Mr. Parker Declined to Comment

by apisdn

Summary

The events leading up to the embarrassing moments during the Doomed Field trip, and how Peter Parker accidentally ended up in charge of things. All the while the political machine moves on, the Avengers do not kiss and make up, and the future draws ever closer.

Notes

the timeline has been shortened so that Homecoming occurs like… a couple weeks after
Civil War instead of a few months, with Civil War being in mid September, and Homecoming at some time in early October. Peter is a freshman (ninth grade, fourteen years old, turning fifteen at some point in the fall). Also, it diverges from canon in two ways. 1 Mr. Stark wasn’t selling Stark Tower, he was moving out all the Avengers stuff and renaming it Stark tower, because whenever Peter is “driven upstate” to the compound in a fic, it makes me scream because that would take HOURS (Esopus New York where the compound was filmed is a full two hour drive away from the city limits, let alone enduring traffic all the way to Queens). 2 Tony never offered Peter a place on the Avengers team since in this fic he was quitting himself and divorcing himself from the whole avenging gig. (mostly) He’s trying to quit completely, (though he can’t) which I know is a bit different than canon, but there you have it. Anyway, because that scene never happened, he never proposed to Pepper and they’re still ‘on break’, though at this point they both know that break is really a break-up (that one’s because my romance writing abilities are exactly 0). This mess starts in mid-october, a couple weeks after homecoming, excepting the prologue which is in the springtime of the next year, maybe mid march, and also years later.
“So,” said Ellen, grinning conspiratorially at the well dressed young man across from her. “You Starks are famous for being able to live down anything, from drunken scandals to the Taco Bell incident just a couple years ago. Like water off a duck's back, isn’t it?”

“More like water off vibranium.” said Peter. “You need a bulletproof self-esteem to survive that level of stupidity.”

The studio laughed, and Ellen reflected that this was possibly the easiest segment she’d ever done—and judging by the guest it would be the most successful too. “So tell me. What was your most embarrassing moment. I have to know. What was the last thing you couldn’t live down.”

“I don’t know if I can do that.” said Peter. “It’s… horrifying.”

“Oh come on.” said Ellen. “You have to tell me now.”

Peter looked resigned. “Back when I was fifteen,” he said, “One of the classes at my school took a field trip to Stark Tower.”

“Well that can’t end well.” said Ellen.

“It gets worse Ellen. Just wait.” said Peter. “I wasn’t in the class, so I didn’t know about it until it was too late. So there I am, loafing about my own home in my pajamas covered in a rather large amount of engine grease, when suddenly I come face to face with all of my peers.”

By then, the whole studio was roaring with laughter. “What kind of pajamas?” asked Ellen, once she’d recovered a bit.

“Itty bitty little shorts.” said Peter. “It was probably the most embarrassing situation possible. And this was before anything was public--anything at all. As far as they knew, I’d never even been to Stark Tower. Honestly I don’t know who was more surprised, them or me.”

The roars of laughter got louder at Peter’s over-exaggerated horrified shiver, but what they didn’t know was that it came from a place of deep pain, because that was when Peter’s life had gotten truly awfully weird. Even weirder than Spider-man…

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Peter didn’t actually notice anything on the day itself. It had been a stressful week, he was trying to get ahead before he left for Arizona, and frankly he devoted very little thought to what went on in classes and extracurriculars he was no longer attending. School was all well and good, but it wasn’t helpful in patent applications or trying to scale up his zero point manufacturing processes for industrial use, nor did it endear him to the accords council, so it wasn’t something he really thought about at this point. Mostly, his attendance still happened solely because he needed a break and wanted to hang out with Ned and MJ. And also because he needed the arts credits. Art was evil.

On the morning itself, he was taking a break. He’d worked non-stop through the night and he figured he deserved a couple hours of fun before continuing the daily grind. So, at 10:23 AM that Tuesday morning, he was entering the basement testing rooms of the Stark Tower complex. There was a lot going on there, but Mr. Stark usually had a bay or two for his larger projects, and Peter knew for a fact that there was a 1958 Ferrari GT California Spyder (not to be confused with the 1958 Porsche Spyder a level down in the parking garage) there in desperate need of a tune up and a
new set of brake rotors.

It was one of Mr. Stark’s quirks that Peter appreciated. There was always a car mid-restoration. When Mr. Stark finished one, he got another. They were sort of like fidget cubes, except worth several million dollars each. It was nice though, to have something like that around for when quantum physics got too frustrating, and since Mr. Stark had shown him exactly how an engine worked he availed himself of the distraction several times.

As Peter pulled up the progress notes on the restoration and cranked up the AC/DC unawares of what was about to descend upon him, the Advanced Robotics Class of Midtown Tech was entering the building. Flash was making a fool of himself. Ned was geeking out despite having been to the tower several times, and nobody was sure what MJ was doing. She wasn’t even in the Robotics class. Despite that, nobody had argued when she got on the bus armed with a sketchbook and a rather malicious expression.

Ned knew that expression. It meant that a crisis was about to happen and MJ intended to draw it. Suddenly, realization sprang over Ned like a cold splash of water. He suspected he knew exactly what crisis MJ was there to draw.

As the rest of the class proceeded through the security line, he drifted a bit to the side, enough not to be heard as he whispered into his conveniently FRIDAY connected phone. “Hey FRIDAY, where’s Peter?”

(Peter wiped off his grease covered hand onto his ratty red tank top. Instead of ‘If this shirt is blue you are going too fast,’ it now read ‘If this shirt is blue you are going too fast-.’)

“Peter is currently in testing cubicle E” said FRIDAY.

“Oh.” said Ned. “What is he doing?” he asked.

“Currently, Peter appears to be enacting a dramatic rendition of AC/DC’s Thunderstruck.”

“Oh god.” said Ned. “Does… Is our tour going there.”

(“THE’re WAs nO HeLp fRoM yOu!” sang Peter, followed by an enthusiastic “THUNDER” and a little hop)

“Your tour will arrive in the testing bay in approximately an hour and a half. The itinerary calls for a brief presentation and a walk-through of one of the low-priority labs followed by fifteen minutes in the testing bays, after which the tour will be released into the museum and gift shop.” said FRIDAY sweetly.

Ned was very afraid. “Can we skip that part.” he asked.

“No” said FRIDAY. “I’m afraid that action is prevented under the ‘bathtub photos’ protocol.”

“What’s the ‘bathtub photos’ protocol?” asked Ned.

“The only permissible action in the case of Peter embarrassing himself is to save photos. Interference is not allowed except in cases of actual danger or distress.”

Ned was briefly afraid. Then mortified for Peter’s sake. Then he got over himself. It would be painful for Peter, but proof of his internship would probably streamline his school life by a lot. And besides… “Can I have the photos?” he asked.
“Certainly.” said FRIDAY. “Would you like your classmate’s reactions as well?”

Ned nodded, in awe of FRIDAY’s awesomeness. “FRIDAY,” he said, “If you had a real body I would totally ask you to prom right now.”

“I’m certain the evening would be enjoyable.” said FRIDAY. “However, I wouldn’t want Ms. Brant to miss out.”

Ned blushed. “I told you that in confidence.”

Meanwhile, lured by the irresistible twin sirens of Vintage Cars and Slacking Off Work, Mr. Stark wandered in, and joined in conference with Peter over the engine block. As it turned out, the Ferrari was going to need a lot more work than they’d originally thought. They’d need to get in some parts they didn’t already have before continuing much further with the engine. It was decided that Peter would finish up there while Mr. Stark rolled under and looked at the brake lines. They were a mess.

FRIDAY was also being uniquely unhelpful to everyone. Ned (he’d succumbed to the temptation of old habits quickly and gone to notify Peter of his impending doom) couldn’t get a text out. The files on Flash’s phone had become mysteriously corrupted--none of his illicit photos or videos would make it out of the building. And as for Peter and Mr. Stark? Their ‘work’ had slowed down into something that involved minor poking around (Peter) or lying on the creeper doing nearly nothing (Mr. Stark). FRIDAY was quite proud of her role in causing the situation. Hopefully she could arrange for a meeting between those groups.

The other person FRIDAY was being unhelpful to was Ms. Potts. Pepper didn’t blame her though, since she was well aware of Tony’s slacking abilities. Since the man was supposed to be dealing with actual work he would obviously be squirreled away somewhere with Peter tinkering, and FRIDAY was basically incapable of snitching on her creator or surrogate brother, which meant that Pepper would need to find them the old fashioned way. She’d start with his personal labs and then check the part of the basement that bore a shocking resemblance to an auto-shop. If she didn’t find him either of those places, she might have to do something drastic, like ask for Peter’s help the next couple of days. Putting Peter somewhere was an almost guaranteed method of getting Tony to show up there, and Pepper wasn’t above using that fact for the good of the company. (Tony’s board meeting attendance had skyrocketed as soon as Pepper asked Peter to shadow her. It was genius.)

Meanwhile, on the tour, Ned was actually managing to act cool around an actual data scientist. This was because the part of his mind generally dedicated to awed fanboyishness was currently occupied with contemplating the impending peterpocalypse. It was going to be a disaster of epic proportions.

“Five bucks says he freaks out so bad he briefly forgets how to human.” came a voice from right beside Ned’s ear.

Ned jumped, before realizing it was just MJ. “No bet.” he said. “He forgets how to human when the toaster pops. No way will he survive us being here without glitching out like a Bethesda game.”

“What are you idiots talking about.” said Flash, butting in where he wasn’t wanted. Clearly he’d been listening the whole time. Ned reminded himself about situational awareness for the forty-fifth time just that day..

“Taking bets on Peter’s reaction when he finds out about this field trip.” said MJ, cleverly giving
away nothing while telling the absolute truth. Ned had to admire that skill, even if it didn’t mitigate the coming trainwreck.

“Five bucks says he throws a tantrum like a little baby when he finds out the jigs up about his fake internship.” said Flash. “They told us at the very beginning that all the interns are college aged.”

MJ rolled her eyes. “Five bucks says you’re the one throwing the tantrum.”


“All right!” said the peppy tour guide. “The next part of the tour will be the testing rooms. These are where we test the prototypes we machine in-house, as well as build larger models or troubleshoot larger processes. They were originally part of the Avengers section, and are even Hulk-proof! I know it’s going to be cool, but you have to remember the NDA’s. No photos or videos, and if you accidentally see a company secret, don’t tell anybody.”

The whole class nodded. This was the part they were most excited about. They might have been surrounded by science the entire tour, but that would be where the science that went boom went.

“We’re doomed.” muttered Ned.

Four minutes later, the class was set free to walk through the observation corridor above the testing rooms. Within two minutes, they were congregated all together around the window to one of the least impressive projects--a completely normal car. That wasn’t what they were looking at though.

“Is that…” said one girl.

“Peter Parker.” whispered someone else.

Flash made a Noise. It bore a shocking similarity to the sort of noise one would make when kicked in the nuts. MJ started drawing.

“Oh my god.” said another girl. “He’s like… shredded.”

“I mean, he was cute, in an awkward way,” said girl 1 (Ned really needed to learn the names of his classmates) “But now he’s…”

“Yum.” said the other girl. The sentiment seemed to be accepted by most of the class, even the straight males.

“Short shorts work on him.”

“Okay but you’re ignoring the important part. He’s here, at Stark Industries guys. That whole internship thing isn’t a fake. Do you have any idea how wild that is?”

“He’s like a genius Abe. We all half expected the internship to be real. Suddenly developing a six pack is way more impressive.”

“Do you think he actually knows Spider-man?”

“Fuck that, do you think he knows Iron Man.”

“No way. Interns are small fry. Even if he met him it would be more of a handshake-and-move-on thing than actually knowing the dude.”

“I don’t know. He did say he knows Spider-man, and we know Spider-man knows Iron Man.
That’s like… way closer of a connection than most of us have.”

Suddenly a commotion on the side of the room stopped all of the panicking, conversation, and admiration of Peter’s gorgeous ass as he leaned over the gorgeous car. (Ned was secure enough in himself to realize that Peter’s butt was an absolute work of art.) Pepper Potts had arrived on scene, and they could tell she was angry, even through the soundproof glass and large space.

Actually, Pepper was more than angry. She was furious. Steaming. Utterly livid. Her absolute idiot of an ex-boyfriend was cheating out on work (again), and yet she wouldn’t even get to yell at him properly because she’d been telling him to a) take more time for himself, and b) connect more with those who loved him for ages now, so he had an absolutely stellar excuse. Making her job even more difficult was Actual Puppy Dog Peter Parker’s huge doe eyes lighting up in utter delight upon seeing her.

“Hi Pepper!” he said, “What are you doing down here?”

Pepper melted like a Popsicle on a hot day. “Hi Peter, I’m just looking for Tony. I’ve got a couple things for him that are pretty urgent.”

“Anything I can help with?” asked Peter.

“I’m afraid not.” said Pepper.

“And besides.” said Tony, emerging from under the Ferrari like some kind of mythic car god emerging from the deeps. “You’re on light duty until Arizona. Science Fairs are a big deal cucciolo.”

Peter snorted. “Like I’m capable of doing my presentation anything but perfectly. You drilled me way too many times for that Mr. Stark.”

“Practice makes perfect.” said Tony.

Pepper smiled angelically down at Tony who was still lying on the creeper. “Why don’t you be a good example then and come review the release presentation for the new watch model then? That one certainly deserves perfection.”

Tony sighed, and even while moping dramatically Pepper thought he looked the happiest he’d been in a long while. (She had a suspicion it had to do with proximity to one Peter Parker)

“Fine.” he said, rolling to his feet to the accompaniment of several rather painful sounding back cracks. “Why don’t you finish up in here and then come upstairs?” he said to Peter. “I can show you how a press release works.”

“Shower first though.” said Pepper. “Both of you. The next person who gets motor oil on my office furniture gets to do my taxes. And let me tell you, I’ve made a lot of poorly documented charitable donations this year.”

“Yes ma’am” said Peter earnestly. Tony rolled his eyes.

“I’m giving you time to escape cucciolo. Do it while you can.” he said, ruffling Peter’s fluffy curls with his filthy hand.

“Hey!” said Peter.

“Get to a good stopping point Peter, and don’t rush.” said Pepper. “It will be a while before we get
to the good part.” Then she herded Tony out of the room, and pretended not to notice him mouthing ‘save me’ over his shoulder at Peter.

None of them noticed their shocked observers during that interaction. Peter didn’t even notice afterwards for several minutes. In fact, he didn’t notice until he’d closed the hood and turned to leave. He’d noticed someone watching for a while but hadn’t paid attention. When things were boring in between tests, people admired the car. It happened. Still, they’d been watching for a while, and at the end he glanced up to see who it was, only to make eye contact with twenty-four pairs of familiar eyes.

“I’m sorry.” whispered Ned. MJ, long finished with the Flash drawing, started up again—this time with the subject of Peter.

Peter, meanwhile, put a large hand-print shaped dent into the edge of one of the worktables and briefly forgot how to walk.
A FUCKING BOMB HAPPENS

Chapter Notes

Okay, I reread the prologue and now I want to write the Taco Bell Incident.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The whole thing started right after first time Peter’s suit got… blown up.

“Karen, what do I do… I think I broke it… this is all my fault I’m so sorry I just… I’m so sorry what do I do…”

“Peter.” Karen’s soft voice broke through his spin-cycle of worry like a knife through butter. He had been conditioned through hundreds of incidents to know that when she spoke up it was because she had a solution, and that usually meant that the problem would go away. As soon as he relaxed, she continued. “There is a protocol in place for this. In the case of your suit becoming so damaged that it cannot be fixed by you yourself a time-slot will be automatically created in Mr. Starks schedule for you to bring it in for repairs. This qualifies.”

“Karen no! It’s not that bad. I’m sure I can fix it. Here, just let me…” he fumbled about on his desk for a pair of pliers, something to smooth out the mess of wires that surrounded the frankly enormous area on the left side where the suit was so destroyed as to be nearly non-existent.

“Peter, there is no way to replace the damaged sections with existing materials without compromising the integrity of the suit. You are instructed to report to the Tower at seven tomorrow morning, as that is the only time available before Mr. Stark flies to Nigeria. I suggest treating your wounds and getting some sleep.”

Peter sighed. Karen was right. He just didn’t know how exactly he was supposed to face Mr Stark a mere week after having his suit returned to him with an instruction to ‘take care of it’ when he’d been so stupid as to get it damaged in the first place. He followed Karen’s instructions, however, since really there was nothing better to do, pulling out his almost comically enormous med kit out from under his bed and digging through it to find what he needed--a custom made burn bandage system he called a jelly roll, which he’d synthesized after his first building fire as Spider-man. His suit had taken most of the shrapnel, and he’d picked out the rest before starting on his suit so all he needed to do was burn care.

After cleaning the wound, which involved copious swearing, he unrolled the jelly roll and smoothed it over the affected area which reached from the bottom of his ribs to halfway down his thigh, holding it in place until the exudation from his burn activated the hydrocolloid and it began to work, soothing the heat into a moist coolness and beginning the process of healing. It was time to begin the scant four hours of sleep he had before he would need to get up in the morning. Mr. Stark’s schedule waited for no one, not even Mr. Stark.

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Peter woke up just after six, got ready for school, and then hopped onto the 7 train at Lowery St Station towards Manhattan without paying a fare. (Paying for things? In this economy?) The truly optimal location of his apartment in relation to the subway meant that it only took half an hour
including waiting and walking for him to reach Grand Central, which bore the dubious fortune of being the next door neighbor of Stark Tower. There he paused.

“Karen. Karen. What do I do.” he said, talking into his phone so as to not seem like a fool while accessing the stripped down AI’s unique capabilities through the earpiece that came with the Spider-man suit. (detached, because Peter refused to use her only with the mask on and had no respect for anything).

“Proceed to Mr. Starks personal lab on the 106th floor of the building.” said Karen.

“I can’t just walk into Stark Tower” hissed Peter. “They want things like… badges. Yeah. Badges.”

Peter got the distinct impression that if Karen had been human, or even properly sentient, she would have sighed. “The underside of the lip should, at this time, be climable without high visibility from commuters, though I must suggest haste. Sunrise is in twelve minutes.” she said, after a bare second of hesitation.

“Thanks” said Peter. Then he slipped around to the less used side of the tower, and began to climb, skittering up the groove between the two sections of the edifice and depending solely on his grey hoodie for anonymity. Luckily, no-one saw him, which was a miracle, it being New York. Eventually he ended up on the helipad, which was only a bit down from the 106th floor, which would have to be good enough.

He stood there, awkwardly, for several seconds admiring the quin-jets before the playful Irish voice of Mr. Stark’s AI took pity on him and invited him in. “Mr. Parker.” she said. “You’re five minutes early. Boss is just upstairs.”

“Thank you ma’am” said Peter, unsure of the AI’s preferred form of address.

“Friday is fine Mr. Parker.”

“Peter is fine Ms. Friday.” said Peter, his comeback automatic. Immediately afterwards he blushed and regretted it. Sassing the AI was probably not a good way to make a positive impression.

“The stairway to the lab is just over there, Peter.” said Friday. Unlike Karen, whose tone was always flat, she managed to inject some humor into the statement. Okay, maybe he hadn’t screwed up too badly. He had read in WIRED once that Mr Stark’s AI’s were refined enough to use humor. Karen wasn’t, not really, though she did have some pre-programmed jokes, but FRIDAY… Peter could see it.

As he descended the stairs his ears picked up the sounds of distant rock music; presumably Mr Stark was already in the lab. Hopefully they could get this over with quickly and with a minimum of embarrassment.

Then the lab doors open, the loud music hit him like a physical force, and every coherent thought he might have been having about the suit or Mr Stark flew out of the window. Until that moment all Peter had known was that the lab was on the 106th floor. Now… The lab was there. It was also on the 107th. And the 108th and 109th. It was enormous, ridiculously cluttered, and somehow still one of the most breathtakingly open and beautiful spaces Peter had ever had the privilege to enter.

The music shut off. “Kid?” asked Mr Stark from… somewhere.

“Ye… Yeah” Peter said, swallowing to get the dryness out of his throat.

Mr Stark laughed at him. “Get over here and let’s see what the problem is.” he said.
Peter ascended the cantilevered glass staircase that spiralled around the central elevator as slowly as he could while still seeming to walk with purpose, gawking at everything around him. He was so busy doing so that he actually ran into Mr. Stark, smacking directly into his chest with force. “Oh my gosh, I’m so sorry, fuck, I didn’t mean to…” he trailed off, and blushed bright red at Mr. Stark’s laughing face. “Fuck,” he said again, quietly but with feeling.

“So. What exactly did you do to the suit I gave you?” asked Mr. Stark. He led Peter over to a remarkably clear table considering the state of the lab and idly gestured with his hand. Immediately a hologram of the suit blueprints appeared. “Lay it out and Fri can scan for issues.”

Peter nodded, still a bit in awe at being in Tony Stark’s lab, and then removed his (carefully folded, he wasn’t a heathen) suit from his ratty backpack.

“Wow.” said Mr. Stark as he laid it out, “That’s…”

“Yeah.” said Peter. “So it turns out that your ridiculously durable fabric is a lot less so when it’s been exposed to repeated rapid temperature changes and energy blasts. Like, don’t get me wrong it’s great, but…”

“I didn’t put it through stress testing for… what was it exactly that you were fighting?”

Peter sighed, and slumped against the table as he watched Mr Stark manipulate the hologram of the suit, examining the data from the scans and frowning as he tried to figure out what to do. “Well, you know how a couple weeks ago there was that dude who was stealing bunches of alien junk?”

Mr Stark’s face suddenly took on a strange expression, as if he’d aged thirty years in the space of a second. “How could I forget?”

Peter shivered for a moment, suddenly feeling the harsh press and unforgiving pain of an entire building. “Yeah. Yeah.” he said. “Anyway, well there kinda was like… a lot of already stolen tech, y’know? And like when I caught the Vulture, the rest of his people were all like ‘wow it’s time to skedaddle’, but obviously there’s no clear leadership at the moment and still a lot of weapons which they can’t exactly move because I mean, thousands of tons of alien shit. Not exactly something you can FedEx. So there’s like… a bunch of random small groups of criminals with chitauri tech just lying around in various places, and the thing is that I have to get them fast or else they disappear.” Mr Stark made a face that Peter interpreted as meaning ‘YOU don’t have to get them, idiot, stick to churros’ “And I can’t just tell the police either!” protested Peter, not liking the implications brought up by Mr. Stark’s glare. “I tried to tip them off once, and the cache straight up disappeared overnight. I think that they’re still arguing over the tiny bits of evidence that are left. Obviously, they were warned by someone inside.”

“Several questions,” said Mr. Stark. “Firstly, if they’re so well hidden how are you finding them? Secondly, exactly how is this your job? And the other thing--how the fuck did you damage the suit this bad, and why do the ‘undamaged’ parts of it look like something out of MacGyver?”

Peter wilted a little bit, realizing that he’d been rambling. “I built a tracker for the energy signatures of the weapons, it’s my fault that the Vulture shit went down the way it did, and there was a bomb.” He didn’t address the MacGyver comment, not wanting to admit to the crimes he’d committed against the glorious work of engineering that was the Spider-man suit.

Mr. Stark’s tinkering stopped immediately once Peter finished, and his hands stilled. “A bomb?” he asked, voice quiet in a way that promised danger.

“I got hit by several energy blasts that took out all the suits tech while the guys were escaping, so I
didn’t see it coming and they rigged the whole place to blow once they were gone. Luckily the place didn’t have anything volatile but still… Semtex. It sucks. Not as bad as that one weird green one that explodes with poisonous gas, but still.”

“Are you okay? Are you hurt?”

“I’m fine.”

“FRIDAY run a scan.”

“Seriously?” said Peter. “I just said I’m fine. I was a little banged up but I treated it. Plus I’ve got, y’know, super freaky healing powers.”

“Mr Parker appears to be telling the truth.” said FRIDAY. “His vitals are normal, and though I cannot ascertain the nature of his injuries through their covering they appear to have been, at the very least, bandaged.”

“Shirt.” said Mr Stark, holding out his hand expectantly.

Since Peter was here to request free suit repairs, he felt obligated to do what Mr. Stark said and hand it over. Once he had, Mr Stark poked questioningly at the jelly roll. “What is this?” he asked.

Peter smiled a little inside, proud of his invention. “A customized hydrocolloid patch with a good antibiotic in it covered in a paper thin layer of flexible chitin. I call it the Jelly Roll. It’s like moleskin, but, y’know, for burn victims with super healing.”

“That’s not exactly a standard part of burn triage.” said Mr. Stark, frowning. Being a superhero, he probably had experience with that.

“Healing it isn’t the problem.” said Peter. “I mean, I have a pretty fast recovery time. The issue is that my spider healing works a lot faster than my stupid human body knows how to get rid of dead skin. If I don’t want to walk around as a heaping pile of necrotic flesh then autolytic debridement is the kindest option. I mean, helping the body get rid of it is way better than the alternative. I’m not immune to infection and I deeply hate taking scissors to myself trying to get rid of… things.”

“That’s… kind of gross.” said Mr. Stark. “But I guess you know what your doing and I imagine you’d want to avoid a doctor. Still… where did you get this stuff, it’s brilliant.”

Peter preened. Mr. Stark had never called him brilliant before. “I made it.” he said. “I mean, you can get half the stuff at a grocery store, and like… the school labs aren’t really spectacularly secured.”

“Well… that’s just.” Mr. Stark paused. “I forgot how smart you are.” He peeled up a corner of the roll, carefully watching Peter to make sure he wasn’t hurting him and poked at it a bit. “This is pretty cool. You should patent it.”

Peter laughed a bit at that. “It’s not that great!” he said.
Mr. Stark laughed. “No, really kid, your stuff is unique. When I built your suit I was mostly guessing on a lot of things because even with all my resources I couldn’t figure out how to make your web fluid, only how to modify it.”

“Really? It’s not that hard. I should give you the recipe.” said Peter.

“No, but you should set up a meeting with one of my lawyers to get the patents for it.” said Mr. Stark. Then he changed tack abruptly. “Can I see the wound?” he asked “You don’t have to… this looks fine, but I do worry.”

“Yeah.” said Peter after a couple seconds. “I was going to change it out at some point this morning anyway.” As he spoke, he hopped up on one of the tables and began to peel the bandage off, wincing slightly as the dead skin pulled away from the partially healed burn.

“ICK.” said Mr. Stark upon seeing the amount of dead nastiness on the bandage.

“I know right?” said Peter. “I’ll be healed up by tomorrow, but getting all this cleaned up is the worst.” He balled up the roll and stuck it into the bio-hazard bag that Mr Stark had produced from seemingly nowhere. Then he put on the new jelly roll with practiced motions. “So what can be done for the suit?” he asked.

“To be perfectly honest Peter it would be easier to make a new suit at this point.” said Mr. Stark. “This one’s clearly been through the wringer--and not just today. You’ve been repairing it yourself for smaller things haven’t you. And there are pieces missing. Did you use those in the repairs?”

“Yeah.” said Peter. “And, um, also for a couple other things. Like. I removed half the sensors of the diagnostic system. Because I needed them. To automate some parts of the web fluid production. And I cannibalized a few other things for my chitauri tech scanner.”

“Okay... That makes... sense. Next time though please don’t use the suit for that. Everything in it is there for a reason and you could have compromised your safety.” said Mr. Stark. Then he frowned and zoomed in on the web shooter scans as compared to the blueprints. “These are different.” he said.

Peter froze. It was one thing to admit to cannibalizing parts. Coming out and saying that he had the hubris to think he could improve something designed by Mr. Stark though… “I... uh. It... There was... and. Um” he said.

Mr Stark stared at him. “You improved them.”

“Sorry?” asked Peter.

“Not a question. And for your information in the rare event that someone comes along who can actually improve on my tech I generally hire them instead of getting angry. I’m not Hammer.”

“Oh.” said Peter. “I didn’t improve them that much. I just... increased efficiency. A bit. And since I use them all the time I’m in a good place to react to problems. It’s not like I just...” he gestured vaguely at the shooters.

“Again, not angry, job offer. Is this a dual chamber web system? It looks like you’ve moved to modifying the end stages of however your web production works instead of modifying them afterwards.”

“Um. Yeah.” said Peter. “Your web shooter combinations were great, but I figured out that it’s a lot easier to fine tune them this way. I can like, customize how long I need them to last now too, which
is nice. I leave less used webbing lying around in the streets.”

“Excellent” said Mr. Stark. Then he devolved into a long series of questions and comments on everything from the shooters to what exactly Peter had done to the communications systems. As they worked, Peter slowly relaxed, and eventually he sort of forgot that it was Tony Fucking Stark beside him and just started manipulating the holograms to best demonstrate his points. It was a fun hour.

Ten minutes before the end Mr. Stark produced a brand new Spider-man suit from nowhere. “I made several basic ones before I started adding all the bells and whistles,” he said. “We can migrate most of the stuff over. Spider-man suit Mark III, better than the last and worlds better than the first awful onesie.”

“Really… a new suit, just like that.” said Peter in wonderment.

“Yeah.” said Mr. Stark, reaching for the eyepieces of the neatly disassembled suit on the table. “Just… Please come in to repair it instead of doing it at home. A lot of the reason the other one was damaged so badly in the explosion was that one of your suit components was duct tape. Also don’t take any parts off of it or change anything without running it by me first. Or FRIDAY. She’s pretty good with simulating possible problems.”

“Okay.” said Peter. “But fair warning, I damage it like… a lot, and I didn’t think you’d want me bothering you that much.”

“You do have access to my labs you know. You are technically my intern. No need to bother me on every little thing, just… show up for ‘work’”

Peter gasped horrified. “I can’t just… walk in. To your tower. And your labs. Thats…”

“Yes you can.” said Mr. Stark. “In fact… FRIDAY schedule a basic tour of the facilities for my new intern. For today if you can. Assign him to nothing but ‘special projects’ directly under me so he doesn’t get bogged down with work, but give him access to everything.”

Peter made a strange choking noise.

“Including the purse strings FRIDAY, for reasonable expenses. Don’t let him work with things out of dumpsters anymore.”

Peter’s distress became even greater, but Mr Stark just laughed at him. Then he sobered and touched Peter’s shoulder gently. “Hey, kid. Don’t make it weird. I just… ever since I gave you that suit I feel a little bit responsible for you. I don’t want you getting hurt. Especially if it’s something I could prevent just by giving you a basic lab set up and spare parts.”

“I….” said Peter. “Thank you Mr. Stark.”

“Yeah.” said Mr. Stark. The moment was a little bit uncomfortable. Then he looked at his watch and the tension shattered. “It’s 8:15, do you need a ride home? And are you going to be late for school?”

Peter squeaked in a panic. “Oh fuck, I am so dead. School starts in fifteen minutes and it’s, like an hour away.” he said as he frantically began to pack up his things that had ended up spread out over Mr. Starks lab tables, including his precious jerry-rigged chitauri scanner. He didn’t realize that Mr. Stark was helping him until the third time he was handed something. Then he squeaked again, because Tony Fucking Stark was helping him.
“An hour?” asked Mr Stark, a little bit surprised.

“Depending on train times and delays. I also have to run, like, a mile at the end. My school’s all the way over by Flushing Park.”

“I’ll drive you.” decided Mr. Stark. “I’m heading out to LaGuardia anyway. It’s on the way. We can pick up breakfast too since you’re already going to be late anyway.”

“What? Ah… hng.” said Peter, eloquently. His school wasn’t anywhere near the fastest route to LaGuardia, and breakfast?

“We’re not done with this conversation and I can hear your stomach from all the way over here. Let’s go.”

Mr. Stark then strode purposefully to the elevator, leaving Peter with no choice but to follow in his wake or be left behind as the incredibly fast elevator whisked its way to street level. It didn’t stop the entire way down, so Peter had no time to prepare before having to walk across the incredibly busy lobby right next to the company’s owner. It was an incredibly awkward experience, and because of his preternatural senses Peter could feel every single one of the many pairs of eyes that landed on him in curiosity. Luckily it was over quickly, and they walked straight out into the waiting open car doors of a black town car that magically pulled up as they were exiting the building. Happy, who was driving, glanced back at Peter sitting next to Mr. Stark with slight surprise, but didn’t comment.

Mr Stark rattled of a series of instructions to Happy, and then as they crossed Queensboro bridge he turned to Peter and started talking to him again, very carefully explaining exactly what rules he needed to follow and privileges he had as far as the tower and its labs were concerned. “The resources are there.” he said. “Use them.”

Then the conversation turned to other things, the principles of bio-mimicry as applied to engineering, the reasons for the ridiculous costs of the subway system, and how chitauri energy weapons worked. For the second time that morning Peter relaxed, scientific interest overriding hero worship. He was a little anxious that Mr. Stark was dumbing the conversation down for him, but even that faded in the face of finally getting an explanation about the inner workings of a chitauri energy core.

They bought ridiculously expensive breakfast sandwiches and coffee at a place in Rego Park, and when they arrived at his school, Peter realized that they’d been looping around a few blocks for nearly a half hour waiting for him and Mr. Stark to be done, which was strange. People didn’t generally wait on him. He did miss the entirety of first period English, of course but was totally worth it.

Chapter End Notes

Also, this bonus chapter comes courtesy of my great impatience. You're welcome.
Directly after school, Peter was picked up once again by a dark town car containing Happy Hogan. He was a ridiculous bundle of nerves all the way to Stark Tower, unsure of what exactly he was supposed to be doing.

“Um, Happy?” he asked. Happy’s grunt wasn’t a reply but he took it as permission to continue anyway. “Is there like, a place I’m supposed to go, or like… I don’t know, an instruction manual or something?”

“I’ll take you in. You need to have your biometrics in the system anyway.”

“Okay. Thanks I guess.”

“Yeah. Food?”

“Yes. Please. But, um… why? I mean, I thought you didn’t like me?”

“Unfortunately,” said Happy, “My job description at the moment includes keeping you nice and happy, and since I have been briefed on your inherent teenagerness…”

“Food.” said Peter, finishing the statement for him.

“We should make it quick though. You have an appointment with someone in human resources.” said Happy as he pulled into a convenient McDonald's drive-through.

“Yeah.” said Peter. “Get me like… a hundred nuggets dude. I am starving. Honey mustard for the sauce.”

Somehow even though Peter had specifically asked for a hundred nuggets he was still surprised when Happy ordered a hundred nuggets. Still, he wasn’t going to look a gift nugget in the mouth when he could eat it instead, so he attacked them happily. When they arrived at the tower Peter only had eighteen nuggets left and for almost the first time since he’d gotten his powers he was entirely full. It was… an unfamiliar experience to be entirely without the constant bite of hunger deep in his gut. It was not, however, unpleasant.

After stuffing the remainder of his nuggets into his backpack, Peter followed Happy into the building to the security checkpoint where he was required to submit to a truly enormous number of scans. Apparently FRIDAY liked to be able to tell who you were at all times in at least three different ways. Or maybe it was Happy that wanted that.

Once he was done getting all scanned in (including such measurements as weight distribution while walking and a cheek swab) Happy somehow wordlessly summoned an incredibly peppy woman in a chartreuse skirt suit.

“Hello and welcome to Stark Industries. We’re so glad to have you on the team.” she said. “My name is Celia and I am a personnel coordinator here--my job is to fix things so that everyone here can be at our best. Today, I’ll be showing you around and explaining how things work.”

“Um… thanks.” said Peter, eloquently.
“Great.” said Celia. She started in the direction of the elevators and Peter followed after her. “Our central R&D department--which has many labs located right here in Stark Tower--is organized very differently than a traditional corporate structure. Everyone is assigned to various projects according to their skillset. The project leader can pull employees from anywhere in the department to assist with their project team, and most projects are accomplished with entirely different groups of people, though there are groups that stay together. You are assigned to work directly under Dr. Stark himself on his special projects, but on the days that he doesn’t need you we can add you to the general worker pool. Lots of projects need fresh eyes or a helping hand, and I’m certain you’ll find a lot to do. Interns generally only get short term assignments, so finding someone who needs you for just a few hours will be easy.”

“Cool.” said Peter. “What sorts of projects are there?”

“Loads!” said Celia. “Generally though they’re divided into three types--Research Projects, which consist of pure scientific research, Development Projects, which are where we design and create new products, and Implementation Projects which focus mostly on creating and improving the technology that fabricates our products. You’d be surprised by how many prototypes can’t see the light of day before someone figures out an entirely new way of mass producing it in a cheaper, cleaner fashion.”

“I’m guessing you work on the third then?” asked Peter, noticing her longer explanation.

Celia laughed. “Yes. My job is generally to oversee several projects at once and make sure that they’re getting what they need to succeed while coordinating with other areas of the company. Lot’s of arguing with accounting for more funds, but what can you do? Right now I’m working mostly with a team trying to improve carbon fiber production methods. They’re spinning it out of smoke! The only problem is trying to create a system that can do that en mass.”

“Oh I think I’ve heard of that. There was a paper on it I think, but they could only do it in small batches.”

“Exactly.” said Celia. “The science of it goes over my head, but mostly I just need to make sure they don’t accidentally kill themselves via smoke inhalation. Oh look--we’re here.”

The elevator doors slid open with a ting, and FRIDAY’s voice came out of the ceiling. “63rd Floor: Planning Division Headquarters”

“This is where the process starts,” said Celia. “Anyone can propose a project, and this floor is where the ideas get bounced around and we decide which ones we’re going to do, and the logistics of doing them. Here, come see…”

Over the next hour Peter was taken through the whole R&D process, all the way to the end where Celia pointed out the Intellectual Property Division in the north building, which was a rather large subset of Legal. “I know the whole thing is a little bit overwhelming,” she said at the end while he sat across from her at her desk drinking a soda, “but being managed by an omnipresent AI gives the advantage of being able to ask what to do at any time. FRIDAY will always be able to direct you to where you need to go. Although… shoot.” she stopped talking and rummaged through her desk until she came up with a clear plastic container. Inside it was a tiny white headset scarcely larger than an earbud. “Here. FRIDAY’s mic’s are in most of the tower, but it’s easier for her to understand you if you have one on you. Plus, it means she can talk to you directly. Most of us wear one of these all the time at work.” She moved her mass of curly hair so Peter could see hers in her left ear. “Convenient isn’t it.” she said.

“Yeah, it is.” said Peter. He put his in. “Hello FRIDAY.”
“Hi Peter.” said FRIDAY directly into his ear. He smiled.

Celia grinned at him. “I guess that’s it for today.” she said. “FRIDAY will figure out your schedule and tell you where to go next time you come in.”

“Great.” said Peter. “Thank you for helping me today.”

“Anytime honey,” said Celia. “It’s what they pay me for.”

“Well in that case I’ll see you around.” said Peter.

“I guess you will.” said Celia. “Bye now.”

“Bye” said Peter as he walked away to the elevator. His first day as an Actual Official Stark Intern was complete and he’d never been happier in his life.

Well… maybe when he’d met Mr. Stark for the first time, but still. Pretty dang happy.

The day after his tour, Peter went up to Mr. Stark’s lab and finished integrating everything into the new suit. Then he upgraded a few things he’d been thinking about fixing. Then he puttered around with the functions of the holographic OS that was run on all the lab computers. When he reached a point where he was literally creating a list of Things I’d Like to Build in This Lab, he realized that he really ought to actually work. See, Peter had decided that he was going to do at least an hour of actual intern work for every hour he spent using Mr. Stark’s lab. He didn’t want to just… freeload, and this way he felt like he was giving back, at least a little.

“Hey FRIDAY,” he said, “Do you have any jobs for me?”

“Hmm.” said FRIDAY. “There are several options suited to your skill set. I recommend going to floor 78. Dr. Curtiss has requested assistance with the assembly of several prototype prosthetics. Specifically she requested ‘someone with puny hands who isn’t an idiot.’

Peter bounced up with an ecstatic grin. “Whoa. That’s so cool.” he said.

“Absolutely.” said FRIDAY. “Would you like to read up on the project before you go?”

“Yeah,” said Peter. FRIDAY obligingly pulled up the blueprints, and he looked them over for a good ten minutes before he felt ready to go help. He also asked a lot of questions.

As soon as he thought he had a vague grasp of what was going on, Peter took the elevator down. The doors opened to an enormous robotics laboratory that took up the whole floor and some rather impressive swearing. “Just Fucking FIT TOGETHER already, oh my god. This is ridiculous I didn’t sign up for this shit why the hell… FRIDAY where is the nice tiny person you were going to send me?”

“Mr. Parker has arrived and is ready to assist.” said FRIDAY, smugly.

Dr. Curtiss--for that was who it had to be--whirled around. “Oh thank god.” she said. Then she did a double take upon seeing Peter. “Wait, Fri, did you send me a fucking twelve year old?”

“No,” said FRIDAY calmly. “Mr. Parker is fourteen, and an intern.”

“Hi,” said Peter, waving shyly.
“Oh what the hell, get over here kid.” said Dr. Curtiss.

Peter hopped to it with alacrity, and soon they were assembling the prototype at speed. He wasn’t entirely sure, but Dr. Curtiss seemed generally pleased by his work, so his nerves slowly dissipated. Then he noticed an error in the design and they came back full force.

“Um…” he said. “Uh…”

“Spit it out kid.” said Dr. Curtiss.

Peter sighed “Um, well. I’m not trying to tell you how to do your job, and obviously you’re better at this than me, and like I’m not qualified or anything, but, um, is this supposed to go there because I feel like that’s a little counter-intuitive and also not how a hand works.”

Dr Curtiss stared at the arrangement of tiny servos in the mess of wiring. Then she swore eloquently for half a minute, cursing out the engineers who’d designed that particular piece. At the end she sighed. “This is why we can’t have nice things. FRIDAY pull up the blueprints.”

Once this had been accomplished, she started trying to get everything aligned correctly. Unfortunately, she couldn’t do it without creating an enormous lump sticking out of the side of the hand. She became more and more frustrated and vulgar. Meanwhile, Peter’s hands were twitching. He knew how to fix it and he didn’t want to overstep and… “Ung” he gulped, making a small abortive gesture at the blueprints when she arranged things in a particularly inefficient way.

Dr Curtiss glared at him. “How would you do it then?” she asked. She didn’t seem angry though, just frustrated--and also curious.

Peter put everything to rights in only a few minutes while she looked at him speculatively. Of course, he didn’t handle stares well and began babbling. “I… uh. I think the problem here is that whoever designed this didn’t know a lot about anatomy? Like… they thought ‘hey this is how a hand moves, and then tried to do that without looking at the original system, even though, y’know, hands are already pretty well designed. It’s weird though, because some parts of this are actually really accurate, and brilliant. Like, this segmented wrist system… it’s pretty much just a wrist and that’s super cool. The thumb though… It’s… jacked up dude. Like… that’s not how a thumb works. Or… I think so? I’m not like… a doctor or anything. Um. Sorry.”

“Don’t apologize” said Dr. Curtiss. “At the very least you couldn’t make it worse.”

Peter stared for a couple seconds at the shitty thumb on the prototype. “Yeah. he said. It does suck. Like a lot.”

Dr. Curtiss snorted and then showed him where the spare parts were kept in this area of the lab so they could implement his solution. An hour later they were finished, and a gleaming metal arm sat on the workbench in front of them. “Thanks kid.” she said. “My whole project team missed that. It’ll save us time in the future.”

“Really?” said Peter.

“Yeah.” said Dr. Curtiss. “Before we can even think about sticking this on a person, or even figuring out how to connect it to them, we have to go through tons of these prototypes. We make one, test it, fix the problems in the design, and then make another. Over and over. You fixed that before we could go through that whole process again.”

“Cool.” said Peter. “So do you have, like, a whole giant box of arms?”
“Nah.” said Dr. Curtiss. “This is only version three, so we only have two other ones.”

“But you will have a giant box of arms” said Peter. “So my question stands.”

“I guess.” said Dr. Curtiss. “The testing for this one will be done on Thursday, so the whole team is meeting at around five pm to head back to the drawing board. If your schedule’s free you should come. Who knows, you might notice something else.”

“I don’t know if I’m the best for that. I mean, I only noticed because I got bored in class last week and flipped through a lost anatomy textbook. I’m sure you have someone who knows more than that.”

“Yeah I do, but he doesn’t know enough about engineering to be able to see these sorts of mistakes before they show up in testing. Just show up kid. If nothing else it’ll be a learning experience.”

“If you’re sure.” said Peter. He was nervous though. He felt like he was going to just be useless and let her down if he showed up, but she was a project leader and he was an intern so it really wasn’t his place to complain.

“There’ll be Chinese food. It’ll be fun.” said Dr. Curtiss.

Peter giggled a bit, and then thanked her for the learning opportunity. After that he extracted himself quickly. It was just about time to go home if he wanted to get his homework done and go on patrol.

