not even getting these – I don’t even know why I’m still trying, you’re likely gone with the rest but if there’s even a chance... please at least tell me how it happened. He thought the world of you, please tell me he went peacefully and not...

“She deserves to know.”

Steve’s words cut through his reverie, bringing him back to the present – the guilt that he had been trying to keep under control now even heavier upon his shoulders.

“If I get him back, then it won’t matter.”

Tony retrieved what he was looking for from the crate, turning away in a manner that was supposed to mean end of discussion.

A signal that Steve clearly didn’t pick up, or blatantly ignored.

“Bruce hasn’t managed to crack any way to locate Thanos yet, and as far as I’m aware-” he gestured to the ship which, despite a few scuffed panels, looked a great deal better than it did when they ‘landed’, “-this is almost ready to go.”

Tony shot him a sharp look. The point?

Steve took the hint and got down to brass tacks.

“What I’m saying is that, when you get it functioning then what? Pick a direction and just hope you cross his path? If we’re gonna pull this off, we’ve got to be sure. Recover, recharge, and you and Bruce find some way to pinpoint a location – then we go.”

This stopped him short.

“We?”
“You're not alone in this, Tony. Each of us has been dealing with the fallout, and everyone is willing to sacrifice themselves to get that son of a bitch.”

The tiredness in the blue eyes now contained an undertone of resolution – and Tony could tell he held a similar look in his own. Both of them clinging to their own objectives like lifelines.

It didn't surprise Tony that the other's were focused on the stones, on getting the other half back – he knew his own view was skewed; In a perfect world he'd give the needs of the one for the many, but he just couldn't.

In retrospect, him recruiting Peter as his impromptu protégé had been entirely self-serving. Thinking he could bring some good into the world by taking him under his wing. He was a kid, one that Tony had led into a life of warring superheroes and alien tyrants – in the process taking him out of a normal life.

Peter was the best of them all – too good to be left at Thanos' whim.

Steve didn't break the silence they had dissolved into, giving ample time for his statement to sink in and letting the other man become lost in his own thoughts.

It was Tony that spoke, quietly and with a tone that could be mistaken as desperation.

“I can't leave him, Steve. There has to be a way of finding him fast; Thanos is one of the most feared guys in the galaxy, you'd think someone-”

His own thoughts, synapses racing with new revelations, interrupted his sentence and he lapsed into silence once more – Why the fuck didn't he think of asking before...

“Where's Nebula?”

Although he was becoming accustomed to his consciousness being out of his control, Peter couldn't help but feel jarred when he was wrenched away from the tranquil darkness once again. They were the moments he savoured the most - as it was merely pure and complete nothing.

No Thanos, no 'training', no thoughts of Tony.

No feelings. No thoughts.

It was the closest to bliss he was granted – a reprieve.
The artificial light hit his retinas sparked a fierce lance of pain spiking through him, and he hastily clenched his eyelids shut. This only seemed to worsen it, as the tension of his muscles caused the ache to continue – attempting to blink the pain away only resulted in a wave on nausea that crept through him, so he relented, keeping his eyes firmly shut as to prevent further pain.

Calming his breathing and honing his focus, he assessed the situation; A stab of fearful apprehension crept it's way up his spine as the familiarity of the situation dawned on him. He bit back his panic. The brief view he had gained through the flurry of pained vision had been of the ecclesiastical ceiling, and by the fact he was being held immobile and aloft by some unseen force, his suspicions were confirmed. *The 'enhancements' room.*

Initially, he was surprised that his leg held little of the agony from earlier – instead feeling numb and unresponsive to his weak attempts at movement – but that was soon replaced with a gnawing foreboding; The irrationally hopeful voice in his mind, now so quiet and even more infrequent, assured him that his accelerated healing was the answer. He'd been under for who-knows how long, and the gouges that had littered his skin probably hadn't been as bad as it'd looked-

*Fuck, he could barely think through the headache...*

On an impulse and a determination to face his reality, he pried open his eyelids.