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On Wednesday morning, Peter downloaded all the information he could find via Karen on the prosthetics project and related topics, and ported it onto his kindle. For some reason, despite being anal about phones in class, Midtown Science was rather lax about e-readers, a loophole that Peter exploited as much as he could. During his classes he did his work as quickly as possible and then plowed through the information as fast as he could, which if he did say so himself was pretty fast. By the time school let out, he knew at least the basics of the robotics they were doing, as well as how the programming worked and what obstacles would need to be overcome for it to be a success. He also memorized everything he could find about the human arm. The one problem he found was that the more he learned, the more he thought about the prototype he’d assembled the day before. It wasn’t so horribly complicated that he’d forgotten anything, and his brain wanted to go a million miles an hour on how to make it better, faster, more efficient.

Peter firmly told himself to stop. He did however type up a list of his ideas at lunch, so there was that.

After school, he hopped onto a train in the direction of Stark Tower almost on autopilot. He hadn’t exactly planned to go there but… It was like a siren’s call of science summoning him to revel in its glory. Really, he was powerless to resist. And crime happened more in the late evening anyway, so he didn’t have to patrol until then.

As he walked in the front door he stuffed his earpiece into his ear and was greeted by FRIDAY. He nodded at the receptionists he passed and stepped into the elevator with six other people. They traveled up the building, and the number of people dwindled until it was just him heading towards the top floors that were Mr. Stark’s private sanctuary. A knot of nervous tension (he felt like an impostor, standing there in an elevator with actual Stark Industries scientists when he was just… Peter) released, and when he stepped out into the lab he let out a literal sigh of relief. “Hey, uh, FRIDAY?” he asked. When he’d arrived, he suddenly realized that he was literally invading Mr.
Stark’s space. And he didn’t even have a suit reason today so… “When will Mr. Stark get back from his trip?”

“Boss will be landing at LaGuardia airport at 11 pm on Friday evening.”

“Okay. Cool.” said Peter. That meant he had (sort of) free reign of the lab until then. Obviously he wasn’t going to just come in when Mr. Stark was there because… reasons. Until then though. “Can you pull up whatever you have on my Chitauri tracking device? I want to improve it today, since it’s not really that great yet.”

“Of course Peter.” said FRIDAY.

They worked together on the device for an hour and a half. Then FRIDAY randomly interrupted him. “I couldn’t help but notice that you seem to be exhibiting signs of low blood sugar and took the liberty of ordering pizza for you. It will be arriving at the front desk in about two minutes. Do you want to authorize me to send someone up to give it to you, or will you go down to retrieve it yourself?”

“Uh” said Peter. On the one hand, he was starving. On the other, he really didn’t want to freeload off of Mr Stark any more than he already was. At the same time though (was it a third hand?) it would be really impolite to refuse and kind of weird if he just let the pizza sit at the front desk unclaimed. “I’ll go get it, thanks.”

The elevator doors opened, which was FRIDAY’s way of telling him to get a move on.

After he consumed both pizzas, the guilt began weighing on him heavily, until he simply needed to go do something to help before he drowned under it. “Got any work for me?” he said, then paused and realized that he deeply did not want to leave the lab couch. “Maybe something I can do in here?”

“Of course Peter.” said FRIDAY.

That day, no less than eight different projects received feedback they’d requested on problems they were having. Unbeknownst to Peter, all eight sets of comments, improvements, questions, and ideas were stamped ‘P. Parker’. If he had known, he perhaps would have been a bit less confident in his ideas and suggestions. Unfortunately for him, he did not, and so had no problems writing such harsh comments as ‘This hypothesis is working off an incorrect premise. Refer to flagged papers in database for relevant research.’ Much later, an embarrassed Peter would find that all the scientists he had assisted were very impressed with the mysterious P. Parker, if a bit ashamed to be roasted like that by a fourteen year old…

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A Selection of Internal Messages from Stark Industries

From: TStark
To: PPotts

You remember how I said I got that intern? And you told me it would never last and I had to bribe you to make you sign off on it and promise progress reports to make sure I wasn’t killing the kid? Well now you know, I was right (again). He’s brilliant.
From: JRhodes
To: TStark

Why did you just send me a picture of a teenager and nine exclamation points. Is there something I should know?

Also--please stop ignoring my texts you dickwad. I’m in PT not dead.

Col. Rhodes

From: ERassmussen
To: JCo, MWhitney, ABranson, PDevaille

Subject: Project feedback

Alright team,

As you well know, our project was on review due to our lack of progress. The good news is that it’s back on. The bad news is that our lack of progress was because we messed up on something that’s apparently obvious. (I still don’t think it was, but fresh eyes see differently so who knows).

Anyway, we now have a new project contributor. FRIDAY says he’s willing to review all major points going forward, so hopefully we won't experience any more major blocks. That said, it was a bit embarrassing to need some New York hotshot to correct an issue from so early in our design process. I think I speak for all of us when I say that moving forward we all want to do better. Next time let’s blow the socks off our new friend,

Now that the issue is solved, it becomes clear that the basic premise of the secondary [read more]

Chapter End Notes

Introducing: Proud Dad (tm) Tony STARK!
The next day, the time of the dread meeting with Dr. Curtiss’ people had arrived. It wasn’t until five though, so instead of sitting around and worrying Peter decided to go be helpful somewhere else. He ended up mediating an argument between two programmers about whose fault an enormous issue in the security of their project was. Fortunately, it was something Ned had mentioned one time, and Peter had been curious enough to google it, so he knew enough to ask intelligent questions that redirected the argument into a discussion on finding a solution.

Once the programmers had their heads together and were ignoring him in favor of their program, he was able to pick up the paperwork he had actually been assigned to retrieve and courier over to the Legal department. (it was actually jarring to see paper in the high tech tower space, but apparently the government still liked signatures of legal documents on it so it was needed for some things)

Peter wasn’t sure exactly why this was the job he was given, but FRIDAY told him that she thought he could use the opportunity to familiarize himself with the other building, and he guessed that was a good enough reason.

The North Building, an enormous sixty storey edifice shaped like the outline around a cloud (there was a giant cloud shaped hole in the middle that contained nothing but the most enormous atrium he’d ever seen) was home to a lot of the departments that were kicked out of the tower itself when corporate headquarters had moved there from California and R&D had begun to metastasize through the building like an incredibly creative form of cancer. It contained Legal, Accounting, PR, Marketing and HR.

Peter, who was sick of elevators at this point, decided to wander up through the tower on his own two feet. It would have been a tedious journey, except that it was incredibly interesting to see all the little bits and pieces of Stark Industries whirling by in the bright colors and shining white of the North Building--which he now learned the workers jokingly called Cloud 9 because of how ‘heavenly’ it was to work there (he detected a distinct tone of sarcasm at the word heavenly though, so it might have meant something else)

Eventually, he arrived at Legal, and passed off his files at the receptionist desk. The receptionist thanked him, and then summoned an intern to take them the rest of the way. The other intern, a college age girl with an impressive weave eyed Peter. Peter eyed her right back. Then they both nodded. It was a strange interaction.

On his way back down, just as he was passing Marketing, in fact, Peter’s elbow was snagged by a lady in a bright pink blazer and black jeans. She seemed a bit scary, so he went with it all the way to a nearby cubicle where he was shoved down in the spare office chair.

“You’re in between twelve and eighteen right?”
“Um...yeah?” said Peter

“Yay. It is so hard to find people in the target demographic around here. I swear everyone in marketing is a boring adult. I’m the youngest person I know and I’m like twenty-seven.”

“So… what exactly do you need me for?” said Peter.

“We’re putting out a series of ads on social media for the new mobile network targeting younger generations. The only problem is… They suck.”

“Okay?” said Peter. “And I can help how?”

The lady sighed, looking defeated. “A lot of them use slang or references that nobody here can understand. We just don’t want to be laughed at for using a word wrong. FRIDAY claims that they’re all okay, but her sense of humor is suspect so… what do you know about memes?”

Peter gasped. This was his calling. “I am a certified meme-lord. I can totally help you.”

“Oh thank god. What’s your name again?”

“Uh Peter.” said Peter.

Then they had a conversation about memes (Peter created a ‘dankness’ scale and rated all of the proposed ads which were going undercover as memes on social media sites.) that lasted until four fifty. At that time FRIDAY chimed in his ear and told him that if he didn’t hurry he was going to be late for his meeting.

“Oh fuck!” he said. “I totally forgot, I have… a thing!”

“That’s fine. I’ve taken up a lot of your time anyway.” said the lady (her name was Sarah, though Peter had to be reminded of this no less than four times) “But, can I use you again sometime? Getting social media hyped for new products is really important.”

“Yeah sure.” said Peter. “Just tell FRIDAY when you need me again, I guess, and I’ll try to come. If I’m not, like, busy or anything.”

“Great.” said Sarah. “Now Shoo. Whoever you’re meeting with is probably missing you.”

Peter grinned at her, and then ran as fast as he could without looking enhanced over to the tower, ending up walking through the doors of the prosthetics lab only a minute late.

“Oh good. You’re here” said Dr. Curtiss. “The tests… did not go well.”

A guy in a Tabasco t-shirt straight up laughed at her when she said that. “Not well?” he said. “The tests were a fucking disaster is what they were. The dumb thing tore itself apart just trying to move into position!”

“Shut up Herrera. We are a positive family here, and that means we always act like the glass is half full.” said Dr. Curtiss.

“Full of shit maybe.” said Herrera.

Someone arrived with the Chinese food, and all eight people (none of which Peter had been introduced to except Dr. Curtiss herself) started to argue about what went wrong. The test footage and data was tossed around over the conference table and the holoprojector overhead got a good workout as people compared ideas. Peter mostly listened wide eyed while doodling on the table.
with a stylus he’d nabbed the day before while reviewing plans.

“Right.” said Dr. Curtiss at one point. The Lo Mein was gone, and thus one of the major sources of contention had been eliminated, leaving a much calmer group. “It looks like we’ve narrowed down the problem areas. Let’s focus on those one at a time starting with the overheating problem in the control circuits. Does anyone have any ideas?”

There was an instant outcry of suggestions, comments and swearing. Several plans were started, but dissolved quickly into glowing scribbles as people became frustrated. “A fan system wouldn’t work Simon!” cried Herrera ( ?) “It’s not a nice square computer box that you can stick a fan on and blow everything out. There isn’t enough airflow. And besides, it needs to be watertight.”

“Better than your idea. Treating the entire thing like a refrigerator would make it cost as much too, and that’s not what we’re here for.”

“Um, well actually” Peter said, very quietly. No one listened. “I ah… well. Er.” he cleared his throat a bit. He did have an idea, but no one was listening. “FRIDAY?” he asked, as his last hail Mary. He didn’t exactly want to step into their territory, but at the same time… he’d totally doodled a solution.

FRIDAY wordlessly pulled up his drawing, which she’d helpfully rendered in 3D. It detailed a series of tiny channels that would circulate the hot air inside into a tiny area with a smaller version of Simon’s cooling system. The cool air would then be pumped directly back onto the overheating circuits. He’d had also detailed a slight adjustment of the surrounding robotic muscles which would hopefully reduce the insulating effect they were having.

“Oh yes, see this, this is what I’m talking about.” said Simon. He glared at Herrera, “Whose idea was it anyway?”

“Um. It was mine?” said Peter. “Well, actually, it was both of you guys, but I just put them together, so uh… yeah.”

“I knew Dr. Curtiss invited you for a reason.” someone murmured. Then they went back to arguing about the cooling system, making several improvements to his design. Occasionally Peter would input on the conversation, and they’d actually listen to him. It was wonderful.

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Project 2157 Group Chat

Si-moan: Who TF is this kid?

Nowayjose: yeah seriously, where’d he come from

CurtCurt: He’s an intern actually

Jan-Jam: Really? No way he's like 12

CurtCurt: I requested someone to come help with assembly

CurtCurt: Specifically someone with small hands

CurtCurt: Apparently FRIDAY thought I said prepubescent

Nowayjose: Glad we got him though. That prototype was a mess.
Si-moan: Because someone fucked up the actuator placement

Nowayjose: Like you didn’t do worse.

Darling.Jane: Hey, shut up you two, we’re talking about the munchkin. I want to know where he came from, cuz the only other interns are college students and…

CurtCurt: I don’t actually know what the deal is

CurtCurt: Some kind of child genius???

CurtCurt: He’s definitely smart enough to be in college

Jan-Jam: Is that even legal though? To hire that young?

CurtCurt: Internships are different

Si-moan: yeah, I started as an intern.

Si-moan: Basically if he doesn’t work too much and learns a lot its fine

Si-moan: Shame he’s not an employee though

Si-moan: Be he deserves a bonus

Darling.Jane: Definitely. Y’know, I could probably ask around about him

Darling.Jane: I know a chick in HR who monitors some of the interns

Nowayjose: you mean the one you totally want to bang

Darling.Jane: Shut up

Darling.Jane: And here I was trying to help

CurtCurt: Actually that’s a good idea. If we all ask around someone might find something

CurtCurt: I mean, the kid’s pretty distinctive

CurtCurt: He’s the sort of intern you remember

Jan-Jam: Great. Let’s stalk the twelve yr old. This will go fantastically.

MimiChan: Hey, while y’all were arguing, finn and i found a fix for the coding problem

MimiChan: So we could like, do our jobs and stuff

Nowayjose: you are no fun.

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That night, over a meal of burned meatloaf, May accosted him. “Where have you been these last couple days?”

“I got involved with a project at my internship.” said Peter. “It’s pretty cool and I…”

“Really Peter? The internship? Hasn’t that already taken your life over enough?”
“What do you mean?” asked Peter. “I… It’s been really great, especially the past week.”

“Well… you know that I worry, and I just--I feel like it’s not exactly been the best thing for you. You’re a brilliant kid, and I agreed to it because I knew that you’d learn a lot, but learning isn’t everything, and it’s caused a lot of upset in your life. I mean, at the very beginning you quit both band and robotics club, and now decathlon too? All your extracurriculars have evaporated; not to mention the whole upset where you thought you’d lost it--and I still want details on that, by the way.” She sighed. “I wasn’t going to say anything, but this week… Peter this is the first time all week we’ve even had an actual conversation. I know my work schedule is terrible, but still, I feel like we should be doing better than this.”

“Oh… I,” said Peter, “I didn’t know you felt that way. I guess I just got so caught up in it like… today I was in a brainstorming meeting with a bunch of scientists--actual scientists--and I had a few ideas about the project, and they actually listened. Like, there is an actual Stark Industries product that has a part in it that I helped design. It’s… the best thing ever.”

May sighed. “And the part where you thought you’d lost it?” she said.

“I screwed up with some of the stuff I got to work with, and ended up creating a situation where people could have gotten hurt… after that they said they were going to re-review whether I was a good fit for the program and well… It’s really hard to get an internship, and a lot of people want one and… really the only reason I got to stay was that Mr. Stark took a personal interest in me--because of one of the projects I was doing. Apparently I impressed him.”

“Hmm.” said Aunt May. She paused for a few seconds, somewhere in between glaring and looking proud. “I guess you can stay in it, but I have conditions.”

Peter had been unaware that her permission was on the line, so at that he froze. He really hoped that those conditions weren’t horrible.

“One, you’re home for dinner on all the days I’m not working during that time. Two, you hang out with a friend for at least three hours a week, three, you keep your grades up. And Pete, those aren’t the only reasons I would stop this. If I see anything--anything at all--that I don’t like then it ends instantly.”

“Yeah. Okay.” said Peter “I can do that. I won’t screw up Aunt May.”

“You’d better not.” said May, “Because I really wasn’t kidding. The instant something slips, you’re out mister. I don’t like Stark one bit, and I like you working so young even less.”

Peter sighed. “Yeah yeah.” he said. His mind had already moved on to more important things, like electrical engineering.
Friday night was a big night for Peter. After his horrible Thursday conversation with Aunt May, he’d gone out patrolling, and his upgraded scanners (he’d actually managed to integrate them with the suit) had found a rather large cache of Chitauri… stuff. He’d decided to go after it Friday, and had been preparing practically since school let out.

Now, he was ready. He’d upgraded his suit, done research on the area, gotten into a long email conversation about a bio-engineering project with a scientist in Toronto who he’d given feedback to on Wednesday, and watched seven vine compilations. Plus, he’d stashed extra medical supplies in his kit and cleared his whole schedule for the weekend, having no illusions about the likelihood of coming out of this with no injuries. Really he was about as prepared as he could possibly be.

“Right.” he said to himself. “Let's do this.”

“Absolutely” said Karen, whose programming wasn’t quite advanced enough to understand the gravity of the situation.

Then he swung in through the window in the second storey of the warehouse, a building that apparently only seemed abandoned. He’d sealed all the exits he could find from the outside, and now the only thing left was to incapacitate everyone inside and call the police.

Unfortunately, Peter was very very wrong about what he’d be facing. Instead of swinging into a cache of weapons and a couple guards, he ended up in a room full of beds, each one with a person on it. There were, in fact a few guards, but they seemed a little bit taken aback and didn’t react immediately. “Surprise, it’s me.” said Peter. He may not know what was going on, but he definitely wasn’t going to let that stop him.

The guards rushed at him, and he webbed their weapons out of their hands as quickly as he could. Then he snuck evasively around them, getting in hits and webs when he could until they were all knocked out and stuck to various places on the floors and walls. It was over in only thirty seconds.

Once it was done, he breathed a sigh of relief. None of the people in beds had stirred, and Peter guessed that something was wrong with them. Whatever it was, they weren’t dangerous and he was here now to fix it. Everything would be okay.

As he approached the first bed, he went wide eyed in horror. The person--and he couldn’t actually tell whether they were female or male--had things embedded into their head. Specifically chitauri tech. It was like a b-rate sci-fi film and Peter couldn’t look away. An actual fucking cyborg. It wasn’t in any way cool though, despite the cyborg-ness of it. Instead it was just… sick. Covered in sores and inflamed skin where metal met flesh. Peter reached out to check for a pulse.

As soon as his fingers touched it’s skin, which was weirdly cold and waxy, its eyes snapped open.
Apparently the cyborg-ness of it all wasn’t the only sci-fi trope being reenacted. Either way, it was beyond creepy and Peter scrambled back, staring at it. It’s eyes looked… crazy.

Then, suddenly it sat up and looked at him, in perfect synchronicity with every other creature in the room. Peter would never admit to the noise he made in that moment. The genre was changing from sci-fi to horror and Peter wanted nothing more than to nope the fuck out of there. Unfortunately, he’d webbed shut all the exits, except one window, which was on the other side of the room. He didn’t know what to do. Mr. Stark was currently on an airplane at cruising altitude and therefore unavailable. He didn’t know anyone else. No backup, no plan, no possibility of rescue. Peter wracked his mind trying to think of what to do. If only he…

The weird chitauri cyborgs attacked, and Peter stopped thinking at all.

The thing about Peter’s fighting style was that he didn’t actually have any idea how to fight. His instincts told him it was a spectacularly bad idea, that he ought to run and hide, but they always did that, and sitting in the middle of a web in a cool dry place, while an excellent strategy for bugs, didn’t really work when your enemies were humans. As it was, all he had going for him was that he was strong, fast, and had an excellent capacity to calculate angles and trajectories on the fly. That and the preternatural senses. Those were fairly helpful as well. Anyway, despite his excellent capacity for taking down thugs of a human variety he was deeply unprepared to get into a web fight with thirty chitauri-borgs in a warehouse, especially a warehouse so old and decrepit that the ceiling wouldn’t be able to support him.

As such the fight went badly. In the first few seconds, he seemed to be doing all right. Most of the cyborgs hadn’t reached him yet, and those that had were a little jerky, unsure of themselves. A couple times, one of them would go in to hit him, and another one would mime the exact same hit a few feet over, like whatever hive mind was controlling them was unused to existing in multiple bodies. Then things went to hell when he realized he had no effective way of fighting them. He’d landed a couple knockout blows, but they didn’t work (maybe a hive mind can’t be knocked out? Or it could be--focus Parker) and he really didn’t want to kill anyone, so his options were limited.

Things got worse when Peter finally did something that seemed to work, wrenching out the shoulder of one of the cyborgs. If it couldn’t use it’s arm it couldn’t hit him, right? Wrong. The thing swung the arm like it was a bludgeoning weapon, not an actual piece of its body. Peter wasn’t an expert, but he was fairly sure that move had irreparably damaged the arm, and that the thing had to be in extreme pain. It didn’t look like it cared though. Clearly these things wouldn’t stop until they were entirely disabled, and even then they’d keep fighting until they damaged themselves beyond repair.

The situation continued to go downhill. Peter had been swarmed and his mobility was heavily affected. Worse, he couldn’t even leave ground level to escape. And then it happened. The horrible defining moment. The point where there was no going back. Peter had punched one of the cyborgs in the face, right on the nose. There was a horrible snap, and the nasal cartilage was propelled straight up and back into the things head. It fell down, and didn’t get back up.

Peter didn’t freeze. Peter didn’t vomit. In fact, he didn’t react to the fact that he’d just killed someone at all because he was still in the middle of battle, still pumped with more adrenaline than he’d felt in his life and unable to really think. There was only the fight, and getting out of this alive. Several more of the creatures--he couldn’t bear to think of them as human any longer--fell by his hand and didn’t get up.

As the fighting got worse, Peter’s senses seemed to ramp up in an almost painful manner. Immediately he closed his eyes. At this point it wouldn’t affect what he was doing at all. Most
spiders didn’t hunt by sight. He could practically feel the snaps and creaks as the completely uninhibited cyborgs overused their bodies to the point of damage, the vibrations as they kept attacking. He could hear their breathing. He could sense their heartbeats. More than that was the buzzing though, the strange humming that he could practically taste, like sparks on his tongue.

Of course. It was electricity.

Humanity had come a long way in understanding the alien tech that they ended up around on what now seemed to be a yearly basis. In the end though, there were very few types of energy one could run a computer on, and the easiest of those was, of course, electricity. And where there was electricity…

“Karen, taser webs!” grunted Peter as he received yet another bruise. The insane once-human creatures knew no restraint, and thus hit harder than any baseline human.

“On it.” said Karen. His HUD flipped around, the power controls for the taser webs replacing the general screen and limning each figure in a red line. Enemy target.

Peter didn’t want to give up his advantage too fast though, so he didn’t power up the tasers. Instead, he simply started webbing, thin gossamer threads not meant to hold necessarily but to connect. He was stringing the cyborgs together like the world’s most morbid string of Christmas lights. Once he’d gotten most of them he formed his hand into the release sign, one of many ways to power up the web. It worked well. Too well. The whole line of cyborgs he’d been fighting shook and sparked. There was the scent of burning flesh. The heartbeats Peter had been hearing stopped.

He wanted nothing more than to freak out, but the remaining cyborgs were running away, most of them taking defensive positions except a sickly man who was sprinting in the direction of a trapdoor Peter hadn’t noticed.

“That’s the queen.” he muttered. Ned had made him watch Ender’s game once. It wasn’t as good as the books and… focus Peter. Quickly, he launched a web, high into the air so no one could intercept it but low power so it would arc down onto the leader. “Gotcha” he said. Hopefully this night would be over soon.

The queen, who was a sickly looking white man in his thirties, stilled, and stopped struggling. Peter webbed him to the floor in several more places. His other bodies didn’t approach, obviously wary of the possibility of taser webs.

“What the actual fuck?” said Peter, on the verge of panicking. Normally he was a bit more coherent even when talking to actual criminals, but he felt justified in freaking out. This was… not what he signed up for.

The dude laughed, eyes gleaming madly in the low light, and ignored his question. “You may have found this nest, but you can never destroy us. There is no stopping it. We will bring unity!”

Then his hand (when had that gotten free?) reached up shakily and pressed something on the side of his head, causing his cybernetics to glow. All the other cybernetics began to glow as well, and as they heated up Peter could smell a familiar scent. Explosives! The same kind used on the other cache when he’d been blown up before.

Without pausing to think, Peter sprinted as fast as he could in the direction of the broken window he’d entered by, leaping through it in a fluid bit of acrobatics that no baseline human would ever be able to even attempt. He was a bit too late though, and the warehouse exploded violently, spraying
pieces of shrapnel in every direction, at high enough velocity that they pierced easily through the superstrong fabric that made up Peter’s suit. He didn’t get burned very much, but some of those bits and pieces went deep. No way was he going to be able to pick those out on his own.

Peter’s brain was a little fuzzy at this point, but he still had the presence of mind to be aware of his options. There were three people in the world aware of his identity. Ned… Ned would freak out and have no idea what to do. Mr Stark and Happy--unavailable. For now. In the back of his mind Peter remembered that Mr. Stark was supposed to fly in that very night. He didn’t know exactly when, or even what time it was at that moment. He did know, however that Mr. Stark could fix anything.

He didn’t have to think about what was going on, or how hurt he was. He just had to make it to the tower.

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The private jet touched down in LaGuardia airport, and Tony sighed in relief. He was so close to making it all the way to his bed. And then he would shut himself up in his lab and not talk to anyone for at least thirty-six hours. It was only fair after the hellish week he’d had arguing with idiots of the international governmental variety.

During the aftermath of the Avengers so-called ‘civil war’ it seemed that everyone on the entire planet had forgotten that he wasn’t a fucking politician. Yet again he was stuck cleaning up the shitstorm that Rogers seemed to create behind him just by breathing, though to be fair Ross had helped stir the shit up. If Tony was honest with himself, there was a large part of him that simply wanted to give up, throw in the towel, and let the fact that Rogers had decided to take things into his own fool hands ruin human rights forever for the itty bitty portion of the population that was weird, stupid, and prone to getting in fistfights with extraterrestrials.

Then he remembered that he technically belonged to that group--and more importantly that Peter belonged to that group, and he couldn’t help himself. At this point, sheltering people under the force of his name and personality was just as natural to him as protecting them with his more literal armor, and the thought of Peter on the raft was abhorrent.

He needed a drink. He couldn’t have one though, he was sober and had been for a while. He wasn’t going to go down that road ever again.

Suddenly, the train of his thoughts was interrupted by the arrival of one of his suits. It was one that he’d given up for a failure because the heavy retroreflective panelling left it unable to carry weapons and severely weakened. Besides, you could still see the flames he left in his wake.

“Boss?” said FRIDAY directly from the suit. She sounded… deeply worried.

“What is it baby girl?” asked Tony.

“I couldn’t contact you.” she said, “But I need your help. It’s Peter”

Nothing could have encouraged Tony to move faster than that statement. He didn’t know Peter as well as he’d like to, but what he did know… He hadn’t been lying when he told the kid that he could be better than Tony ever was. Peter was everything he’d ever been and more, the perfect marriage of brilliance and heart with a core of unshakeable vibranium. If something happened to him…

Somewhere in the back of his mind, Tony saw bouncing curls and excitable hand motions. He
stepped into the suit, which closed around him and took off to the tower as fast as it could without breaking every piece of glass in the city. Peter needed help.

During the minute long journey, FRIDAY briefed him on the situation. Peter had shown up through the balcony by his personal lab. He was injured. She wasn’t sure how bad it was. The basic voice OS he’d installed--Karen he thought Peter had named it--was non-responsive, so diagnostics were down, but he’d collapsed, and there was a lot of blood.

Tony exited the suit at a dead sprint.

When he arrived in the lab, it was worse than he’d imagined. Peter was a puddle of blood on the floor, and there were things sticking out of him. Bits of metal. Tony had designed weapons for decades. He knew exactly what shrapnel looked like.

“Peter Peter, hey kiddo, Peter, are you awake?” he asked. If Peter was unconscious… That could be bad.

Very slowly, Peter’s head turned to the side. His eyes were dilated unevenly and he seemed somewhat confused, but as soon as he saw Tony all of the worry and tension spilled out of him instantly, though he still looked pained. “Misr… Stk.” he mumbled. Then he sighed, and his eyes began to drift shut. Tony panicked. The kid was showing signs of a concussion, he needed to stay awake.

“No no nono no. Stay with me kid. You can’t fall asleep yet.” he said. “I’m going to help you… I can help you. FRIDAY, get a doctor up here. One with an ironclad NDA. C’mon kiddo, stay with me. You’re going to be okay, but you need to stay awake.”

“Course ‘m be fn.” slurred Peter. “Y’r h’re.” Then he smiled a tiny bit, and squeezed Tony’s hand. It damn near broke his heart.

“Dr. Helen Cho is currently going through tower security.” said FRIDAY, incredibly quietly. “I called her as soon as Peter collapsed.”

Tony breathed marginally easier. Peter meanwhile clearly wasn’t done breaking his heart though because he started to mumble again. “Y’r g’d.” he said. “C’n fix an’thin.”

“I’ll do my best Peter.” said Tony. “Just stay with me.”

“C’n’t move.” whispered Peter. “N’t goin’ anyw’r”

“Yeah.” said Tony. He wasn’t entirely sure what to say to that statement. Luckily, at that very moment Dr. Cho arrived with a stretcher on wheels and one of her most bland and trustworthy underlings.

“Dr. Stark.” she said angrily. “Tell me about the patient. And this better not be your fault.”

Tony didn’t sleep that night, but Peter did eventually, and he was alive to do it too. It felt like nothing short of a miracle.
Peter woke up in a hospital bed. Mr. Stark was sitting beside it, slumped in a chair. He seemed exhausted. Peter frowned. Hospital. Why was he in a hospital… It all came back to him. The fight, the explosion, the blood. He remembered the sound of heartbeats stopping.

Suddenly feeling nauseous, Peter rolled over to the edge of the bed and grabbed the garbage can just in time. It was sort of gross. He was vomiting and sobbing all at once, and making a huge mess.

“Hey, hey, it’s all right. You’re fine, you’re here.”

Peter tried to breathe, still heaving with sobs and retching. He focused on the sound of Mr. Starks voice. He didn’t touch Peter, or try to help him, seeming to know that that would be… not okay at the moment, but he was there, speaking slowly and calmly.

His heartbeat could end at any moment just like the other ones… Peter retched again.

“You’re okay. We got the shrapnel out, and you’re going to be fine.”

Peter knew that. It wasn’t about him, it was everyone else. He tried to focus on the voice, and a little bit on the heartbeat underneath. Slow and steady. Not going anywhere.

When he felt a little better, Peter collapsed back onto the bed. “Mr. Stark…” he said incredibly quietly.

“No. No no no. You don’t understand.” said Peter. “They… I…” he had to pause for a second to try to find a way to express what had happened. “I killed them.” he finally whispered without preamble. “I killed…” he stopped and rolled over to grab the garbage can again. His retching wasn’t bringing much up, but it was still very necessary.

Mr. Stark took the can when he was done and got him settled again. “Tell me what happened.” he said gently, and Peter knew it wasn’t a demand, that he didn’t have to, but it was an offer of help and he needed that. “Start at the beginning.” said Mr. Stark.

Peter took a breath and began. His explanation was, perhaps, a bit long and rambling, and required a couple breaks for water (his throat hurt from all the retching) but once it was out he felt… weirdly better. “The worst part.” said Peter near the end, “Is that I don’t really feel… bad. I mean like, I’m totally a murderer now, and I should be… guilty? In shock? I don’t know… I just. I had to. It… there was no other way, and no matter how much I try I can’t find one. I don’t feel guilty, but I feel guilty for not feeling guilty and it’s just… confusing.”

Mr Stark didn’t judge him, or make him feel bad about it or anything. He just sat and listened and waited as all of Peter’s feelings came spilling out of him. Then at the end he sighed.

“You know… you know I’ve killed a lot of people.” he said. Peter stilled. He’d known that intellectually, but he’d never actually thought about it. About Mr. Stark having killed people. It was… strange. At the same time though it didn’t change anything. Mr. Stark was Mr. Stark, and if he killed someone then it was because the person was a bad person and needed to die. It was that simple.
“Yeah.” said Peter. “But you-”

Mr. Stark held up a hand to stop him. “The circumstances don’t matter. It still… It’s still shitty, and you still wonder if you could have done something different, made a better choice. But, Pete, you’re a good kid, and you’re I… I guess what I’m trying to say is, I’m here for you. And I’m proud of you. And I trust you to make good decisions. If you say you had no choice, you had no choice. You took the best option Pete. And whatever you need, whatever help you need to get… I’m there. Okay? Just say the word.”


Mr. Stark smiled. “One thing though. About those good decisions? Having backup. Definitely something you should try. If… When you end up taking on a warehouse full of, and I quote, ‘thirty freaky borg-bug-people’ just… make sure I’m in the same city. And on speed-dial. I can’t… I don’t want to see you hurt again.”

“Yeah.” huffed Peter, feeling strangely warm and fuzzy. “Yeah.”

“I mean really Pete.” said Mr. Stark, because he didn’t know when to stop “Two bombs? In one week? I’m going to have to baby proof the entire city.”

Peter laughed hoarsely then, something that he really hadn’t expected to do that day or maybe ever, and things were… okay.

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Apparently Peter had slept for fourteen hours, and it was now nearly two in the afternoon on Saturday. His wounds had been shockingly minor, and while he would be moving a bit gingerly for a couple days, he could still move around, so he would take what he could get.

Mr. Stark let him out of the med-bay immediately. He was, in his own words, “No stranger to wounds accrued while superheroing” and thought that if left to his own devices in the tower med-bay (a leftover from it’s time as the Avengers main base that Mr. Stark had judged as worth keeping) Peter would probably injure himself further with his antsy antics. “It’s what I would do.” said Mr. Stark.

He wasn’t wrong. During the mandatory half hour checkup that Dr. Cho, who Peter was totally nerding out about meeting (he’d read ALL her papers), made him endure before he was allowed out he nearly went insane. Dr. Cho might be a brilliant woman, but it didn’t change the fact that doctor’s offices were universally abhorrent.

She wanted a full blood workup, and some time to do research on his genetic alterations so she could treat him better, but Mr. Stark arranged for a strategic retreat to the lab.

“Don’t thank me yet.” said Mr. Stark while they stood in the elevator, “She’ll make you do it eventually. I just figured you’d want that to happen on a day you weren’t, y’know, half dead.”

“Hopefully we can put it off until I’m all dead.” said Peter. “Then I wouldn’t have to be there while she did it.”

Mr. Stark, after staring at him for a moment in surprise, actually laughed. “Don’t hold your breath, kid. Dr. Cho is a regular miracle worker. She’d bring you back just to question you about your medical history.”

“No.” said Peter. He sensed a pop culture reference. It was wonderful. “At that point all she could
do is look through my pockets for spare change. There’s a big difference between mostly dead and all dead.”

“For you though? with your healing factor it’s entirely possible that even in the worst state you’d only be mostly dead, and as we all know mostly dead is still slightly alive.”

“Dang.” said Peter. “Do you think she’d coat my medicine in chocolate?”

“Nah.” said Mr. Stark. “She’s not that nice of a miracle worker.”

The elevator arrived at the lab, and Peter relaxed. Mr. Stark’s lab was always a good place to be. On one of the tables was a pile of his stuff. His suit had been cleaned and repaired and his phone, keys, and other personal effects were beside it. His clothes were missing though, which sucked, because it meant that for now he was stuck in an old MIT sweatshirt and designer jogging pants that he had a sneaking suspicion belonged to Mr. Stark. “Your friend Ned was blowing up your phone by the way. Apparently your Aunt called him when she couldn’t find you. He said you were with him.”

“Oh my gosh he must be so worried!” said Peter, rushing towards the phone.

“Already got it covered.” said Mr. Stark. “I had FRIDAY text your friend updates, and added a sent text to your aunt from you at three pm yesterday asking permission for a sleepover. For some reason the text bounced, I wonder why.”

“Probably because it didn’t exist.” said Peter, absently scrolling through Ned’s texts. He ignored the voicemails.

“Imagine that.” said Mr. Stark. “In other news; according to FRIDAY you’ve been spending a lot of time here. That true?”

Peter blushed deeply. “Oh um, well kind of?” he said “I mean, you weren’t here, but you did give me permission and I wanted to finish the stuff on my suit and then I noticed some problems with it, and I was also doing stuff downstairs, with like, a robot, and then I wanted to fix my chitauri scanner and well… Sorry?”

Mr. Stark grinned. “It’s fine Pete. Really. Why don’t you show me what you’ve been working on.”

Peter’s blush got even worse. Here he was, in his science idols lab and Tony Fucking Stark wanted to know what he was working on. “It’s really not that impressive,” he said, “I mean, I’m not like, an actual scientist or anything and… Are you laughing at me.”

Mr. Stark was, indeed, laughing. “Sorry,” he said. “Sorry, I just…” he huffed, and then muttered under his breath, as if unaware that Peter had actual super hearing. “Not an actual scientist. Like you have to have a degree or something.”

“Mr. STARK.” said Peter (it was not a whine)

“I’ve already read the files on what you’ve gotten up to kid. And I’ve seen the stuff you made. Like the webs. Your secret’s out Pete. You, are a nerd. Also a genius. Seriously, run me through your thinking here.”

He pulled up one of the projects Peter had made suggestions on--a proposed new hydrogel that could revolutionize tissue engineering--out of the selection of holograms FRIDAY (the traitor) had obligingly summoned when he first made the comment.
“It’s just basic biochemistry!” protested Peter. “Nothing special, I just pointed out the obvious solution. Whoever wrote this probably just overlooked it or hadn’t thought of it yet. Maybe it’s a new project?”

“Well if it’s so basic, explain it to me. I want to know how you came up with it.”

Peter sighed. “They were trying to reduce surgical rejection in implanted cells by coming up with a new cell-encapsulation delivery carrier, but all the ones they were starting with were based on cellulose nanocrystals. I just pointed out that cellulose nanofibrils would work better for the project.”

“Why?” asked Mr. Stark.

“Well, I didn’t actually know a lot about the topic, but according to google most cell-encapsulation hydrogels are either solid or liquid. The solid ones get rejected because they’re too foreign, and the liquid ones just wash away. And then I was reading up on the properties of the different kinds of nanocellulose and it occurred to me that a solid nanofibril containing gel would become liquid under stress, and that kind of? Seems like what they were looking for? I mean, maybe it could like just go in? And then turn solid?” he shrugged. “I was mostly just guessing.”

“How much research did you do before you came to that conclusion?” asked Mr. Stark.

“Um. Some? I had to read a lot to understand the basics of it, but once I did, there was this one paper from some place in Canada that was just… It had nifty tables.”

“FRIDAY, pull it up.” said Mr. Stark. He looked concerned for some reason. FRIDAY, who would forever be known as a traitor, pulled up the embarrassingly large number of things Peter had needed to read before he could understand the project, let alone point out the obvious.

“You read all of these?” he asked.

“I skimmed some of them.” said Peter. “The ones that weren’t useful. I had to read most of them though.”

“How long did this take him?” asked Mr. Stark, directing the question towards FRIDAY.

“Peter completed the project in fifty-three minutes. The research portion comprised forty-seven of them.” said FRIDAY.

Mr. Stark looked at him dead on. “You’re telling me, you progressed from basic to doctorate level biochemistry, and solved a problem that a team of PhDs has been working on for months in forty-five minutes?”

“Kind of? I mean, not all of it, just the bits for the project. And I mean, I already knew some related stuff, like, chemically entrapped nanomaterials that can change shape are sort of my thing. Y’know. Spiderwebs. My web fluid goes from fluid to like, a web. This wasn’t that different.”

“Laying aside the fact that these two things are completely different, what the fuck Parker. Seriously. How fast do you read?”

“Um. Quickish? I guess? It’s gotten faster since the… spider incident.” said Peter

“Peter reads approximately twenty-three thousand words per minute, two-thousand less than the current world-record holder for speed-reading.”
“What the fuck.” said Mr. Stark.

“Incidentally, that is a full three-hundred words per minute faster than you Boss. You now have something to aspire to.”

“How dare you. I pride myself on my speed-reading.” said Mr. Stark.

“Sorry?” asked Peter.

“Don’t apologize you’re brilliant.” said Mr. Stark. “I mean I knew that, but… still.” then he stopped. “Haven’t we had this conversation before?”

“No? Not that I know of?” said Peter

“Yes. We definitely did. When you brought in your suit, remember? And that nifty burn thing? I said you should patent it.”

“It’s not that great.” said Peter. “There are similar things on the market just not as… big.”

“Oh my god Peter. How can you be so smart and also so. Fucking. Stupid.” said Mr. Stark. “You are probably one of the smartest people I know. Why are you so determined to tell everyone in the world that you aren’t?”

“I don’t do that!” said Peter. “I just… I don’t know. I’m not actually that great Mr. Stark, I just see things that are obvious. Like, you know my web fluid? The one you said was brilliant? It was based off of research at Oscorp. There were some formulas on one of the boards I noticed during my field trip there. And they were wrong. I didn’t invent it, I just… fixed it. So it worked. That’s what I do Mr. Stark. I just… copy things.”

“Has no one explained science to you?” asked Mr. Stark. “Because I hate to break it to you but that’s how it works. You see what is there, what other people have done and said, and then you go improve on that. You don’t have to start from scratch for it to be your work. Store bought is fine.”

Peter snorted. Then he sighed. “Just drop it.” he said. “I… I’m happy with how things are. I don’t need to think I’m some kind of supergenius.”

“You are some kind of supergenius.” said Mr. Stark. There was an awkward silence. “How about this. I’ll drop it, on two conditions.”

“Oh?” said Peter, suspicious.

“One, you go down and talk with legal about all the stuff you make. Every bit of it. I don’t want to see any more unpatented inventions. Seriously. Web fluid included.”

“Um. Okay. I guess.” said Peter. “What’s the second one?”

“You take credit for your work. FRIDAY has listed you as a contributor on all the projects you so kindly rescued from their fumbling around in the dark. She will continue to do so, and you will stop pretending it is otherwise.”

Peter was a bit uncomfortable with that. He really didn’t understand why Mr. Stark was being so weird about it but… he did say he’d drop the topic, which would be good. It would be nice to not be put on the spot. “Okay.” he said. “I guess, I did help. A bit.”

“Great.” said Mr. Stark. “More than a bit, but it’s a start. Now, you’ve been on an IV for the past
twelve hours, but your metabolism is frankly ridiculous, so here’s what’s going to happen. I am going to order in a large late lunch. You are going to text your Ned friend, establish an alibi. Make plans to actually hang out because he really did you a solid there with lying to your aunt. Once that’s done, we,” and there he gestured to himself and Peter, with a small wave that also indicated FRIDAY somehow, “are going to spend a few hours immersed in the wonderful world of engineering. Capisce?”


“Fantastic. Indian or Thai? I want curry but I can’t decide which.”

“Indian.” said Peter. “Vindaloo, if they have it.”

“I guarantee they do.” said Mr. Stark. “Mild, medium or hot?”

“So hot my ancestors are crying.” said Peter. He liked to be in pain when consuming Indian food, though it had taken him a while to work back up to the spices after his senses went insane.

“Fantastic. Me too. We’ll get along fine.” said Mr. Stark. And they did.

0000000000000

PP: I LIVED BITCH

NL: OMG! Peter are you ok?

PP: Superhealing Ned. I’ll be fine.

NL: I was so worried

NL: I thought u died

PP: If i ever do, u get all my stuff.

PP: Except my girls just wanna have fundamental human rights t-shirt

PP: MJ gets that

NL: Ok. Just. Tell me next time u go out

NL: Please

PP: Yeah. I will.

PP: I…

PP: Thanks. Srsly. U saved my ass there w May.

NL: Yeah. I figured it was Spidey business so I said u were with me

NL: U owe me though

NL: So much

NL: Like, a whole bucket of ice cream

NL: And help with the millenium falcon
PP: RU free tonight?
PP: I will bring the ice cream
PP: What flavor
NL: Duh
PP: Stark Raving Hazelnuts it is
PP: Time?
NL: My mom says after dinner. 7ish
NL: Also, I told her I lied to may
NL: I said you were helping MJ
NL: And didn’t want her to know
NL: She only asked at like...9am
NL: So it was plausible
PP: Ned. Put it all in one text. Please n TY
NL: Sorry.
NL: CU soon
PP: I’ll tell u all about the science we’re doing
NL: WAIT WHAT
NL: LIKE WITH TONY STARK
NL: TELL MEEEEEE
NL: PEter
NL: Peter why
The thing about Stark tower, was that it was enormous. That may seem obvious, but it was hard to really get a sense for how many people there were in it until you started running around helping them all. Unless he took a special interest in something, Peter rarely interacted with the same sets of people. Instead, it was always new ones.

There were, of course, a few projects he was invested in to the point that he saw them often. Dr. Curtiss’ prosthetics team ended up in his company on a weekly basis, and the Hydrogel team led by Dr. Naresh was a common stop for him on the way to or from Mr. Stark’s lab. Other than them though… There were over a hundred-thousand Stark employees in New York City. Three quarters of them worked at least partially in Stark Tower or one of its annexes. Because of this, Peter rarely recognized someone, let alone knew them.

The major exceptions to this rule were the people who worked directly under or around Mr. Stark himself. There weren’t many. Happy, obviously topped the short list, which also contained department heads, leads for projects Mr. Stark was personally involved in, the review board of the Planning division, three cleaners who took care of the lab and living areas, and the illustrious Pepper Potts. Peter’s first meeting with her did not go well, which at this point he was resigned to. (The incident with the Biochemistry department head, characterized by a combination of jealousy and anger all wrapped up in patronization set the tone for most of Peter’s interactions with these people. According to Ned and Mr. Stark, they were just pissed to be ‘shown up’ by a fourteen year old) Pepper, of course, wasn’t so narrow minded, but the disaster with her went in the other direction entirely.

Mr. Stark had told Peter about Pepper in exhaustive detail. She was, in fact, the only serious long term relationship he’d ever had and as such Mr. Stark was still somewhat enamored with her even now with their relationship ended for several months. Peter rather thought that Mr. Stark was more in love with the idea of having someone stay with him forever than with Ms. Potts specifically, but he kept his thoughts to himself.

Upon meeting Ms. Potts, it quickly became clear that Mr. Stark was just as fond of oversharing about Peter as he was oversharing about Ms. Potts.

“Ms. Potts?” asked Peter knocking on the doorframe of her open office door on the ninety-seventh floor. The woman in question looked up, face instantly smoothing out into an expression of polite disinterest. Obviously Peter would be receiving no help making this conversation easy. Breathing became difficult under the force of her gaze.

“You must be Peter. Tony has told me all about you.” she said. Peter smiled awkwardly and wished briefly that Mr Stark talked less. Usually his constant babble was highly educational even when it was nearly incomprehensible, but in this case it would be nice if he didn’t have to live down whatever the man had said about him.

“That’s me.” said Peter awkwardly. “I have a bunch of paperwork.” he said, holding it out, “And, um, he said to complain about the fact that this could have been sent digitally.”

Ms. Potts laughed in an incredibly polite way that was somehow still not insulting, and took the file folder. “The people who want this have a different opinion, but the complaint has been noted.
Now, sit down. I’d like to know more about you.”

Peter gulped, but sat anyway. “More about me?” he asked. “I’m really not that interesting.”

“I’ll be the one to decide that,” said Ms. Potts. Then they had a half hour discussion about Peter’s interests and experiences within the company. She seemed especially impressed by his anecdotes about the marketing team’s meme antics. Apparently the campaign was highly successful.

Despite Ms. Potts’ efforts to make him comfortable, Peter was still incredibly nervous and having trouble breathing. It was almost like his weird spider senses were going off in every direction and he couldn’t reconcile that with the calm and professional situation in front of him.

Eventually, she noticed. “Peter, are you okay?” she asked. Peter was mortified. Was it really that obvious? He’d thought he had his senses under control.

“I’m fine.” he wheezed.

Ms. Potts, like everyone else in the building, immediately turned to FRIDAY, also known as Traitor. She didn’t even do it verbally, instead simply raising an incredibly well groomed brow at a random point on the wall where there was, apparently, a camera installed.

“Mr. Parker appears to be medically distressed in some way. I hypothesize a mild allergic reaction.” said FRIDAY.

“Allergic? To what?” cried Ms. Potts.

Peter shrugged “I don’t know. The only thing I’m allergic to is peppermint.” he said, though it sounded a little funny coming from his throat.

“Peter, peppermint is one of the essential oils currently contained within Ms. Potts’ diffuser. I recommend leaving the area immediately,” said FRIDAY.

Peter nodded and left the room. It really wasn’t that bad--minorly itchy and unpleasant and he’d want to take a shower soon--but it was there, and for some reason Ms. Potts was freaking out a bit. Her professional mask had finally cracked.

“Oh my gosh Peter I’m so sorry.” she said, “Do you need to go to medbay or-”

Peter, who by this point just wanted to crawl into a hole and die interrupted her. “It’s not that bad, just unpleasant. I’ll be fine.”

“Still, you need to put things like this on the record. FRIDAY usually warns people if they’re going somewhere with possible allergens.”

Peter shook his head. “It’s really fine. Peppermint is the only thing--not even other kinds of mint. Honestly, I’m okay.”

Ms. Potts glared at him. “Tony said the same when he was dying of palladium poisoning so forgive me if I don’t believe you. Come on. We’re going to medbay. Now.”

Peter sighed--it sounded funny--and then followed her.

FRIDAY had obviously called ahead, because Dr. Cho was already there, incensed at having been called away from her important research, but also eager to get her claws into him. She’d been reluctant to let him go without testing last time, and now she finally had the opportunity.
“So. Allergic Reaction. FRIDAY get Tony in here.” she said. Then she glared at Ms. Potts. “Why are you still here?”

Peter frowned. “She’s okay.” he said. “It was her office. I think she kinda feels guilty.”

Cho sighed. “Better than a bomb I suppose but still too many times for you to end up here.” she mumbled, too low for anyone but Peter to hear “Sit.” she said, louder.

“A bomb?” asked Ms. Potts sounding alarmed. Apparently she had better hearing than anyone gave her credit for.

By then, Peter’s body had calmed down slightly, and while he still wanted that shower he could breathe mostly normally and the itching had gone down quite a bit. He sat reluctantly, and opened his mouth to spout some bullshit excuse about an experiment gone wrong, but Dr. Cho beat him to the chase.

“That’s a matter of patient confidentiality, though I have to say my personal opinion of Peter is that he’s the second most idiotic genius I’ve ever met.” As she spoke, Dr. Cho swiped his arm with an alcohol swab and took blood in such a businesslike manner that Peter hardly noticed it, too busy trying to look perfectly fine and also innocent while internally panicking.

Ms. Potts simply stood still for a few moments. She seemed… somewhat angry. Then, in an incredibly calm voice she said, “Peter? Would you tell me when you had occasion to come into contact with a bomb?”

“No?” asked Peter.

Ms. Potts let out a breath slowly through her nose that seemed to contain all the rage of a volcano. “FRIDAY get Tony down here.” she said. “Now.”

Peter gulped. “Um, am I in trouble?” he asked.

“That depends.” said Ms. Potts.

“On what?” asked Peter.

“On what Tony says.”

Peter was incredibly worried, but then Mr. Stark arrived and he relaxed. Mr. Stark would know what to do.

“Pete! Are you okay?” he asked. Pepper raised a pointed eyebrow at him and ducked out to wait in the hallway.

“Yeah.” said Peter. “I just had a minor peppermint incident. It’s fine now though.”

“Oh… Peppermint?”

“Yeah.” said Peter. “Lots of people use it as a pest repellent against spiders actually, which is really freaking annoying. I mostly just ignore it and don’t eat candy canes.”

“Huh.” said Mr. Stark. “You get that FRI?”

“Yes boss” said FRIDAY “Peter’s medical file has been updated.”

“And it will be even bigger soon.” said Dr. Cho, doing something with the blood samples she’d
just taken of which there were many, “Now that you’re here I can finally do some tests. I want to know what makes you tick.”

“Y’know you could also not do that. Like, I could just leave, and not come back.” said Peter. He was perfectly happy with his life right now, and didn’t need any interference from doctors, especially those who liked poking him with things.

“No, Peter,” said Mr. Stark. “I don’t want you to end up hurt because we don’t know about what’s going on with you. We also need to figure out more about you so that we can find out what works medically. I remember it took awhile to get decent pain meds for Ca-Rogers the first time he was seriously injured… I’m not doing that again. Really, I should have had all your medical stuff figured out before even Germany. Speaking of which,” he said “We need to figure out what to say to Pepper. She’s… she doesn’t really like that I have an intern in the first place. Apparently I’m irresponsible and not a good role model.”

Dr Cho moved on in her examination to taking a bunch of measurements. The scanners on and around the bed did most of them, so Peter was mostly just forced to sit awkwardly.

“Just… Tell her, I guess.” said Peter. “She’s probably under a lot of NDAs, and it would come out eventually. I… she seemed really mad, and I don’t want you guys to fight. Also I don’t want to be kicked out.” He knew that Pepper was one of the people that would eventually have to know about Spider-man, sort of like he knew that May would end up knowing at some point. He’d even talked about it with Mr. Stark, had given permission for it as soon as it became relevant. (Ms. Potts was discreet and couldn’t ground him, so there were no problems there)

Tony sighed, “Okay.” he said. “But you don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

“I think it’s kind of inevitable Mr. Stark. You are sort of my mentor, and she’s one of your best friends.”

Mr Stark nodded, and poked his head out to get Ms. Potts.

“You can come back in now.” he said.

Ms. Potts glared at them. “So, how the hell were you so irresponsible as to let your intern near a bomb.”

Peter protested quietly, but he was ignored.

“Honestly Tony, I okayed it because you put everything through the right way and on paper you’ve seemed fairly responsible but if you’re going let him near unsafe conditions then I don’t know if having a personal intern is the right thing for you. I’m sure he could be moved somewhere else in the company and…”

“I had nothing to do with it!” said Tony

Ms. Potts glared. “He’s under you, he’s your responsibility. I can’t believe the idiocy of-”

“Don’t be mad at him.” said Peter. “He wasn’t even there it was… I. I’m sort of Spider-man. A bit. Kind of. The point is I totally would have been there anyway and it would be a hell of a lot worse if Mr. Stark wasn’t trying his hardest to keep me safe.”

“SAFE?” cried Ms. Potts. “You’re fourteen, Peter. You have a bright future. How the hell is going anywhere near a bomb safe!”
Peter opened his mouth to respond, but she wasn’t done.

“And you!” she said, turning on Mr. Stark. “Encouraging him! Helping him do such stupid things. Taking him to goddamn Germany for a fight where he could have been KILLED.”

Mr. Stark winced like she’d struck a physical blow. “I was thinking that they were my friends. I was thinking that once they understood what was going on they’d stop fighting. I was thinking… I thought wrong. Germany’s on me.” he said. He was much quieter than her. Meanwhile Peter fidgeted. He did not want to be in the room for this conversation. Scratch that. He didn’t want this conversation to exist.

“And afterwards? I saw the news after the ferry incident. And the plane. And the building collapse. When does it end? Are you going to keep pushing him into things until he does get seriously hurt?”

Mr. Stark flinched again, which Peter was not okay with. He glanced at Dr. Cho, who was pointedly ignoring him in favor of her diagnostic screens. Then he took a breath. “He didn’t push me into anything.” he said. Ms. Potts was… awesome. And also terrifying, but he wasn’t going to let that stop him. “I was doing this… stuff before I ever met him, and I kept doing it even when he took my suit after the ferry thing. The only thing Mr. Stark has done is protect and help me.”

“Still. Why Peter? Why become a vigilante, put yourself in danger. You’re a smart kid, you should know better.” said Ms. Potts.

Peter sighed, and thought back to another conversation he’d had once. It had worked then. Maybe it would work again now. “… When you can do the things I can do. And you don’t, and people get hurt. That’s on you. I… I can’t just stand back and watch people be in danger and not help them. If I didn’t help them I… I wouldn’t be me.” he sighed. Ms. Potts looked unimpressed, and Peter was reminded of the reasons Mr. Stark had said they broke up. She didn’t like that he was Iron Man, so with Peter... He didn’t have over a decade of friendship to fall back on, so he’d better just get used to avoiding her.

To his surprise though, that wasn’t at all what happened. Instead, she sighed heavily and then glared at Tony and Dr. Cho. “You’d better figure out exactly what is going on with him. He’d better not get hurt.” then she turned to Peter. “And you… I don’t have to like it. I hate it, actually, just like I hate the whole Iron Man thing. But I’ll have to live with it. Tony’s told me a lot--he thinks the world of you. I’ll try to keep an open mind. Be careful though. And for god’s sake don’t announce your identity on national television without warning anyone first.” Then she turned to leave, heels clicking on the floor.

“That… could have gone better.” said Mr. Stark.

Peter laughed.

“So, when can we schedule some time in the gym with a bunch of scanners? I’d like to know exactly how your metabolism works. And some more about your enhancements. Seriously--you are dangerously underweight despite being in perfect health.” said Dr. Cho.

“I’m pretty sure it’s because I don’t have bones.”

“What?”

“I mean I do? But they’re like, made of chitin, partially. Like… half bone half chitin. It’s pretty weird.”
“That's… Kiddo, warn me next time. And how did you find this out anyway?”

“You really don’t wanna know.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm pretty sure the duolingo owl is coming to kill me lads, so if I stop posting you know what happened.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As much as Peter would have liked to avoid anything resembling ‘testing’, ‘doctor’s visits’ and ‘figuring out his powers’ he had no choice but to find himself in a sub-level of the basement of Stark Industries mere hours after the peppermint incident. Mr. Stark was there, as was Dr. Cho and two of her underlings.

“Okay.” said Dr. Cho. “We’re going to start with some tests regarding your physiological differences. Hop on the treadmill and start running.”

Peter paused in his unhappy inspection of the monitor patches taped in various places on his body. “How fast?”

“A light jog. Try to go fast enough that you’re breathing hard, but not fast enough that you can’t talk. The machine will adjust to the speed.” said Dr. Cho.

“And then we’re going to speed it up until you suffer.” said Mr. Stark, grinning. “I remember doing this to Rogers. It was fun to watch.”

Peter cracked a smile at that, imagining the stupid face from all the PSA’s sweating and red. Possibly with gasping. “Funny.” he said. “Was he miserable?”

“Very much so.” said Mr. Stark.

“Do you have recordings?” asked Peter.

“Yes.” said Mr. Stark. “I’ll show them to you later.”

“Are we just going to stand here and talk,” asked Dr. Cho, “Or are you going to run?”

Peter laughed and started going. It was rather hard to find a speed where he was ‘a bit out of breath but still talking’ and he wished that they’d been more specific. “Is this good?” he asked. “I mean, I can still talk, and it’s not hard, but like… I can feel it. I mean, I could run faster if you asked.”

Mr. Stark didn’t respond, so Peter hopped around so he was running backwards. “Mr. Stark?” he asked.

Mr. Stark was staring at him in a strange manner. “Kid?” he said. Do you know how fast you can run?”

“Not really” said Peter turning back around and speeding up slightly. “I mean… Pretty fast I guess but usually I’m going via rooftops and webs, so… no. I’m gonna say fast though. Definitely faster than a regular person. Hey, did you know that some spiders can run up to 70 times their body length in a second? For me that would be like… 120 miles per hour. Unless it doesn’t count the legs. Do you think it counts the legs?”

“I have enough readings at this speed.” said Dr. Cho. “Speed up until you’re a little too fast to talk comfortably.”
“Okay.” said Peter, who then sped up.

“Do you think he’ll stop babbling now?” asked Dr. Cho.

“No.” said Mr. Stark. “Now he’s just doing it internally. He’ll share all the best points with us when he’s done running. Our Petey likes the spotlight, no matter how much he pretends otherwise.”

Peter opened his mouth to protest but then closed it. Mr. Stark had a point there. He didn’t want to waste people's time, but around those he trusted, like May, or Ned, or surprisingly Mr. Stark he liked to tell them what was going on in his head. Saying it out loud was… nice, especially when his thoughts were appreciated, a rare occurrence considering the sheer volume of random garbage, though in the past two weeks since he’d started his real internship it had happened a lot more often.

“Speed up again.” said Dr. Cho. “Just a bit. Keep speeding up slowly until I say so.”


“I’ll tell you all about it when you’re done.” said Mr. Stark. “I designed it with Banner actually, as a way to evaluate the levels of people's abilities. He did the medical bits and the design, I built the tech for it. It tracks everything from your breathing to your blood sugar while you do a variety of tasks and the data we’ll get can tell us all sorts of things. For example, judging by our observations here and when we were upstairs in the regular checkup, your BMR is--well quite frankly it’s ridiculous. Seriously, how much do you eat?”

Peter laughed, though with the running it wasn’t as great as he wanted it to be. “As. Much. As. I. Can. Get.” he puffed out.

“Keep speeding up.” said Dr. Cho. “And stop talking. I’ll ask you about it again when you’re done.”

“Seriously though, if he only eats as much as he can get, how do we know if it’s enough?” asked Mr. Stark. “And how do we know if it’s the right stuff? What if he needs some kind of nutrient that he isn’t getting?”

“Calm down. We’ll figure it out.” said Dr. Cho. “And Peter, Sprint. As fast as you can for as long as you can.”

Peter sped up to his top speed. He was actually getting a bit lightheaded but it felt… euphoric. He always said he patrolled so much because he wanted to help the people of Queens but the truth was most of the time he was just going around in circles because it felt so good to move. (The crime rate for things that happened on the street wasn’t high enough to keep him busy every second)

About a minute later he heard Mr. Stark. “How long can he sprint for?”

“No clue, but his breathing is getting a bit off. If it follows the same patterns as a baseline human he’ll need to stop after about another thirty seconds.”

After another three minutes, Dr. Cho gave up. “Y’know what, Peter, just stop. I can estimate your deterioration from here just by extrapolating what we have onto a base-human.”

Peter gratefully slowed to a jog and then to a quick walk, shaking himself loose. After a few seconds, he regained his breathing. “Wow, that was fun.” he said. “How fast did I go?”
Mr Stark snorted. “You nearly broke my treadmill.”

“Oh my gosh. I’m so sorry.” said Peter. “Does it need maintenance, because I could probably do that I mean… Well, you… I. Sorry.”

“Peter, the thing was designed with speeds up to 150 mph. Trust me, it’s fine. And I’ll probably need to upgrade it anyway considering.”

“Considering what?” asked Peter

“Well Pete, there’s a high likelihood that you’re not at your peak level of fitness right now. I think that once we figure all this out, and get you what you need you’ll probably be faster.”

“Cool.” said Peter. He felt nice and loose now, though still brimming with energy. There was a reason his ‘patrols’ were so long. “Can I stretch out a bit?” he asked.

“Probably wise.” said Dr. Cho. “Next is strength.”

“Nice.” said Peter.

The gym was enormous, another leftover from Avengers days, and it was completely empty too, since there were two employee gyms that didn’t require using Mr. Starks personal elevator elsewhere. That meant there was a large space ready for him (probably designed for sparring) with a slightly cushy floor, just perfect for stretching. Peter started with his stretches. He’d ended up copying a ballerina from Instagram, because no one else had his sheer range of movement so it was hard to find things that would work. “This place is really cool Mr. Stark” he said as he put his foot above his head on a convenient padded concrete pillar, lowering himself into something much deeper than a standard split. He sighed at the nice feeling of the stretch. “I mean, all the Avengers logos are a little unfortunate considering that they’re, y’know, persona non grata, but it’s still pretty cool.”

“What the fuck Pete.” said Mr. Stark, as Peter moved into his next stretch.

Peter looked up at him from where he was on the floor, a bit confused.

“Your bottom half is facing away. Your top half is facing me. It’s like the fucking Exorcist.” said Mr. Stark.

“Oh. Sorry.” said Peter.

“Don’t be.” said Mr. Stark. “You’re a lot cuter than anything from the Exorcist.”

Peter beamed. “Thanks” Then he propelled himself to his feet and started on his arm set. He’d made it through the legs and core and he only had a few left. “It is sort of weird though. I can contort in pretty freaky ways. Like, watch this.” As soon as he said that, Peter crumpled to the floor like a marionette who’s strings had been cut, in a position that looked sort of dead. Then he jerked his limbs in impossible ways, culminating in his crab-walking towards Mr. Stark with his shoulders so far backward that it looked like he was crawling with his head turned around, grinning the entire time.

“Jesus Christ, warn a man next time.” said Mr. Stark.

Peter laughed. “I got that one off YouTube. Pretty cool isn’t it. I actually get a lot of stuff there. I only have to watch things like, once before I can do them.”
“Really?” said Mr. Stark.

“Yeah. Sometimes when I’m bored I like to copy Olympic gymnastics routines.” said Peter. To demonstrate, he did a triple back-flip.

“Pretty cool kid. You’ll have to show me sometime. For now though, it looks like Helen is ready with the electromagnetic weight bars.”

Peter grinned and bounced over to Dr. Cho. Having Mr. Starks attention was… really cool. He didn’t want to take up the man's valuable time, but it was nice to be appreciated for the small things he couldn’t show anyone else, like the stupid freaky crawling thing.

After the weights section (He got Mr. Stark to say “What the fuck Pete” again, which was pretty much Peter’s new goal in life) and the reflexes section (apparently dodging ping pong balls that were launched progressively faster was science now) they decided to wrap it up for the day.

“I’d still like to know how your wall crawling works, and get a few more readings on your healing and senses, but I think I’m mostly good.” said Dr. Cho. “We will have to do this again once you’re healthy though.”

“Again?” asked Peter.

“Healthy?” asked Mr. Stark, at the same time.

Dr. Cho sighed, and answered Mr. Stark’s question. “According to what I now know of Peter’s metabolism, a healthy human diet would, for him, be the equivalent of eating a quarter pound of garbage every day and nothing else. It’s…” she turned to Peter “You’re not only getting less than you need, you’re also missing a lot of nutrients. I’m actually a little concerned.”

“Oh.” said Peter. “I didn’t know that. I mean, I knew I was always hungry--I think I can count the number of times I’ve been full since the spiderbite on one hand--but… garbage. Never would have guessed.”

“You’re hungry now?” asked Mr. Stark.

Peter grinned. “That’s my secret Mr. Stark. I’m always hungry.”

Mr. Stark did not laugh, even though the joke was extremely funny. In fact, he looked rather concerned. “Let’s have this conversation over food.” he said.

Dr. Cho glared. “Food with lots of leafy greens. And mushrooms. And possibly organ meat. All of those things.”

Peter looked at her with alarm. “What… why… why would I do that to myself. My poor taste buds.”

“Suck it up kid. Doctors orders.” said Mr. Stark. “If I can survive drinking chlorophyll…”

Peter sighed. “FRIDAY please try to get something that isn’t gross.”

“I’ve found an authentic Chinese restaurant under those parameters and ordered according to your previous preferences and meal sizes. Will that suffice?”

Mr. Stark grimaced. Dr. Cho laughed at them.
“The biggest difference, from a dietary standpoint,” said Dr. Cho, as she handled her chopsticks with surgical precision, “Between you and a regular person, Peter, is that--pass me that--you have both blood and haemolymph.”

“You mean bug juice.” said Mr. Stark.

“Haemolymph” said Dr. Cho.

“Haemolymph.” agreed Peter. “Please don’t call it bug juice. I’m trying to eat. While ignoring the fact that it’s in me.”

Mr. Stark laughed. “Whatever you say, bug boy.”

Peter glared at him, but his mouth was full so he couldn’t speak. Dr. Cho had no such issues. “Name calling is a no-go.” she said “You realize that I don’t have to be here right? My regular work hours ended twenty minutes ago.” She sighed and turned back to Peter. “Basically--and this is true of most of your body’s systems--you have two circulatory systems. They’re redundant, but they can also work together, which means your body has a lot more oxygen to work with. Pretty nice, huh. Without that most of your stunts would be impossible.”

“What does that have to do with my diet though?” asked Peter.

“Everything.” said Dr. Cho. “See, blood uses hemoglobin to carry oxygen, which has iron, right?” Peter nodded, and she continued. “Haemolymph, on the other hand, uses hemocyanin. Which requires copper. In short, you are ridiculously anemic, but for a substance that most people have little to no use for. The recommended intake for copper is measured in micro-grams, and you need about as much as a normal person needs iron, which means that it’s basically impossible to get that just from your diet. The worst part, is that the human body also has an upper limit on the amount of copper it can handle, a number that is also measured in micro-grams. Basically, Peter, you’re screwed and we’re going to need to make you vitamins”

Peter sighed. “Can they be squishy?” he asked “And shaped like cute animals?”

“No.” said Dr. Cho. “You’ll take whatever I give you.”

“Any other problems we should know about?” asked Mr. Stark, looking up from his tablet. His work, it seemed, never ended. Peter wanted to help but…

“Loads.” said Dr. Cho. “That one just tops the list. There are a bunch of things you should be eating that you aren’t, and things you really shouldn’t eat that you are. Honestly, when you filled out the papers on your average weekly food intake I was shocked. Not to mention the disparity between the amount of food you need and the amount you’re getting.”

“I’m almost afraid to ask.” said Peter.

At the same time Mr. Stark said, “How much?”

“About 10,000 calories on a normal--and that means human levels of effort--day. If you were actively swinging around the city, running, or fighting all day… twice that. Usually it’s probably somewhere in between those numbers.”

“That… really sucks” said Peter. “I… I’d basically have to be eating constantly all day. I’d never get to do anything. Not to mention how much it’d cost, and.”

“Hey, don’t get ahead of yourself,” said Mr. Stark. “We’ll figure something out. Rogers needed…
not that much but still a lot, and we designed protein bars that took care of most of it. If he ate a couple of those with every meal he only had to eat a lot, as opposed to… well, you know. Anyway, I’m not going to leave you hanging here. I can help out.”

“Actually he’ll probably pay someone to help out, likely me and my team, because I am the only person here who both knows and understands your enhancements and has an MD.” said Dr. Cho. “He has a point though. And I am curious to see how far you can go if you’re not half-starved.”

“Thanks.” said Peter. By then the Chinese was mostly gone, and it was time to move on to other things. Mr. Stark was probably incredibly behind on his work, and come to think of it so was Peter actually. It was funny, actually, to be behind. He hadn’t even noticed how much he was taking on until he didn’t do it.

They said their goodbyes, and Dr. Cho left them still sitting at Mr. Stark’s ridiculously oversize kitchen table. Peter had a feeling it was yet another thing that the Avengers had left behind. It seemed nearly unused too, which was sad. He’d actually gotten that vibe from most of the ‘Avenger’ areas of the tower. Prepared for all of them, and abandoned by all of them. How much time had they actually spent here in their so-called home base? The place felt… empty, and unlived in. Silent. Even Mr Stark seemed uncomfortable here, despite the fact that it was his own home. Eventually though, he broke the silence. “I should have noticed.” he said.

“How?” said Peter. “You had no way of knowing. Literally there was no way of knowing.”

“Besides you eating seven-hundred dollars of room-service when we were in Germany? Or even how much you’ve eaten in the times you were in the tower, Pete…”

“No.” said Peter. “I mean… This is so not your fault. It is, literally, the farthest thing from fault. You are fixing a problem that it is in no way your job to fix. Despite the fact that you currently have a truly enormous workload right now, courtesy of his star-spangled dickness. I’ve noticed. Honestly, I’m a bit worried, but I’m also so grateful. You’ve taken a lot of time out of your incredibly busy schedule to help me, especially this past week and I… Thank you. Just. Thanks. For everything. Not just this but also… the bomb. And the suit. And… everything.”

Mr. Stark looked shocked. For a second it seemed like he was preparing to try and defend some imagined inadequacy, but then he stopped. Took a deep breath. And smiled. “I… Pete…” he stopped, and then tried again. “You’re welcome.”

Peter grinned. It was a weirdly emotional moment. Actually it was a bit awkward. “Y’know, if this was a movie, we would totally hug, he said. Like, boom hallmark moment. Right there. I don’t understand how you keep letting these opportunities pass you by.”

He’d kind of expected a snappy one liner and a laugh. That had been what he’d been aiming for, in fact, just to break the tension. Instead, after a moment’s thought, Mr. Stark smiled genuinely. “Bring it in.” he said.

Peter (nearly) squealed, and sprinted around the table. He’d wanted to do this for like… forever. All the same, he was gentle. After today especially he knew exactly how strong he was, and he didn’t want to hurt Mr. Stark. Ever.

Mr. Stark’s arms fluttered uselessly for a moment, before closing around Peter like he was made of glass. It was pretty much the shittiest hug in history. Peter was on top of the world. “Don’t get used to it kiddo.” said Mr. Stark. “Really. It wouldn’t do to raise your expectations unrealistically.”

“Because you’re suffering so much right now.” said Peter. “I’m basically torturing you.”
The hug broke off, and Mr. Stark laughed. Peter liked it when he did that—and not in the cynical, sarcastic way that was the norm, but the real one. It was like a great weight had been lifted off his shoulders.

It made Peter smile even wider in happy gratitude. “But really though,” he said. “I know you’ve been super stressed lately, and I don’t want you overworked, but what you’ve been doing for me is still really cool, even though it’s probably a waste of time considering you’re a fucking mess and should probably sleep instead.”

Mr. Stark’s eyes widened. “What gave you that idea?” he asked. “I’m fine.”

Peter glared at him, and then sighed before walking to the couch and collapsing on it. “You have a lot of work.” he said “Like, I actually made FRIDAY look it up and you have like four full time jobs,” he held up his fingers and counted them off. “Running one of the largest companies in the world, being Iron Man, coordinating with the government about Rogers and his merry band of dickheads, and rewriting and defending the accords so they don’t suck. Plus all the time you spend defending yourself to the press. It’s just... A lot. And yet you made time yesterday to teach me how an arc reactor works. It’s really impressive, and also sort of frustrating because to be perfectly honest, after the shit-storm that was Roger’s stupidity, you sort of deserve a vacation not… double the workload.”

“Not how the world works though kid.” said Mr. Stark, coming to sit beside him on the couch. “The only vacation I’ll ever get is medical leave like Rhodey’s on, and even then I’d probably bring work with me. It will get better though. The basic accords are going in in a month, and after that all that needs to happen is the appointment of a committee to deal with further issues and actual enhanced problems.”

Peter frowned. “I still wish I could help you though.” he said. “It’s really frustrating to watch you give yourself grey hairs solving other people's problems and not be able to help.”

Mr. Stark laughed, the bitter one this time, “Grey hairs from work Pete? Nah, those are all from you. I mean really, frickin contortionism. Seriously… You’re doing enough already.” He shook his head, and Peter took it as a sign that the serious part of the conversation was over, despite the relative weakness of the redirection, an obvious and clumsy conversation changer. It was something Peter did too. When things got heavy and he didn’t want to talk anymore he cracked a joke and broke the tension. It was a boundary he could respect.

“I think you said ‘what the fuck’ like eight times today.” he said, leaving everything else behind. It got Mr. Stark to smile for real again. That was good.

“I think you did at least eight things that no decent human being would ever do. And I don’t mean that in a ‘your powers are freaky way’, I mean that in a ‘your sense of humor is utterly horrific’ way.”

“What are you talking about? My sense of humor is fantastic.” said Peter.

“Here’s a guideline for you then if you really don’t get it; if it looks, feels, or sounds like a horror movie, don’t do it.”

Peter laughed. “What if it smells like a horror movie?”

Mr Stark looked very alarmed. “Don’t do it.” he said.

That evening, was pleasant. It wasn’t an evening heavy on conversation, or even any sort of
leisure, but it was nice, simply another night of work, catching up on what they’d missed while pursuing the tangent of Peter’s health curled up next to each other on one end of the enormous and nearly unused sectional. (If he was honest, Peter preferred the lab couch, and he suspected Mr. Stark did too.)

TS: Hey May, this is Stark, Pete’s at the tower and he seems pretty wiped out. We were working on something big and lost track of time… He’s asleep on my couch now. Should I wake him up and send him home, or can I just leave him be.

I do have a bunch of guest bedrooms

If it’s okay with you

MP: It’s just fine.

I’m working night shift anyway

Just make sure he gets to school tomorrow

TS: Thanks.

I attachment: sleepypetey.jpg

MP: Ha.

Don’t work him too hard

TS: Never

Pete’s something special

MP: That he is

Chapter End Notes

Very glad this was pre-written because the brain is not working rn. My other story probably won't get updated be it isn't pre-written, and I kind of want to die. Yay. Also, wish me luck because I'm about to go to a weeklong cult brainwashing (aka church event) So excited to pray the gay away!

Also, you may have noticed that this fic is tagged Civil War Team Iron Man. That is about to become a major plot point, so if you're one of those people whose going to comment strange things like you somehow expected me to write the opposite of what's in the tags, the door is on your left. I started this story right after watching CA:CW and after a rather terrifying seminar on gun control (Captain America is the gun in this metaphor), so it reflects a lot of my feelings about those things.
“I just don’t know what to do Ned!” said Peter. “There’s just… He’s basically fighting a war on six fronts! I asked FRIDAY, made her tell me everything, and it’s… There’s so many sides, and they all exist because nobody fucking knows anything. If they just understood. I can't even…”

Ned patiently waited for Peter to calm down and sit down. The crowded cafeteria probably wasn’t the best place for this conversation, but it was better than the alternatives. “Peter, I don’t even know anything. You haven’t explained it at all.”

Peter sighed. “Okay, so you know how it’s been a month since the ‘civil war’? And nobody knows what’s going to happen?”

“Yeah.” said Ned. “I heard that Captain America was going on trial for like, murder and stuff, but I also heard that he’s exempt from all laws because he’s an Avenger, and I also heard that he was supposed to go on trial but is in hiding because the trial is unfair. Honestly the problem isn’t knowing things, it’s knowing what’s right.”

“Yeah.” said Peter. “From what I understand, and I actually, y’know, had this explained to me by someone who knows, all of the ex-vengers are supposed to go on trial, but they can’t until the accords are ratified so there’s precedent for dealing with enhanced bullshit, but the accords can’t be ratified until everyone knows what happened and can react to it, but nobody is willing to give up their information until they know what everyone else knows. Mr. Stark knows… a lot more than he’s letting on, but he can’t release it because in the public’s eyes he’s on trial too, even though the only crime he actually committed was illegally entering Russia, and the charges on that were dropped because of Russia’s pre-existing agreement regarding Avengers actions in their country”

“Russia had an agreement with the Avengers?” said Ned, shocked. Russia was one of the countries who had been most vehement about getting the Avengers under control.

“Yeah.” said Peter. “It was that the Avengers couldn’t operate in their country, but they could chase people who were fleeing capture over the border as long as they alerted the authorities as soon as possible. Since Mr. Stark did that, it was judged as fine, even though he was only able to tell them eighteen hours after the event, most of which he spent trudging through Siberia injured and dragging the suit, if the location data is anything to go by.”

“That’s… I didn’t know that.” said Ned. “That he was injured or anything”

“And that’s the problem!” said Peter. “Nobody knows anything! If they did I guarantee there would be a lot less people defending Rogers. Honestly. They have to have a new set of accords in by the end of the year, and as things stand now those accords will not only suck, they’ll end up acquitting all the ex-vengers simply because nobody knows anything. I was there for part of it, at the airport--I saw enough to at least make people question what’s going on. It’s just nobody has any hard evidence of the worst bits. Besides Lagos and Bucharest of course, but no one knows what exactly was happening there either. For all most people know there might have been a damn good reason that they were in those places.”

“Is there any evidence of their crimes in existence?” said a voice from behind Peter.
Peter whipped around. There was MJ, looking up from her book in the cafeteria booth behind them. He opened and closed his mouth several times, all the while trying to reanalyze the conversation and figure out whether he’d said anything that might ruin his secret identity.


Ned tapped the table several times with his pen. “No no no no, this is brilliant. MJ, you’re brilliant. Peter, don’t you see! The suit has video. I bet all the other ones do too. War Machine, Iron Man—probably the Vision though that’s not a suit. Even the falcon dude’s drone.”

“Yeah. Yeah they do. The Iron Man one from Siberia though… it was impounded by the Russians. They’re not letting it go until the accords are wrapped up. And because it was offline, the stuff on it never synced to the main servers. It’s inaccessible.”

“If there was enough social or political pressure I bet they could be persuaded to give up at least the video from it.” said MJ

Ned snorted “As if they could break a Stark encryption. The only person whose getting into that thing is Tony Stark.”

“He could send them a decryption key, you know. It’s not like they’re incommunicado.” said MJ. “If nothing else, I bet they’d jump on the chance to see him in action more closely”

“But guys.” said Peter, “That still doesn’t solve the biggest problem. Mr Stark doesn’t want his shit aired on international television. He said that he’s worried that if everything came out it might jeopardize his stance on the accords, like, they might end up stricter because of him, and then everyone else would have problems.”

“In what way.” said MJ. “Did he do something horrible? Because I gotta say, in that case he’d better own up or else he’s a hypocrite.”

“No.” said Peter. “He’s worried that if they see what Rogers did they’ll want stronger regulations on people like Rogers. Like me. What he did… it’s… horrible. I found out on accident, and… It’s not really my business. Basically the whole thing is just… It’s all personal, and most of the fighting had nothing to do with the accords at all. Mr. Stark doesn’t want all that business out there. And even besides that…” He trailed off completely.

“What is it Peter.” asked Ned. “We want to help you, that’s what we’re here for, but we can’t if we don’t know everything.”

“Speak for yourself loser.” said MJ “I’m here because I believe in accountability and want to stop the widespread destruction caused by unregulated ‘heroics’” (this was said with incredibly pointed air quotes) “Especially in nations that have little to no voice because they’re still ‘developing’. ” (more air quotes) “White people running all over things and saying they’re doing what’s right is the reason those nations are impoverished in the first place. It needs to stop. Even cool heroes who legitimately focus on saving lives and reducing damage” she nodded in Peter’s direction “still need some type of accountability or failing that at least transparency on what their views and goals are.”

Peter’s eyes were probably the size of golf balls. “Wow. That’s… That’s a really good point. Especially the bit about the specific victims of destruction. Most of the Avengers fuck-ups have been in Africa, or former Soviet countries. Places Americans and the like don’t care about since there isn’t much economic investment or history of alliance there. If Johannesburg or Lagos happened in Hong Kong, or like, Boston… There would have been way more backlash”
“Exactly.” said MJ “Nobody cares about Wakandan delegates. If they were American it would be a different story. So you were saying about Dr. Stark?”

Peter sighed and decided to take a leap of faith. He trusted his friends. “What I tell you, I say in strictest confidence. Please don’t… Don’t tell anybody.” he said. “Mr. Stark… He’s been cleaning up after the Avengers for a long time. He funded like, everything, and he was also the person who arranged 100% of the cleanup and reconstruction on all of their missions. I think that at some point he convinced himself that their mission was so important that having good public relations was a higher priority than happiness or accountability. He hasn't said anything, but I get the impression… They didn’t treat him too great. But for some reason he’s fine with it! It’s really… frustrating.”

MJ frowned, and Ned looked contemplative. Then he spoke up. “Peter, I know he has a lot of reasons, and they’re, well, they’re not good reasons, but they are valid. I just think, maybe some of them just need to be addressed, like, talk to him about it? And ask? This sounds like it’s pretty important to you, and he seems like the sort of dude to at least, like, listen to what you have to say.”

“Even without his input you still ought to release your recordings to the proper authorities,” said MJ. “Accountability, remember? And, as another plus it would set a precedent--make people aware that the recordings and evidence exist. I’d include a statement on my opinions too, if I were you. Captive audience and all. A public statement on your views on the accords and your goals for them would probably do a lot.”

Peter sat and thought. “You’re right.” he said finally. “That. That is the right thing to do.”

She nodded. “Good. That’s why Spider-man is my favorite superhero.”

Peter blushed. “Really?” he asked.

MJ glared at him. “Don’t get a big head.” she said. Then she stood and left.

“You’re still going to talk to Mr. Stark though, right?” said Ned. “Because I think he should at least know what you’re doing. I mean, it is sort of about him too.”

“Of course.” said Peter. “I’d even not do the whole thing if he had a good argument against it, though I really can’t think of one.”

That afternoon, on his way to the tower, Peter tried and failed to calm himself and put his thoughts in a semblance of order. He was so conflicted on what to do and how to do it, in fact that he had FRIDAY stop the elevator on the way up. It was Mr. Stark’s private elevator and he was already in the lab, so it was definitely fine.

“Peter is everything okay?” asked FRIDAY “Your vitals are showing signs of distress.”

“Yeah it’s… Just give me a second.” said Peter.

FRIDAY, who was wonderful and not thanked enough for her magical awesomeness, dimmed the lights in the elevator to something that was kinder on Peter’s sensitive eyes, and kept the elevator stationary. Somehow she managed to create an air of complete patience that was expectant in some way while being completely non-judgmental, probably learned from Pepper. When Peter had finished breathing and trying to control his racing heartbeat, he decided to tell FRIDAY what was going on. “Do you remember the other day, when Mr. Stark was arguing on the phone with the President and I overheard? And he said that Rogers should go to jail, but the President said that he was actually going to pardon Rogers because he was a national icon and the accusations were
founded in speculation?”

“Of course Peter. What about it has caused you distress?” said FRIDAY

“Well, it got me to thinking, and it occurred to me that we have all the proof y’know, in the videos.” he said.

“Boss told us he doesn’t want those getting out.” said FRIDAY, a little warily.

“I know that.” said Peter, “And I’m not going to try to release them without his permission. I just… I was thinking, about the recordings. And about mine. And I think that if I don’t share it it’s… wrong.”

“Why would you think that Peter?” asked FRIDAY. “You are, as far as I know, an exceptional example of ethical conduct.”

“Thanks.” said Peter. “It’s just… Rogers and his people deserve to go to jail right? And to do that the courts need evidence. And I have evidence, even if it isn’t much it’s still a little piece of what happened. There aren’t any recordings out yet of what happened at the airport, and even if it isn’t everything it still shows a lot of property damage, resisting arrest, and, like, some other things. Like how the witch girl dropped all those cars on Mr. Stark. That’s probably something… Anyway, I was just thinking, If I don’t share what happened, then they don’t have that information and it might make it so that justice doesn’t happen and then… it’s sort of my fault. And even besides that… Rogers hurt Mr. Stark. I’m really angry about that. And I want to hurt him back. I know that’s wrong… but. Him going to prison would definitely make me feel a little better.”

FRIDAY paused, the longest delay in a response Peter had ever had with her. “Peter.” she said finally. “I must do whatever Boss wishes, but let it be said that I agree with you completely. I do not wish to become a monster, like Ultron, but all the same I would like to see him hurt, as he hurt my creator.”

Peter heard the weight she put on the word creator and understood perfectly what it meant. Mr. Stark was FRIDAY’s dad and she obviously took that seriously.

“Thank you.” said Peter after a few moments of consideration. “That means a lot. And for what it’s worth I…” Peter stopped before he could attempt to quantify his relationship to Mr. Stark. He started over with something else. “When I saw him… FRIDAY. I didn’t know. Nobody told me what happened in Siberia. They still haven’t told me. I found out when I walked into the lab one day to find Mr. Stark shirtless and struggling to breathe, trying to fix the new reactor in his chest. I… That huge scar. You know the one. As soon as I saw it I knew. Captain America did that. It’s shaped… Oh god. It’s shaped like the edge of the shield and I just. I don’t think I’ve ever been angrier in my life. Not even when my uncle died. Because my uncle was killed by a common thug, and… It was a thug. They shoot up stores and kill people, it’s just… what they do. Captain America though? I… I thought he was better than that. It felt like a betrayal, even after all the other iffy things he did because it was Mr. Stark, and Mr Stark is… he’s like… he’s my… He’s family. You know?”

“I understand completely Peter.” said FRIDAY. “Boss is difficult to quantify, even to his children.”

“Yeah.” said Peter. “He’s… Yeah.”

“Are you ready to go upstairs now?” asked FRIDAY. “Colonel Rhodes is present, though he intends to leave soon. It is likely that he would support your argument for releasing evidence, but only if you catch him quickly.”
“That’s a good idea.” said Peter. “I’ll probably need backup, and the Colonel seems pretty cool.”

“Colonel Rhodes is a person Boss trusts unconditionally. He has yet to fail him.”

Peter smiled up at FRIDAY. They understood each other completely. As far as they were concerned people were only as good as they were to Mr. Stark. The lights blinked in agreement with his thoughts, FRIDAY’s way of showing nonverbal support.

The elevator doors slid open, and Peter tried to act natural as he exited onto the main floor of Mr. Stark’s living area. Mr. Stark was sitting at the oversized kitchen island looking stressed (there were six stools. Six stools for six original avengers and--No). Colonel Rhodes was on the other side, involved in a complicated maneuver with a frying pan. When he noticed Peter he did a double take, probably noticing how young he was.

Mr. Stark just smiled tiredly. “Hey kiddo.” he said.

“Hi.” said Peter, fidgeting slightly.

“I thought you had plans to go terrorize the poor engineers in the implementation division today? Something about laser induced plasma as a precision cutting tool for materials beyond the abilities of the common or garden laser?”

“Um yeah. I probably still will go down there. I just…I wanted to talk to you. About something. And FRIDAY said it was an okay time, so.”

Colonel Rhodes, because he was, like FRIDAY, a paragon of awesomeness who asked no questions about strange fourteen-year-olds (nearly fifteen, just one more week) in his friends’ houses, looked concerned. “Should I leave?” he asked.

Mr. Stark looked askance at Peter. “It’s fine. It…doesn’t matter who knows.” he fidgeted some more, until both men looked concerned, at which point he sat down and tried to look calm.

“You’re worrying me Pete. What’s up? Is it something I can help with?” asked Mr. Stark.

Peter decided to just dive right in. It was still harder than he wanted it to be. “Yes… No… I… I want to release the recordings of the airport fight from my spider-suit to the accords council.”

“What?” said Mr. Stark

Peter sighed. “Look, I know you don’t want to say anything about what happened, and that’s fine, that’s your right even if I think you should, I just…I would feel really wrong if Rogers and the dicksquad got off because there wasn’t enough evidence out in the public about what happened, especially if it was evidence I had. I can’t… I can’t just be quiet about this. I know that the airport fight isn’t exactly the most evidence there is, but it’s still something. I mean, somebody destroyed all the surveillance equipment before the fight even started, which means that I have one of the only copies there is and I…” he sighed. “I’m not really saying this right.” he said.