He squinted, trying his best to ignore the fresh hurt that burned through his retinas as the room became clearer. Peter barely had time to get his bearings before his body was released from the invisible hold – being lowered none-too gracefully until he lay on the floor, his arms automatically bracing and hoisting himself into a sitting position.

His head swam, nausea rearing up as the change in orientation sent another siphon of agony running through his temple.

Something scraped across the floor.

There was less terror than last time, his breath only hitching slightly – only an empty, almost numb feeling spreading through his veins.

Where hours previously lay a leg torn into ribbons, pearly bone glinting through the blood, now rested a limb of silver.

His trembling hand met cold metal.

The smooth skin of his thigh transitioned harshly into an encircling ring of metal that signalled where his leg now ended and the 'enhancement' began – It looked like a mockery of muscles, plating
twisting around each other, sleek, strong, unfeeling.

*It didn't account for his headache though.*

The left side of his head felt like it was splitting – each movement spurring residual soreness spreading to behind his eyes. He pinched the bridge of his nose, a technique that had worked during stress-induced migraines after sleepless nights of patrolling. There was no relief.

Slow, measured breathing was the way he was preventing the swell of nausea overtaking him.

Raking his fingers steadily through his hair, he skimmed them across his scalp, the skin was tender, each shift of the hairs agitating it further. Moving further towards his left temple-

Pain skyrocketed as he located the source; a large, rigid metal panel lay unyielding, it's expanse arcing from near the corner of his eye and cresting past his ear. Fingernails prying at the seam where it cut harshly back to bone did nothing – embedded in his skull securely.

He couldn't hold back the nausea this time, but he barely registered vomiting onto the floor – his mind stalled in a state of shock. The web shooters he had just about dealt with, but he couldn't help but imagine what the process had been, of Thanos cutting into his *head*-

“You are fortunate I did not make you *watch* as I pulled your brain from your skull.”

The words pierced through Peter's fugue state, Thanos having stayed silent until that point, merely observing from the sidelines.

His head still resounding with a unyielding ache, Peter watched him through bleary eyes – unwillingly tensing as Thanos closed the distance between them, coming to a halt beside him.

“W-what is it?” Peter's voice was scarcely a whisper, almost loud in the quiet of the room.

“Ensurance. There are consequences for your actions, and I trust you will not defy me again.”

Hand once again skimming across the side of his head, he automatically began pulling at it again as if somehow, if by pushing it in *just the right way*, he could hope to reverse the irreparable damage.

*No luck.* He started to scratch, digging in despite the pain – he wanted it *out*, he didn't care how much it hurt, it was just *wrong*-

A large hand gripped his arm, firmly guiding it away from the cybernetic.
“Your accelerated healing is an asset, but it still needs time to heal.”

He couldn't help but be taken aback by Thanos' tone; it wasn't exactly gentle, but was a vast change from the venom from before – *as if speaking to a child*.

“Nebula failed in many ways, but through her I could determine what enhancements are beneficial.” He gestured briefly to the panel, “There will come a day when I will be unable to oversee you at all times,” Peter's eyes involuntarily fell to the gauntlet, “It provides memory access, should it be necessary.”

The implication was clear.

There was no hiding anything now – Stones or not, Thanos would know *everything*.

Although backing away wouldn't do any good, it was an instinctual response. He pulled away, trying to find his footing and manoeuvre himself upright; he almost fell when he couldn't get his new limb stable underneath him. It responded to his movement, though the lack of feeling was too disconcerting, sending him stumbling.

A guiding hand returned to his arm, stabilising him before leading him slowly towards the door.

“Come, we have more to discuss.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope this makes sense? Idk I finished this at like 3am so lemme know if anything is confusing

so next chapter there'll be a section from Thanos' perspective :O tbh it was gonna be at the start of this one, but needs a little more work and would fit better with what's gonna go down next time

No jokes, I'm gonna seriously try to get the next chapter done quicker – love y'all and thanks for reading xx

End Notes
yeah, I know this is kind of bad - but it was a lil something I needed to get out my brain, and I'll continue if people are interested :) thanks for reading x

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