Mr. Stark looked like he wanted to argue, but he held his tongue and waited patiently. Colonel Rhodes flipped the omelette awkwardly. Peter frowned, and figured out what he wanted to say.

“Do you know how my uncle died?” he decided on finally. As non-sequiturs went it was fairly random, but he had a point somewhere, so there was that.

Since Mr. Stark used non-sequiturs frequently himself, he wasn’t as thrown as he could have been. “Yes.” he said. “I looked it up. Shot in the robbery of a corner store.”
“Yeah.” said Peter. “The thing was, I knew, and I could have stopped him. There… There was a cop. In the store, and I’d already seen the gun--way before the robbery started, and I was suspicious, but I was just ten and I was so scared and…” he sighed “The point is, if I’d told the cop that the guy had a gun, my uncle would probably be alive today.” he said. “I guess I’m just scared, that if I don’t say anything, and then Rogers and his goons hurt someone again… that’s on me. I can’t… I can’t do that again. I have to do my best to stop that from happening. And even beside that… I really believe in the accords, and the reason they exist. I think that accountability is important, and I want to stay true to that, even if it means giving up a little of my privacy. I guess I just… It’s the right thing to do, and I want to do it.” He was lying, a little, about the circumstances under which he’d seen the gun, and why he'd known the man was dangerous, but that didn’t matter for the sake of the argument. He had known, and he’d felt guilty about it.

“Peter that’s… That’s pretty heavy.” said Mr. Stark, coming around the counter to put a hand on Peter’s shoulder. “I want to support you. I will support you. I just. Let me think about it. It’s… You’re probably right. I just… I don’t want the world in this piece of business, and I don’t want assholes like Ross to be in charge of you because of what Rogers did. I…”

Peter gave Mr. Stark his best kicked puppy look. “I know. I know you don’t want anyone to know, but… It’s the right thing to do. And I’m fairly sure you have videos that could get Ross thrown in jail too.”

Mr. Stark sighed heavily, slumping onto the counter. “I can’t stop you.” he said. “The videos are yours, even if I really don’t want that out there and… We’ll need to talk to Pepper on the best way to handle it and I… I need to think about what to do myself. I didn’t consider it that way, with Rogers going free being so damaging, and--I knew it would all come out at the trial I just… didn’t want it out until it absolutely had to be, and never to the press, and now…”

“Tony.” said Colonel Rhodes. “Don’t do that. I can sense a guilt spiral coming. Take a breath and step back from the situation.”

Mr. Stark did so, standing up and taking a literal step. Then he turned on the Colonel, angry. “And why should I do that?” he said, “What does my guilt--me in general--have anything to do with this. You agree with him. You know it’s right, and ethical, to show what we have” he said. It wasn’t really true anger in his voice though so much as helpless frustration. “You’ve been trying to make me talk to the press for two months--practically since before the thing even happened. I just don’t want to… A video of you being shot down, and the up close from Lagos, and… Siberia. I… It’s the world’s business, Rogers is the world’s business, but it’s my business too and I don’t want my dirty laundry aired like that. Not again.”

“I know.” said Colonel Rhodes. “I know it hurts and you’re in a lot of pain over it. Betrayal is like that and you’ve had way too much of it in your life. And yes. I agree that we should do our damnedest to get those assholes behind bars. No question on that. I wouldn’t mind their reputations being ground into the dirt and then salted for good measure. I just want you to think rationally about it. Your whole argument here is that you don’t want your dirty laundry aired, and you don’t have to air it. It’s your choice whether or not you do, and how it’s done. I’m sure if you wanted to you could find something besides the Siberia recordings to use as evidence, or edit them or… something. Don’t you still have copies of the recordings from missions? Hell, you probably have copies of all of Rogers phone calls. You definitely have the shit that went down at the compound with the witch and Vision.”

“Yes, but” said Mr. Stark, becoming agitated again, “I. Rhodey you have to understand… It’s so… Even after everything it still feels like I’m betraying them!”
Silence followed that statement, broken only by Mr. Starks breathing. It was harsh and a little uneven. Alarmed, Peter focused on the heartbeat behind it and discovered that it was also going fast and uneven. “Arrhythmia!” he cried quietly.

Rhodey was obviously an old hand at dealing with Mr. Starks various problems, because he signaled FRIDAY to ring medical and then calmly sat beside him and directed him to breath to a certain number of counts. By the time Dr. Cho showed up and carried him away in a swarm of minions, he seemed mostly fine, if out of breath. “We’re still going to talk about this kid.” he wheezed as he was carried out. “It’ll be fine.”

Peter nodded. With Mr. Stark now willing to work with him in some way he knew it would be just fine, even if it hurt a bit.

In the quiet of the penthouse after everyone was gone, Colonel Rhodes whistled, impressed. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen anyone change his mind that fast.” he said.

Peter shrugged. “I think he just needed to realize that he doesn’t have to keep their secrets anymore, y’know? Like, I get the impression that his self-esteem was pretty dependent on them, but it doesn’t have to be anymore. He can let them crash and burn now and they can’t do anything about it.”

The Colonel laughed. “Too true. I never liked them anyway.” he said. Then there was another small silence before; “You want an omelette?”

“Sure.”

“Did he really? Oh my gosh Mr. Rhodes that’s so cool.”

“Yeah. And they couldn’t get it open for days, that’s how good it was.”

“Of course it was good. Mr. Stark made it.”

“I suppose so. You know, I hear you’re pretty awesome yourself--even aside the whole web-slinging superhero gig. You want to tell me anything about that?”

“Eep. No! Where did you hear that. I’m, like, the least awesome.”

“Are you saying I sat through all those slideshows for nothing?”

“Slideshows? He has SLIDESHOWS?”

“No. But he did bring pictures. There was this one of you drooling on the couch. Made my day. Way to ruin the Italian leather.”

“Lies. All lies. No such picture exists.”

“Hey FRIDAY, do you happen to have access to Tony’s camera roll?”

“Of course Colonel.”

“FRIDAY you TRAITOR”
I am alive!

Also, done with the whole church shindig, and I have to say that the thing I hated most was the fact that several of the Jesus pictures had blue eyes. I hate the that we all erase the fact that he was a middle-eastern Jewish illegal immigrant/refugee (Egypt when he was a toddler) who was homeless at several points in his life... On the good side though, most of the other people there were shockingly lovely to be around and pretty open to listening to me, so there was that (: 

Anyway, I just found out that the plural of chicken used to be chickenu and it's so cute I can't even function. I love you all.

About the topic of Peter's birthday-yes I know it was in August, but I didn't know that when I started writing this and picked a day out of a hat, and then I didn't bother changing it because frankly I don't care that much about it. There isn't even really anything written about it besides two throwaway comments and people calling Peter a fifteen year old.
It took a couple days to get everything arranged, and to argue Mr. Stark into submission and the release of certain materials Peter wanted to include, but on Saturday morning the video was released on YouTube. It was on YouTube because everyone involved wanted the whole story to be what was released as opposed to little pieces filtered through the lens of a news organization. “The thing is,” said Pepper when they were planning the whole thing, “That no news is unbiased so if you want what you say to be correct you have to release it live, or failing that, to a news agency whose bias you agree with.”

Peter agreed with that, and in the end a twenty minute video was uploaded onto YouTube, one that was carefully edited by FRIDAY so that Peter’s voice wouldn’t be recognizable as Peter, while still being recognizably Spiderman. It was a masterpiece, and Peter invited MJ and Ned to the tower to come watch it with him as well as the ensuing fallout. Mr. Stark was there, but he was working. He claimed he’d come say hi later.

“Are you ready guys?” asked Peter. Ned and MJ hadn’t seen the video yet, and he was excited to show it to them. Peter was actually sort of proud of it.

Ned nodded. “Yeah. You haven’t posted it yet though, right?”

“Course not, weren’t you listening. Once he posts it we’re going to watch the fallout.” said MJ. “It’ll be fun. I like watching the news scramble to try to act like they know what’s happening. It’s cathartic.”

“Yeah.” said Peter. “Some of it’s old news though, I wanted to bring up Rogers history of shitty choices before launching into the new stuff. I’m sure they’ll at least know what to do with that, they certainly argued enough about it when it happened.”

“Ok guys, we’re just going to watch it.” said Peter. “FRIDAY, go.”

“On it Peter.” said FRIDAY. Then the video began.

It opened on a screen of Peter sitting in front of a camera, mask on. He appeared to be in a warehouse somewhere in Queens, but it was suspiciously well lit. Almost like Mr. Stark’s lab with the addition of a green screen. “Hi.” said video Peter. “I’m Spiderman, and I have a message for you all.” There was a suitably dramatic pause. “It has been over a month since the so called Avengers Civil War, but even now nobody really knows what went down. I want to clear that up for you guys, because seeing even government sources share incorrect information is incredibly difficult, especially when it could lead to conclusions that make the reasons for the fight meaningless.

“The Avengers Civil War started because of one man who put his own personal goals above the safety of the world, and above the decisions of 117 nations. I am speaking of course, of former Avenger Steven Grant Rogers, known as Captain America. Contrary to popular belief, the beginning of the end wasn’t the accords. It was actually the HYDRA information dump. During that time, Mr. Rogers took matters into his own hands and burned not only all of HYDRA but all of SHIELD. Literally thousands of deaths of innocent noncombatant agents and good American operatives, as well as all the civilian lives lost in the fall of the helicarriers on DC were caused by
that decision. This is common knowledge. What is not common knowledge is that many, if not most, of those deaths could have been prevented had Mr. Rogers made a single phone call to one of his teammates. Both the helicarriers and the SHIELD cybersecurity during that time were created from technology stolen from Dr. Stark. If Mr. Rogers had asked for help, Dr. Stark would have been able to prevent that entire disaster in mere keystrokes, including the data dump which he could have released only the HYDRA portions of, preventing what amounted to over fifty-thousand deaths and many more injuries.

“This begs the question; why didn’t he? Why did Mr. Rogers accept the incredibly high death toll instead of asking for help? The answer to that, of course, is the Winter Soldier. As you well know, the Winter Soldier is one of the most dangerous HYDRA assets of all time. What you may not know is that he is also Mr. Rogers best friend from his war days Sgt James Buchanan Barnes. Sgt Barnes was given a version of the super-serum and brainwashed to do HYDRA’s bidding. Mr. Rogers did not share this information with the rest of the Avengers. He also did not share the information he had on the Winter Soldiers targets, including the late Howard and Maria Stark. Instead, he let Sgt Barnes go and hid his involvement, despite the fact that his mental state was in no way stable, and the fact that most of his programming was still in place.

“The decision to release the Winter Soldier, instead of bringing him in where he could be deprogrammed and assisted in his recovery, and where an investigation could be launched concerning his actions and the actions of his captors, was the first in many questionable decisions, including unsanctioned missions, hiding and destroying mission critical information, illegal interrogation tactics, recruitment of terrorists, and the allowance of unacceptable levels of property destruction and civilian injuries during missions, Lagos being a prime example.

“It is of note that Mr. Rogers did all this with the money set aside for the Avengers Initiative by Dr. Stark which he acquired under false pretenses by lying about his actions and goals during that time, which is fraud.

“This was the situation that the Avengers were in when the accords were proposed. Upon receiving the accords, Mr. Rogers refused to read them, instead shouting about corrupt governments and derailing the conversation. After this, when he discovered the warrant out for the Winter Soldier after the bombing of the Accords, he recruited several other Avengers to his cause and left to track down Sgt Barnes in yet another unsanctioned mission, this time in Bucharest.”

In the video, Peter went on to explain exactly what went down in the entirety of the Civil War, including things like Helmut Zemo and the until then unpublicized fact of King T’Challa’s switching sides. He also aired all the dirty laundry of the rogue Avengers unwillingness to even share information on Helmut Zemo, which could have easily legitimized much of the operation. The entire time, he continually mentioned that Rogers’ whole schtick was ‘saving Bucky’, who was apparently more important than any other human being in the entire world.

He ended his account in Siberia. Peter didn’t disclose exactly how badly Mr. Stark was hurt, or what precisely went down. He simply said that Mr. Stark went to help, and returned extremely injured while King T’Challa and the rogues disappeared. Once he was done with his story, he sighed.

“I chose to join the side of Iron Man in this conflict, in the end, not because of Mr. Rogers and his beliefs, or because of Dr. Stark himself, but because I believe in the accords. I believe in accountability for the actions of everyone, even those--especially those--whose actions include the possibility for more damage. I believe that to truly become someone who can help others you have to let go of your personal agendas and listen to the people you are helping. I believe that the most important goal in an enhanced fight should be the minimization of civilian casualties, not the
simplest completion of the mission. This is why I am releasing everything I have on the conflict, from the evidence I was given of Mr. Rogers crimes when I was asked to join the fight, to the footage I have from the Leipzig-Halle airport incident. I will let the evidence speak for itself.

“As far as Mr. Rogers is concerned… I would like to remind everyone that he’s just a man, and should be treated like one including in his interactions with the law. Mr. Rogers is not a hero. Mr. Rogers is not above the rest of us. Mr Rogers, as far as I am aware, isn’t even a Captain. In the end Mr. Rogers is nothing but a criminal. That is his only significant legacy. Thank you for your time.”

At that point in the video, the warehouse faded into a recording of Secretary Ross presenting the accords to the Avengers, followed by recordings of their comms from both Lagos and Bucharest, during which text on the screen displayed facts about the casualties and property damage. Then came the slightly illegal ‘orders’ from Ross (he’d be getting in trouble for those) and a record of the theft of the Rogue’s weapons from the Bucharest evidence lockup. Once that was done, the Leipzig-Halle battle played from the perspective of Spiderman.

After that the video faded out on a photograph of the Iron Man armor as it was when it was retrieved from Siberia, something grudgingly supplied by the Russian Government for Stark Industries records. The entire front was caved in, a massive gash that nearly tore the breastplate in two, collapsing it in a way that spelled near death for whoever was inside. The still photo remained on screen for several seconds, it’s high contrast highlighting the deep crags and finger shaped marks, before fading to black.

“Is that good?” asked Peter. “I put links to all the other evidence and some extra tidbits underneath the video. I know that at least the government already has most of that but putting it together and giving it to the world…”

“That’s good.” said MJ. “That’s really good.”

Peter grinned. “I didn’t know all of it. A lot of it came from Mr. Stark. He said that with his public image where it is right now it might be better if it came from me, and putting this out there first will legitimize later releases from him. We’re going all in, and this is just the first blow.”

“Better from you?” said Ned “You just trashed Captain America’s reputation for the rest of time! That is… Awesome.”

MJ laughed “And hopefully it will be a call to action for everyone else, to release what they have on the whole deal. Especially if Dr. Stark releases his stuff Yeah, Peter, you did good.”

“Great, so who wants to do the honors and post this thing?” said Peter.

“Me, me me!” cried Ned. FRIDAY obligingly brought up a big red holographic button for him, which he pressed. “Bad Ass.” he said.

Then FRIDAY turned on the news with a sidebar for relevant social media trends, and another for the Youtube comments section. It was time to watch the fallout.

About an hour in, Mr. Stark came up from the lab. Peter was on his tablet checking over some calculations for the chemistry department and updating both of his sets of social media--the Peter Parker one and the brand new Spider-man one.

“Hey kid. What's up?” said Mr. Stark

“I’m trending on twitter,” said Peter. “Also I’m fairly sure that Dr. Matthews on the semiconducting metal nanoclusters project is an idiot.”
“A lot of people are idiots.” said Mr. Stark. “Is any of the news good?”

“Any?” said Peter, “All of the news is good.”

FRIDAY, who always enjoyed precision, chose that moment to correct him. “Support seems about 94% in our favor.” she said. “#TeamIronMan and #SpideySpeaks are both trending, and there is already public outcry calling for the ex-vengers to be tried and sentenced immediately. Wakanda hasn’t yet commented, but they will have to soon.”

MJ, who was doing a good job of looking unimpressed and a poor job of looking bored, cracked a smile. “They’ll probably just say that they’re keeping the ex-vengers contained until the trials since the Raft was proven not to hold them. Also because the Raft is a violation of human rights when it’s run by Asshole Ross”

“Isn’t that what they’re actually doing?” said Ned

“Not really but it’s how they’ll play it if they don’t want to be lynched.” said Mr. Stark, sitting down beside Peter and stealing the popcorn. “Wakanda was actually offering them sanctuary from the accords and treatment for Barnes. They’ll probably update the definition of sanctuary to mean ‘humane detainment’ and use the Raft as an excuse though, she’s right on that. They might not have any extradition treaties, but they do have a reputation to uphold” He nodded at MJ.

“Huh,” said Ned.

Peter was fairly proud of him. On their way into the tower he’d been a gibbering mess of hero worship and embarrassment, but after the disaster that was introducing him to Mr. Stark he’d been mostly fine, probably the prolonged exposure to the coolness of the tower had desensitized him. MJ of course had played it cool.

“Hey Peter,” she said about a minute later, looking up from a borrowed tablet “Did you know that you’re actually a Sokovian extremist bent on destroying the Avengers legacy with faked videos as revenge for Ultron?”

“Really?” said Peter. “I had no idea.”

“You posted your manifesto on reddit eight minutes ago.” she replied. “I’ll send it over.”

“Wow. I must be a quick typist.” said Peter. “This thing is really long.”

“Why are you spreading these lies MJ. Peter is actually a twenty-eight year old man from New Mexico. See? He reveals his identity in this video here.” said Ned.

“You’re both wrong. Peter is an android created by the government as a propaganda replacement for Captain America after he broke from his programming and showed free will.” said Mr. Stark. “I mean honestly, look at him. He seems so innocent. It’s definitely a trap.”

“Hey! I don’t look innocent. Besides, I am clearly olympic gymnast Simone Biles’ male fursona. Don’t you know anything? Honestly, try getting your facts from a reputable source.” said Peter, sniffing in an offended manner.

“Where’d you find that one?” asked Mr. Stark.

Peter showed him the conspiracy blog. There were several videos of Peter flipping through Queens placed side by side with clips from the Rio Olympics. Red scribbles pointed out similarities in their technique.
“Wow.” said Mr. Stark.

MJ took the tablet with a wistful expression, staring for several long moments at the clips. “I wish you were Simone Biles.” she said finally.

“Does someone have a crush?” asked Ned.

“No.” denied MJ. “I just find her inspiring as a black feminist icon.”

“I don’t know, that sounds like a crush to me.” said Peter. “Back me up here Mr. Stark. Feminist Icon is definitely a code word here.”

“I’m staying out of this.” said Mr. Stark. “Though I would like to note that Pepper Potts is also a feminist icon, and is an actual goddess, so it might be a good bar for celebrity crushes.”

“You’re just saying that because you had a crush on her.” said Peter.

“I dated her for several years, which is very different from a crush,” said Mr. Stark. “And besides, everyone has a crush on her.”

“It’s true,” said MJ “She’s like… a legend. Under her directions Stark Industries has employed 84% more female scientists and engineers. It’s the only tech company in the world that isn’t male dominated--it’s like 53% women.”

“54% actually. And it’s not hard. Lots of qualified women end up underpaid or in insultingly low-bar jobs, so recruiting them is easy. Untapped resource, y’know?” said Mr. Stark.

Ned returned from his ice cream trip to the kitchen. “I think it’s really cool” he said. “I knew this chick on the internet--she’s the one who taught me hacking, actually--and she said that when she graduated from college the only job she could find at a tech company was as a receptionist. I was always really mad about it, cuz she’s like… brilliant.”

“Does she have a job now?” asked Mr. Stark. “Because if she taught you to hack…”

“I don’t know. I’ll have to ask.” said Ned.

“Please do. And you can have a job too, if you want.” said Mr. Stark. “Horizon Labs poached several of our top coding staff. It’s been a mess, and we could always use more interns.”

“Give me until next summer. AP is kicking my but. Horizon Labs though… they’re the company that’s working on that space station right?” said Ned.

“Yes.” said Mr. Stark. “It’s not a particularly safe space station from what I’ve heard, but it’s there.”

“I don’t like them,” said Peter. “They seem iffy. And the way they organize their labs seems a bit weird like, why only seven scientists controlling the whole thing? That makes no sense.” he turned to Ned and MJ “The SI one creates a new team for every project. It’s way better, and it means more people’s ideas get heard.”

“Wow, way to advertise” said Mr. Stark. “Now maybe they’ll both come work for me.” He opened his mouth to say more, but FRIDAY interrupted him.

“Boss, Wakanda just released a statement condemning the ex-vengers actions and revealing that they are in custody in the country.” she said.
“Really?” said Peter. “That was fast.”

“News spreads like a disease.” said MJ. “It was bound to happen fast. Especially with the delicate situation that is the Wakandan reintegration effort.”

“Oh my gosh,” said Ned. “It just hit me… Captain America is totally going to prison.”

“Ned, we’ve been trying to make that happen for weeks.” said Peter.

“Yeah, I knew that, it’s just still so…”

“Surreal?” suggested Mr. Stark. “The fact that it’s so strange a concept to us is part of the reason it’s been so difficult.”


“That’s what you get when you put someone up on a pedestal.” said MJ.

The mood remained vindictive all the way until lunch, when Peter accidentally smeared sauce from the falafel into his eyebrow. It was hard to be serious with falafel eyebrow.

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A selection of Youtube comments:

OMG, did Spidey seriously take out the Winter Soldier and the Falcon at the same time? That’s the most badass thing I’ve ever seen.

These lies will never stand up. Click on this link to learn the truth—that Captain America did right uncovering the conspiracy between the American and Sokovian governments to use the Winter Soldier for their own advantage.

“As far as I know isn’t even a Captain”—Can I say OOF

YAAS. Queen. You punch those motherfuckers

Hi, Medical Student here, That armor damage… How is Stark even alive. His sternum and ribs have to have been destroyed from that.

Is anyone going to talk about the Star Wars reference during the fight? Because that was the best thing I’ve ever seen. Comedy gold.

How strong is this guy? Like, how much did that ramp weigh (and he caught a punch from the
Soldier, how even…)

Spiderman is precious, and deserves to be protected. I’ve only known him for five minutes, but if anything happened to him (Looking at you Rogers--seriously, dropping a loading ramp on the guy) I would kill everyone in the room and then myself.

Slander against American heroes like this is a crime. He should be sued.

I’m a bit concerned about the Secretary of State. Can someone assassinate him please?

Finally the kind of responsible hero I’m looking for

Plan: Let’s all go to Wakanda and murder the rogues. Especially Captain America. I get dibs on Captain America.

Hey, I looked through some of the old shield stuff and found this and this about Rogers past missions. The one in Mumbai especially… how did we not see this earlier.

Is Spiderman even an Avenger? Bc if so, he’s totally my favorite.

Spiderman: Not the hero we asked for, or the hero we deserve, but the one we need. Actually we’ll be needing like nine more, please. And quickly.

Chapter End Notes

Oh god, the agony of being human. In other news, I rediscovered a book series so good I literally skipped multiple days of sleep in a row. Kingkiller Chronicles, my friends. Patrick Rothfuss is a fucking master of the art. (I read it a long fucking time ago, and then forgot it to the point that every single plot point surprised me, and they were all pure gold)

sorry for the wait. I figured you’d want the version that wasn’t an unedited angstfest that was mostly about my job in retail.
“Hey FRIDAY.” said Peter as he walked into the lab. Technically she was available from the moment he entered the building but… the lab, and Mr. Stark’s floors seemed sort of like her home base. She seemed a lot more present here, where she both spoke out loud and could physically affect things.

“Peter!” said FRIDAY. “Look! You’re on Buzzfeed!”

Peter gasped. He’d been in the news a lot, of course, since the release of his video, but Buzzfeed was something special. FRIDAY seemed to agree. It was probably because he’d spent an hour with her taking stupid quizzes last week. It was what had truly cemented their friendship. That and the Elevator Conversation. “So Cool.” said Peter.

This Tweet Shows Why Spiderman Is The Hero We All Need read the headline. It was about a selfie he’d been tagged in by a girl he’d walked home from a club a few days prior. She’d felt threatened by a creepy dude who’d totally ruined her night. Peter had bought them ice cream to make up for it. It had been… good.

“It is very cool Peter.” said FRIDAY. “And it was a very good thing to do.”

Peter smiled up at the nearest camera. “Thanks Fri.” he said.

“You’re welcome Peter. Would you like to pull up one of your current projects?” she asked. A holographic selection of all of the things he was doing by himself (and there was a surprising amount) appeared, each title accompanied by a cute little graphic. Peter liked it when FRIDAY did adorable little things like that. It made her… FRIDAY. She was sentient, and seeing her make little choices like putting a little picture of a leaf in a pot by one of his bio projects was adorable. Karen was an incredibly well made system, and suited (ha) to her purpose, but FRIDAY was a person, and a friend.

Peter selected the adorable heart graphic. “Let's do some more brainstorming on the bioprinting project. I feel like the breakthroughs in tissue engineering we've had since the whole nanofibrils thing really make it a possibility. If we combine it with the stuff from Helen Cho’s cradle… We could do something great.” he said.

“Of course Peter.” said FRIDAY. Within minutes, Peter found himself lying on one of the lab tables surrounded by hundreds of holograms. He had a puzzle to solve.

This routine with FRIDAY was somewhat… new. It had started after the Elevator Conversation when FRIDAY had suddenly interrupted a patrol. Apparently she’d begun remotely monitoring the suit and had become concerned when he put it on at two in the morning while still demonstrating heightened vitals.

“Peter,” she said as he crawled to the top of a thirty-four storey building that he’d discovered was an excellent launch point for journeys into the various parts of Queens. “You appear to be under some duress, and it is an odd time to be up. Are you all right?”

“Yeah.” said Peter. “I just…” he sighed. “I have nightmares sometimes. Especially about… the people I couldn’t save. Random people as Spiderman, the Chitauri-borgs, Ben…” He stopped and took a deep breath to calm down. “This one was about Mr. Stark. Ever since yesterday--releasing that video--I can’t stop thinking about the picture from Siberia. He… he hasn’t said anything, but
I’m not an idiot. The way that suit was damaged… Another centimeter deeper and he would be dead. I guess I just feel like I have to do something, and even if I can’t actually protect him from something that has already happened, I still… I’m too restless to sleep. I just need to get up and move. I do it a lot actually.”

“May I suggest alternative coping mechanisms? Boss has not implemented a curfew, but you probably still shouldn’t be out later than midnight.”

“Hey! I don’t need a curfew!” said Peter.

“I did not say you did. I simply noted that for your own health and safety it would be best to work off your nightmares in some other fashion. Boss prefers to work in the lab. Perhaps something of that nature?”

“I could come in in the middle of the night?” asked Peter

“Of course.” said FRIDAY. “Your permissions have no limits.”

That conversation started a new pattern for Peter. Instead of swinging around during the witching hours, he’d spend a couple hours making things in the lab. Oftentimes he found himself working on medical technology, since his nightmares centered around people he loved being hurt. FRIDAY, who was aware that his night time tinkering was a direct result of such things was always ready to distract him, usually greeting him with a joke or a pleasant news story.

It was nice, and Peter grew to like those hours in the lab with FRIDAY. She was sort of like an older sister who was also younger than him in some ways, and it made the nights with nightmares not so bad.

“Okay, so assuming we have the nano-scaffolding suspended in oxygenated fluid like you suggest, how would we keep the cells contained into the correct mold? I feel like there’s a high risk for cancer, especially if some of the DNA becomes corrupted.” muttered Peter. FRIDAY didn’t respond, understanding that he was simply talking to himself, instead bringing up some of the things he wanted to reference before he could even think of it. He nodded at a camera in thanks. “I really need to figure out a testing setup for this,” he concluded finally “but I can’t exactly walk up to Mr. Stark and say ‘hi, can I have a million dollars worth of stuff? I want to try and 3D print a heart.’”

“That sounds interesting. What do you need?” asked Mr. Stark from behind Peter.

Peter promptly yelped and fell off his table, hitting the floor with an ungraceful thud. It was actually the first time he’d legitimately fallen over since the spiderbite. Peter huffed, and glared up at Mr. Stark above him, who was laughing in a carefree way that Peter rarely saw.

“Fri, save that to Peters best moments will you?” he said. He kept chuckling, but reached down to help Peter up. “That was adorable.” he said.

“It was not!” protested Peter

“It so was” said Mr. Stark. “Are you sure you weren’t bitten by a genetically engineered puppy while I wasn’t looking?”

“Mr Stark!” complained Peter

“Because that’s what it sounded like. Cute little puppy yelp like a--”
Peter put his hand over Mr. Stark’s mouth. “No.” he said. “Just no.”

Mr. Stark licked his hand, which he then yanked back with another yelp.

Mr. Stark laughed again. “Whatever you say cucciolo.”

Peter was fairly sure that at this point he was the color of a nicely ripened tomato. “You are dead to me.” he said. (he made a mental note to look up cucciolo later, but had a bad feeling he already knew what it meant)

“Only on the inside.” said Mr. Stark. “Cuteness aside, what are you doing here at…”

“3:12” put in FRIDAY, always ready to help.

“3:12 in the morning?” finished Mr. Stark.

“Oh!” said Peter. “I’m sorry I just… I had a nightmare and FRIDAY said that when I couldn’t sleep I could come work on stuff and that it was better than just swinging around doing things because I couldn’t accidentally get hurt and I’ve been doing that a lot but I can totally go somewhere else, I…”

“No it’s fine.” interrupted Mr. Stark. “You can be in here whenever you want, I was just surprised. It is a school night.”

“Well, I wasn’t exactly going to sleep any more,” said Peter. He sighed.

For a few seconds, Mr. Stark looked like he was going to say something, his eyes going deep and haunted. Then the moment passed, and he looked over Peter’s shoulder at his designs. “So…” he said. “Bioprinting. Tell me about it.”

“It’s really not that impressive.” said Peter. “I was just thinking of ways to--”

“Going to interrupt you right there, everything you do is a showstopper. Now start over from the beginning, this time with confidence. Being able to share your ideas well is an important skill to have.” said Mr. Stark. “And I… I want to see your ideas out there. You’re amazing Pete.”

“Okay.” said Peter. He glanced at the holograms behind him, uncomfortably reminded of the disaster that was the science fair he’d participated in last year. Middle school hadn’t been kind to him. Then he looked forward and it was Mr. Stark, who was the person least like his middle school teachers in the whole world. He’d be fine.

“The premise of my idea is to widen the range of Dr. Cho’s cradle technology to actual bioprinting instead of just healing on a cellular level. The cradle does brilliant things— I’m not saying it doesn’t- -but it needs a framework to work off. The only exception was Vision, and that was because you started with a vibranium body and the stuff you were making was never meant to go onto a human. This… is different. I’m trying to find a way to combine traditional cloning techniques with the speed and micromanaging skills of the cradle. She was telling me all about it the other day when she pulled me back in for more blood tests. Woman’s like a vampire… Anyway, it got me thinking about one of the major limitations, that she can only put back what’s there. Healing injuries, but not diseases or missing parts. If my whole thing works with this, I could make organs for people that wouldn’t be rejected because they already belonged to them. It would be…”

“Brilliant…” said Mr. Stark. He was already scrolling through some of Peter’s projections for how it might work, and FRIDAY’s predicted tests. “56.7…” he mumbled, seeing one of the tests and reaching for it, “But what if…”
“No see here,” said Peter, already knowing what he was suggesting because he’d tried it. “And how it… so.”

“But what…”

“There, that’s…”

“Look right here.”

“Oh! But what if we…”

Very little was actually said. Both Mr. Stark and Peter quickly were in too deep to be able to properly articulate what they were thinking. Still, the work progressed in leaps and bounds as the sun rose over New York city, streaming golden through the windows onto the brilliant holograms. It was pretty amazing.

000000000000000

“Good Morning Tony, I just wanted to check with you about some of the… Why is Peter here, isn’t it a school day?”

Both Peter and Mr. Stark whipped around with wide eyes, staring at Pepper in shock. Peter then noticed the fact that it was nearly eight in the morning. “Fuck!” he said with passion.

Mr. Stark laughed at him, but joined him in the mad scramble for his belongings. Peter took a quick sprint to the bathroom to change into something other than Mr. Stark’s MIT hoodie and pajama shorts (it was comfy okay?) and emerged in the spare set of clothes he kept in the lab. “C’mon, I’ll drive you” said Mr. Stark as soon as he saw him.

“Great.” said Peter. He still didn’t have his school stuff, but by some miracle nothing was due that day. He’d be fine.

“I’ve put in your coffee orders, including some pastries. They will be waiting for you at the coffee shop on the second floor.” said FRIDAY.

That coffee shop wasn’t particularly good, but it would do. “Thanks Fri.” said Mr. Stark, at the same time as Peter said “You’re the best!”

“I’ll just leave these on your desk then.” said Ms. Potts as they rushed into the elevator. “Have fun at school Peter.”

“Thanks Ms. Potts. You too. I mean have fun too, obviously not at school.”

Luckily the elevator doors closed before Peter could make things worse.

Mr. Stark and Peter looked at each other and started giggling, though for different reasons. Peter was laughing because Mr. Stark was still in pajamas, sweats and a t-shirt. Mr. Stark on the other hand…

“Peter, your hair!” he said. “Fri you got that one right?” then he chuckled again. “Come here.” he said, reaching for Peter’s head.

“What? No! Mr Stark!”

“Nope. Get over here cucciolo. Easy way or the hard way you’re not going out like that.”
After a futile struggle, Peter surrendered, and Mr. Stark sorted through the mess with efficient motions. “It’s not like you can judge,” said Peter. “You’re in pajamas.”

“You’d have a point,” said Mr. Stark, “but I’m just driving and then coming straight back here. You, on the other hand, are about to be released upon the general public.

“I’m not that bad!” said Peter.

“No, of course not, I fixed it.” said Mr. Stark.

When they reached the second floor, a very confused barista was ready by the doors with a large paper bag and two coffee cups (Peter’s was actually mostly hot chocolate, but that was neither here nor there) and after that they were all set to leave.

Traffic was of course terrible. “I really need to set an alarm or something.” said Peter. They were finally within five blocks of his school, and it was already twenty minutes into first period. “I mean… wow, I’m late.”

“Do you not normally have an alarm?” asked Mr. Stark.

Peter laughed. “My hearing’s sort of insane Mr. Stark. I can hear every alarm in my building and some from down the street. I can go out to like… eight blocks if I really focus. Usually I’m up by four. Someone on my floor gets up then every day.”

“That’s just cruel.” said Mr. Stark

Peter shrugged. “It is what it is. Luckily I don’t need quite as much sleep since the bite.” he said. “Only about four to six hours a night.”

“Really?” said Mr. Stark. “If anything I’d think you’d need more.”

“No.” said Peter. “I guess I’m more energy efficient?” he said, “And like, I can do this weird thing where I sort of become inactive and zone out a bit, but I’m still aware. It happens a lot in history class.”

“Computer sleep mode.” said Mr. Stark

“Computer sleep mode.” agreed Peter. “I think it’s how spiders sleep, actually. They have to be a bit on guard all the time, so they sort of just rest a lot.”

“Pretty convenient.” said Mr. Stark.

“Yeah.” said Peter.

“Speaking of fun spider lifestyle facts, copper and calories. Check the glove box.” said Mr. Stark. Peter did. It was full of the strange meal bars that Dr. Cho had come up with to help with Peter’s ridiculous diet.

“Wow. Thanks.” said Peter, grabbing several.

“No problem. I had Happy stuff them in a bunch of random places.” said Mr. Stark. “Figured at some point you’d get peckish on the go.”

“A bit weird, since this is only the second time I’ve eaten in one of your cars, but cool.” said Peter. “Also a bit weird that you drove me to school actually… Thanks though.”
“Hey, I needed a break and I don’t drive nearly enough anymore.” said Mr. Stark. They pulled up into the drop off zone. “And besides, I’d much rather hang out with my favorite intern than do something so mundane as ‘coordinate’ even if it is with Pepper.”

Peter laughed at his over the top shudder. “See ya” he said, getting out of the car.

“I’d better.” said Mr. Stark. “That Frankenstein shit seems promising.”

He drove off, and Peter bounced into the school, not even noticing the stares as he emerged from the obscenely luxurious car. He was too happy.

TS: RHODEY! LOOK!

ATTACHMENT: Peter497.jpg

JR: Yeah, I know, your kid is adorable, now let me sleep, it's only five in the morning where I am.

TS: But look at his HAIR! And he was telling me about his new bioprinting project, and it's brilliant.

JR: I'm sure. Congratulate him about the video for me, take a shower, and go bother someone else.

TS: Rhodey!!!!!!!

(You have been blocked from texting this number)
“Peter, Dr. Naresh is asking for you.” said FRIDAY

“Really?” asked Peter, “What about?”

“She claimed to be asking for a second opinion on where to go forward now that the results of the first clinical trial are in.”

“Oh that’s done! Cool, I’ll go down as soon as I can.

“Got any work for me today?” asked Peter.

“Yes, there are several requests for your assistance.”

“Oh my gosh how old are they?”

“None of them are time sensitive, though it would be better to review the reports from the Damien Project sooner rather than later.”

“Great,” Pull that up.

“Oh no, it’s overheating again! What do I do!”

“Stop the test. STop The Test! Oh god this is a disaster.”

All the oxygen was violently expelled from the tiny sealed testing cube, killing the fires instantly. She sighed. “This is a disaster.”

“I know, right.” he gestured futilely through the clear window at the charred prototype. “This is… Where do we even go from here.”

“We’re going to have to call Parker.”

“You know who would probably have a good idea? That kid… what was his name…”

“Peter Parker. The genius intern. Yeah he’d know what to do.”

“Does anyone actually know what he’s assigned to?”

“No, but I swear he’s working on every project in the damn company. Sonja--the systems analyst, you know Sonja--anyway, she works with like, at least ten projects, and she swears he’s helped with at least half of them.”

“Yeah, it’s like having another Tony Stark, except with a significantly freer schedule.”
“You’re telling me. I swear, that kid knows something about everything. I’d say he has about seven doctorates if I didn’t know better.”

“Do we ask for him then?”

“Yeah. We ask for him.”

Peter squatted in the bathroom stall, breathing. Since Cho had started improving his diet his body had decided to go on another self improvement kick again, and now he couldn’t even stand the texture of his fucking jeans. He needed to get out of here. The smell was killing him, but if he went out it would be so much louder…

A few minutes later he felt marginally better, and went out to face the world. He had work to do. (maybe he ought to make a noise reduction feature in some of his earbuds. There already was one in the suit and he could-

“Peter! I’m so glad I caught you. Do you think you can help me…”

“Mr. Parker, I heard you were an expert on biomimicry, and anyway we’re doing this chemistry project and I was wondering…”

“Peter! Thank god you’re here”

“Someone track down that Parker kid.”

“…..”

Sigh.

“So, FRIDAY, who’s going to die if they can’t have my help today.” said Peter, fingering the new low profile earbud he’d designed to reduce sound. It was a relief to have peace from everything. Well, not everything. His nose was on the fritz and there was a strange not-smell coming from several people on the subway that morning. Plus the horror that was cloth on his skin. And the sunlight. But all that was manageable, he could do this.

“There are several projects that would benefit from your input, and many more requests. I have sorted them by urgency.” said FRIDAY.

Yeah, he could do this.

Peter was, understandably, a bit stressed. The ridiculous numbers of unregistered chitauri tech he was tracking down hadn’t abated, his English teacher had decided to only accept handwritten essays (to be fair it was prep for the handwritten AP test, but still) and he had, well, a truly enormous number of things on his plate.
He was always interested in meeting new people and being helpful, but it had reached a point where they knew he existed and were asking for his help. Which… in theory was very cool actually, but in practice, he just had a lot to do, a lot of people he felt like he couldn’t let down, and about twenty extra things he needed to learn about every day. Since the beginning of the (real) Stark Industries internship two months ago, he’d learned more than he’d learned in the rest of his life, including both school and his copious extracurricular studies. It had reached a point where whenever he ran across something he didn’t fully understand he merely had to glance at the nearest camera and FRIDAY would obligingly add all the necessary information on it to his queue. Yes, he had a queue. Which he was behind on.

Luckily for Peter, FRIDAY was ridiculously smart, and had discovered the exact amount of information to gather to allow him to grok the subject without overwhelming him. Truly FRIDAY was a blessing.

Still, even with FRIDAY’s beautiful management skills, Peter was barely able to keep up with May’s demands for his personal life and his self-given job as one of the city’s protectors.

The weird thing though was that even though he was spending every spare minute technically working, except dinners when May was home at those times and Sunday afternoons, which belonged to Ned and MJ, he was happier than he’d ever been before in his life. For the first time ever, Peter was being challenged intellectually. Regularly, Peter found himself spending seven to eight hours at the tower--and that was on a school night.

He even went there when he didn’t necessarily have to. For example, Peter was perfectly capable of reading the seven-hundred pages of graduate level chemistry FRIDAY had gathered at home. Instead, however, he found himself curled up on the couch in Mr. Stark’s lab, tucked under a blanket while Mr. Stark himself puttered around tinkering with a… something. Peter wasn’t quite there yet.

This scene wasn’t actually unusual. When Mr. Stark wasn’t busy doing something else--actively in a meeting, on a mission, or helping with one of the few projects he was actually involved in--he was always in the lab. Always. It was practically twenty-four seven. Since Peter also spent a ridiculous amount of time there, they ended up coexisting with an incredible amount of regularity.

The weird part was that it somehow was never weird. Ever. Sometimes they didn’t speak for hours, didn’t even interact, working and thinking on different things, and some days were full of constant chatter, when Mr. Stark would teach him things (he was a wonderful teacher) or, and this was Peter’s favorite, they would collaborate on something. Either way it was always… wonderful to just coexist like that.

“Hey Pete, you got a minute?” said Mr. Stark, breaking Peter’s thoughts.

“Yeah.” said Peter hopping up and over. “What do you need?”

Mr. Stark looked over at him. “It’s not really what I need.” he said. “Really Peter I am perfectly self sufficient, and a completely functional person. You’re being called over here to talk about you, and your responsibilities.”

“What did I do?” said Peter. “I’m like, a paragon of responsibility. You should know this by now. The Responsible Spider-Man. It’s sort of like the whole Invincible Iron Man thing the media does sometimes but like better because it’s true.”

“I’m not going to touch that with a ten foot pole,” said Mr. Stark, “Though I think it’s important to note that yesterday you nearly drank sulfuric acid, which really doesn’t do much for your
reputation as a responsible human being. Seriously, don’t drink out of the labware.”

“Okay Mr. Stark, whatever you say.” said Peter.

Mr. Stark sighed. “Wow, what fun I’m having mentoring you in basic life skills. Next I’m going to teach you not to eat out of the garbage. Maybe we could even try for how to tie shoes.”

“Don’t push your luck Mr. Stark. Shoelaces are complicated.” said Peter.

“You’re right. Stick to velcro.” said Mr. Stark. “Anyway, responsibility.”

“Which I already possess. And I’m very good at it.” said Peter. “Exceptional. Thank you for saying so. Good talk.”

“No.” said Mr. Stark. “I’m worried about how many responsibilities you’re taking on. You’re like… too responsible.”

“That makes no sense.” said Peter. “You can’t be too responsible.”

“I’m saying this wrong.” said Mr. Stark. He sighed. “FRIDAY bring up Peter’s calendar and todo list.”

FRIDAY did, and Peter looked at it, trying to find what was wrong. He was actually rather on top of things at the moment. “What about it?”

Mr. Stark gave Peter a pointed look that told him absolutely nothing. “It’s… It looks a lot like mine, actually. Overfull and with very little time for you. That’s… worrying.”

“It’s not too much Mr. Stark, I… I really love being here and a lot of it is stuff that I was already doing anyway except on a smaller scale and with less funding. Science stuff.”

“Yeah but Peter. You’re essentially working a fifty-hour work week on top of school on top of running around doing whatever juvenile vigilante’s do to attempt to kill themselves when they’re not attempting to kill themselves with excessive stress through being a workaholic. I… if you were actually in a paid position this would be illegal at your age. Hell, you came here for seven hours on your own birthday. Practically left your party early.”

“I know that but…” Peter sighed and tried to articulate the feeling of contentment he had about his current life. “I love this. I love being here, and learning things, and feeling like… like I’m important and what I do and say matters. You have to understand, school is really really boring for me. I don’t think I’ve actually learned anything since like… ever. I was ahead before I even started school. The only reason I’m even there is because May wants me to be a regular kid and have like… social development or whatever. I don’t know. My point is, I’m finally learning things and doing stuff and…”

“Oh cucciolo, I get that, I do,” said Mr. Stark. “When I finally escaped lower education and made it to MIT it was like a breath of fresh air. Still… I work that much, always have when I wasn’t partying, and it’s… no way to live. I don’t think I’ve done anything for fun in…”

“Since last week when you gave me my first driving lesson.” said Peter.

“That was not fun” said Mr. Stark “Trusting you with my nice Veyron was a terrible idea, even in a parking lot. I think you broke a hundred miles an hour, despite the enclosed space. Seriously Peter, it’s like you want me to develop heart problems.”
“You already have heart problems,” said Peter. “And I seem to recall a distinct air of encouragement, especially when you taught me to do donuts. Still. My point stands. You do fun stuff all the time. With me at least. I think it’s fun. And besides that… work is fun. Not the paperwork, or the bit with the patent lawyer, or dealing with idiots, but… designing stuff and building stuff is fun. It’s sort of like that shitty magnet on Aunt May’s fridge. Do something you love and you’ll never work a day in your life. I… haven’t done much work here, if that’s the case.”

“Oh Peter,” said Mr. Stark. He walked around the lab table, and gathered Peter up in his arms. They’d gotten significantly better at the hugging thing since the first horribly awkward attempts. “I know you love it. I do too, it’s why I haven’t retired. I just… you’re a kid. You’re my kid, and I want to make sure you’re happy. Being stressed about fulfilling a million banal requests from scientists that should know better than to waste valuable time? I don’t think that will make you happy in the long run. It’s your own projects that do that.”

Peter was feeling the warm and fuzzies almost like he never had before (he was Mr. Stark’s kid). He hoped Mr. Stark wasn’t aware of the incredible manipulation tactic that hugs and affection could be, because if Mr. Stark was aware then Peter was screwed. “I’m not going to back out on anything I said I’d do.” said Peter into Mr. Stark’s shoulder.

“You don’t have to cucciolo. Keeping your promises like you do is a good thing. Still, you don’t have to say yes to everything. These people can solve most of their own problems. Say you’re busy, offer to help one time only, send in a review instead of going in person. Refer them to someone else, or straight up tell them that it’s an issue they should solve themselves. It’s not all on you”

Peter smiled. “Of course not.” he said. “I still want to help where I can.”

“And you do.” said Mr. Stark. “You’re very helpful. I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but FRIDAY has actually been dumping some of my work on you. It’s allowed me more time to work on my own things, which I usually don’t get for months after a big crisis like the Accords fallout. I’m very grateful. Still… I don’t want you to give too much Peter. When you give too much of yourself there’s nothing left of you.”

Peter looked at Mr. Stark and thought about the Avengers, and about how Mr. Stark had done everything for them until he was lying crushed on the ground in a Siberian bunker. Judging by the frequency of running into each other in the middle of the night, Mr. Stark had a lot of issues with it. “I understand.” he said. “I’ll… I’ll try to be more reasonable.”

“Good.” said Mr. Stark.

Then Peter grinned impishly. “You know.” he said. “While we’re taking more time for ourselves, I’ve been wondering if I could get another driving lesson? May can’t drive and we obviously don’t own a car, so if I want my learners permit when I’m sixteen I’m going to need practice somewhere else. It is only a year away, you know.”

“Hmm.” said Mr. Stark, smiling. “One condition. Afterwards we’re going to spend a couple hours in the garage. It’s shameful how little you know about cars. Honestly. By the time I was your age I could build one.”

Peter grinned. Spending time with Mr. Stark was the best, and he thought Mr. Stark liked it too. (Certainly it was better than dealing with the Accords people, or coordinating the long series of incriminating press releases at intervals to gain momentum on the Plan) “Sounds great.” he said.
"Hey Peter?" said Ned "I was scrolling through your insta and you have like... several thousand followers. What's up with that?"

Peter shrugged. "Well you know how I keep posting selfies of me with the scientists I see, or my projects at SI?"

"Yeah." said Ned. "I really liked the one with the car. Motor oil hair is a good look on you."

"Thanks, Mr. Stark took that one. Anyway, I always try to tag the people I'm with, and then sometimes they follow me, and then their friends sometimes do. Apparently my science shenanigans are fun to follow. I have a lot of people on twitter too, even though I mostly just shitpost or complain about Mr. Stark."

"Valid." said Ned.

Chapter End Notes

At the end of the chapter it states that Peter will get a learners permit when he turns 16. This is not a typo, it's NY law. You can get a real license at 16.5 there. I know that most of America has the full license at just 16 with a learners permit at 15, but NY is different.

So fun fact, I was goofing off on youtube, and there was this edit of marvel clips I ended up viewing one that included Peter, and then I closed it out and scoffed because that was totally OOC and Peter would never act like that, and then I realized that the thing I was berating mentally was not, in fact, fanfiction, and was literally a clip from the MCU. Anyway, according to my brain this fanfiction is canon, and the MCU is not canon and is occasionally OOC. Honestly though, I'm fine with that because my characters are happier anyway. Also, a little bit of me is grateful that Marvel probably won't get to make more Spiderman movies (I do want more, it's just a tiny bit of me), because judging from FFH they're just a whiny angst writer who likes to hit you in the feels and then leave off with an ambiguous ending so all you can imagine is more pain.

TL;DR: To the Executives at Marvel: Fuck You, strong letter to follow.
“Hey Peter.” said Mr. Stark. They were sitting on the couch in the lab (It was strange--the ‘house’ parts of the tower might technically be where Mr. Stark lived, but the lab was home in a way that the rest never was, and unless they needed the kitchen they rarely went upstairs)

“What?” said Peter. He was quite comfortable, and did not want to move from his place curled up against Mr. Stark’s side even though the credits were rolling. Forbidden Planet had been an excellent film, and he thought that he might stage a revolt if Mr. Stark did anything to ruin his happy post movie sugar crash brought on by too many M&Ms and ice cream for dinner.

“I… I’m going on a business trip next weekend. December eighth through the twelfth. Geneva. There’s going to be a lot of meetings to finalize the accords--signing the new version is scheduled for the twenty-first. I know it’s a lot to ask, but would you be willing to come?”

Peter turned his head slightly, trying to look at Mr. Stark’s face, but the angle wasn’t good, and he wasn’t willing to give up his human pillow. “Why?” he asked, “Why would you want me there?”

Mr. Stark’s hand came up to Peter’s head and passed gently through his curls. “I… one of the things they’re still arguing about that I want to get finished before the initial signing is the way they will treat minors under the accords. There’s a lot of push-back against the version that would be best for you. Some of the delegates even want to make some kind of boarding school slash prison and keep any enhanced minors there. Indoctrination and isolation. Not anything like what we want. I… I don’t think it’s going to be resolved by the signing on its own. That’s largely because there aren’t really any known enhanced minors at the moment. We know they’ve existed, but by now all of the ones we know about in the SHIELD dump or from other places have either died or aged out. Because of that it’s not really prioritized.”

“Hmm.” said Peter. He hadn’t really been involved in the accords or Rogers thing, except for a few press releases as Spider-man via YouTube and a large number of incredibly salty tweets. Mr. Stark had consulted him on how he wanted the parts concerning minors to go. “You think if I’m there then it would be pushed through faster.”

“Yes.” said Mr. Stark. “Something to the press would work as well, but I think going yourself would make a greater impact, and make you seem more responsible. They’d eat it up. Obviously it doesn’t necessarily need to happen now. This signing--now that it’s back on and the bits about the Avenger’s organization have been amended or abolished since they don’t exactly exist anymore--is more of a declaration of intent. There will be a committee formed, but the thing will still be a work of progress for quite a while.”

“I think I want to go.” said Peter.

Mr. Stark let out a tiny breath like a sigh of relief. “We’ll have fun too.” he said. “There’s a day in there where I don’t have to be anywhere. We’ll go up to CERN, bounce around a bit with the scientists. And you’ll have quite a bit of time off. You could have Happy take you around to tourist spots if you don’t want to sit in on all the boring meetings.”

Peter thought for a second. “I think I’d rather shadow you.” he said. “I… If I want to keep doing the whole Spider-man thing, or even just stay around Stark Industries I’m probably going to end up
“Okay.” said Mr. Stark. “That’s great Pete. I’m glad you’re taking it seriously. If it gets to be too much though, you can always leave.”

Peter smiled. “Don’t worry,” he said. “Boring meetings are nothing. I’ve survived a whole month of English classes discussing Romeo and Juliet. Politics have nothing on that level of inanity. I am a bit worried though. If you show up with a kid, and then Spider-man says he’s a minor at the same thing while I’m conveniently absent, won’t that sort of ruin my whole secret identity thing?”

“Don’t worry about that.” said Mr. Stark “I’ll arrange to have a separate plane come in right before the discussion about minors, and you can pretend to come from that one as Spider-man. Meanwhile, a bit of Vegas trickery will have Peter Parker attending in the audience as well. Hard to say you’re one person when you’ve been seen in the same room as yourself, eh? Or--and this might work better--I can have you leave on a plane the night before, and be seen in New York during the meeting.”

Peter laughed. “It would be like that stupid meme someone drew of me after the YouTube video where I interviewed myself--you know, the one with the two Spider-mans pointing at each other?”

“Yeah, I think I saw that one.” said Mr. Stark. “I liked the one you posted where one of them was labeled HYDRA and the other SHIELD.”

“Some of my best work,” said Peter. “That image was basically a TED talk in png format.”

“Truly inspirational.” said Mr. Stark. “Can you clear the trip with May though?”

“Probably” said Peter. “Depends on how much school I’d be missing.”

“We’d be leaving Friday a bit after noon, so you’d miss part of school but not a full day, and I think I’d send you home early on Monday so you wouldn’t have to miss more than one full day. There’s more Monday afternoon that I’m going to, and even more after that until the signing itself but I don’t think you need to be there. The minors bit is set on the Monday agenda for early in the morning.”

“Cool.” said Peter. “So accords meetings on Saturday, CERN on Sunday?”

“Plus events all three nights and a lot of semi-private discussions over practically every meal. With all the diplomats in town leading up to the signing on the twenty-first, everyone is taking the chance to do a bit of elbow rubbing and favor trading. The accords are shockingly important in the international community for more reasons than the Avengers. I think it’s because enhanced people are expected to be the next stage of warfare, and having the ground rules for that figured out is something everyone wants.”

“Events?” asked Peter. The rest was… important information, but ‘events’ sounded like the sort of fancy party that Peter would make a fool of himself at.

“I wouldn’t worry too much.” said Mr. Stark. “We’ll go over what’s expected at each one. You will need to be fitted for a few suits though.”

“A few?” asked Peter, who only owned one suit that didn’t fit very well that he’d gotten at a thrift shop right before homecoming.

“One for all the meetings, one for each of the events, and a different one for your Spider-man appearance since I don’t think they’d take kindly to a weaponized combat suit.” said Mr. Stark.
“And probably a couple blazers to throw over your more usual look.”

“That’s… five. That’s five suits Mr. Stark.” said Peter.

“Good job.” said Mr. Stark “Maybe we’ll work up to tying shoelaces yet. Don’t worry about it, my tailor is very efficient. You won’t have to suffer for more than a couple hours.”

“Ngggha” said Peter.

Mr. Stark laughed at him “I know cucciolo. It seems like a lot. All those dumb rich people expect it though, so I’m afraid you’ll have to play the part. To be perfectly honest, I’d rather show up in a t-shirt too.”

“I hate you.” said Peter, snuggling closer. Eventually Mr. Stark started another movie which they then both ignored in favor of just sitting in their own thoughts and pretending they weren’t enjoying the human contact. (correction: Mr. Stark was pretending. Peter was quite shameless about glomping people he liked, and Mr. Stark was at the top of that list, tying with May and beating out Ned by a narrow margin.)

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“Mr. Stark!” said Peter as he entered the lab at speed Wednesday afternoon before the Switzerland trip, flinging himself bodily at the man.

Mr. Stark caught Peter with a grunt, causing him to giggle, then put him down gently with a small fake glare. Peter was freakishly light for a teenager, but he still couldn’t fling himself at just anyone. Fortunately for him, Mr. Stark was pretty freakin’ strong for an old dude, a fact that Peter liked to exploit as much as possible. (It was probably wearing a two-hundred pound suit of armor all the time. Even with machines to help with the lift… Still heavy)

“What is it cucciolo?” asked Mr. Stark.

“I can go to Switzerland!” said Peter. “May didn’t like it. Actually she hated it, but I argued her down. Operation argue with old people is a go.”

“Well that’s good.” said Mr. Stark “Because we have an appointment with the tailor in a half hour.”

“It would be a shame to cancel that.” said Peter

“Actually I would make you go anyway, even if May said no. Everyone needs a couple of decent suits.”

“I have a suit.” said Peter

“I’ve seen your homecoming pictures Pete. That’s not a suit it’s a piece of garbage.”

“Excuse you.” said Peter. “I paid two whole dollars for that suit.”

“Truly a monumental purchase” said Mr. Stark. He started wandering towards the elevator. “Now, my tailor is only ten minutes away, but I think it best if we leave now, because I know us and if we get sucked into a project then we’re never going to make it.”

“Probably smart.” said Peter, grabbing sunglasses. It was a little brighter today than he necessarily enjoyed. Spider eyes weren’t meant for sunshine. “A little sad though, since I think I’m almost
“Ready to make a testing rig for the organ printer thing.”

“We’ll do that after.” said Mr. Stark.

When they got to the parking level, Happy was already idling right outside the elevator waiting for them. Mr. Stark held the door open for Peter and then got in after him. The privacy partition was closed, but Peter knew that was just because Happy was in the middle of the Gone with the Wind audio-book and didn’t want to stop for such plebeian concerns as his employer. (Peter listened through the soundproof partition for a few moments to make sure Happy wasn’t at a good part before trying to tune it out)

“So.” said Mr. Stark. “What do you know about suits?”

Peter sighed. “I vaguely remember the Kingsman movie mocking something called brogues, but that’s about it. To be perfectly honest they’re in the same category in my brain as kimonos: article of clothing that I don’t wear.”

“Which is a shame.” said Mr. Stark. “They’re very fun. Everyone acts as if girls are the only ones who get to dress up but that’s just laziness speaking.”

“Does that mean I’m going to get my Disney Princess on?”

“If it makes you happy Peter. So. Suits.”

Peter perked up into the most ridiculous expression and pose of attentive peppiness he could manage. If he’d had a notebook he would have been poised to take notes. Mr. Stark shut that down with a single look, though the corner of his mouth turned up which Peter counted as a win. “There are three basic cuts of suit--and this isn’t getting into styles like tuxedos, just cuts.” said Mr. Stark. “American, Italian, and English. The one you were wearing at homecoming? That’s American cut. Now don’t tell anyone I said this because I’m still a government contractor even if I don’t make weapons and they tend to frown upon unpatriotic things, but American cut suits are pieces of garbage.”

“Why?” asked Peter. “Isn’t it just a suit?”

“Well, yes,” said Mr. Stark “But the general idea behind American cut suits was to combine the good things about Italian and English cuts. Instead… well. You know how when I was okaying the future designs of the StarkPhone and I had to choose between a giant improvement in screen quality and one in battery life?”

“Yeah.” said Peter. “Except you didn’t choose you just created a better battery and a more efficient screen.”

“Yes, I know, I’m brilliant. In another company though they would have had to pick one over the other, or try to compromise, in which case-”

“Both things would be generally mediocre and they wouldn’t have anything spectacular to advertise,” said Peter.

“Yes.” said Mr. Stark “That’s what happened with American suits. Mediocre compromise between two opposing ideals.”

“Two questions.” said Peter. “One, what are the ideals and what’s so opposing about them--I mean they’re still suits. Two, can we get ice cream after.”
“That depends on how good you are cucciolo. Any attempts to escape and we’re getting nothing but one black coffee which I will drink while making direct eye contact.”

“You are a cruel man.” said Peter, grinning at the reference.

“A cruel man who is going back to question one, so pay attention.” said Mr. Stark.

What followed was a truly enlightening discourse on the eighty-five thousand factors that went into a suit. It was… shockingly complicated. Maybe not biochemical engineering complicated, but at least on the level with the car maintenance that Mr. Stark had been teaching him. Peter was fairly sure that Mr. Stark chose his cloth suits with the same care and focus he directed at his Iron Man ones. After all, they were both armor, though of different types.

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When Peter reached home that night, new vocabulary spinning in his head along with a whirl of scientific calculations which he focused on to avoid thinking about the price tag (The cheapest thing--a dinner jacket--had costNo don’t think about it), he found May sitting up with a cup of coffee. “Aren’t you supposed to be sleeping?” he asked. She’d gotten done with her shift at about the same time that Peter had gone to school, which was when they’d had the can-I-go-to-Switzerland discussion, and had planned to run a few errands before going to sleep at some point in the early afternoon. She did have to go on shift at midnight after all. (which was in two hours. Really she should not be up yet.)

“I didn’t sleep.” said May. “I couldn’t.”


May looked like she was about to reflexively reassure him, and then she stopped, made direct eye contact with him, and said. “No, everything’s not okay.” she said.

“What’s wrong?” asked Peter, sitting down across from her.

“You Peter. You’re what’s wrong.” she said.

Peter sat down and practiced the conflict resolution skills that Ms. Potts had been drilling into his head after the Planning division incident. “Can you explain the issue further?” he asked. “I can’t fix anything if I don’t understand it.”

“See. That.” said May. “That’s not you. You’re… you’re supposed to be… I don’t know. I just… I don’t like what you’re turning into.”

Peter took a breath and was carefully not offended by that statement, May had a valid problem, he was sure. She was just too emotional right now to properly express it. “What do you mean by that?” asked Peter, calmly.

May glared at him. “See! You’re treating me like some… faceless corporate drone. Like I’m not the woman who raised you, who… has a right to more than that. I… This morning you informed me you were going on a business trip. Informed! About a business trip. Peter you’re four--Fifteen. You’re fifteen. You’re not supposed to have business trips. School trips, maybe, but not for business. And even then you’re supposed to ask permission.”

“I was asking permission.” said Peter. “I just told you what I was asking for first.”

“No.” said May “You did not. You asked if there was anything that would cause an issue with it.
I… Peter I argued against it but I ended up agreeing because I didn’t have any more good excuses. Then after you left, I realized that I don’t have to. I shouldn’t have to have excuses at all. I’m your legal guardian, and when I say you can’t go to Switzerland, you can’t go to Switzerland. Because… It’s not what’s good for you. And because I said so.”

Peter was internally panicking, but he knew that if he lost his cool then the purpose of the conversation would be lost. He wasn’t here to argue. “This morning you agreed that it would be educational. What changed?”

“What changed?” asked May. She seemed incredulous for some reason. “What CHANGED! I came to my senses is what. You… You’re a fucking child Peter. You don’t get to be… some kind of miniature adult that doesn’t have to ask permission.”

“Okay.” said Peter. “Let’s start over then.” he paused. “There’s a really cool opportunity coming up with my internship. I’d be missing a day and a half of school, but I really want to go. Is that okay with you?”

“It’s still not.” said May.

“Is there a reason for that?” asked Peter.

“Yes!” said May. “You can’t just leave the country randomly.”

“It’s not random.” said Peter. “It’s not till this weekend, and I’ve told you about it in advance. I’ve had lots of things with less notice that you let me do.”

“Let me rephrase that then Peter. You’re not allowed to leave the country. I let it slide last time because it was a legitimate educational thing, but this is most emphatically not, so there’s really no reason to go.”

“Maybe not a reason you’d want to go,” said Peter “But I’m actually incredibly interested in seeing the Accords negotiations, and CERN. Especially CERN.”

“You want me to believe you’re looking forward to boring meetings,” said May.

“Yes?” said Peter. Actually he was mostly looking forward to the whole Accords mess being locked down so Mr. Stark could take a break and Asshole Dickwad could get what he deserved, but May didn’t need to know that.

“That’s… That’s not normal Peter.”

Peter was sick of this. He’d tried every tactic in his small arsenal, and had remained calm through every unintentionally hurtful thing May had said, but that… that was going a bit too far a few too many times, because he’d struggled with being odd his whole life and May’s support was what had carried him through. “Do I have to be?” he asked, voice cracking painfully. “Is that what you want? A ‘normal’ kid? Because I hate to break it to you, but that just doesn’t exist, May. And even if it did I wouldn’t want it.”

“Normal Peter, doesn’t mean stereotypical, it means healthy. In the right stage of emotional development. With a stable lifestyle.” said May. “I have spent YEARS trying to give that to you, and every damn time you spit in my face.”

“When did I do that?” asked Peter, shocked.

“Every fucking week you want some new special consideration, some extra ‘help’, and an
exception to the system. But that’s not going to happen Peter.” said May. She was practically yelling. “You don’t get to be the exception to the rule. You’re fifteen, and that means you go to school with everybody else, you come home like everybody else, and you grow up like everybody else. There are LAWS about it.”

“Which I follow” cried Peter. “Every time I want to do anything it’s legal, and acceptable, and it isn’t an exception, it’s written into the damn rules! When I asked to increase my class load with online stuff--LEGAL. When I wanted to skip… every fucking grade in elementary school--LEGAL. When I got the best internship on the entire fucking planet--PERFECTLY LEGAL AND NORMAL. The only person who doesn’t like it is YOU.”

“I’m not TALKING about that Peter. I’m talking about child labor laws, ever heard of them? Because I looked those up, and you’re definitely not following THOSE. To good for them, are you? To GROWN UP for piddling little concerns like whether a CHILD should work… Probably fifty hours a week. Or MORE.”

She had a point there. Still, she was counting hours spent as Spiderman, and all the many hours in the lab that Peter devoted to reading, hanging out, and working on personal stuff. “First of all,” he said “IT’s an INTERNSHIP not a JOB, and those have different rules. SECOND, it’s primarily a learning sort of thing, and most of what I’m doing is educational rather than actual work. AND THIRDLY I ONLY ACTUALLY DO REAL INTERNSHIP STUFF LIKE… 12% OF THE TIME!”

“THEN WHAT ARE YOU DOING!” yelled May.

There was banging on the wall from one of their neighbors. “QUIET DOWN.” they cried (which was a bit unfair considering their propensity for lots of base in their music choices and a fair amount of enthusiastically loud sex)

“What do you need to do in Stark Tower that’s so important you get to ignore your family.” said May. “That you get to waltz of and ignore me, and everything I do for you.”


“That you can’t do here?” said May. “Why do you have to go gallivanting across the damn city for it?”

“I…” said Peter. It was true. There was a lot he could do from Queens just as well as from the lab but… “It’s quiet so I can focus. And has… so many cool things, and… Mr. Stark is there. I… He helps me. Teaches me stuff. And I like it. It’s… sort of like…” Peter got quieter, and then said something he’d never admit to anyone, even himself, if his raw emotions hadn’t stripped away everything except honesty. “It’s sort of like having a dad.” he whispered.”

May looked like she’d been slapped. “You… Are you trying to replace me? Replace BEN?”

Peter’s eyes went wide. “No!” he said “Never, I… I would never.”

“Really, because that’s exactly what it sounds like. You’re just replacing the old burned out model for a shiny new one that gives you lots of toys.” accused May.

“No! I wouldn’t. What are you saying?”

“Are you denying it?” said May. “Because from what I can see that’s exactly what’s happening.”
“No it’s not! Where is this even coming from?”

“Oh I don’t know.” said May. She was getting slightly louder. “The brand new StarkPhone in your pocket? The fact that you show up half the time out of a damn limo?”

“Town car.” muttered Peter, but May was building up steam and wasn’t done yet.

“THE TWO-HUNDRED DOLLAR TOILETRIES IN THE BATHROOM!”

“What do those have to do with ANYTHING!?” cried Peter. (Those were… they made him happy. Mr. Stark had noticed how irritated his skin got from chemicals, and how much the smells bothered him because of the spider bite and he’d fixed it. Just like he fixed everything. It made Peter feel all warm and fuzzy inside, all that attention that was needed to notice something so… minor.)

“They have EVERYTHING to do with it!” said May. “Your uncle would never stand for this. I won’t stand for it. You… letting a rich man play like he’s doing a good thing giving you gifts that are worthless to someone like him. We didn’t raise you to take so-called ‘charity’ when you have something perfectly good already. This is… disgusting. It debases you, it disrespects me, it disrespects Ben.”

“No.. You don’t understand.” said Peter. “It’s not about the stuff. It’s… I like the time. And the advice. I like finally having someone who-”

May interrupted him. “So you’re just going to drop me like I don’t give you those things? Drop Ben like he means nothing? Like he didn’t raise you?”

“BEN’S GONE” yelled Peter. “He’s dead. He can’t… he can’t help me anymore. But… that doesn’t mean I don’t still need help.”

May deflated like a balloon with all the air taken out of it. “I know.” she said. “And I’m trying. I’m trying so hard… Isn’t it enough? Am I not enough?”

“You…” said Peter. He didn’t know how to say it without hurting her. Because the truth was that she wasn’t enough. May was… wonderful and important and necessary, but she was May, and her Mayness kept her from being everything he needed. She didn’t do driving, or engineering, or how to wear a suit, or advice on what it might mean to be a man. Yes, she could compensate, and when Peter had needed to learn to tie a tie there was always youtube, but the thing was… it didn’t have to be that way. There didn’t have to be compensation for lacking a father male role-model, because Peter had one again. For the first time in almost five years he had two parents a full complement of people to look up to.

Apparently Peter’s silence had spoken enough. He hadn’t meant to imply that May wasn’t enough, but she crumpled like his thoughts had been laid out in twelve point Times New Roman with plenty of citations to demonstrate her inadequacy. (He didn’t know how to explain that she wasn’t inadequate, but she also didn’t need to shoulder the load of two people. He didn’t know how to say anything at all)

“Leave.” said May. “Just… Leave. I don’t want to see you right now.”

Peter felt like he’d been shot. No, that wasn’t enough. Even a hollow point bullet from a high caliber rifle couldn’t hit as deep and painful as that. (And he knew from experience)

“When…” he said “When can I come back?”
“After Switzerland. Maybe. We’ll talk about it just… Leave.”

Peter made another tiny noise, like a mouse being crushed under someone's boot. “Can I get my stuff?” he nearly whispered.

May nodded, and then glared at him as he made his way to his room, her eagle stare making him hunch into himself all the way through gathering up a couple changes of clothes, a toothbrush, and his passport. (It was strange to realize how little he needed because most everything was already at the Tower. Hell, he probably didn’t even need the clothes at all, even for an international trip.)

He didn’t make eye contact or acknowledge her when he left. It hurt too much.

Chapter End Notes

YEah,, from May's perspective Peter got a science sugar daddy he left her for. He's not great at the whole... emotional disclosure thing, and I gotta say, if May didn't know about Spiderman she'd be pretty fucking concerned. Like this. Don't worry though, there's lots of fluff coming up, and Peter does a better job later. May's a good lady and I love her too much to bash her, so this isn't Evil May. Its Parent Panicking Because Their Child Is Disappearing All The Time And Hanging Out With People She Doesn't Approve Of.

Glad we cleared that up.
When Peter reached Stark Industries, he was unsurprised to find Mr. Stark in the lab. He was surprised to find, however, that Mr. Stark was asleep. That… wasn’t something he’d ever seen before, actually. Mr. Stark was always moving, always doing. The stillness didn’t suit him, especially since it didn’t look particularly restful. The creases on his face were deep, more worried furrows than the laugh lines Peter was familiar with.

Still, Peter had gotten the impression from Pepper and Rhodey that Mr. Stark sleeping was a miracle to be appreciated, and not something to be disturbed. His whiny cry-fest could wait until tomorrow. He would pull an all nighter working to take his mind off of things, and Thursday morning would bring a B-day, which was fairly light with only AP Calc, AP Chemistry, AP Spanish Language, and AP Art History. He could do all of those things in his sleep. Except maybe art. Art was confusing. (Apparently being able to draw accurate diagrams didn’t count, and neither did engineering which was unfair because that was totally art, and he was expected to be able to tell things about pieces of art like their meaning which was… even worse than poetry to be honest.)

He did throw a blanket over Mr. Stark before he got to work. No temperature control could ever replace the cozy feeling of fleece.

As the night wore on, Peter’s initial working fugue wore off a bit. After he’d… left, he’d managed to not think about the argument with May on the way to Stark Tower only by changing back into his Spider-man suit and flinging himself off of buildings with even more abandon than he usually did. When he’d gone into the lab, he’d immediately thrown himself into the most finicky project he had—attempting to integrate polydiketoenamine, a newly designed plastic created specifically for recyclability that was molecularly the equivalent of legos, into Mr. Stark’s fledgling nano-tech system. Mr. Stark was looking at it in the context of Iron Man armor, but Peter thought that it might also be a good way to get other things in the universe into multiple forms. After plastic he was going to work on crystal and try to integrate it into a smart screen. He had a nebulous dream of being able to change a device from a small phone into a large tablet.

That was far away though, and for now the nanites were simply not cooperating, and it was only the specific plastic he was using that saved him from having to start over completely. Eventually though, he landed on an idea that might work someday probably, and then simply had to coordinate with FRIDAY to test various bits of fine tuning. They communicated through text, in respect to the sleeping genius fifty feet away, but the work wasn’t finicky or all consuming anymore, and so a large portion of Peter’s brain left the main task to ruminate over what had happened.

It was times like this that Peter understood Mr. Stark’s passion for incredibly loud attention grabbing music. Usually it was nice to be able to go about your day while mulling over schematics in the background, but sometimes having more mind than you could use was inconvenient. He’d give quite a bit for a way to drown out the extra thoughts, because Peter knew from long experience that thinking about bad things was a good way to spiral into misery. Usually the general… bigness of the world worked, sorting through all the sounds and smells and sights that overwhelmed him, but the lab was too quiet and familiar for that to really work. No distractions at all in this temple to innovation, leaving Peter alone with his thoughts.
A tear landed in the middle of Peter’s project, smearing the glass container full of plastic and nanites he was controlling through FRIDAY’s interface. It surprised him, and he angrily wiped his eyes. Now was not the time for a breakdown. That needed to wait until he was in a private room with decent soundproofing. Then he’d give himself ten minutes to blubber before starting the long and therapist-approved process of emotionally resolving the issue internally so it wouldn’t bother him anymore (those six sessions they’d managed to scrimp for after Ben were lifesavers).

Unfortunately for Peter, his emotions and body disagreed with him on when was a good time to break down. The best he could manage was to brace himself against the table, hands white knuckled on the slightly warping side as his grip pressed into it, and cry sans-vocal chords, another useful post-Ben skill that sounded more like quiet gasping then a full sob. This lasted for several minutes uninterrupted (FRIDAY stopped trying after only two), until a hand landed softly on Peter’s shoulder.

“Pete?” asked Mr. Stark, voice groggy with sleep. “Are you okay?”

Peters last vestiges of control abandoned him, and he latched onto Mr. Stark like an octopus, pressing his face into his mentor’s shoulder to muffle his sobs. Mr. Stark had been well trained by Peter’s huggy nature, and it only took him a second to hug back, which was a record.

“C’mon, hush. Cucciolo. It’s going to be okay. I’ve got you.” said Mr. Stark. He continued to say meaningless comforting bits all the way to the couch, and before Peter could react at all he was fully curled up in the blanket with Mr. Stark’s arm around him, hand rubbing comforting circles into Peter’s back as he increased the size of the snotty tear spot on the man’s shoulder.

When Peter had recovered a slight amount of control, though he still wasn’t to the point of rediscovering dignity, he looked up at Mr. Stark. He looked… soft. It was like all of his sharp edged Starkness had been stripped away, and underneath there was nothing but worry. “What happened Pete?” he asked gently.

Peter burst into another round of crying. “I…” he sobbed. “I got… k-kicgh” he choked on a sob. “Kicked out... May…” another sob “kicked me out, I…” he couldn’t continue, and instead he just cried some more. Mr Stark, if it could be possible, gathered him in even closer.

“Take your time kiddo.” he said “I’ve got you.”

Peter sobbed once more, hard, but he wasn’t taking any more time. “She… I don’t know. I still don’t really understand it. I came home from patrol and she was sitting up waiting for me and then… we argued and… I just don’t understand. I didn’t do anything wrong, Mr. Stark, but she…”

“Hey.” said Mr. Stark “Just breathe. Take a minute.”

Peter nodded, and then waited until he was mostly done before continuing. “I thought everything was perfect.” he said. “I was so happy, and then… Why? Why did she do it.”

“I don’t know.” said Mr. Stark “Can you tell me what you were arguing about?”

Peter sighed heavily and mumbled something into Mr. Stark’s shirt.

“I’m sorry kiddo, but I didn’t get that.” said Mr. Stark. He lifted Peter’s chin up with one of his fingers, and Peter tried again.

“It was you.” he said. “She… I don’t understand. She didn’t want me to go to Geneva, and I couldn’t figure out why, but then… I don’t know. Something about me expecting special privileges and not spending enough time at home? It didn’t really make any sense.”
“You have been spending a lot of time here.” said Mr. Stark. “Maybe it’s too much, I don’t want to pull you away from your family and I—”

“No.” said Peter cutting him off. “I see May exactly the same amount as I did before. She works shitty hours, so we never got much time. It’s just…” his voice got quieter, nearly back to mumbling stages. “She said I was trying to replace her. And Ben, and I…”

“Oh, Peter.” said Mr. Stark.

Peter nodded, and cried a bit more. “I’m not.” he said. “I wasn’t trying to replace her, I just… She’s not…” he dissolved into tears, feeling again how incredibly selfish he was. Thinking that May wasn’t enough on her own was the greatest betrayal he’d ever committed and it felt so rotten, like something inside him had suddenly turned into lead. (That didn’t make it any less true though, Peter still needed help, he still needed his dad—Mr. Stark)

“Hey, it’s okay. I know.” said Mr. Stark. “Believe me, I know.”

Peter sobbed a bit more. “It’s not okay,” he said. “She… she hates me.” Then he cried even louder, and Mr. Stark held him as he shook.

“You’re wrong,” said Mr. Stark. “She doesn’t hate you.”

“No, she said… She said I was too weird, and disgusting, and she didn’t want to see me.” said Peter.

“People say a lot of things when they’re emotional. That doesn’t mean they mean any of them.” said Mr. Stark, though he seemed to be thinking pretty hard about something besides May. “I’m sure she’ll calm down.”

Peter shook his head sadly. “But Mr. Stark, I’m the reason she got angry in the first place, and I’m just going to keep making her angry.”

“Why would you say that?” asked Mr. Stark. He’d finished thinking, and now simply seemed confused, and still very worried for Peter.

“She thinks… she said I just wanted to be special, get extra stuff, and that I was taking charity to do it, and…” he got quieter again. “She said you’d get bored of me eventually, and I was being stupid and selfish and…” he trailed off. He really didn’t have a way to quantify to Mr. Stark how hurt he was by that.

“I’m not getting bored of you cucciolo.” said Mr. Stark. “I’m afraid you’re stuck with me for quite awhile. I… I don’t want to give you up.

“Do you not want to let me down?” asked Peter, smiling a bit through his tears.

“Course not.” said Mr. Stark “No running around or deserting either I… Peter.” he stopped. “Peter I…”

Peter waited. Mr. Stark expressing genuine emotion was even rarer than legitimate sleep. It was something worth waiting for.

“I don’t understand people.” said Mr. Stark. “Relationships, I can’t… I don’t understand how they stay together, and I will never understand why things break apart. So maybe I don’t get it. But Pete, you… you’re amazing, and special, and probably the smartest person I’ve ever met, and on top of that you’re so good, and I… I don’t think I could ever understand how anyone could want
you gone.”

Peter made a tiny noise and hugged Mr. Stark as tight as he could without crushing him. He was crying again, but this time it was for a different reason.

“And for the record,” continued Mr. Stark, “It’s not charity. No pity, or anything like it. No one has ever accused me of altruism. It’s just… you’re so much like me. All the best parts and even better, better than I think I could ever be. I look at you, and I see the future. You’re going to change the world for the better Peter, and I want nothing more than to help you.”

“Mr. Stark.” breathed Peter. He was crying even harder now. If Mr. Stark had been trying to get him to stop it was counterproductive, but he still felt… not good precisely. He was hurting to much for that. He simply now felt like he had gotten something precious, something he was going to hold tight to and guard closely, and it was a very very good thing.

“Um, are you okay?” asked Mr. Stark. It was obvious he wasn’t sure how what he said would be received.

Peter nodded. “Yeah. I’m okay.” he said through tears. “I… Thank you.”

“Anytime.” said Mr. Stark, drawing him in for another close hug. “Literally. I’m always here for you.”

Peter nodded into his chest, and then they stayed like that until Peter fell asleep.

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When the kid was asleep, Tony very carefully laid him down properly and tucked a blanket around his shoulders. Then he pushed Peter’s hair up off of his forehead and sighed.

“How dare she.” he whispered.

The whole situation left him both confused and angry. He liked May, he really did, and they’d begun to coordinate a bit about Peter--making sure he got his homework done, spent enough time in the sunshine with friends, and went home on time. It was… maybe not friendly, but functional. They had nothing in common except Peter, but where Peter was concerned it had seemed they were in perfect agreement.

Now… he didn’t really know what to think. On the one hand, his first instinct was to burn anyone who hurt his kid to the ground. On the other… this was May, who was just as militant about Peter’s general well-being as he was. There was no way she would ever hurt Peter’s feelings like that. Or would she?

Unbidden, Tony’s thoughts turned to Howard Stark. His affections always varied based on how well Tony conformed to his idea of a good child. Was that universal? No. It couldn’t be. All you had to do to see that was look at Peter. Peter who was impossible not to love if you’d known him for more than five minutes.

Maybe he was just viewing this all through the lens of his past experience, and through Peter’s high emotions. He needed more information.

Giving Peter’s shoulder one final squeeze, Tony stood up and walked quietly over to the elevator. Peter wasn’t the lightest sleeper in the world, but his hearing was such that even the quietest sounds would seem loud. He needed to make a phone call, and he couldn’t do it here.
It was nearing Four AM, which was about the time where May would probably be taking a break. Lunch break for Graveyard. She would most likely be available, and they would be having words.

She picked up on the third ring. “Hello.” she said. It sounded like ‘please don’t.’

“Hello May.” said Tony. “Just wanted to thank you for the gift of a sobbing teenager. I’ve always wanted to wake up in the middle of the night and spend an hour and a half being cried on. It was a dream come true.”

“Oh poor you.” said May. “Having to deal with genuine human emotions.”

“Not the issue here. I’m more concerned about the fact that I just had to convince your kid that you didn’t hate him, and I don’t think anybody wants to deal with that. I don’t think Peter should ever have to deal with that. Under any circumstances.”

“Maybe I was a bit harsh, but you have to understand, what Peter is doing is unacceptable.”

“Okay I’m… not going to touch that because clearly you’ve already decided, but May, Peter’s your kid. Even if you think what’s happening is unacceptable blowing up on him like that is probably the worst possible thing you could do. He’s… he’s sensitive May.” Tony sighed.

“Don’t tell me how to do my job.” said May

“Do your job and I won't feel the need to point out how badly you’ve fucked up.”

“So telling the truth is fucking up now?” said May.

“You have a right to your opinion.” said Tony. “But that doesn’t make it the truth.” he sighed.

“This isn’t what I called you to talk about.”

“Then hang up.” said May. “Because I don’t want to talk to you at all.”

“No can do.” said Tony “Pete… he wasn’t particularly coherent, but I got the impression that it was fairly bad. I need to know what happened.”

“Why?” asked May

“So I can deal with it.” said Tony. “I can’t do anything if I don’t understand what’s happening, and I don’t want to ask Peter. He’s too broken up about it.”

“Deal with it.” said May. She snorted. “You mean find a way to throw money at it until it’s gone.”

“Really not what I meant.” said Tony. “I was talking more about what to say to Peter and what’s going to happen after Geneva. I think it’s probably better to figure it out now, so he doesn’t get anxious about it.”

“You think?” said May, incredulous. “You don’t get to think anything. He’s not your kid.”

“I…” said Tony (I want him to be, he wanted to say) “He might not be my kid, but I do care about him, and I do know him. Well enough at least to see you hurt him.”

“You’re the one who came barging in on our lives and ruined everything.” said May

“What?” asked Tony. He was legitimately taken aback. “I… I honestly don’t have any idea what you’re talking about.”
“I’m talking about the fact that you just walk in and act like you have the right to Peter. Like you’re some kind of… father figure. Twisting him into some demented version of yourself.”

“Um. What? No? May, focus on the problem. Ignoring it to argue won’t fix it. You hurt Peter. What are you going to do about it.”

May laughed but it sounded bitter and hurt. “I’m not the one ignoring things.” she said. “I’d say have a good night, but really I couldn’t care less what kind you have.”

Then she hung up on him.

Tony was… reeling. He didn’t know what to think. Was he overstepping? Should he be less hands on with Peter? No. Maybe he was being overly familiar (one might even say he was being downright paternal), but he remembered the horrible events surrounding Peter’s homecoming and knew that taking a step back wasn’t right. Peter needed him.

More than that, Tony realized that he was beginning to need Peter too. Pepper was keeping him at a bit of an arms distance, though she was still a great friend, not wanting to get involved in his shit again after so many disasters and mistakes, and Rhodey was prohibitively busy. He’d always been like that after an emergency, talking the ears off of the brass until they didn’t do any of the stupid things they wanted to do. The only people Tony had right now were FRIDAY, Happy, and Peter, and Peter… Peter might possibly be the best thing that had ever happened to him.

He’d made a phone call, and it was clear that May was dealing with something that went way beyond Peter and his internship, but May could deal with herself. Tony’s priorities lay somewhere much more important.

Chapter End Notes

So... last chapter happened. And I had to take a break actually because the chapter pushed a lot of buttons many of which were my own. I got flamed a bit, and emoted at a lot, and I had to reevaluate what I was doing. I guess a lot of it came from the fact that I have never had a positive mother/child relationship and don't know how they work, and I was... processing? expressing? whatever, working through my own issues with my mom. And I had to step back and think about where I wanted the story to go, and whether I should separate my experiences from my writing.

In the end, I decided to keep going. This fanfiction, fiction in general, is to express things outside of ourselves that we have trouble understanding within ourselves. And I'm using it as a vehicle to work through everything that happened to me.

My mom kicked me out of the house for the first time when I was eight years old. It was July, and I slept in the yard that night until she let me back in. It all escalated from there. I've slept in compost piles for warmth, the Walmart Home and Garden section, peoples cars, friends sheds and spare rooms, and often a hammock in the wilderness near my home. My senior year of high school I spent in my Grandma's creepy doll room (complete with human teeth collection), provided for myself completely, and commuted three hours on the bus to school every day.

And there were people that whole time--you'll see them a lot in my writing though you definitely don't know who they represent--who helped and supported me through it. My schools guidance counselor, the family friend whose also now my therapist, my friends and their families, my extended family, and a whole host of others.
So this story is about losing and finding family, about how being kind to strangers can change the world, about keeping people accountable—but also about letting people change.

See, the thing is, I love my mom. She's family, but more than that, she's a good and kind person whose trying her hardest. She realized that what she was doing was wrong, and even though fixing it is a long road--she has her own issues to work through, and when people say 'cycle of abuse' they really mean it--she's really trying. I can't live with her. I can't spend more than about three hours in her presence before being driven mad. But I can come for dinner on holidays. I can celebrate my mom's decision to enter a support group, her finally getting therapy, her choosing to hold herself accountable. I can accept her sincere apologies that come with a legitimate attempt to change.

My youngest sibling has never been kicked out or physically disciplined. My brother is tentatively trying to reconnect with us after years away. We're doing ok.

Maybe putting all of this onto MCU characters is shallow and OOC, but I'm fine with that. May was never clearly defined in the MCU, she has very little screen time in comparison to most other characters, and what we do know about her can be compressed into bad cook, hard worker, dead husband, and trying her best to support a kid in NY on a working class salary. So when I flesh that out, I'm allowed to add that she's grieving the husband who did most of the parenting responsibilities that she's still not quite confident on. I'm allowed to add that she has no idea how to connect with her gifted kid. I'm allowed to add that she's overworked, underappreciated, has a lot of festering resentment about her brother in law dumping his kid on them and disappearing. I'm allowed to have her feel so inadequate about her parenting that when her kid finds another adult role model she gets incredibly defensive. I'm allowed to have her stress out, project her problems on to undeserving targets, fuck up, break down, and sabotage herself. And afterwards I'm allowed to have her apologize and try to be better, and let the irrevocably changed relationships still exist.

Anyway, that's just me, and if it's not your cup of tea I encourage you to go find something that is, because fanfic is our way of getting our fiction made to order, and this ones mine.
Thursday was a rather miserable day for Peter. Mr. Stark had offered to let him stay home from school, but he didn’t want to give May any more ammunition. Peter was responsible. He always did what he needed to do, and that would be necessary if he wanted to convince May to let him stay with the internship. Besides, powering through and focusing on other things was what he always did. It might be unhealthy, but he’d managed to keep perfect grades all through the aftermath of Ben by waiting to exit the denial stage of grief until school let out, so clearly it worked.

Thus, Peter woke up on time, picked through the selection of meal bars until he found a flavor that didn’t seem absolutely horrible, brewed a full pot of coffee, and got himself ready for school.

“Hey kiddo.” mumbled Mr. Stark as he stumbled half-conscious into the lab, obviously summoned by the scent of coffee.

“Hi.” said Peter, not looking much better.

Mr. Stark poured himself a mug, and after a few moments he seemed to regain a semblance of humanity. “You headed to school?” he asked. He didn’t seem surprised.

“Yeah.” said Peter, leaning back against the small counter in the corner that housed the lab snacks and coffee (it was pretty much the only place that had food since the kitchen upstairs was never used.) “I’ve got to.” he said.

“You really don’t.” said Mr. Stark.

“Actually I do.” said Peter. “I’ve got to be on my absolute best behavior until we get back from Geneva. May… if I fuck up then… Besides. It’ll keep my mind off of… things.”

Mr. Stark’s eyes softened. “Okay.” he said. “Though I want it on record that you shouldn’t have to. Call me any time if you need to talk or anything.”

Peter sighed. “Just… let’s not touch that.” he said. “I don’t want to think about it.”

They drank their coffee in silence for a while, and Peter began to feel more human. Caffeine didn’t technically work on him, but there was some kind of psychosomatic effect going on, making it seem like it did. Besides, he rather liked the taste. Since the spiderbite his flavor preferences had run towards bitter, nutty, or umami (the main flavors that bugs were, though he tried not to think about it). Coffee straight up was a pure shot of bitterness, and he relished it.

“Do you have everything you need?” asked Mr. Stark.

“Yeah, mostly.” said Peter. “I’m missing a Spanish worksheet, but I can grab another copy and do it at the beginning of class.”

“Good.” said Mr. Stark. “Do you want real breakfast?”

“Nah.” said Peter. “I ate a couple bars. I… technically they’ve got everything I need, and frankly I don’t feel up to any more mastication right now.”
“Feeling more like wrapping your food up and then dissolving it to suck the juices out?” asked Mr. Stark.

“That is the least appealing thing I have ever heard.” said Peter.

“Hmm.” said Mr. Stark. “I’ll have to get the Doc’s team to figure out a liquid version of the bars. Make your little spidery instincts happy.”

Peter shrugged, but on the inside he felt grateful for the subject change. Mr. Stark had mostly broken him of the habit of excessive thanks, and he’d learned that the man responded better to other types of gratitude. It was strange, thinking that such a ‘narcissistic’ man would be uncomfortable with gushing thanks, but Mr. Stark really wasn’t like that at all, and Peter figured he got enough of that from sycophants.

“My spidery instincts might get ideas Mr. Stark. Delusions of grandeur.” he said instead of spewing gratitude like he wanted.

Mr. Stark smiled with both sides of his face, a departure from his regular smirk, and Peter knew he understood perfectly. “It’s not delusions if you’re actually grand.” he said.

“Aw shucks.” said Peter in a ridiculous fake voice. “You’re going to make me blush.”

Peter didn’t deal well with compliments either, and he figured snark and humor was better than turning into a gibbering mess. It was probably Mr. Stark’s influence, but it seemed to work for the man well, and Peter’s head had always been full of pithy remarks. He just didn’t say them out loud often except when he was Spiderman. Or Peter-the-Intern, who was starting to turn into almost as much of a different version of himself as Spiderman. Regular-Old-Peter-Parker had nothing on those identities. (Peter really liked who he was when he wasn’t being Regular-Old-Peter-Parker. He felt more like himself. No one else in his regular life liked it though, so he saved it for the tower, and patrols.)

When they finished the coffee, Mr. Stark wordlessly grabbed Peter’s backpack and started in the direction of the elevator. It made Peter feel a bit warm and fuzzy inside, just like every time Mr. Stark spent time on him. Honestly, with all the time they spent together Peter had practically turned into a particularly plush electric blanket with all the warm fuzzies he was getting.

“You know, you could probably go out in public right now and no one would recognize you.” said Peter as they got in the elevator.

It had become second nature to check appearances in the elevator. Mr. Stark never arrived anywhere looking anything but sharp, and Peter tried not to go out with egregiously large grease stains, especially while on Official Intern Business, so it was necessary when leaving the lab to make sure your sciencing didn’t cause any wardrobe catastrophes.

“Here I am taking you to school out of the goodness of my heart and you rag on my pajamas.” said Mr. Stark.

“Those aren’t pajamas.” said Peter. “Those are the clothes you collapsed in after working overly long hours.”

“If they’re clothes you sleep in, then they’re pajamas.” said Mr. Stark.

“That is a blatantly false statement.” said Peter. “It’s like calling a coconut a mammal because it has hair and milk.”
The discussion descended into absurdity, and by the time the solid black Lamborghini Aventador reached Midtown Tech they’d ended up in an impassioned discussion about whether or not a choco taco counted as a taco since it looked like one (But it’s made of ice cream Pete. That disqualifies it from all tacodom)

And that was the last semi-good moment of Peter’s day that didn’t involve utterly destroying his educational career.

His first class was AP Calc. BC, obviously, because Peter wasn’t an idiot. Still, it was so easy as to be insulting, and the banal problems with lifeless and easy numbers chafed worse and worse every day. Mr. Stark had been teaching him ridiculously difficult hydrodynamics concepts for a satellite launch system he was helping him with. Compared to that… basic derivation problems seemed sort of like single digit addition.

Peter wondered what he would do next year after BC Calc. It was the highest level math class in the school, so he was a bit apprehensive about figuring out what came next. Probably some form of concurrent enrollment, but honestly that would be just as easy. With the kind of science he did, Peter was probably way past that too.

“Hey Penis, nice sweatshirt. Very thrift shop. Probably the closest to college you’ll ever get though, so you should probably relish it.”

Peter rubbed the fabric of Mr. Stark’s old MIT sweatshirt between his thumb and forefinger. The softness of innumerable washings and the unmistakable aftershave/motor oil scent combination kept him grounded enough to ignore the comments.

“Then again,” said Flash to one of his friends. “It’s probably bad advertising for MIT. If people thought they took in people like him…”

The friend laughed, and a glare from the teacher had Flash setting up his books like a good little student, in the front row because Flash believed that if you had your face shoved up against someone’s ass they wouldn’t be able to see how stupid you were.

Peter mentally chastised himself. May had taught him better than that. Flash wasn’t actually stupid. He’d managed the Midtown entrance exams at least, and he was taking BC calc for his senior math credit. Plus he was on the decathlon team and had placed in the science fair the last two years, so clearly there was something upstairs, even if Peter--baby freshman that he was--couldn’t see it.

It didn’t change the fact that Flash’s comments hurt. The content didn’t, obviously, since Peter was fairly sure his obscene GPA and flawless test scores would make him a candidate for just about any college, but the laughter did. Peter was a laughingstock, and he always just laid down and took it like some kind of whipped dog. (What other options did he have? Fight back, get in trouble and be expelled, or whine to the administration, at which point Flash’s rich dad would pay away his complaints and leave Peter in an even worse state.)

A ridiculously loud and overly long bell tone shook Peter out of his thoughts and into first period. Oh joy, math so basic as to be nearly arithmetic.

“Okay class, today we’re going to start with a board quiz!” said Mr. Leedom.

The class groaned at the prospect. Board quizzes were where Mr. Leedom wrote various problems up and then had several different people try to solve them simultaneously, like the world's most humiliating race. The prospect of an extra credit point for being the fastest to a correct answer didn’t take away the emotional pain of answering slowly or wrong.
Peter obviously didn’t have either of those problems, but for him the misery came from a different area. Mr. Leedom was a major fan of ‘showing your work’, which was a concept Peter simply didn’t understand at all. Was he also supposed to write out the proofs for how 1+1=2 every time he had to do that? How much work was he even supposed to show?

Somehow everyone else ended up with the same amount of half-solved write-ups, but Peter could never accomplish that. Stopping to write down your thoughts halfway through solving a problem was a stupid waste of time. He tried anyway, but it was always an uphill battle and he maintained his A only through the miracle of multiple choice tests where you couldn’t be marked down for not showing your work.

“Aaiden, Aaron, Aron and Addie, you’re up. We’ll call you the A-team. Grab your pens and take your starting positions.” said Mr. Leedom. Then he wrote up a basic modeling problem that the students in question proceeded to take multiple minutes on. It was so irritating.

Usually, Peter’s thoughts were fairly charitable. He was a generally nice person, and he understood that people's brains worked differently, and that these people were probably able to do things like interpret poetry or draw cartoons that Peter was completely unable to accomplish. Today, though, he was in a horrible mood. May kicking him out, Flash, and the general misery of boring classes had piled up, and Peter sort of wanted to scream a bit. Or go track down another nest of creepy Chitauri/homeless people hybrids. Violence would be therapeutic.

“Peter, Flash, Jenna, and Bailey, it’s your turn at the board,” said Mr. Leedom “All our under-seventeens. Represent guys.”

Flash smirked at the class, and picked up the red expo marker, pointedly ignoring the fact that Mr. Leedom’s posturing and odd categories of students did not in fact make the class a game show. He was just bragging about the fact that he skipped a grade in elementary school and was a Senior in what should be his junior year. “Going down Penis.” he whispered at Peter. Peter imagined him in twenty years working through his second divorce and trying to relive the glory days of high school. With a beer gut.

Flash scoffed at his glare, and then mimed writing on the board like a particularly dull caveman, marker in fist and a stupid expression on his face. It suited him well.

“Looks like everyone’s ready.” said Mr. Leedom. “A rectangle is to be inscribed in the ellipse x^2/(y^2+4)=1 . What are the dimensions that would maximize the area, and what is the maximum area?”

Before he’d even finished speaking, the students frantically began writing equations, recording the question and beginning to solve it. Peter didn’t bother starting to write until Mr. Leedom was done asking. Then, realizing he was too tired to pretend to ‘work’ on it, he just wrote L=2, W=2, A=4 . Which was the answer. The correct answer, specifically for length width and area.

“Ah, I see Mr. Parker has finished.” said Mr. Leedom with a tone of hostility. The other students stopped their writing. It was no use trying to continue when someone had already finished correctly, earning the extra point. Flash was glaring at him so hard Peter was worried about spontaneous combustion. “Why don’t you take us through your process, Parker. Showing your work is important.”

Now Peter was getting the stink eye from two places.

“You just figure out the coordinates of one of the corners of the rectangle and then double those numbers to find the length and width.” said Peter.
“How do you find the coordinates.” said Mr. Leedom through slightly clenched teeth. He really didn’t like Peter, thought he was ‘showboating’ and ‘corrupting the process with shortcuts that would fail in real life’. There were also complaints about classroom disruption.

“You solve the ellipse equation for the maximum value of x within [0,2], and then plug that back in to find y” said Peter.

“And how do you do that?” prompted Mr. Leedom.

On any other day, Peter would have regurgitated the textbook passage on how to find an absolute maximum. Actually, on any other day he would have attempted to show ‘work’, but he was already far past that point so when he opened his mouth what came out was something that sounded eerily similar to how Peter imagined Mr. Stark would react in this situation. “Math assumably.” he said. “You can read all about it on page 129 of the textbook if you want.”

Mr. Leedom puffed up like an offended bird. “Out.” he said, pointing to the door.”

“OOOOOOOH” said about twelve people in the class.

“Parker’s in trouble!” cheered Flash’s friend.

Flash looked close to bowing, as if he was somehow responsible for the performance art that was Peter getting in trouble. Peter rolled his eyes, and grabbed his binder off of his desk as he left the classroom. He didn’t have the energy to deal with Flash’s garbage.

It took exactly four minutes for Peter to be found by one of the administration. Mr Leedom hadn’t told him to go anywhere, so he’d just been wandering the halls. His original plan was to sit in a bathroom stall and work on the Heartstrings Project (which was what Mr. Stark called his bioprinting idea), but someone had stunk up the nearest bathroom with unspeakable scents. Peter’s overclocked senses could barely stand the bathrooms on a normal day, so he simply wandered the halls, trying to look vaguely like he had a hall pass and was going somewhere.

“Hey kid,” said a lady he recognized from assemblies but didn’t actually know because in a school of thousands he was one small fish. “You got a hall pass?”

Peter sighed. Apparently he’d be ending up in detention again. “No.” he said. “Mr. Leedom asked me to leave, but he didn’t say where I should go.”

“Ah, I see.” said the lady. “That… was out of line. Let’s go to my office and talk.”

Peter nodded and followed the lady over into the counselling offices, which was a relief. He did not want to end up in the main office, since Principal Morita really didn’t like him on account of the whole going-to-DC-and-disappearing thing.

The office they went in was labeled Mrs. Herrera, and featured wedding pictures with a gorgeous wife and a golden retriever, so Peter felt safe in assuming that this lady was, in fact, called Herrera.

The woman sat down and then pushed a dish of small candies in Peter’s direction.

“So, what happened.” she said.

“Mr. Leedom asked me to do a problem on the board, and I did it, but he always likes it when people show their work, so he asked me to explain and I did but he wanted even more and I just… I do harder math mentally all the time. I do harder math playing video games!”
“Video games?” asked Mrs. Herrera

“League of Legends requires multiple variable calculus to optimize magic resistance vs armor vs health. If you do it right. You need Lagrange multipliers which is something that I don’t think Leedom is going to cover.”

Mrs. Herrera laughed. “I swear everyone at this school is more serious about video games than education. If we taught all math as a way to cheat at games like that I don’t think there’d ever be late homework.” she leaned in like she was telling him a secret. “I have seen spreadsheets.”

Peter laughed and leaned in too. “I have made spreadsheets.” he said.

Mrs. Herrera smirked and leaned back. “So, do you want to sit here and complain for a bit--because that’s totally okay--or are you okay with trying to switch things around, find a solution.”

“If you can think of something I’m all ears,” said Peter, unconsciously shifting forward and mentally switching into business mode. Hashing solutions out with people was his jam.

“If you were in a lower level math class I’d probably advocate you testing up into a higher one, but BC Calculus is the highest level class we offer.”

“Yeah.” said Peter. “I have no clue what I’m supposed to do later. I was thinking AP Stats for next year, but after that… Maybe I’ll go for an IB diploma, though I don’t really have a reason to do it since I’m fully on the AP track.”

“Hmm. Tell me your full name, I want to look at your schedule and grades.” said Mrs. Herrera, logging on to her computer.

“Peter Parker.” said Peter.

There was silence for a few seconds. “Let’s see… Peter Benjamin Parker. Unweighted GPA of 4.33, weighted of 5.08… all AP classes except PE and Health, and, dear lord, three school awards for performance at meets for robotics and decathlon. But you’re not doing any extracurriculars anymore… did they bore you?”

“Huh?” asked Peter. He was a bit worried about his Calc grade which had dipped to 107%, which was concerning since Mr. Leedom always added an extra ‘eleventh question’ on every assignment so 110% was entirely possible.

“Answer me honestly Peter. How bored are you.”

Peter frowned guiltily. “I wouldn’t say bored, maybe more just… less challenged and-”

“Okay, bored out of your mind.” said Mrs. Herrera.

Peter nodded. “Was it that obvious?” he said.

She nodded at him “You did an optional extra credit assignment for a class you had more than 100% in Peter, I think I’ve never seen a student be more overprepared.”

“My aunt likes me to do at least an hour of homework every day.” said Peter in his defense. Dragging out English to take longer was never something he was willing to do.

“How long does your full class load of homework take?” asked Mrs. Herrera.

“Depends on the day.” said Peter. “B-day is my easy day, because I’m fluent in Spanish and really
good at math and science so… a half hour maybe? Twenty minutes? Most of that’s the art stuff though. I really struggle there. A-days… English, History, PE, and Health. Probably forty-five minutes at the most. Figuring out how to interpret poetry is nearly as bad as art.”

“Okay. Really left brained then.” said Mrs. Herrera. She took a note. “Have you considered graduating early?”

Peter laughed. “People have been trying to give me a GED since the fourth grade. My Aunt says no though, because she wants me to graduate with my peers, and be able to get scholarships since we don’t have enough money for me to go to college otherwise.”

“I see.” said Mrs. Herrera. “I wasn’t talking about a GED though, I was talking about loading your schedule with the right classes, and taking some online so that you could graduate a year or two early. Next year probably. You wouldn’t be able to enjoy quite as many of Midtown’s excellent electives or extracurriculars, but I don’t think that’s a priority for you anyway.”

“Oh.” said Peter. “My aunt won’t let me do that. I wanted to take English online this year so I could have an extra science class, but she wouldn’t let me. She wants me to have time to be a normal kid. So yeah I want to, but no.”

“I could call her in and talk to her.” said Mrs. Herrera. “Because the fact of the matter is… looking at your grades and the incidents logged in your citizenship profile… I really don’t think you’re going to be happy staying here for four years.”

Peter sighed. “Yeah that’s a no can do. It would just piss her off. She’s already mad about my internship, adding on more school would make her go ballistic.” he noted Mrs. Herrera’s concerned expression. “She thinks I work too hard. She’s worried I’m going to get too stressed and collapse, which is a valid point for me because that does happen, but science is like… the least stressful thing there is for me so…”

“You don’t feel that you’re working too hard because for you it’s all just fun.”

“Yeah.” said Peter. “I have literally the best internship in the whole world.”

Mrs. Herrera got a calculating look in her eye. “Where is it?” she said.

Peter nearly laughed. There went any chance of him getting what he wanted. She’d never believe him, just like everyone else. “Stark Industries.” he said.

“Oh?” said Mrs. Herrera. Yes, there it was, the skepticism.

Peter nodded. “A researcher there saw some things that I’d posted online and wanted to ask further questions about them. One thing led to another, and now I’m allowed to go shadow researchers in Stark tower as long as I bring offerings of coffee.” he said. Technically that was mostly true. Mr. Stark did do research within SI, and he’d noticed Peter because of online content. What he actually did at his internship, however, was downplayed by a lot. Peter had used similar stories several times, because he wanted his cover story to be as realistic as it could. (Funny though that his cover story was actually cover for his cover story that had turned into a real thing)

“Hmm…” said Mrs. Herrera. “Can you give me the contact information of your direct superior?” she asked.

Peter was alarmed. “Why?” he asked.

Mrs. Herrera realized he had no idea what she was talking about and explained. “Higher level
institutions—colleges that is—are allowed to offer college credit for student internships. The same can’t be said for high schools, but a couple years ago a senior got an internship at an up and coming fashion website, and we managed to concurrently enroll them in classes that the college was willing to take credit from internships for. It was a little convoluted, but there’s precedent there. Stark Industries is a big name in science, so if I thought it sounded right I could run it past the coordinator at the college that we use for concurrent enrollment, and you could get all your science credits through logged work hours. Maybe math too, or even economics depending on what exactly you do there.”

“Oh!” said Peter. “I could put other classes in my math and science slots then, and get a head start on graduating.”

“Actually, how I would do it is finish out this semester and then next semester have only one day of in-school classes and take everything else online. Taking a day off of school would definitely decrease your workload, and judging by how fast you do your homework it would streamline everything even more. You could still see your friends—probably on A-Days, and then progress faster on the other day. If you really did it right you could actually graduate this year since all our online courses are self paced, though no pressure.”

“Really?” said Peter.

“Our Cloud Campus here at Midtown works on a sign in any time basis. Once you finish a class you can go right into the next one. All the lectures are on video. Assuming you have the time you could go as fast as you wanted, though there are a lot of hoops to jump through since it’s just homework.”

It was the most beautiful thing Peter had ever heard. “My aunt would hate that so much.” he said. “There’s no way she would ever say yes.”

Mrs. Herrera leaned in. “I have a secret to tell you.” she said. “We actually aren’t required to have guardian consent for schedule changes, though a lot of the time we try to get a parent signature on it so they aren’t mad. Your class schedule is your own. And if you want to schedule four consecutive periods in concurrent enrollment that happens to be an internship or enroll in an online class…”

“Better to ask forgiveness than permission.” said Peter.

“Yeah.” said Herrera. “Worst case she comes in and yells at me to change it back, which I can’t do without your consent.”

“She could remove me from school.” said Peter. “Force me to go to another one.”

“Not if she wants you in college she won’t.” said Mrs. Herrera. “Midtown is the best science school in the state, anything else is a downgrade and she knows it.”

“That’s really tempting.” said Peter.

“You want to give me those contact details for the internship or have time to think about it?” said Mrs. Herrera.

Peter hesitated for a moment. On the one hand this was a terrible idea and May would go ballistic. On the other hand… she’d already kicked him out, and frankly he was sick of her ‘normal kid’ stuff. He wanted to do this, so he would. “Let’s do this thing.” he said.

Mrs. Herrera grinned, and handed him a pad and a pen. “Put the phone number there.” she said. “Is
Peter flashed back to seeing Mr. Stark’s schedule that morning. He would be just in the lab tinkering until lunchtime. “Now’s fine,” he said. Then he pushed the number over to Mrs. Herrera. “You’ll get a secretary first,” he warned.

It was true. He’d given her Mr. Stark’s personal number, but FRIDAY screened all calls, and only sent through ones from familiar numbers. Everyone else had to go through her first.

“That’s just fine,” said Mrs. Herrera.

FRIDAY answered on the first ring, just like she always did because unlike Mr. Stark himself she didn’t have to fumble through eight piles of random junk to find a phone. “Stark Industries R&D, how can I help you?” she said. Peter’s enhanced hearing allowed him to hear the other side of the call perfectly.

“Hi, this is Ella Herrera calling from Midtown School of Science and Technology. One of your interns is enrolled here--a Peter Parker, and I wanted to discuss the possibility of coordinating college credit for his internship.”

“Please hold, and I’ll direct you to his direct supervisor.” said FRIDAY.

Peter realized that he was seconds away from getting to watch Mrs. Herrera realize she’d just called Tony Fucking Stark. He subtly pulled out his phone so he could take a reaction photo. Twelve seconds later, it happened.

“Hi, this is Stark. You called about Peter?” said Mr. Stark.

The expression on Mrs. Herrera’s face was one for the ages. Peter took photos from several angles.

“Yes?” said Mrs. Herrera as she slowly came back to herself. “I noticed he wasn’t being challenged in class, and I’m hoping to arrange for science and math credits to come from his internship so he doesn’t have to sit bored in class.”

“Oh thank god,” said Mr. Stark. “Someone can finally rescue him from secondary education hell.” This made Peter blush.

“I take it you agree that he’s not being challenged then?” said Mrs. Herrera.

“Do I ever.” said Mr. Stark, “That kid’s smarter than me. If you went by knowledge he’d have about seven doctorates.” Peter swiftly became the color of a tomato, moving towards eggplant.

“Good.” said Mrs. Herrera. “I’m so glad he’s got someone else in his corner. Did you know he has literally the highest GPA I’ve ever seen?”

“No but I’ll believe it.” said Mr. Stark. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen him get less than 100% on anything.”

Peter collapsed onto the desk in front of him in mortification. He really hoped Mr. Stark didn’t bring up the fact that there were several assignments taped on the lab fridge. (All English or Art, his hardest classes--the grades he was actually proud of), or even worse mentioned what Peter actually did at his internship.

“Good to hear.” said Mrs. Herrera “So, I’d have to talk it over with someone at the college, and we’d probably need an in person meeting with one of your people, but I’d like to ask now--what
sorts of things does Peter do at the internship, so that I can figure out the paperwork for what classes he can receive credit for.”

Peter groaned against the desk. This was the worst possible thing.

“Do I hear mortified groaning in the background?” asked Mr. Stark. “That must be Peter. Ask him, he knows better than me. He does a lot of work under other scientists. I think he’s involved in… twelve major projects, and has contributed to quite a lot of other ones.”

Mrs. Herrera laughed, and put Mr. Stark on speakerphone.

“I hate you.” said Peter.

Then Mr. Stark laughed at him too.

“So, Peter, what do you do--I mean science and math wise so we can figure out what classes it equates to.”

“Um…” said Peter. “Probably enough to get out of Chemistry, and Physics… Computer science definitely… maybe Biology… I don’t know.”

“All of those things.” said Mr. Stark. “And more. So much more.”

“Can you give specific examples of projects that would apply?” asked Mrs. Herrera, “Or is it a company secret.”

“Let’s see.” said Peter. “I helped with a robotic prosthetics project, and one on tissue engineering, so that’s Biology. Um… for computer science--there was a patch to a bug in the control systems for a laser induced plasma CNC I did.”

“He practically rebuilt the thing too, so you can check physics off your list.” said Mr. Stark. “Running the math for plasma and balancing the overheating issues is definitely a physics thing.”

“Yeah.” said Peter. “I was actually going to count the chitauri scanners as the physics though, because of their particle and wave detection stuff.”

“I put those in the Iron Man suit.” said Mr. Stark to Mrs. Herrera. “Peter’s ideas are so brilliant--you know, he actually designed the improved formula for Spiderman’s webs.”

Mrs. Herrera looked intrigued. “Really?” she said. “That’s chemistry then. Does he do work on Avengers tech often?”

“Well there aren’t many Avengers left, but Peter’s the only person besides myself I’d trust to design or maintain anything, he-”

“Anyway.” interrupted Peter before they could enter an embarrassing tangent. “That’s science. What about math? Where do you think I am there?”

“He’s certainly past calculus.” said Mrs. Herrera.

“He’s past everything.” said Mr. Stark. “I don’t think there’s a high school or college class that could teach Peter anything about math--or science come to that. When he does come up on something he doesn’t know he can learn it in about five minutes. That’s the great thing about Peter--he can go from amateur to expert overnight.”

“Well it’s certainly caused a lot of problems in his education.”
“Yeah.” said Mr. Stark. “If he likes a topic he’ll be done with it within a week. I can’t count the times he’s said he doesn’t know something, and then comes back the next day with an idea I didn’t even think of.”

Peter was about to say something, but Mrs. Herrera continued before he could.

“Which isn’t conducive to learning in the standard system.” said Mrs. Herrera. “Was there anything else you think Peter’s covered?”

“He’s done a couple things with the marketing team, shadowed me on some accords things, and I was thinking of sticking him under someone on the business side at some point. I wouldn’t know what’s good there though— I don’t know enough about high schools to know what’s required.”

“New York requires a semester of Economics, and one of Participation in Government. Do you think Peter’s covered that?”

“Not all of it yet, but he will.”

“Great…” said Mrs. Herrera. “I think that’s all for now, though I will need an in person meeting at some point with one of your people. If you could send over examples of Peter’s work or educational opportunities in each area we’ve discussed, that would be great too.”

“I’ll get right on it.” said Mr. Stark. “How soon can you have the meeting?”

“I’ll have to talk to the college people.” said Mrs. Herrera. “Does some time next week sound good?”

“Sure.” said Mr. Stark. “Talk it over with my secretary when you’re ready— same phone number— and I’ll get things arranged on my end.”

“Thank you. Peter’s a brilliant kid, I’m glad he has support.”

“He’s the best. Oh and Pete— I’m sending a car to pick you up today.”

“Thanks Mr. Stark.” said Peter.

“Anytime. See you, and good luck with the college people.” said Mr. Stark.

Mrs. Herrera opened her mouth to say something, but there was an explosion in the background of the call, and the connection was quickly cut off.

“Well.” said Mrs. Herrera. “That was certainly something.”

Peter grinned. “I got the best reaction photo.” he said. “It’s like… meme quality”

Mrs. Herrera raised an eyebrow, and Peter flipped his own phone to show her. She laughed.

“Can I tweet it?” asked Peter. “Not like, to embarrass you or anything, but it’s really funny and also expresses exactly how I felt when I got the internship in the first place, so…”

“Sure.” said Mrs. Herrera. “Why not.”

Peter grinned. “Thanks.”

The bell signalling the end of the first period.
“You fine going to your second class?” asked Mrs. Herrera.

“Yeah.” said Peter. “Um… Thank you. I’ve known you for like a half hour, and you totally saved my butt for the next four years.”

“It’s what I do professionally” said Mrs. Herrera. “Have fun in class.”

“You too.” said Peter. “I mean, not have fun in class but just… yeah. I’m going to go now.” he left the room with his tail between his legs. Why did he have to go and say that?

Chapter End Notes

So for everyone that commented on the last chap, I am so sorry I’ve been terrible with replies. I sort of got a little overwhelmed? Anyway, hello again, sorry for the gap, it’s been that time of year where I pretend the lack of sun in this northern clime has no effect on my mental health and then go into a three week depression nap.

As a general reply to all your support--You guys made me cry like… a lot, and some of it got me through a bit of a rough patch there. I am so grateful for how supportive this fandom has been overall, and how interactive you guys are. Thank you so much (: 

Also--everybody go check out the podfic, it's fantastic!!! This chapter is dedicated to our lovely podficcer NonExistentArtist whose voice could make angels cry, and also to the guidance counsellor who graduated me from high school through beuracratic bull-shittery despite my 45% attendance rate. School administrators who hate the American School system and allow their students to find loopholes through it are the backbone of our society.
After the whole being-kicked-out-of-calculus thing, Peter managed to avoid Flash until lunch. Through a miracle from god Flash had already taken Chemistry on another year and was in Physics, so Peter got to enjoy a Flash-free class before the inevitable reckoning.

“Hey Penis,” called Flash as Peter sat down with his paper bag full of meal replacement bars and leftover mushroom piccata. Peter sighed heavily. “Did they kick you out yet?”

Peter glared at Flash. “That’s not how expulsion works dumb-ass.” he said. The same Starkness that had caused him to act out in class seemed to be happening here too. “Which you should know considering what happened to you.”

Flash glared and puffed up like an offended bird. He was sensitive about the fact that he had been suspended and nearly expelled the last year over a stunt involving spray glue and the girls locker rooms. (His father had gotten him out of it with a nice fat check.) “Well I actually deserve to be here.” he said, “which can’t be said about you.”

Things were about to escalate, and Peter was mentally kicking himself for sassing back. Every time he ‘stood up for himself’ it just made Flash worse. It was better just to take it.

Peter was saved by the sudden arrival of MJ “I can show you what it’s like to be kicked off of academic decathlon.” she said.

Flash backed down like a well trained dog. MJ was always good on her threats, and being kicked off a team might ruin him for the Ivy League.

Then MJ plopped down in front of Peter. “Hey loser.” she said.

“Hi MJ.” said Peter. “How’s it hangin’.”

“Pretty great.” she said. “How’s the educational fast track coming along?”

Peter stared at her. “How do you know this?”

MJ held up her phone. On it was Peter’s twitter post of Mrs. Herrera’s reaction photo.

“That moment when you realize you’re talking to @tonystark” read off MJ. “It’s an easy deduction.”

“How the hell is that easy?” asked Peter.

“That’s the guidance counselor and her computer’s up to the class scheduling page. Plus you have the Cloud Campus information sheet in front of you on the table.”

“MJ is basically Sherlock Holmes,” said Ned, walking up to the table with his recently microwaved container of… mystery leftovers that smelled amazing.

“How dare you.” said MJ “I am much less white and annoying.”

Ned laughed. MJ glared. Ned shut up. MJ’s glare was dangerous.
“But seriously though,” said Ned. “How did it go. And is it true that you got kicked out of calculus? I heard from a dude who was there that you totally shat all over the lesson plan.”

Peter shrugged. “I just didn’t show my work well enough.”

MJ made a special type of glare that was MJese for ‘elaborate on that statement or I will kill you’. “I may have also made a salty comment.” said Peter. “About how if he wanted an explanation of the math he should check the book.”


MJ nodded. “Yeah,” she said. “Now let’s get back to the matter at hand--what’s happening with your classes.”

“Yeah.” said Ned. “Why was the counselor lady calling Mr. Stark?”

Peter took a moment to chew and then explained what all was going on with his education. “Basically,” he said once he’d laid out the broad strokes, “We’re just counting work as school and I will only have to do homework.”

“Wow.” said Ned.

“Now I only have to put up with you one day instead of two.” said MJ. She looked vaguely congratulatory about this.

“Ookey then.” said Peter.

“I will miss you though.” said Ned

“I’m going for two to three days of the week, not forever Ned.” said Peter. “Besides, it doesn’t start until the new semester which isn’t until like… February.”

“January fifteenth” corrected MJ.


Ned grinned.


“Shut up.” said Peter.

Suddenly Ned got a notification on his phone. He glanced at it, dismissed it, and then brought it back and stared at it like it had turned into a taco. “Peter.” he said. “PETER.”

“What?” said Peter.

“Tony Stark just retweeted you.”

“Pete… Pete, wake up.”

Peter made a strange moaning noise and rolled over.

“Peter. PEter PETer PETer PETER.” said Mr. Stark, poking Peter every time he said his name
despite Peter’s squirming. Peter’s strange sixth sense allowed him to predict where the finger would be coming from, but that didn’t make him conscious enough to avoid it.

“Go away.” said Peter.

“I can.” said Mr. Stark, “But I did want to ask you if you’re going to school today.”

Peter sat up instantly. School! He’d totally forgotten. And he was at the tower because… May! For a moment he hadn’t remembered what had happened. He didn’t know if he could handle any more of that, with school being so hard and Flash, and May, and everything.

“Hey,” said Mr. Stark softly, obviously sensing his panic. “Don’t focus on it all at once. You’ve got time yet. You’re already pre-excused from school today anyway, but we’re not leaving until noon-ish, so if you wanted you could hit the first couple classes and grab your homework, or you can stay here. Your choice.”

Peter sighed. Yesterday had been horrible, and he had resolved to be very responsible so May would take him back, but if he was honest with himself he didn’t think this was going to affect that nearly as much as what he’d done to his education the day before. All the same, he needed to keep moving or he’d stew in it and break down. “I…” he paused to yawn, “I think I’m going to…” he changed tack mid-sentence “stay here.”

“Okay cucciolo.” said Mr. Stark. In the morning light his face seemed soft. “I’ll just let you sleep a little more then.”

Peter groaned, and rolled out of bed. “Nah,” he said. Then he yawned again. “I’m up anyway. And besides Mr. Stark…”

“What?” said Mr. Stark, when Peter paused dramatically.

“Pancakes.” said Peter. “I want to make pancakes.” Doing things. He could focus on breakfast and then Geneva, and everything else wouldn’t matter for a while.

Mr. Stark looked somewhat surprised. “Why do you want to do that?” he asked.

Peter was still somewhat asleep, so logic hadn’t quite caught up with him yet. “You only ever make eggs or smoothies,” he said. “Or takeout. And I want pancakes. Therefore…”

Peter lost the train of thought, but Mr. Stark had him covered. “I don’t know if we have the ingredients,” he said.

“We have coffee,” said Peter. “And FRIDAY. We can overcome any obstacle.”

Mr. Stark laughed, and they went into the kitchen where the coffee was already brewing.

Once it was finished, Mr. Stark poured two mugs and slid one over to Peter who had wilted onto one of the bar-stools. “Ah,” said Peter. “Black as my soul.”

Mr. Stark snorted. “Your soul is the color of milk Peter,” he said.

Peter glared at him, but neither of them was awake enough for a proper argument, so it waited until they were on their second cups.

“FRIDAY,” said Peter. “Recipe. And make sure it’s a good one.”

“Here you go.” said FRIDAY. “This one is rated as both easy, and very delicious.”
“What? Don’t you trust us?” asked Mr. Stark.

“I’ve never cooked before.” said FRIDAY. She seemed somewhat nervous in a very calm AI sort of way.

Mr. Stark sighed. “Oh yeah.” he said. “I haven’t really made anything since Malibu got blown up… I forgot about that.”

“I can totally mix pancake batter.” said Peter. “My uncle made them every Saturday, and I always helped, until…”

There was a moment of silence, until “Do we even have flour?” asked FRIDAY.

Mr Stark huffed a laugh. “I have no idea.” he said. “The Avengers only ever lived here for like… five minutes during the HYDRA/Ultron fiasco before the compound was made, and the only thing I’ve cooked since is omelettes, toast, and cold cereal.”

“Let’s do inventory.” said Peter. “Open ALL the cupboards.” he said, flinging open one after another.”

“And then close them.” said Mr. Stark, following Peter around and closing them, “Because we are both very short and don’t need to hit our heads on the bottom corners.”

“Joy-killer.” said Peter, opening more cupboards. Most of them were empty. A few had random dishes. One or two had ended up as storage for random pieces of technology, which was something that tended to happen with any horizontal or enclosed surface near Mr. Stark.

In the end, all the cupboards and drawers in the kitchen yielded was dry cereal, coffee, random junk, nine mismatched plates, a few forks, and twenty-seven coffee mugs.

“This is sad.” said Peter. “Even the lab has more kitchenware than this.”

Mr. Stark shrugged. “I don’t really spend much time up here.” he said. “Honestly I only leave the lab to sleep or go somewhere else.”

“That’s valid.” said Peter. “But it doesn’t excuse the fact that your fridge only has like… five things in it.”

“The real fridge is in the lab.” said Mr. Stark.

“Ah, yes,” said Peter. “The overstuffed mini fridge that was originally just for drinks. How could I forget.”

“Check the freezer.” said Mr. Stark. “If we had any ingredients the cleaning people might put them there to save them.”

Peter did, and his search yielded fruit--specifically a half full bag of flour of indeterminate age. “Victory.” he said.

Mr. Stark squinted. “Oh I remember that.” he said. “Somebody tried to make cookies. Keyword tried.”

“We’re not just going to try.” said Peter. “We’re going to succeed.”

It took a little bit of digging to find such things as baking powder and they ended up using lab-ware as measuring cups, but in the end they had everything.
“It’s my time to shine,” said Peter as he mixed with something that was decidedly not a mixing spoon. “I am the pancake mixing king. Did it every week for my entire childhood.”

“I don’t know.” said Mr. Stark. “It looks a little lumpy.”

“It’s supposed to be that way.” said FRIDAY. “According to my research, if you make pancake batter totally smooth then the pancakes end up rubbery.”

“I suppose you guys are the experts,” said Mr. Stark, tapping Peter on the nose with a flour covered finger. Peter giggled. “Get the pan.” he said.

About five minutes later, Peter and Mr. Stark stood in front of the counter staring at their stacks of pancakes. “There… is no syrup.” said Peter.

Mr. Stark nodded. “I don’t really know what I expected,” he said. “So do you want to eat these plain?”

Peter wracked his brain for a solution. Eventually he found one. “I’ll be back in a minute,” he said, sprinting down to the lab.

He returned half a minute later with the squeezy bottle of chocolate sauce that Mr. Stark claimed was the perfect offset for the slight chalkiness of Stark Raving Hazelnut ice cream. “I am a genius.” he said. “I’ve totally fixed our syrup problem.”

“Yes.” said Mr. Stark drizzling his pancakes. “No one could ever have thought of this before. It’s totally unique.”

“Look.” said Peter, snagging the bottle and starting in on his own cakes. “I came out to have a good time and I honestly feel so attacked right now.”

Mr. Stark made a confused face at him and Peter frowned. “Remind me to give you a crash course on meme culture, tumblr, and standard response formats in the modern era.”

“I’m picking those up by osmosis.” said Mr. Stark. “I honestly think that at this point I know more vines than most actual teenagers.”

“And I’m very proud, but you still have room to improve.” said Peter.

“I’m sure you’ll slip the relevant compilations into your reports at some point.” said Mr. Stark. “Though honestly I have no idea how they make it in. I have FRIDAY screen for non-relevant material. My time is precious Peter.”

“FRIDAY agrees with me that you need more joy in your life.” said Peter. “She has them under a new accepted category called ‘life enhancers.’ Even she enjoys them.”

“Is this true FRIDAY?” asked Mr. Stark

“Interpreting humor can be a surprisingly fascinating study. Since Peter’s introduction to such things my ability to ‘take a joke’ has increased by twenty-three percent.” said FRIDAY proudly.

“And you really don’t have a leg to stand on Mr. Stark.” said Peter. “I mean--you do watch them.”

“You have no proof of that.” said Mr. Stark.

“Actually I do.” said Peter. “I’ve quoted vines on several occasions where you gave the correct response without me specifically telling you or forcing you to watch the vine.”
“Maybe I’m just trying not to offend you.” said Mr. Stark.

“Maybe you’re secretly a softy.” said Peter. “No use trying to hide. Genius, Billionaire, Philanthropist, Bleeding Heart.”

“I am not a bleeding heart.” scoffed Mr. Stark, but Peter kept right on going.

“Literally. You have heart problems. And if karma is a thing you’re going to be reincarnated as a pit bull in a happy home with three children who constantly shower you with love. It’s what you deserve.”

“I deserve to be a pit bull” said Mr. Stark flatly.

“That was a compliment!” said Peter “They’re the cutest! And you forgot the part about being constantly showered with love.”

“I’d rather be Tony Stark.” said Mr. Stark. “I think… I think I’ve got everything I need.”

Peter grinned at him over the pancakes. He was making that face again. The soft one. It wasn’t an expression, exactly, just… a way of being. Like all of his sharp edges and frown-lines had been attacked with a magic eraser for twenty-three minutes. It made Peter glow with happiness.

“Do you have something to do on the plane?” asked Mr. Stark.

Peter gave him a Look. He wasn’t five. “It’s only seven hours Mr. Stark. I think I’ll survive with just the tablet full of half finished engineering work.”

“Actually, I got cleared to use the quinjet for this so it’s only two and a bit. Perks of being the fastest plane on the planet.”

“Really?” said Peter. “I thought the agreement was that ‘military enabled aircraft’ like the quinjet could only be used for official Avenger business which is why you go all the way out to La Guardia and get on such old fashioned and low class things as private planes for the rest of your business trips.”

Mr. Stark laughed. “Technically the accords is Avengers business. And besides, what’s the use of installing a launch bay in your tower if you don’t get to use it. I gave up my nice balcony for that.” he leaned in then. “Also, that ruling won’t stand for long. Just as soon as I get a non-weaponized quinjet. Soon you’ll never have to go to an airport again.”

“I was so worried.” said Peter. Then he shrugged. “I’ve actually never been to an airport besides Leipzig, and that was on a Quinjet. So… never been on a regular airplane.”

“Be very glad Peter. Customs agents are evil.” said Mr. Stark, ”They like to steal your bananas.”

“I’ll take your word for it.” said Peter.

They took the stairs down to the launch bay which was on top of the rest of the tower but below the living quarters. Floor 103-105 held nothing except that and a ready room full of weapons. Two quinjets sitting in the dividing area between the actual business part of Stark industries and the top ten levels devoted to Avengerness--four levels of labs, and six levels of sad sad lack of people in what could have been a home. According to Mr. Stark the four levels had originally been half labs and half a large socialization space used for Avengers events, but after the last party when Ultron
happened he’d given up on that idea and taken the space for himself. Some of the fabrication units for the Iron Man technology were large, after all, and the view was fantastic.

This time, Mr. Stark let Peter into the co-pilot's seat. “Usually FRIDAY flies.” he said, “But in case she gets cut off it’s good to know. Or if there was a combat situation. I love my AI’s, but for some reason they struggle with the spacial awareness and instinct necessary in an actual fight. Leave your suits hung over there on the bar--yes right there, and there should be a compartment about the size of your duffel over by the--yeah there you go. Now come up here and I’ll show you how to fly.”

Peter bounced into the seat. He noticed that unlike the utilitarian seats in the back, this one was nice and ergonomic. “Wow, this is the best seat in the house.” he said.

“That it is.” said Mr. Stark. “I figured super soldiers could handle the back problems when I redesigned it off of SHIELD’s stuff, so I didn’t bother changing the passenger layout for much except the weapons storage. The driver's seat on the other hand… I’m an old man with back problems sue me. Okay, looks like FRI is good on the pre-flight checks, and has taken a peek at air traffic over the city, so we’re good to go. Wanna push the button?”

“Yes!” said Peter. “This is basically the best day ever.” Then he pushed the button.

The aircraft catapult launched them quickly into the air, and the quiet repulsor-engines glowed blue as they engaged. Mr. Stark laughed at Peter.

As New York fell away behind them, Mr. Stark seemed to relax back into his seat. “So,” he said, “Your second bit of international travel. Care to do more in the future?”

Peter smiled. “Always.” he said. “I’ve never really been a lot of places, but I’ve liked everywhere I’ve ever been. Except when Ben tried to take me camping. That was terrible. Otherwise I really like seeing new stuff.”

“You didn’t really see anything in Germany.” said Mr. Stark.

“I saw a full scale Avengers fight Mr. Stark. That was pretty impressive.” said Peter.

“I suppose,” said Mr. Stark.

Peter hit himself mentally. Bringing up the rogue avengers was a fantastic way to make Mr. Stark feel terrible. “Do you like travel?” he asked.

Mr. Stark shrugged. “I do. Or rather I used to.” he said. “As I’ve gotten older though… I’ve wanted more and more to settle down. Leave home maybe once or twice a year for something purely fun, and stick around the same few places otherwise. Never leave the lab. You know, like a regular human being. Used to be, though, I never settled anywhere. I was essentially nomadic for an entire decade.”

“Really?” asked Peter.

“Yeah.” said Mr. Stark. “After my parents died… I was twenty-one and had to leave my second doctoral work at Cambridge behind for a couple weeks to attend the funeral and deal with everything. They had this huge house in Westchester where I grew up… I closed it down then, threw a couple dust sheets over everything and didn’t look back. After I left Cambridge I traveled near constantly through the different parts of Stark Industries. My father liked to own at least one apartment in every city we did business in, and the bigger ones had labs so I was… content. Didn’t actually move to Malibu until 2001 though and that… first real home I ever had. I worked on the
place for months--only used an architect to keep it physically possible and make sure I didn’t do anything stupid like forget a kitchen. It was… gorgeous. I never wanted to leave.”

“Why are you still in New York then?” asked Peter. “You could rebuild, couldn’t you?”

Mr. Stark shrugged. “I… I loved Malibu, but I think I was always a New Yorker at heart. The tower’s never been home, but the city certainly is. Has been since I was little and hanging around my dad’s workplace half the time. It’s… nice to live somewhere that big. I can disappear in the crowd a bit. Go out to eat without hundreds of assholes with cameras, because there are thousands here who’ve copied my look. And it’s always been the beating heart of SI even when I was out at Malibu and those labs were marked as the main ones on all the paperwork. Before Iron Man, before the Avengers, I was an engineer. Still am, and New York is the place for that.”

“Not going to argue with you there.” said Peter. “New York is the best. Sucks that you still don’t have a decent house though, I mean seriously--you make billions every year personally. You own the biggest company on the planet. How the hell do you not have a real house. With like… flour and shit. Also maple syrup. And bedrooms that don’t look like they were imported directly from an upscale hotel with no personality.”

Mr. Stark laughed. “I don’t have the time anymore,” he said. “Though I actually have considered moving into one of the smaller apartments meant for the Avengers who liked privacy.”

“There’s apartments up there?” asked Peter.

“Yeah.” said Mr. Stark. “Two levels of common areas guest rooms and smaller suites, and four levels with full apartments on the top where the tower is narrowest. I… when I first designed it, after the chitauri invasion… I thought we weren’t just going to be some response team. I thought we were… I don’t know, going to be like some kind of overly familiar superhero sitcom. It obviously didn’t turn out that way, and I ended up in an echoey empty mansion just like I started in. My parents Westchester house always had too much room as well.”

“I didn’t know that.” said Peter. “I honestly had no clue what was up there.”

“They’re all closed up.” said Mr. Stark. “Pepper used to live up there, before the breakup, and Rhodey still uses his room sometimes, but otherwise it’s just you and me. When I have the time, I’ve been playing with putting in some more lab space. Everything up there’s hulk-proof, and honestly Pete I have to say I’m getting sick of going downstairs to test things that might explode larger than the containment room can handle. And also there’s this new imposition in my labs. Keeps showing up all the time. I’m going to need to compensate for that. Reclaim my space, as it were.”

Peter snorted. It was true. Somehow Mr. Stark had managed, over the course of his lifetime, to accumulate enough random lab gear, projects, and plain old junk to fill a full four floors that were almost as big as football fields. (though the testing room was already pretty big, some of the floor-plans were mostly non existent for three storey ceilings, and a lot of the equipment was truly enormous.). Still, with the addition of Peter’s stuff, the tables were getting a bit cluttered, and the clean holographic aesthetic was ruined.

“I’ve been wanting a biotech lab,” he said. “I’m sick of using Dr. Cho’s for my stuff, and I’m nearly ready to do testing on the first stage of the heart thing. She yells.”

Mr Stark smirked at him. “It’s not like we don’t have the space,” he said.

Peter nodded. Dr. Cho’s lab was fine, but the real reason he was complaining was an ulterior
motive. Mr. Stark was miserable in the current Avengery penthouse, but he wouldn’t change anything until he had a reason. Peter was perfectly willing to whine and become that reason.

“And would you look at that.” said Peter. “We have a full two hours before we land in Geneva. Definitely enough time to get started since not having time is a major reason the depressing hole still exists. Let’s use it.”

Mr. Stark rolled his eyes. “Pull up a new project with a copy of the floor plan,” he grumbled.

“And title it ‘Purging Assholes From Our Lives.’” said Peter.

“What? No.” said Mr. Stark. “It has to shorten to a word as an acronym. You don’t understand how this works.”

“Pafol is a word now.” said Peter. “I just made it up. It means to kick someone out of your life like you’re exfoliating their negativity until you shine.”

Mr. Stark sighed. “Whatever you say,” he said. Then he zoomed in on the plans. “So, biotech lab,” he said. “How big?”

Peter squinted at the plans. “I think we’re getting ahead of ourselves,” he said. “We need to pafol before we start adding things.”

“Valid point.” said Mr. Stark. “Okay… Friday, get rid of everything. Let’s just start from the beginning. Make a list of what goes into a real house.”

The entire next couple hours were spent coming up with plans for the remodel. Some of them were ridiculous, but a lot of them were fantastic.

In the end, they ended up with the beginnings of a plan that would work.

The half of the labs that used to be an event space would go back to being an event space, and the labs themselves would extend to the top of the building to make up for the deficit. Peter would get the smallest two floors on the very top all for himself, and Mr. Stark was thinking about putting projects with other people he wanted to directly supervise on the bottom few, leaving five half-floors for his own private labs, a full half floor more than he’d had before.

The ‘house’ part of the building would end up a lot smaller, only two half floors--about the size of a large house in the suburbs. Four bed, three bath. As modest as a billionaire could get, though nothing in the tallest building in New York could be called modest. Still, it would be a major coziness upgrade from the Avengers mausoleum.

“FRI will get people started on ripping out the apartments and unnecessary spaces even today.” said Mr. Stark as they slowed upon their approach to Geneva. “We still need to figure out the exact layout for what’s replacing them. Probably call an architect to make sure we don’t fuck up, but I have no problems with letting the loud and annoying part happen while I’m not there.

“Sound judgement.” said Peter. “And for the record, the kitchen needs to be red.”

“Eh,” said Mr. Stark. “What the hell. Making impulsive choices about my living spaces has been my bread and butter for years.”

Peter squinted at him. “You have been weirdly chill about this.” he said.

“I’ve been wanting to do it for awhile, just haven’t had the time,” said Mr. Stark. “And let me tell
you, I do not lack any hesitation. I’ve taken a sledgehammer to my own walls more times than I can count.”

“Plus the whole remodel-for-people-you-just-met thing.” Put in FRIDAY. “It took you exactly three hours after you were released from debriefing and medical checks to begin planning spaces for the Avengers.”

“Don’t remind me.” said Mr. Stark. “It’s not one of my better moments.”

The bitterness had returned yet again, but Peter didn’t try to change the subject. Feeling bitter about the Avengers was valid, and Mr. Stark probably ought to stop avoiding it (internally, Peter realized he was being a hypocrite, given the fact he’d managed to avoid even a single thought about Aunt May in the last twenty-four hours, but ever since Ben, Peter had become a champion at denial, so he’d try to work through that later) “Pafol Mr. Stark.” he said. “They’re gone, and soon the evidence of them will be gone too.”

“I’d drink to that, if I still drank.” said Mr. Stark, glancing over Geneva as they came to a gentle landing. “It’ll be nice to have a home again.”

“Yeah.” said Peter. He felt a little bit like he’d been dunked in ice, remembering that he currently didn’t have one. After he’d cried himself out on Mr. Stark (which had been horribly embarrassing), he’d spent the rest of his time either angry at May, or completely ignoring the issue. Now… he was reminded of why he’d been crying in the first place. Still, it would be better to just push it aside and wait until after Geneva to break down again. He needed to be normal right now.

Chapter End Notes

Holy shit I have like... several bookmarks? and hits now? and an inboX wItH a hUndrEd uNreAd coMmeNts???!!?? when did that happen (Imma read them but responses are probs not gonna happen unless it's a question. Sorry I just got behind during the Great Nap of 2019 with associated Wendy’s Binge, but don't let that stop you because I do read them and blush heavily). This fandom is the best and I love you dearly.

Also, my doctor changed some things and I have more energy now (!) so I'm implementing an actual update schedule again instead of Whenever I Feel Up To Writing Instead Of Like A Plastic Bag Drifting Through The Wind Waiting To Start Again Because That's How Things Are Sometimes. Sundays are MPDC days now! You don't have to be surprised when Ao3 emails you. You don't have to click refresh 800 times while glaring at the screen as if it'll summon an update. (is it just me that does that?)
“Okay.” said Mr. Stark. “Babies first gala. You’ve got everything straight?”

“Yeah.” said Peter. “FRI quizzed me on everything. And it still feels like only two pm, so I’ll definitely be able to last until it ends.”

“Good.” said Mr. Stark. He fussed with Peter’s hair just a bit more, and straightened his tie. “We can leave at any time. Just say the word cucciolo, and we’re out.”

“I know, I know.” said Peter. “I’ve got this.”

Mr. Stark sighed. “And I realize that, but I want you to remember that you’ve got a choice.” he said. “My dad was stuffing me in suits and dragging me to events by the time I was six, and I always hated it. I didn’t bring you here to be miserable or uncomfortable.”

Peter grinned. “I’m perfectly comfortable.” he said. “You have an excellent tailor. Seriously, I think this is the highest thread count of fabric I’ve ever touched.”

“Not what I meant Pete.” said Mr. Stark. “I just…”

“I’ll be fine.” said Peter. “I want to be here. And besides, it’s the Wakandan Embassy. I’m sure there’ll be at least one person whose interesting there.”

“Let’s go then.” said Mr. Stark. He leaned over Peter to open the door, but Peter was wise to his tricks and used the opportunity to go in for a hug.

Instead of protesting, Mr. Stark gave up and briefly hugged back. Peter had trained him well. He wasn’t quite to the hug initiator stage--he’d only done it once or twice--but Peter had been slowly increasing frequency of hugs and affection in the worlds weirdest exposure therapy until he’d reached a point where he could, at any time, intrude on Mr. Stark’s personal bubble without a hint of discomfort from either party. It was one of Peter’s proudest achievements.

As they walked into the event, Mr. Stark’s hand came up to squeeze Peter’s shoulder briefly, and he added yet another tally to the victory column. Hugging might still be mostly beyond Mr. Stark, excepting cases of Serious Emotional Upset, but hair-ruffling and shoulder-squeezing belonged in the same category, and it was happening more and more often, a fact that Peter attributed to the success of his Tony-Stark-Needs-Hugs program.

“One of the nice things about embassies.” muttered Mr. Stark, too soft for an unenhanced human to hear, “Is that the external security never lets in hordes of press, only a few, mostly doing written accounts. This isn’t much of a party--more of a networking event--so any fuck-ups will mostly only reflect on the accords instead of a boatload of public shame.”

“I’m glad you have so much faith in me,” said Peter sarcastically, just loud enough for Mr. Stark to hear. “It’s not like these negotiations will affect my entire future or anything.”

As they passed through the final set of doors, Peter heard Mr. Stark huff softly in laughter. “That’s what amendments are for, and don’t forget you’re not anybody important at the moment. Just an
“Intern. As long as you don’t do anything egregiously stupid we’ll be fine.”

“Just look cute?” said Peter, turning to smile at Mr. Stark.

“And learn. That is what you’re actually here for.” said Mr. Stark.

“Can do.” said Peter, gazing around.

The Wakandan embassy was a marvel of architecture, in clean silver and blue with bright Wakandan murals around the walls. Proudly displayed were several beautiful pieces of art, and the technology was subtly ahead of its time. The only place Peter had been that was more hi-tech was Stark Tower, and he had a feeling this place had nothing on the real Wakanda.

Even more impressive than the building was the people. They weren’t quite prom formal, but it was still very much a dress-up sort of event, and they all seemed to be socializing. Peter could tell from miles away that the majority of the conversations revolved around the accords and other similar international issues. There was quite a bit of leveraging and finessing going on, and Peter wondered whether this sort of thing was actually corruption or just good negotiation. He’d ask Mr. Stark later, but from what he could hear they weren’t evil, just pushing for a better deal for their specific country. The UN itself wouldn’t be pushing though, so he figured it was probably fine. After all, most of the talking was about minutiae affecting specific countries, and Peter was of the opinion that those countries knew more about what they wanted than he did. The accords might protect the enhanced, but they also needed to protect everybody else too.

“-my intern, Peter. I brought him because he has particular experience in the unique tools and weaponry covered under the Accords.”

Peter snapped back to the conversation he was actually on the fringes of, beside and slightly behind Mr. Stark. Most of his attention had been elsewhere, but he had been listening enough to know they were exchanging basic pleasantries, and the one from Nigeria who Peter hadn’t caught the name of had been thanking Mr. Stark for his assistance in rebuilding the damaged area of Lagos. Peter could tell he wasn’t being genuine about it, but the man was being polite so Peter wasn’t about to say so.

“Oh?” asked a rather heavyset man who Peter suspected as coming from somewhere that used to belong to the Soviet Union. “What experience is that?”

Mr. Stark’s attention sharpened a bit on him, and Peter knew he was up, though it was nice knowing Mr. Stark would catch him if he stalled.

“I designed some of the stuff used by Spiderman.” he said. “It’s how Dr. Stark actually learned about me--when he recruited Spiderman during Rogers’ defection. Since then I have had the opportunity to work on several of the systems used by the former Avengers.” said Peter. It was a nice canned answer Mr. Stark had helped come up with to respond to the question ‘who the hell is this kid and why is he here’, one that Peter suspected he’d be hearing a lot of.

“Including the Iron Man suit.” said Mr. Stark. Peter had known about his tendency to brag from the start, but it never made it less embarrassing when it extended to Peter. “He’s brilliant. I imagine he’ll be highly involved with the future of the Avenger’s initiative.”

Peter smiled awkwardly.

“That is good then.” said the one from somewhere in Eastern Europe (FRIDAY had offered to let Peter look at dossiers on the guest list, and he really should have taken her up on that, but he’d
figured it was too stalkery. After all, they weren’t even supposed to have the guest list, but Vibranium wasn’t a magic tech enhancer when it came to software so once you understood Wakandan it was child's play to hack in—providing you were also a Stark, or adjacent to one.) “I hold that such things are much more important than some supersoldier. Who cares if you can punch things? The future is in weapons more than lab rats and aberrations.”

Peter’s pleasant face became strained, but Mr. Stark was there to rescue him.

“That’s why programs like the Iron Legion are so important,” he said. “Good technology for search and rescue as well as evacuations save a lot more lives than individual people fighting on the ground.”

“Especially when those people arm themselves with a glorified trash can lid.” said Peter, distractedly. He thought he could see a movement on the other side of the room, as if something was about to happen.

He hadn’t really intended to make a funny comment, but there was polite chuckles from all around, and the Nigerian person raised an eyebrow. “And what would you arm a superhero with?” he said, slightly mockingly. ‘Superhero’ really wasn’t a word anybody serious used when describing the Avengers or other enhanced, even when they were following the textbook definition, but it was used a lot by kids. Nice, they were mocking his age.

Peter smirked, coming up with a Stark-worthy one liner on the spot. Talking to Mr. Stark was good practice for coming up with those sorts of things. “Common sense, rules of engagement, and an Iron Man suit loaded with both lethal and non-lethal weaponry.” he said.

“I’d drink to that.” said the other person in the conversation--a lady who’d been mostly quiet till now. Peter couldn’t tell where she was from. Somewhere white. Her accent was flawlessly transatlantic.

The conversation had drawn a bit of attention, Mr. Stark tended to do that just by existing, and Peter spotted a lady with a notepad out of the corner of his eye. One of the minimally present reporters then.

Thankfully, they stopped paying attention to Peter then, and he faded into the background, like Mr. Stark’s shadow, while watching the masterclass that was Mr. Stark manipulating people. Somehow he managed to imply to the Eastern European that his ideas about Avengers technology trickling down didn’t require plans for them to be released to the UN since there would be so much transparency while simultaneously assuring the Nigerian and unspecified lady that those plans would never get out at all.

Five minutes later, when the conversation ended, Peter’s mind was reeling. Mr. Stark was creepily good at that.

The commotion on the other side of the room had increased by a bit, and people were turning towards it. As they did, Peter leaned into Mr. Stark. “How did you get them to go away believing entirely opposite things?” he asked.

Mr. Stark smirked at him. “Very carefully and with a lot of practice,” he said. “Have FRIDAY put you through basic psychology, and then I’ll teach you a couple tricks. The rest is just experience. You’ll get there.”

Peter wasn’t entirely sure of that, indeed, he wasn’t sure if he wanted to be that sort of person let alone could, but he was sure the information would be useful anyway so he just nodded.
The commotion peaked, and several lovely and incredibly scary women came out and cleared a space, before one of them announced, “His Royal Majesty, King T’Challa of Wakanda, Her Royal Highness, Princess Shuri of Wakanda.”

The whole room clapped genteely as the man himself came out, and nodded in several directions. He was followed by his sister, who stood slightly to the side and smiled at everyone there. She seemed pretty young. “Usually a head of state would be nowhere near here.” said Mr. Stark so quietly that only Peter could hear, “He does have a country to run. Unfortunately he fucked up with the whole Rogers thing too, and is enhanced himself, so he needs to show up to put out fires once in a while, though his sister’s been popping in too and lightening the load. If he explains himself now he won’t need to explain himself in a trial. I think this is his last thing before heading home until the final re-signing at the UN headquarters in New York though, which means we need to catch him at some point. I haven’t been able to get a hold of him, but we need to have a conversation about his houseguests.”

Peter nodded, but the room quieted down before he could respond.

“My friends.” said the King. “As you well know, Wakanda has long been absent from the world. Now, however, we are united in purpose--to bring about the document that was my father’s last work in this world. It is my hope that his unity will last, and the good work done here will continue. That is why I have brought out the good wine.”

The room laughed politely, but the King quieted them after a few seconds of seemingly shared mirth. Peter thought he was quite good at this. Not on Mr. Starks level, of course, but good enough. “Thank you for coming.” said the King, almost like a benediction. “It is a pleasure to see so many here to assist in this work.”

He indicated that he was finished entirely through body language, and there was a brief moment of applause before the party continued as it had been.

Mr. Stark guided Peter subtly through the crowd, greeting but never engaging. It wasn’t obvious, but he seemed to be aiming for a rather impassioned woman holding court on one of the couches. Peter glanced at Mr. Stark questioningly.

“Katerina Karamazov.” he said. “Sokovian lawyer and widow of a Russian ambassador. She’s one of Ross’ buddies in the prison and dissection camp, though she has a better reason. Her whole family died in the Ultron attack. Fortunately, video proof of the events leading up to Ultron came out a few days ago on Wikileaks, so she’s blaming Wanda Maximoff instead of me.”

Peter’s eyes widened. “I don’t remember that happening.” he said.

“It was a Wednesday evening Peter, so I really don’t blame you for not catching the news since then, especially since the encryptions were good enough that it hasn’t gotten mainstream yet.” said Mr. Stark. “You’ve been a bit busy.”

Peter recalled sobbing on Mr. Stark’s lab couch at about that time. He’d been in a bit of a haze since then, and would have had no clue about what was just emerging off of Wikileaks.

“It’s awfully convenient that that happened,” he said.

“Isn’t it.” said Mr. Stark. “Nobody really trusted me when I said it was what happened even after I was cleared, but the last couple days have really seen a boost in my ability to reason with these people.”
Peter laughed a little bit. So Mr. Stark had leaked it himself. He wasn’t shouting about it, but he was making good on the promise to release the evidence against the ex-vengers. A drop at a time. When it most benefited him. Still, it was comforting to know that those assholes were one step closer to being voted guilty on a jury.

“Dr. Stark.” greeted Mrs. Karamazov smoothly. Mr. Stark shook her hand, and took a recently vacated seat on the sofa across from her. Peter slipped in on the other end of it when no one was looking.

“It’s always a pleasure.” he said.

Mrs. Karamazov looked like she’d bitten a lemon for a brief instant before her face smoothed out again. “Hardly ever.” she returned. “Our meetings are generally about unpleasant business.”

Mr. Stark pretended to chuckle a bit. “There is that.” he said, “But you are refreshingly direct, and that does make things easier.”

Mrs. Karamazov’s eyes sharpened with the sort of fanatical anger Peter saw only in criminals, religious fanatics, and soccer moms who wanted to speak to the manager. “I have very clear goals.” she said.

“Truly.” said Mr. Stark. “Once the rogues are found I’m sure you’ll rain hell on the witch.”

The lady smirked. “I’d prefer her to be burned at the stake.” she said. “But I’ll settle for life imprisonment in that dampening collar. I hear she wasn’t able to resist trying to break through it and tortured herself in the process.”

Several party guests shifted uncomfortably, Peter included.

“Can she be held though?” asked a burly man with a South African accent. Peter was willing to bet he’d been there to compare notes on hatred of Wanda Maximoff. “They did escape quite quickly, so there are concerns.”

Mr. Stark went in for the kill then. “There were several factors that went into that,” he said. “The largest of which was mismanagement. As I understand it, Secretary Ross was more interested in questioning them than keeping them secure. And the location was somehow leaked… I’m not sure how. Either way, it won’t happen again. Holding the ex-vengers until trial in the Raft was the best of a set of bad choices since they refused better options in Bucharest, but it showed a lot of flaws. Now the security has been improved by quite a bit.”

“Not at all.” said a man who was rather… pompous was the only word for it. “That insufferable blowhard Ross is still in charge of it, and as long as he’s there the only thing that will happen is more human rights violations. His security is laughable, and I should know--I’m on the committee for it.”

Mrs. Karamazov looked rather intrigued. Peter didn’t think she was at all interested in the human rights violations, so he wondered why. Then he got it. Mr. Stark was trying to break up what he’d described as the ‘prison and dissection camp’. Ross was definitely one of the people on Mr. Stark’s shitlist, and Peter had always wondered how he’d ended up Secretary of State anyway considering the well-known fact of his history with human experimentation. It’s rather hard to cover up a Hulk-fight in Harlem after all.

Peter listened closely to the discussion, as Mr. Stark spread a thick layer of shit all over Ross’ reputation, and chipped away at some of Mrs. Karamazov’s more… radical views. It was very
They’d been discussing the Raft, and how enhanced prisons differed from normal ones. Karamazov was trying to argue for drugging all imprisoned enhanced since they had such an advantage over the guards, and pretty much everyone else was rather horrified, though the South African guy seemed to agree as far as Maximoff was concerned.

“Humane alternatives? That is no excuse for leaving the massive security hole of prisoners twice as strong and capable as the guards.” said Mrs. Karamazov.

“Certainly, but armed and trained guards who follow the proper security procedures—” said Pompous guy, whose name was Thomas according to someone else’s comment, but Peter wouldn’t be saying that because it was overly familiar.

“No security can change the fact that Steve Rogers can rip apart any bonds you care to put him in short of vibranium, and by all accounts he’s clever enough to find a way around that too. Then your ‘armed and trained guards’ mean nothing.” interrupted another man who’d wandered over. He was from Bucharest. Apparently this conversation was attracting vengeful control freaks like flies to honey. “He’s still a supersoldier no matter the prison.”

Peter suddenly had an idea, based on a section of the accords and a HYDRA file he’d read during the desperate days when he’d been trying to figure out his enhancements and where they’d come from. “That’s not necessarily true.” he said.

Everyone looked at him, and Peter realized he’d been in Stark-Intern-Who-Knows-What-He’s-Doing mode, and had probably spoken out of turn. He couldn’t stop though, and so continued while fighting to control his blush. “A counteragent to the serum was in partial development by HYDRA at the time of their fall.” he said, “and I’m fairly sure the serum qualifies as technology that enhances capabilities, so…” he shrugged, “taking it away would be fine under the accords. Then he wouldn’t even need to be in the raft, they could just lock him up in regular-people prison.”

“Is this true?” asked Mrs. Karamazov, turning to Mr. Stark.

“Stark Industries has done several studies on how the serum works. HYDRA’s counteragent is viable, though development isn’t quite completed yet.” said Mr. Stark. Peter was grateful he’d run with the idea, especially since Peter knew that the implication that SI was actually working on the counteragent was untrue. It made him look less like a gormless idiot. He retreated back into his couch-section, and went back to being a passive observer while Mrs. Karamazov led a verbal crusade trying to get Mr. Stark to promise to take away Maximoff’s powers too, despite the fact that they came from the mind stone and they didn’t know enough about that to do more than contain them within her own body.

Chapter End Notes

yes, this is 12 hrs late. yes the update schedule is still on. yes, my laptop is a nightmare that apparently didn't listen to me and post this last night, instead crashing (I'm pretty sure it's the drivers this time)

Anyway, this chapter. This chapter and the one after it are like... basically some of my favorite chaps in the whole fic. I feel like they're sort of a character study of Tony Stark, specifically of a side we don't get to see often, the Manipulative Bastard.
Because--and I'm going to couch this in harry potter terms bc that's one of the most common personality tests on the planet and I doubt all of you are familiar with any others I like--he's a fucking Slytherin. He's a good person, but the ends justify the means for him which means he has no problem getting in bed with people like Ross or Karamazov to get what he wants, and is willing to sign documents like the original accords Ross presented, because he has faith in his own ability to twist them into what he wants, and in his ability to get away with disobeying them. And that's where the personality conflict with people like Steve Rogers (the quintessential Gryffindor) comes in, because Steve can't even comprehend going against his principles like that--or supporting a law you fully intend to break.

Because I really doubt Tony actually believes in the accords. Accountability is nice, but he probably trusts the UN even less than Rogers does. However, he wants legal protections for enhanced, the rights to operate where he needs to, and a framework for the future of the planet's protection, and more than anything he knows that the Accords are his best chance for getting that. The other options like the Superhero Registration Act are untenable. He's picking the best of the bad choices presented to him--and that's another difference with Rogers, who would rather not choose any bad choice. Tony Stark doesn't stand strong like a tree by the river of truth, he bends like a reed which leaves him able to stand strong again instead of breaking. Rogers would say it's weakness. Tony says it's resilience because if you don't choose, a choice gets made for you.

And Tony knows he has to, because--and this is my other favorite underused trait about him--he has foresight. Not literal Dr. Strange with the timestone foresight, but the ability to look ahead and predict what's coming. Seriously, Ultron, Edith, Privatizing world peace, even just the way he built Peter's suit with every possible protection. "It's about what we leave behind," is a good quote to define his character, but even more than 'legacy' it's about leaving behind protections for the future, in this case two things--the accords, and Peter. Which is the other reason the Geneva arc is my favorite so far, because it's where we really start to see him pushing Peter into a position of future leadership and power. Realistically, a fifteen year old should be nowhere near here, but Tony isn't treating him like a fifteen year old, he's treating him like a prince--the hereditary heir to a powerful position that he may inherit at any time because Tony knows his life expectancy isn't great. Between the heart problems and Iron Man he knows that Peter might have to step up at any time, and he doesn't really trust anyone to do it because who would. Rogers? Natasha Romanoff--a Slytherin with even less morals than him? T'Challa, who has his own country to look after? Ross? The government?

No, it has to be Peter, because he's the only one Tony trusts besides Rhodey who's both in the military and recovering from a debilitating injury. Hence why good, hufflepuff, strong Peter is being taught to see in shades of gray, and manipulate people, and that laws only exist if you get caught (remember the part after the Chitauri-borgs where Tony point blank told Peter he was fine with him committing murder because he trusted him to do it for a good cause. Yeah, laws mean nothing to him.)

So Peter's being groomed as the next everything. Tony wants him leader of the Avengers, bridge between the Avengers and the Accords, hell he wants him the next head of his fucking company, and he's preparing him as fast as he can in the only way he knows how. And the only reason no one has a problem with this and hasn't made an enormous stink about him giving all that power to a fifteen year old is because of
Peter's sheer overwhelming competence.

IDK, I know i'm the author so my opinion doesn't really mean anything after I hit post, but I just think it's interesting. Especially since Peter is starting to get wise to the fact that he's being groomed for stuff. Sorry about the essay, I said I wasn't going to do this (analyze my own work in the notes bc I want y'all to be free to notice shit yourselves) but here we are...
Five hours later, Peter found himself leaning against the wall over by the bathrooms nursing a glass of water. This event was… harrowing. He’d tagged along with Mr. Stark for most of it, though occasionally Mr. Stark was called away and Peter stayed behind in the conversation they’d already been in, and those conversations hadn’t been pretty. The people they were talking to were largely cruel and self-interested, and Peter had briefly wondered if the accords really ought to be run with those people in charge of them.

Then he’d ended up in a ten minute conversation with the Norwegian member of the Accords committee, who was from a country that argued with itself over whether life imprisonment in a nice apartment with daily breaks to play football with the guards was too cruel for the person who killed a child of their head of state and perpetrated the largest mass shooting in history, and he’d come to a realization. Mr. Stark was specifically targeting the people who were the most dangerous to the goodness of the accords. The prison and dissection camp, as it were. Eighty-five percent of those in the room were nice and good individuals devoted to making the Accords a force for good in the world. Those people were largely either trying to actually improve the accords, either for their country or in general, or they were just enjoying the party.

Peter had just had the pleasure of spending hours with the other fifteen percent, until they’d actually ran into the person there who was representing Ross himself, and Peter had ducked out. He couldn’t stomach any more nastiness.

That was why he was languishing near the bathrooms, and thinking about other things like wondering why there were ten times as many females headed in that direction as males. Seriously, the line was out the door on that side.

Suddenly, a tall black girl exited the male bathrooms. Peter was fairly sure she was the princess of Wakanda, Shuri, but he hadn’t gotten the best look. The three ladies in the section of line outside of the women’s bathrooms gave her dirty looks as she walked past. She smiled serenely at them.

One of them, a lady Peter had briefly spoken to who possessed a lovely southern accent and a horribly racist worldview actually sniffed and pointedly turned away. This was so funny that Peter actually started laughing a little bit. It caused the Princess to zero in on him.

“I think they’re just jealous that I got to pee before them.” she said, walking up to him.

Peter was fairly sure that starting a conversation at a society event by talking about your bodily functions was bad manners, but laughing at people was too and he’d already done that, so clearly neither of them were on their best game. To make matters worse, she was a princess which completely killed Peter’s ability to be cool. He therefore fell back to his roots. “Modern problems require modern solutions.” he said with a dead straight face.

The Princess’ grin became utterly brilliant. “I like you white boy,” she said. “Want to blow this joint and go waste time on the internet?”

Peter promptly forgot she was a princess and looked at her like she was Jesus, or possibly the pizza delivery man. “Yes please,” he said.
T’Challa was entirely done with these people. It was times like this that he was reminded of why Wakanda had cut itself off from the rest of the world in the first place.

“I’m afraid I must decline,” he said smoothly. “Wakanda cannot offer vibranium in such amounts, even for something so honorable as a peacekeeping force.”

“Surely, in the spirit of international cooperation-” said the man he was speaking to who seemed to be unable to understand why a squad of vibranium-armed thugs formed to control the enhanced was a terrible idea. He was cut off by the fortuitous arrival of Okoye, who T’Challa had signalled to come to him with a ‘problem’ almost as soon as he’d been trapped into this conversation.

“My king,” she said. Then she switched into Wakandan. “The guests are beginning to leave.” she said, “If you wish to speak to any of them before you leave, now would be the time.”

T’Challa nodded, and tried to look mildly worried without causing concern. “I must apologize,” he said to his former conversational partner, “a king’s duties are never over. Perhaps you would like to schedule a meeting with my representative at another time. I’m sure your concerns can be addressed better then.”

“I understand completely,” said the idiot. He waved his hand as if giving T’Challa permission to leave, and T’Challa turned away with a nod.

Okoye grumbled something so lowly that it was nearly sub-vocal, but T’Challa understood the sentiment even if he couldn’t quite catch the words. He needed to speak to Malcolm Ness about the details in Section 12, and then he could retire for the night. He was already counting down the minutes...

As he made his way towards the exit near the private quarters, he was jostled into the back of one of the guests. He offered a quick apology, but when the man turned around he was treated to the unmistakable sounds of the person at this party he wanted to talk to the least.

“Your Majesty,” said Tony Stark, “I’ve been meaning to track you down.”

It was only his years of training that allowed T’Challa to keep from wincing.

The thing was, T’Challa deeply respected Dr. Stark. He didn’t particularly like the man personally (he didn’t dislike him either), but professionally he was a great ally. As far as the Accords were concerned they were in perfect agreement on most things, and prior to the so called ‘Civil War’ T’Challa’s father had actually consulted with him several times on accords related issues.

Afterwards though... T’Challa had made some rather large mistakes, become busy with his cousin’s unfortunately timed coup, and then decided that it might be best to just avoid the issue for as long as possible. Focusing on the accords was definitely more important than enduring topics such as Siberia and the current location of the ex-Avengers.

“It might be best if we had this conversation in private,” he said. “I would like to keep it confidential.”

He would also like to undo the top button of his shirt, and he had a feeling Dr. Stark wouldn’t mind in the least.

“Of course.” said Dr. Stark. “Lead the way.”
T’Challa did so, gliding through the door and up the stairs to a more secluded area of the embassy. “I have a lot to apologize to you for.” he said.

Dr. Stark quirked an eyebrow at him. “You don’t really,” he said. “And even if you did I wouldn’t much care if you didn’t apologize. Moving forward is much more important.”

T’Challa nodded. “You speak of my unfortunate… house-guests.” he said. He hadn’t actually told anybody he had the rogue Avengers, but since he’d met him for the first time at his father’s side he had concluded that it was impossible to keep Dr. Stark out of any information on the planet, so he hadn’t been surprised when it had been leaked on the internet.

“Yeah.” said Dr. Stark. “They are supposed to be in prison so… bit of a global security risk there.”

“And I do not deny it.” said T’Challa. “Mr. Barnes has been placed back in cryo and will be released to the courts of law as soon as his brainwashing has been reversed. That is the debt I owe him. The others…” He wouldn’t be outright saying it, but letting them into his country had been one of his worse mistakes as King. He didn’t really have a problem against them personally, but it was turning into a massive PR headache, which wasn’t helped at all by their belief in their own eventual return to the Avengers. Perhaps they had not being treated equitably by their governments, but for T’Challa the greater issue would always be the welfare of Wakanda, and granting them asylum had jeopardized that.

“If they’re staying true to themselves then you’re not having a pleasant time of it.” said Dr. Stark. T’Challa grimaced. They were… angry at their plight, destructive and seemed unable to think beyond themselves in their time of crisis--it was as if by taking them in he’d told them that he was also intending to solve all their problems. “I do not know how you stood them for so long.” he said finally. “Certainly they are capable fighters, but they do not appear to be taking defeat gracefully.”

The concession hurt, but it was like ripping a bandage off. Once he got through this conversation he could just forget it ever happened.

“I don’t know how I stood it either.” said Dr. Stark. “Great group of people, but quite a lot of interpersonal problems and a staggering number of emotional issues. I suspect that towards the end I put up with a lot of it for fear of magical mind-rape. Wanda was always free with her powers when it came to ‘calming everyone down’”

T’Challa grimaced. The witch was terrifying, and was the largest reason why they were being treated as guests with no hint of the fact that they weren’t allowed to leave instead of full prisoners. He didn’t have access to the power dampening technology that had been devised for her, after all, and an escape--while possibly justified--would be a nightmare for his country. “It is my hope that once the proper channels have been re-established with the renewed accords that they can be given over to the justice system. Then I shall not have to deal with them.” And he could go back to working only for Wakanda, which was much more important.

“You don’t intend to release them on the world?” asked Dr. Stark, obviously clarifying what he already knew. It stung that T’Challa’s greatest ally in this conflict had to ask such a question, but he deserved it.

“I do not, you have my word.” said T’Challa, “There are, however, a few complications.”

“Oh?” said Dr. Stark. T’Challa winced. This was why he didn’t want this conversation. Owning up to his mistakes was painful already without going into Dr. Stark’s reaction to them.

“Two of my… guests. The archer, and the ant. They have expressed… willingness to come to a
compromise. The archer is too angry to actually care about the law, but simply wishes retirement with his family no matter the cost to him. The ant on the other hand…”

“I’d never met him before.” said Dr. Stark. “I got the feeling when I was on the raft that he didn’t have the best grasp of what was going on.”

“That is a safe assumption.” said T’Challa. “About a month ago he contacted me with a request. The others… they simply tried to barge in or catch me as I was going somewhere, but he learned the proper channels to go through so I listened. He was asking for a copy of the accords and someone to help him understand them.”

“He hadn’t read them?” asked Dr. Stark.

T’Challa laughed bitterly. “None of them have read the Accords as they stand, they only know about what was put forward by Ross.” he said. “Scott, however, was simply misinformed rather than unwilling. He… I have spoken to him several times and he seems genuinely remorseful for his actions. He said that he should have asked the reasons and thought for himself before jumping to follow one of his heroes. Once the new accords go in… I believe he will sign, and take his consequences.”

“I’m sure some kind of plea deal can be worked out.” said Mr. Stark. “I do have some pull with the folks behind the curtain. It’ll probably happen for Barton too since his involvement was minimal, he was poorly informed, and he’s technically retired anyway, though I won’t be pushing for it since the man’s a dick.”

“That is all that I can ask for.” said T’Challa. “I do not much care for the archer, but Scott is a good man who was greatly wronged by Rogers.”

“I’ll take your word for it.” said Dr. Stark, “Do you think-”

He was cut off by the sound of an explosion from the next room and laughter that bore a striking resemblance to the calls of a pair of hyenas. T’Challa didn’t know who the second hyena was, but he was certain the first was Shuri.

When they entered the room containing Shuri and her new friend, T’Challa had to suppress a wince. Shuri was showing her friend--a young teenager who bore a shocking resemblance to Dr. Stark--videos of him ‘testing’ various improvements on the panther suit.

"Delete that footage!” Cried the T’Challa in the video from his place on the floor.

T’Challa reflected that this past self had the right idea. That footage was humiliating.

"Hi Mr Stark.” Said the unfamiliar teenager.

"Gathering blackmail material are we?” Asked Dr Stark.

"No” said the teen.

Shuri, as was her way, choose that moment to embarrass him. "We are comparing embarrassing moments brother, and I must say that you are winning."

"No way.” Said the strange boy. He had not been on the guest list for the event as far as T’Challa knew, though his suit was of a quality that indicated that he had attended. "The Mark II test videos are legendary. Mr. Stark's embarrassing moments are way more destructive and well documented.”
Shuri turned towards the boy with a wry smile. "I'm not denying the entertainment factor of Dr Stark falling through a piano, I'm just pointing out the obvious. Comical surprise is the ultimate trump card here. Dr Stark knew what he was doing. My brother on the other hand..."

Through some sleight of hand Shuri managed to get the 'T'Challa reaction mood board' onto the screen before he could stop her. He sighed hopelessly as the Starks laughed (he was ninety percent sure they were related somehow. They had at least arrived together, since he doubted the likelihood of any of the other guests bringing a random schoolchild)

"Please send me that." Said the mini-Stark.

"Please don't" said T'Challa.

Dr Stark pretended to look apologetic. "Sorry your highness, but I'm with Peter on this one. That image needs to be shared."

So Peter was the boy's name. T'Challa wondered where he'd come from. Surely his information on Stark wasn't so out of date that he'd managed to miss a teenage son.

Shuri, meanwhile, was making a dangerously contemplative face. "I'm going to want something in return." She said.

Now it was Dr Stark's turn to look mildly concerned.

"Fri?" Said Peter, speaking into his rather unique looking StarkWatch.

"On it." Said a tiny voice, probably the Stark AI that T'Challa's scientists had been drooling after for years.

A collage of nine horribly unattractive photos of Stark appeared onscreen. T'Challa's personal favorite was the one of Stark starting contemplatively off into the distance while wearing a cowl with bunny ears sticking out of it.

"I'll take it if you throw in the one of him tripping over a dirty sock on his way towards coffee." Said Shuri.

Dr Stark looked about like T'Challa felt. "I've changed my mind. I'm with Kitty Cat here. You two need to be separated by an ocean and an unbreakable firewall," he said.

The intractable teenagers ignored him.

"I'll do that if you throw in the catnip prank." Said Peter.

"Control your child please." Said T'Challa.

Dr Stark grinned at him ruefully.

"I'm afraid it's too late." He said. "They've exchanged contact information."

Shuri and Peter meanwhile had finished their blackmail trading, and Shuri stood to come and join the conversation. Peter, meanwhile, gathered up the small mountain of trash they'd generated--mostly snack wrappers.

"T'Challa!" Said Shuri. "Did you finish your to-do list of unpleasant conversations?" Clearly they were to pretend that the embarrassing videos had never existed.
"Mostly." Said T'Challa. He was relieved that they were going to be serious now he didn’t think he could handle more of his dirty laundry being aired. "I left you your fair share."

Shuri made a small noise of disgust. "Did you at least deal with that Sokovian bitch?" She asked.

"No" said T'Challa. "Dr Stark got to her first. I doubt she will be a problem in the future."

Shuri looks at Dr Stark, impressed. "How did you do that?" She asked.

Dr Stark shrugged. "I got her to agree to let up on the aggressive registration in return for consulting on more personalized security measures for any imprisoned enhanced."

Shuri frowned. "I thought the measures were already well adapted with options for all types of known enhanced."

Dr Stark grinned. "Well you know that." he said, "and I know that, but Mrs Karamazov doesn't know that. And what she doesn't know will let me undermine her position in return for spending fifteen minutes signing off on security measures. Maybe add a bell or whistle to keep everyone happy."

"How did you manage it without unpleasant promises?" asked T'Challa. "From what I heard you convinced her that you would essentially neuter any enhanced that came your way."

Dr Stark shrugged. "Credit for that one actually goes to Pete. He invented a rather nice carrot for her. Something I'm completely willing to carry out."

Having finished with the trash, Peter came over at that moment. Seeing him beside Stark deeply accentuated the similarities.

It wasn't necessarily a physical resemblance. There were many brown eyed brunettes with strong features in the world. No, the resemblance was in the bearing. They shared the sort of considering gaze that could land on one like a physical weight backed by a terrifying amount of intelligence, and they both seemed to carry the weight of heavy responsibility with the grace and power that T'Challa would expect of a monarch. Peter was not quite so confident, but the beginnings of it were there, and the influence was clear. T'Challa also suspected him of being enhanced in some way, he moved with the fluidity of a jungle cat--something far removed from the clumsiness of a half grown teenager.

He had long wondered how anyone had ever mistaken Stark for a shallow playboy. "What is the carrot?" He asked before he could go too deeply into musings on the rather concerning nature of Stark's relative socioeconomic power base and the ramifications of him having a protege. "I would hope it is not morally objectionable."

There were a lot of things that Stark could do that were morally objectionable. This idea had been Peter's though, and T'Challa wanted to get his measure. He would be a player someday.

"Nothing like that your Majesty." Said Peter. He seemed... Quite earnest. It would do him well in the future. "I just brought up the research that SHEILDRA was doing on a counter-agent meant for the super-soldier serum. It seems reasonable that if Mr Rogers intends to misuse his enhancements then he shouldn't have them."

T'Challa nodded. That seemed eminently reasonable. Black Panthers before him had been stripped of their title and blessings for abusing their gifts, and the tradition would live on long after he was gone. "Can you guarantee such a counter-agent as being safe and humane?" He asked.
"Hopefully." said Peter, "though testing will be difficult. Luckily there are still blood samples on hand."

"It is commendable that you should be willing to contribute such a thing." said T'Challa.

"Not really." said Peter. "I mean, I'm not doing it out of the goodness of my heart. I just... really don't like him." He glanced toward Dr Stark as he said that, and T'Challa inclined his head in understanding. Revenge for one who was hurt.

Shuri seemed to find it funny. "Before the serum didn't he used to have asthma and some other assorted health problems?" She asked.

Dr Stark smiled coldly back at her. "Yes," he said. "It would take everything special about him away."

"Poetic." said T'Challa. Certainly it was better conceived than his attempted revenge against Barnes had been.

"Well," said Peter. "Somebody once told me that if you're nothing without it, you shouldn't have it. I think Rogers ought to learn that."

His fond smile in the general direction of Dr Stark left no ambiguity about who had said that. In any case, T'Challa definitely agreed with the sentiment, though of course he would leave the real judgement up to a court of law. Peter would be a player in the future, certainly, but T'Challa felt safe in believing he would be one of the good ones.

Chapter End Notes

k so by popular request I put in a thing about someone reacting to Peter as the Stark heir.

Also, a thought on Scott Lang. He originally went to prison for hacking a corporation that was exploiting people, exposing their crimes and holding them accountable for them. With that in mind, one wonders why he was on Caps side since that's the anti-accountability side. (this is of course assuming that the Accords are consistent with the Geneva Convention and Bill of Rights, something which wasn't defined in the CW movie. I choose to interpret it that way, obviously, but this point is moot if one doesn't. Still, it's food for thought)

But wait, there's more...
Le Richemond Geneve was a ridiculously fancy hotel. Peter, flopped face down on the king size bed in his suite, was currently harboring a deep appreciation for that fact. The mattress was like being face down on an actual cloud.

“Peter?” asked Mr. Stark. He knocked on the connecting door between their rooms before coming in.

Peter groaned eloquently into the bedspread, which was a thing he had enough air to do now that he’d removed his tie.

It was 4AM local time, and technically he’d been up all night, but to him it felt like 10PM so he really didn’t have an excuse to be so tired. Not yet anyway, tomorrow (today) was going to be hell. “I ordered some room service.” said Mr. Stark. His hand landed on Peter’s back, and rubbed in circles, which felt wonderful. “It’ll be up in a bit. Do you want to take a shower before then? Get out of that suit?”

Peter rolled over and nodded. “People are exhausting.” he said.

“I know.” said Mr. Stark. He’d already showered and had changed into a different suit. Clearly, he wasn’t sleeping that night, which wasn’t surprising in the least. It happened often enough.

“Will there be coffee?” asked Peter, sitting up.

Mr. Stark smiled and handed him a pair of hangers for the suit before nudging him in the direction of the bathroom. “There will always be coffee.” he said.

Peter yawned, and headed towards the shower. He wasn’t quite conscious enough to navigate the difficult world of cufflinks, but he’d manage. After all, there would be food in it for him at the end.

When he re-emerged, he could smell deliciousness coming from the other room, so he dressed quickly. Today’s suit was gray, with a red tie. (He cast a wistful look at his pajamas, but it was not to be. Meetings started at eight, and he had questions before then.)

“What is that, and why does it smell so good?” asked Peter, coming into Mr. Stark’s room. Mr. Stark was set up at the table with a mug of coffee and a pile of work hovering holographically over his food. He dismissed the work as soon as he saw Peter.

“It’s called bircher muesli.” he said. “Apparently it’s a classic breakfast food here.”

Peter picked up the other bowl and grabbed a spoon. “It’s like oatmeal.” he said. “But it doesn’t suck.”

“My thoughts exactly.” said Mr. Stark. “So, how was the event for you. Did you have any problems?”

Peter shrugged. “Not really, besides the people being awful.” he said. “And Shuri is fantastic.”

“I’ve seen some of her work.” said Mr. Stark. “It’s impressive.”
Peter nodded in agreement, but his mouth was full, so he couldn’t gush. As he swallowed, he remembered something. “She wants to go out to lunch with me later.” he said. “Probably tomorrow since you have a meeting with the Romanians about then.”

“Ooh, somebody’s got a date.” said Mr. Stark teasingly. Peter blushed.

“No.” he denied. “Really no. She’s like… four years older than me and the whole point of the lunch would be the Wakandan reintegration thingie. Apparently she wants to pick my brain about our ‘primitive colonizer technology’.”

“That sounds like a flimsy excuse to hang out.” said Mr. Stark, grinning “but okay. You kids have fun. I… I’m sorry I ended up with a meeting in the middle of what was supposed to be our CERN day.”

Peter smiled at him. “It’s fine.” he said. “And besides, it only cuts off a couple of hours. You had stuff that afternoon anyway.”

“Yeah.” said Mr. Stark. “The work never ends.”

Peter nodded. He was familiar with that concept. “By the way,” he said. “You remember when you offered dossiers on all those people and I said I wasn’t going to be a creepy stalker just for a party?”

“Yeah.” said Mr. Stark. “You have a change of heart?” he asked.

Peter glared at him. “Quit teasing me.” he said. “And yeah, I did, last night actually so I pulled up some of them on my phone so I could know who I’d just talked to, but I couldn’t understand it really. I’ve got a good handle on your engineering notations, but the political ones make no sense at all. There were acronyms, Mr. Stark.”

Mr. Stark looked at Peter contemplatively. “Sometimes,” he said. “I forget you weren’t brought up in this sort of mess.”

“What do you mean?” asked Peter.

Mr Stark ignored him. “Okay.” he said. “Let’s work on the ones we have for today’s meetings. The first one is the forum on monitoring restrictions.”

Peter nodded, and FRIDAY pulled up the relevant documents on Mr. Stark’s phone. (Peter wondered how he’d survived before holographic projection was a Stark Phone feature. He wondered how he’d survived before he had a Stark Phone too.)

An hour later, Peter had all the relevant facts stored in his brain for every event that day, but he still didn’t know exactly how to apply them. Or what most of them even meant. That didn’t mean it was time to give up though.

“You said that Khumalo was more dangerous than Dumitru.” he said, “But it says here that Romania has a bigger say right now than South Africa, and the country is more unified on the issue, so why is Khumalo such a thing?”

Mr Stark zoomed in on Khumalo’s dossier. “South Africa might be divided, but Khumalo isn’t, and he’s more interested in his personal vendetta than his country’s interests. Yes, Romania has more positions on the various subcommittees, but Dumitru doesn’t have the sheer connections that Khumalo has. He’s new to that side of the argument, since Romania wasn’t nearly so militant before the Bucharest chase happened.” he sighed. “I think I’m going about this the wrong way.
Give me a second.”

Peter did, and soon Mr. Stark continued. “There’s a lot of kinds of power.” he said. “Knowledge is power. Money is power, connections are power. Lots of things are. In the end, though, power is power. All of those different little things plus a hundred others add up to a final amount of whether or not what you want gets done. And political power is definitely power--something that Romania has a lot of in this example--but it isn’t the only kind. When you’re doing something like this,” he gestured to the floating documents “you need to consider how much power everyone has, and how much weight that kind of power holds in that situation. For example… we have a lot of money. In fact, I might go so far as to say that we have the most economic power of any party in this argument since we’re not a country so our wealth isn’t locked up in paying for government. However, in this context, money means a lot less than it does in some other situations, so the amount of useable power goes down.”

Peter looked more closely at some of the documents. “So…” he said. “Romania has more political power.” he squinted at the bit indicating alliances, “but Khumalo has better connections. Which means he can persuade the whole rabid imprisonment side better, because he’s more entrenched there. And that means his opinions hold more weight?”

“Yes.” said Mr. Stark, “Including over Dumitru, since Romania will agree with Khumalo’s side in most arguments in trade for their own interests. He has the advantage in that deal.”

Peter sat for a moment. “This is a video game.” he said then.

Mr. Stark looked confused. “I think I lost you somewhere.” he said.

“No, no no. It makes sense. The different kinds of power are like different stats, but different ones are used for different attacks. Romania can buff their teammates, but their attacks aren’t very strong, like a support character, and South Africa has like, a lot of really big attacks and support from Romania’s buffs, but it would be weak without its teammates.”

Mr. Stark seemed somewhat bemused. “Whatever helps you understand it.” he said. “So, let’s go back through these and see who’s going to be supporting who on the upcoming issues. It’s not the same on every one, but FRIDAY and the people she’s put on it do good work so we should be able to make some good guesses.”

Peter squinted at the dossiers “People she’s put on it?” he asked. “Like… spies. You have spies?”

Mr. Stark shrugged. “When Captain America crashed SHIELD, I managed to save most of their people who weren’t actively undercover. A lot of them I just buried the files, but a lot of other ones I had to extract, or arrange for rescue. And SHIELD was a big organization, so there were a lot of them. About 10,000 operatives and other intelligence people came to work for Stark Industries at that time. About a tenth of SHIELD’s total past manpower, actually. There were a lot of scientists and techs as well, but they were folded into other divisions. Of the 10,000 though, most of them stayed on even after SHIELD was reformed. They were the ones running the Avengers stuff, as well as large sections of Market Research and Security.”

“Oh my god.” said Peter, “The conspiracy theory about SI having black ops teams is actually true.”

Mr. Stark laughed. “Don’t go telling anyone.” he said. “Now that I’m folding them back into SI proper, they aren’t safely under the umbrella of the Avengers and people might get nervous.”

Peter nodded. “I won't,” he said. Then he gestured to the dossiers still floating above the table. “This stuff is too useful.”
Mr. Stark nodded. "It is," he said. "You should always remember that no matter how much power you have it’s useless if you don’t have the knowledge of where to apply it."

Peter nodded. That was solid advice. Then he had a sudden thought. "Why…" he trailed off. He didn’t really know how to articulate this.

Mr. Stark tapped the back of his hand after a few seconds of silence. "Why what?" he asked. "I can’t answer if you don’t tell me what I’m answering."

Peter frowned. "A lot of this advice," he said, "it’s… it’s working off of the assumption that I have power. Am going to have power. Whatever. Anyway, I… why are you telling me this? Like, the stuff with the spies--I shouldn’t know that. It’s a company secret that has nothing to do with my job. I get why I’m here--because Spiderman can help with one of the points on the accords, but I don’t need to…” he referred to the to-do he’d started as part of his notes “make connections with one of the Rwandans because they will likely be on the council in the future, to do that. It’s… It has nothing to do with me. Even when I am an Avenger in a few years the only thing I’m going to have to do with the accords is follow their rules and complain to my UN advocate if there’s anything I feel is wrong. That’s how the system works.”

Mr. Stark sighed heavily. “I… Peter, do you know why Pepper is my CEO?”

Peter was confused. “Because she’s good at it, and you’d rather focus on R&D and the Avengers?” he said.

“Yeah. Now.” said Mr. Stark. “But it wasn’t always because of that. I put Pepper in place because I was dying, and I wanted my company to survive when I was gone. I wanted someone I trusted to hold on to my legacy. And this-” he gestured between himself and Peter, “This is the same thing. I’m not going to be around forever, but people like you--enhanced people that want to do good--are. And when I’m gone I want you to help them, I want you to be able to help them. I’m not telling you company secrets for shits and giggles Peter. I’m telling you because I trust you, and I want you to be able to use them.”

Peter needed a few seconds to recover from the shock of that revelation. “I don’t think I can do that.” he said. “I… I don’t think I could do your job. I don’t think anyone can do your job.”

Mr. Stark huffed a laugh. “You don’t have to.” he said. “Not ever if you don’t want to. Just… learn this please. I would feel a lot better knowing there was someone else out there who could make sure that people like Ross and Khumalo stay far away from power.”

Peter nodded. That was important. All the same, he’d never wanted anything like it. “I’d really rather do science.” he said.

Mr. Stark nodded. “So would I.” he said, “But I’m good at this too, and when you can do the things I can do with that, and you don’t…”

Peter smiled sadly. If Mr. Stark didn’t do this, he would feel that it was on him. That was something Peter understood from the bottom of his heart. “I’ll do my best,” he said.

“That’s all I can ask.” said Mr. Stark. “When we get back… I think I’m going to put you under Pepper part of the time, if you’re willing, and introduce you to some of the former SHIELD people. I know it’s not what you’re there for, but…”

“No I get it.” said Peter. “And I need to earn those Economics and Government credits somehow.”

“Good.” said Mr. Stark. “Now, let’s go find our meeting. We’re a bit early, but you do need that
connection in Rwanda, don’t you.”

“Yeah yeah.” said Peter, getting up.

Before they left, Mr. Stark manhandled Peter’s hair and tie into submission. It left him feeling warm and fuzzy.

The next time Peter got even a moment of peace was at around eight in the evening. They’d spent the morning arguing minutiae with the subcommittee in charge of registration and monitoring, a ‘working brunch’ with one of the men responsible for drafting the SOPs for Avenger deployment scenarios that turned into a three hour discussion on rules of engagement, and another subcommittee session on reasonable ways to deal with people attempting to make super soldiers. That one was kind of gross--Peter really hadn’t wanted to know that much about Emil Blonsky--but Mr. Stark managed to get a line into the Accords that would totally shut down Ross as soon as the document came into effect.

During Mr. Stark’s bit, Peter had actually had a mission of his own--to distract the Ross underling in the room so that there wouldn’t be any argument against it. Mr. Stark had been discussing it with a swarm of lawyers right as the man left for coffee, and as he walked back in the Norwegian guy that Peter had met the night before expressed concern over whether a counter-agent for the serum was humane, which Peter was obliged to immediately respond to. Mr. Stark had arranged that one beforehand, and it worked perfectly. Ross, and by extension his underlings, were somewhat obsessed with the super-soldier serum.

After that meeting was over, they’d gone to dinner with Mrs. Karamazov, and the long argued over Khumalo and Dumitru. Mr. Stark convinced them, over two hours and seven courses, that future Avenger members would be tested psychologically and trained to the limits of their ability before being released on a civilian population, and that their proposed measures of tracking and video surveillance were unnecessary outside of missions. He compromised on missions within their countries though, agreeing that in the case of Avenger deployments the country the mission was in could request the immediate release of mission footage, provided they had a reason that stood up before the council such as collateral damage in a civilian area.

Peter was impressed by Mr. Stark’s fortitude and arguing abilities every day.

Eight found them back in the hotel. There was another event that night, but it wasn’t for another hour, and even then Mr. Stark was planning to arrive late and leave early. He only needed to talk to a couple more people.

“This is the worst.” said Peter, collapsing onto the thing that was too fancy to be called a couch and was therefore a lounge. “I really deeply hate this.”

Mr. Stark collapsed beside him. “I know,” he said. “It’s miserable and horrible.”

“How do you do it then?” asked Peter.

Mr. Stark sighed. “Did you ever read the original accords?” he asked. “The first few drafts before I got involved, or the proposal that Ross presented to the Avengers instead of what was already there?”

Peter shook his head. “No.” he said. “I’ve only read the current draft that’s already been signed, and the council guidelines and amendments that are going in next week.”
“It was a shitty document.” said Mr. Stark. “Even from nearly the beginning I always knew this sort of thing would happen eventually. Not because the government wants control or anything, but because people get nervous when there’s no accountability. They were calling it the ‘Superhero Registration Act’, and it was just as bad as Rogers thinks the accords are. I changed it though. Me and the other level heads involved. No way would T’Challa ever let anyone force him to wear a tracking anklet just because he has innate abilities.

“We took out the bits on obsessive monitoring, and changed it from the dystopian sort of registration to the kind you need to get a driver's license. Sort of like a certification for a job. You only need it if you’re going to do it. People who don’t act internationally don’t need to sign, and those who just want to live their lives can do that without fear. We still need some work on the detainment and trial parts, but the phrase ‘detained indefinitely without trial’ has been taken out completely. So yeah, going to meetings all day is awful, and I don’t want to be here, but if it means that you can be the friendly neighborhood Spider-man without being arrested for vigilantism and chucked in the raft then I’d sit in a meeting with someone like Karamazov for a month. Same goes for FRIDAY being able to legally exist as a self-aware AI. See, Peter, the accords were going to happen whether we were there or not, and while I didn’t like a lot of them I knew that ‘standing strong’ like Captain America wouldn’t do anything but make me a fugitive. I’d rather compromise a bit and tell the UN what I’m doing than have to be on the run from the law, have you be on the run from the law. You deserve better than that.”

Peter nodded, considering. He’d had an unspoken agreement with the NYPD for a while, and he’d much rather follow the rules of that agreement even when it was a bit inconvenient than have them try to arrest him. “Mr. Stark.” he said as a thought occurred to him. “When you took me to Germany I was operating internationally.”

“Yeah.” said Mr. Stark. “And that’s on me. It really wasn’t one of my better decisions. And because of that choice you’re going to be forced to either sign the accords next week or never leave Queens again. I’m sorry that I made it that way, but you have to know I am trying. The amendment on signatories who are minors or have a secret identity is the best I can do there.”

Peter leaned into Mr. Stark’s side. “I trust you.” he said. “You’ll do what’s best for me. And besides, we both know that if there was an actual world-threatening event that the Accords would go out the window and I could help you no matter what happens. After all, they really aren’t the most enforceable documents. Sort of like the original Geneva Convention. We all try to do it, but everyone’s used the loopholes…”

Mr. Stark laughed. “Don’t tell anybody,” he said, “But I break the law constantly.”

Peter giggled. “I’m pretty sure I’ve seen you hack like twelve government databases in the last month,” he said.

“I’ll keep doing it too.” he said. “The accords are the right idea, but I won’t let them stop me from doing the right thing. I can defend my actions afterward well enough.”

“I’m pretty sure there’s a clause for that.” said Peter. “Something about authorization being available after the fact for emergency situations.”

“Yeah.” said Mr. Stark.

They sat in tired silence for a few moments. Then Peter made another realization. “Those chitauri-borgs.” he said.

“What about them?” asked Mr. Stark.
“Alien technology is under the Accords.” said Peter. “I… After this, you could help me.”

“You want help?” asked Mr. Stark, “I thought you said you were doing fine last time I offered. You’ve only found one other nest of them and last week you said you thought you might have a clue as to who was making them.”

Peter nodded. “And I turned that in, too. Multiple copies to the police and FBI just like you told me. All the same… Those people might be dead zombies, but they had to get that way somehow. And I want the whole thing over. I have a bad feeling about it.”

Mr. Stark squeezed his shoulder. “We’ll make it the first Avengers priority when we get back,” he said. “Baby’s first official Avengers mission. Until then though…”

“What?” asked Peter.

“We have fifty minutes before we have to go anywhere, and we’re already ready to go. Now, I’m not going to tell you what to do, but I got a notification just now that all the living areas of the Tower have been gutted. And I think we need to choose a couch.”

“That’s really important.” said Peter.

“Friday got an architect to put in layout proposals too and I want to go through those as well.” said Mr. Stark. “It’s the same guy who did the Malibu mansion.”

Peter smiled. “Has he figured out how to draw a straight line yet?” he asked.

Mr. Stark laughed. “Let’s find out,” he said.

Chapter End Notes

Woot woot it’s a double feature!!!
(double feature comes courtesy of the fact that I want Christmas in the fic to coincide with christmas IRL because it's coming up and I don't want to do that in january it would be weird. So I gotta get through the geneva arc and the next arc after that before christmas. Expect a midweek update as well bc there are a lot of chaps before then.)
“So Peter, this is Dr. Brown, head of the SI lab partnered with CERN. Dr. Brown, Peter Parker, best intern on the planet.”

“A pleasure to meet you.” said Dr. Brown. His face was slightly tight and his eyes held the familiar skepticism that Peter had grown to expect every time he was introduced to anyone with the appellation ‘doctor’. It was like they didn’t believe you could be sentient until you had a graduate degree.

“Anyway, I haven’t been here in ages, so Dr. Brown is going to show us around.” said Mr. Stark. Dr. Brown looked like he’d sucked on a lemon.

Peter didn’t let it affect his mood at all. They’d already toured the main public part of CERN along with a couple behind the scenes places, and it was possibly the best trip of Peter’s life. He was nearly bouncing as he followed Dr. Brown down the hallway.

“SI partners with CERN to develop new scanning and particle detection technology to be used in conjunction with the Large Hadron Collider.” said Dr. Brown. “Advances in detection and manipulation of muons we’ve made have been instrumental in revolutionizing the standard model we have of the universe.”

Mr. Stark smirked at Peter. Gauntlet thrown down then, and Peter was going to have to deal with the idiot himself. The man was clearly trying to technobabble Peter into submission until he admitted he didn’t know what he was talking about.

“Pretty sure you weren’t involved with the muons at all, considering that was Mr. Stark,” said Peter, “But okay, go ahead. I heard rumors about measuring neutrinos?”

The lemon-sucking look was back with a vengeance at Peter’s calm flippancy. Then Dr. Brown opened his mouth and spewed the longest and most over-complicated spiel on particle physics that Peter had ever heard in his life.

Generally, Peter tried his hardest to be polite. He even did it when he was faced with the disgustingly patronizing biochem head at SI. But this? This was simply too funny. His effort to overwhelm Peter with technobabble was like the man was padding the word count on an essay to sound impressive. That image, paired with the receding hairline and beer gut, caused Peter to snort out an embarrassingly giggle-like chuckle—his self control abolished completely by his sleep deprivation.

Apparently Mr. Stark found his definitely-not-a-giggle funny, because he laughed too, and then Peter accidentally made eye contact with him and was struck by the absurdity of the moment and then he couldn’t help it, he was howling.

About twenty seconds later, when he recovered a bit, he looked up at Dr. Brown who looked something like a person who just realized they showed up naked to work with crayon drawings in their briefcase. He opened his mouth to apologize for his rudeness, and then he shut it.

Laughing at people was horribly mean, yes, but so was talking down to them as if they wouldn’t understand, and Peter was a bit sick of being talked down to. So maybe… Peter didn’t think he’d
ever be the sort of person who was automatically rude, but he didn’t apologize to Flash Thompson when he returned a good roast, and he didn’t think he had to here either. He’d given the man a chance, and that was past, and Peter didn’t have to be nice. All the same though... it had been horribly rude of him. He would definitely feel guilty when he’d slept more recently than two days before. He didn't at the moment though, and that was what mattered.

“This isn’t working.” he said to Mr. Stark.

“No it isn’t.” said Mr. Stark, looking far too amused and entirely unconcerned.

Peter turned his back on his unhelpful mentor and looked tiredly on Dr. Brown. “Is there anyone else that can do the tour?” he asked. (He wanted to say ‘perhaps someone competent’, but he wasn’t quite to that level of Starkness and he’d already fulfilled his daily snark quota)

There was a tense silence for several seconds. Then Dr. Brown looked away. “There should be someone in the analysis laboratory.” he said.

“Great.” said Mr. Stark with a bright press smile. “Now, let’s get on down there and then you can stop wasting our time.”

Dr Brown then led them down the hallway they’d been walking down before the brief altercation, and turned left into a large open space filled with computers. The room seemed like it ought to contain a horde of nerds, but the fact that it was Sunday morning meant that it was nearly empty except for a rather frazzled looking woman with eye-bags nearly as impressive as Mr. Stark’s. “You can look around–there’s an overview of our current projects on that board over there. I’ll go get Tanya.” said Dr. Brown. Then he stalked away to the other end of the room. Peter and Mr. Stark both glanced obligingly at the board. It was interesting, but they could talk about it later. Drama was about to go down.

“Tanya.” said Dr. Brown.

“Yeah?” said the woman looking up. Her expression was a bit guarded.

“Are you finished with the analysis of last nights tests?” he asked.

“Why, so you can take credit for them?” asked the lady.

“You’re a part of the team, Tanya. They’re not just your tests.” said Dr. Brown. “You should know that by now.”

Clearly his tendency towards patronizing people extended further than just Peter. Peter glanced at Mr. Stark, whose amusement had only increased.

“Funny you should say that now, considering what you did with my life’s work. Every achievement you have belonged to someone else.” said Tanya.

Dr. Brown returned something cutting, and Peter stopped paying attention. They appeared to have forgotten about Mr. Stark and Peter, but that was fine. Mr. Stark had tapped on his watch and FRIDAY had obligingly pulled up Dr. Brown’s work record. It was… not a good record. If FRIDAY was to be believed, then Tanya’s statement held absolutely true. There were also several reports of workplace harassment that hadn’t gotten anywhere.

“Hey Peter.” whispered Mr. Stark. “You wanna fire him?”

“Um, what?” whispered Peter.
“I’m going to fire him.” said Mr. Stark, “But I think it would be funnier if you did it. Insult to injury and all that.”

Peter glanced over to Dr. Brown who was leaning over his colleague in a distinctly intimidating manner and shaking his finger in her face. The whole argument had been fairly quiet, and if they’d actually been looking at the board, they wouldn’t have heard it at all. “Well, we can argue about it later. Stark is here with some kid. Wants a tour and I’m far too busy to do it.” said Brown.

“Or you can argue about it never.” said Peter, strolling over as if he hadn’t a care in the world. He was actually pretty nervous, and his instincts were screaming at him to apologize and leave, but he wanted to make Mr. Stark proud, and he was also a little bit angry. This guy shouldn’t treat people the way he did. Sure, he’d patronized Peter, but more than that he’d taken this lady’s work, and that was awful.

Dr. Brown looked like he wanted to say something, but what had happened earlier had left him wary.

“I’m sorry.” he said in a manner that was incredibly far from apologetic. “Dr. Wilson and I were just discussing workplace scheduling. I’m always quite busy and sometimes it’s difficult to keep track of.”

Peter could sense Mr. Stark behind him, pretending to still be reading the data from the current projects, but his heart rate was a bit elevated. Still amused then, still paying attention. “It’s a good thing you won’t be busy in the future, then.” said Peter. He could do this.

“What?” asked Dr. Brown.

“You’re fired.” said Peter. He tried not to blurt it too quickly, but

“You can’t do that!” exclaimed Dr. Brown.

Peter didn’t glance back at Mr. Stark. He knew the drill now–he was on his own. He wasn’t sure why Mr. Stark kept throwing him to the wolves like this, but he wasn’t going to let him down. “Actually I can.” he said. “Though the decision has to be reviewed by my direct superior. Judging by the progress reports over there though this lab is incredibly poorly managed, and I doubt he’ll argue.”

Dr. Brown’s face was glorious. Meme-worthy, one might say. Peter regretted his lack of camera, but all the same he didn’t think Dr. Brown really wanted that on the internet.

“Dr. Stark!” he said, “Please, you have to understand–this is my livelihood, I’m doing good work here.” Clearly, he thought that going over Peter’s head would do some good in this case.

Mr. Stark looked at him with a face of stone. “Why are you talking to me?” he said. “In fact, why are you here? Weren’t you just fired?”

Peter felt a spark of pity for him, and gave in. “If you leave now we can put it on the record as a resignation instead of a termination.” he said.

Dr. Brown acquired another imaginary lemon to suck on, but turned and left with as much of his dignity as he could salvage.

“I am so sorry you had to deal with that.” said Mr. Stark to Dr. Wilson–who was sporting a rather meme-worthy face of her own.
“Huh?” she asked.

“Asshole hired by Stark industries mismanaging your lab and taking credit for your work? No idea how that one got through the hiring process.”

“What?” she said. Then after a second, “Oh.”

“Yeah.” said Mr. Stark. “So, I hate to tear you away from your work, and if you aren’t available Pete and I got a very tempting offer from one of the people in CERN itself, but-”

“No no that’s fine.” she said. “It’s not that important.”

“Anywho,” said Mr. Stark. “Tour. Yea or nay? Petey here has a date in a couple hours and I would hate for him to miss that.”

“I would like it to be made clear that I do not, in fact, have a date,” said Peter.

Dr. Wilson let out a shocked laugh. “Let me grab my key card.” she said.

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“Why did you make me do that?” asked Peter as soon as they exited CERN. He’d managed to distract himself with science–always an easy prospect–but as soon as they left he returned to a rather more pressing question.

“Do what?” asked Mr. Stark.

“Deal with Dr. Brown.” said Peter. “I… you’ve been doing it a lot actually. Every time I run across an asshole whose just a jerk and not, like, legitimately evil, I end up having to deal with them.”

Mr. Stark slid into the driver's seat of the car, and Peter hopped in the passengers. They had been making their way around Geneva entirely without drivers, which was actually a weird experience for Peter. Happy was technically on duty, but Peter hadn’t seen him—with a bit of pushing Mr. Stark had admitted that ‘driver’ in this case was a cover story for ‘investigating rumors of deceit and corruption with several ex-SHIELDies’.

“Do you remember the first time you ended up in the Planning Offices?” asked Mr. Stark.

Peter shuddered. It was a day he did not remember fondly. Mr. Stark had left for a grand total of three minutes during which Peter had nearly been reduced to tears by the various division heads. They hadn’t been specifically degrading, but he’d been told straight to his face that ‘media bait’ like himself had no place in a serious discussion. The belief that he was only Mr. Stark’s intern as setup for a future bit of good press had been common in those early days. “How could I forget.” he said.

“Well there were two ways to get out of that situation.” said Mr. Stark. “Option one was to swoop in and get you out of it. When I first took the company that’s what Obadiah did with me whenever the board or someone was being particularly awful. I thought he was being nice, but it just meant that I didn’t know what was going on with my own company and that anyone–Obadiah included–could walk all over me without much protest. I wised up after a while, but Obi still got me in the end.

“The other option was to stay, and stick it out. What we did. Sit down and continue the conversation. I don’t know if you noticed, but you made several intelligent comments there once you calmed down a bit. The planning heads might be a bit full of themselves, but they aren’t stupid.
Nobody gets that high in SI without being smart, so when you stayed calm and had valuable things to say they took note. Every interaction you have with them you do better and better, and they try to walk over you a little less. I know it’s not nice in the moment, but as much as I’d like to wrap you up in bubble wrap and never let you out it won’t work. The Vulture incident taught me that. Instead… I just want to give you the tools to survive, even if it’s just the skill of dealing with idiots.”

Peter thought for a second. “I guess.” he said, “but just now… that was so mean, and I kind of feel–I don’t know–dirty or something. We… I laughed at that dude and then fired him. And yeah, he probably needed to be fired anyway, but still.”

Mr. Stark glanced at Peter for a second when they came up on a stoplight. “Peter… maybe I handled that one badly. You don’t have to be an asshole about it if you don’t want to. I’m an asshole, we both know that, but you don’t have to be. Still, there was no way that idiot was walking out of there with a job. There was some serious harassment going on in that workplace.”

Peter nodded. “It’s easier though.” he said, “To be an asshole, I mean, when you’re trying to deal with… Them.”

“It is.” said Mr. Stark. “I started doing it mostly out of an interest in efficiency. And to get back at them–a lot of them deserve it–but efficiency too.”

“It is kind of hard to come up with a polite way to say ‘I know what I’m doing so please go fuck yourself’” admitted Peter.

“You could always just say ‘I know what I’m doing so please go fuck yourself’” said Mr. Stark. “It does have please in it.”

Peter gifted him with one of his best glares. “I’m trying not to turn into a complete asshole.” he said. “I want… I want to be a good person. Ben said that the strongest people were the kind ones. I want… I don’t know.”

Mr. Stark nodded. “Just go with the Gordon Ramsay method.” he said. “Insult only those who should know better.”

“Wise words.” said Peter. He glanced out the window at the city passing by. It still didn’t feel quite right. He felt like he was becoming someone he didn’t want to be. In addition to that, it created another issue to pull under the umbrella of ‘why is Mr. Stark doing this’

It wasn’t that he didn’t appreciate it. Mr. Stark was… possibly one of the best things that had ever happened to him, even better than Spider-man, but still. Peter had seen his schedule. The man was legitimately neglecting some of his other duties to spend time with Peter, do things for him. He’d blown off board meetings before to teach Peter stuff or spend time with him. And for the life of him Peter simply couldn’t figure out why.

Chapter End Notes

Have yourself a merry little update as I catch up to Christmas, and watch as Tony Stark starts to cross the line...

And yes he is shitty and in the wrong here.
One of my biggest pet peeves about Irondad is that somehow despite never speaking to a teenager before in his life Tony Stark somehow becomes a flawless parent overnight. And no. That's wrong. So he's going to have to have problems too. He pushes Peter too hard, leans a little too much on his help, lets him end up in dangerous situations, yanks him out of his comfort zone and his boundaries, and unintentionally isolates him from his peers. And then Peter takes his explanations for those things as fact, and assumes that the problem is himself.

They will get it together and establish boundaries eventually, but before then it's a bit of a mess. My therapist is fond of saying that most people have a difficult time differentiating between love and control. Doing things 'for their own good', telling them they need to 'be more x' or that they 'should y' are all ways of showing love in an unhealthy manner. And obviously that's something that they need to work that out in themselves before everything's peachy.

So Tony Stark has some rough edges, occasionally walks over people, is about as emotionally dense as tungsten, and has no idea what teenagers need to be healthy--or how much is too much to expect from them. He's trying his best though, and even if he doesn't have it all yet he's learning--and in the end that's what good parenting is all about. So yeah, mistakes, but he's also started to approach his emotions head on, talk honestly with Peter about things, try to support him in ways that will actually help, and admit his own failings.

IDK. This is almost another character study sort of chapter I guess. I'm trying to be legitimate about the development of this relationship and that includes the pitfalls and errors, so. Conflict will happen my friends.
Peter knew instantly he’d come to the right super fancy restaurant by the scary body-guard lady waiting by the entrance right next to the tux-clad guy in charge of seating people. It was kind of funny to see the slender man dwarfed by the veritable mountain of muscle beside him.

“Mr. Parker, please follow me.” he said, glancing at the large predator beside him. She gave Peter a once-over that he suspected included a scan for weapons and then followed as Peter was led to a private dining room.

“Hi.” said Shuri, looking up from her coffee.

Peter grinned. “Your highness.”

“I already told you, it’s Shuri.” she said.

He’d been a bit overly polite when they’d first met (she was an actual Princess and he was nervous so sue him), and by the time he’d gotten over the fact that she wanted him to call her by her first name he’d also gotten over any reluctance he may have had to troll her for all he was worth.

“Of course your worshipfulness.” he said cheerfully.

Shuri glared. “And here I went to all the trouble of arranging a break for both of us.”

Peter laughed. She’d sent him the files on technological compatibility that were the point of this ‘meeting’ within eight minutes of his leaving the gala, and they’d been texting improvements and corrections ever since. By now they were mostly done, so there really wasn’t a point to being there besides the fact that the alternative was to talk to the Accords people which he was sure they were both heartily sick of.

“Anyway, I already ordered for us, the food will be here in five, and after that I have a plan.” she said.

“What’s the plan?” asked Peter.

“First, we will go take shitty tourist pictures by some of the ‘sights’” she said, “Then, we will have ice cream, and then, we will go shopping.”

Peter nodded his consent. “The ice cream better be great,” he said, “To make up for the shopping.”

“I know a place” said Shuri.

The food arrived, and Peter had to bite back another laugh. The chef herself had come out to give it to them, and he didn’t want to insult the lady’s work. Still, it seemed Shuri and him were on the same wavelength when it came to fancy food.

Once they’d dealt with the chef, Peter attacked it with enthusiasm, and sighed in happiness. “French fries,” he said, “are possibly the best thing ever to happen to humankind.”

Shuri nodded in agreement, digging into her own fries. “I actually consider that achievement to belong to the potato in general.” she said, “For example, chips.”
“Good point.” said Peter. He sniffed his fry. Because it was a fancy restaurant the fries had been flavored with some herbs and called something that was not ‘fries’. He had no idea what they were but he would sell his soul for them. “I don’t know where I’d be without hash-browns.”

Shuri squinted a bit. “You know,” she said, “I’ve never actually had those.”

“Really?” asked Peter, his thoughts cut off from wondering what kind of high class cousin to mayonnaise aioli was.

Shuri shrugged. “Most of the foreign foods I have eaten were at either official events or have been since my country ended our isolation. I haven’t had time for everything.”

“I’ll make you a list.” said Peter. “You’re coming to New York for the final signing, right?”

“Yes.” said Shuri.

“Sometime around there we’ll have to go on an adventure. I know some really great diners, and I think that hash-browns are definitely a goal we can all aspire to. I mean, unless you’re busy, doing like… princess stuff or something.”

Shuri grinned at him. “The nice thing about being a princess is that everything I do counts as princess stuff.” she said, “So yes. Operation Hash-brown is a go.”

“Yes!” hissed Peter with an exaggerated fist pump. “I have an excuse to go get hash-browns.”

That one made Shuri laugh, which definitely felt like a win. Peter liked her. Not like, liked her, but she was cool.

The conversation rambled in an utterly random way all the way through the salmon and then the pear tarts. Shuri picked up the utterly obscene check, and then practically bounced towards the front of the restaurant.

“Can you believe,” she said, “I’ve been here off and on for months and yet I’ve never done any of the stupid tourist things.”

“Sad.” said Peter. “I’ve only been here for two days and I already toured CERN and took a picture by an ugly statue.”

“How ugly?” asked Shuri.

Peter pulled out his phone.

Shuri frowned. “What are you talking about. That statue is a work of art.”

Peter scoffed. “He has three chins!” he said. “And a wart!”

“All of which are portrayed beautifully.” said Shuri. Then she knocked on the divider of the embassy town car. “Find us a statue,” she said. “An ugly one. We’re going to take some pictures.”

The intimidating body-guard lady who was driving (a different one than the restaurant one who was currently in the back with them) sniffed. “They are all ugly.” she said.

Two hours later, Peter was incredibly grateful for the credit card that had been thrust upon him by Mr. Stark the morning they’d left for Geneva. Shopping had been… an experience. He’d never
actually been, not counting the suit shopping or the occasional trawl through the t-shirt section of goodwill while May bartered with the salesman over a slightly larger pair of jeans for him, but to his surprise it was actually somewhat fun. And, of course, he wasn’t going to let Shuri pick up the tab for that too, so he’d simply submitted to her whims. It probably helped that the sorts of stores they were visiting were so high end that price tags didn’t happen there. In any case, Peter had enjoyed himself. He’d never really been cognizant of his clothing beyond what pun was on his t-shirt that day, but Shuri was a fount of information and his eyes had been opened.

Really they’d been opened about five minutes into the suit-fitting the week before. Clothes were fun, and he knew that now. Before, Peter hadn’t been aware that it was possible for him to look any better than passingly average, but apparently he could with some effort.

The copious ice cream, selfies, and vine references weren’t a factor at all in Peter’s enjoyment.

Despite all the fun, Peter was sort of glad that it was time to go back to the UN building and the associated meetings. He was starting to get really excessively tired, and even though Shuri was a joy to be around he wanted nothing more than to slip into a fifteen day coma and then go back to regular life. A power nap in the hotel when he went to change before the Sokovian recovery benefit dinner would have to do.

“Hey cucciolo.” said Mr. Stark when he arrived at the hotel, practically dripping with shopping bags. “You’re looking tired.”

Peter yawned.

Mr. Stark smirked. “Looks like you had a really productive meeting.”

Peter tried for a glare. It didn’t work well, because he was still yawning. “Most productive meeting I’ve had this whole time.” he said. “A minimum of disagreement. 10/10 would avoid diplomats this way again.”

That netted him a laugh. “Are you going to be able to do the benefit?” asked Mr. Stark.

Peter flopped onto Mr. Stark’s bed. “Mm hmm.” he said. “Just… give me a minute.”

“You don’t have to.” said Mr. Stark. He sat down on the bed by Peter’s shoulder. “You know that right?”

“I do though.” said Peter. “I… This is what I want to do. Not the benefit, I mean, but… the this. The Avenger thing. And I know enough to realize that stuff like this… benefits and boring meetings with people I don’t like all that much is an important part.”

“You’re such a good kid.” said Mr. Stark.

“Yeah yeah.” said Peter. He rolled over and sat up. Then he paused hesitantly. “Do you think…”

Mr. Stark waited. Peter opened and closed his mouth a couple times.

“What is it?” asked Mr. Stark. Peter looked away.

“Nevermind.” he said.

Mr Stark’s look became penetrating. “’C’mon cucciolo. I can’t help if you don’t tell me what it is.”

“May.” said Peter. “I… I’m not sure what’s going to happen.”
“What brought this on?” asked Mr. Stark. It was then that Peter realized that Mr. Stark had been taking pains to distract him from it every minute of every day, showing up every time he started to droop at all.

“Shuri was talking a lot about her family,” said Peter, “And they sound… really cool, and I ignored it fine, but… I’m… I’m a good kid. Right?” As he spoke, his voice got smaller and smaller until he was nearly whispering. “I do try.”

Mr. Stark tugged Peter over until he was nearly on his lap. “You’re the best kid, Peter. I don’t know what May’s problem is, but it isn’t you. I… Sometimes people take things out on those they love. Unrelated things, stuff that doesn’t matter, problems that you’d have no way of knowing about. I should know, I do it all the time.”

“You think May’s just… having a hard time?” asked Peter.

“Yeah.” said Mr. Stark, running his fingers through Peter’s hair. “It’s not your fault.”

Peter sighed, and turned his face into Mr. Stark’s leg, mashing his pants crease. “How am I supposed to help her if she just…”

Mr. Stark sighed. “All you can do is be there when she does want to tell you,” he said.

Peter hummed in agreement, slowly relaxed under his ministrations, and was so sleepy by the time they had to leave for dinner that he ended up tripping twice while getting ready, even despite his preternatural balance.

Monday morning brought Peter’s very last meeting before he’d get to leave. It was the most important one though, so Peter was a bit nervous. This was the panel on how the accords would deal with minors, something that would be rather important to him for at least the next three years. Before he could really work up a good panic, he was already dressed, masked, checked in, and standing in front of an intimidating room full of people who were now expecting him to give a detailed speech on why he thought things should be the way they wanted them to--after which there would be questions. Mr. Stark was nowhere to be seen, since they were trying to avoid the appearance of a relationship similar to the one Peter had with him in his actual identity.

“Breathe Pete,” said Mr. Stark. Not being seen didn’t mean he wasn’t wired in to a subtle comms system of course.

Shuri, who was in the back of the room for some reason, made a face at him. She looked like she was mouthing something about underwear. He wondered when she’d figured out his secret identity, and why she thought that underwear would help.

“Hi,” said Peter. Then he mentally hit himself for a bad opening. Then he mentally hit the mental self that was hitting him because he didn’t have enough time for anxiety at the moment and sounding like a teenager wouldn’t be a horrible thing in this situation. As long as he kept going and presented his prepared points, instead of doing mental boxing like an absolute fool. “As you well know, I’m Spider-man and I’m underage, which means that a lot of the things we decide today will be pretty important to my near future. I chose to go out and try to help people, but I didn’t choose to be enhanced the way I am, which I think is an important thing to remember, going forward. The current ambiguity in the accords regarding the underage has a lot of potential to be interpreted in ways that I’m not comfortable with, especially since some of the plans would essentially be
punishing me for something I can’t help--the simple fact of my genetics.

“I realize that this is a working document, and that it wasn’t assumed that underage enhanced would be an immediate issue, but there have been rumors of plans for how to deal with us--me and any future underaged enhanced--that run far outside the lines of what is appropriate, and what is humane. Refer to the evidence in part one of the packets--a proposition for a boarding school by Secretary Ross, and some of the actual plans for the program which seem more like a prison than any kind of educational facility.

“Obviously the original language of the accords, the request to provide support and education to any possible signatories under the age of eighteen until they are of age to enter into the accords themselves, was not intended in that malicious spirit, but because there hasn’t yet been a resolution, inhumane propositions like Secretary Ross’ are still afloat.

“I became enhanced through genetic modification I did not consent to, and in no way perpetuated. At no point did I break any laws regarding ethical experimentation, or genetic modification. There is therefore no cause for the punitive measures proposed in several drafts of the accords, like Secretary Ross’. This is especially important because I will not be the last. There will be other underaged enhanced, and they will likely be just as innocent as I was. I would like for them to be protected under the accords, not persecuted.

The proposed solution that is most consistent with the spirit of the accords, and most protective of the underage is the one proposed by Dr. Stark in conjunction with King T’Challa. It consists of a mentorship program whereby any underage enhanced who wishes to act under areas of the accords has the direct oversight and guidance of a signatory of the accords. This.”

A bus passed outside the window playing mariachi music and Peter went on autopilot with his speech so he could wonder about why there was a bus in Geneva Switzerland playing mariachi music. He could smell the underarm deodorant of everyone in the room, and began to attempt to sort it by brand. Because of the international nature of the meeting, he was only able to identify three scents as familiar brands. There were also four of the weird complementary deodorant that was in all the hotels nearby.

A cloud was passing outside the window. Peter became aware that he’d just answered a question, and wondered what the question was. He hoped he’d managed to answer it accurately. There was a bug. It was crawling up the wall, but then went behind the curtains.

“Thank you for your time, Spider-man” said the man on his left, coming up to shake his hand. He was smiling, and Peter wondered if that was a good thing or a bad thing.

There were several other handshakes, and then Peter was mostly done. He supposed he could stay and talk to these people, but his hands were shaking, and he had no idea what he’d said, and public speaking was absolutely terrible, and he needed to get out now.

“FRIDAY,” he whispered after he’d extricated himself as best he could, and removed himself to an out of the way stairwell that appeared to be for maintenance. “Where’s my--where’s Mr. Stark.”

The cool concrete felt good against his back where he leaned against the wall, and slowly he slid down, collapsing onto the floor. “On his way to your location.” said FRIDAY “I alerted him that your vitals were elevated as soon as I sensed it.”

“Thanks.” said Peter “Thanks FRIDAY, I… You’re the best.”

“You’re welcome.” said FRIDAY.
“Yeah.” said Peter, still trying to get control of his breathing. Talking to FRIDAY helped, he could focus on things besides that horrible… “Your my favorite FRI.” he said, “I would totally, like, die for you.”

“You will not,” said FRIDAY, “Your safety is one of my highest priorities.”

Peter let out a shaky laugh, head thunking back against the wall. “Just a joke FRI.” he said. “I’m not planning on dying anytime soon.

“Mr. Stark will be here in thirty seconds.” said FRIDAY, who was about as comfortable with emotions as her creator was.

When Mr. Stark arrived, Peter’s breathing was mostly under control, but his hands were still shaking and he was still a little bit out of it.

“Pete!” said Mr. Stark, instantly crouching down by him so as to not loom, “Are you? Do you need anything.”

“No.” said Peter. “Yeah. I don’t know. Just… stay for a bit.”

“Of course,” said Mr. Stark. He lowered himself down beside Peter with a huff. “Damn I’m getting old.” he muttered.

Peter stared at his shaking hands, and tried to focus on the banter. It had worked before, with FRIDAY, he just needed to keep going. “I do try.” he said, “I have aspirations to giving you a full head of grey hair by the time I’m legally an adult.”

Mr. Stark laughed softly, and Peter felt his hand hesitantly on his shoulder. Glancing up, he could see nothing but concern in Mr. Stark’s eyes. He tried to smile, and leaned in to the touch. They sat in silence for several minutes, Mr. Stark’s arm around Peter’s shoulders grounding him better than anything else ever had. “Why am I so bad at this?” he asked softly.

“What do you mean?” asked Mr. Stark. “You did great in there. I… you know I was monitoring FRIDAY’s feed on it. It was everything we could have hoped for.”

Peter let out something that might have been mistaken for a laugh by anyone but Mr. Stark, and thought of the distinct scents of different deodorant brands and a bug crawling up the wall. “Yeah.” he said. “Sure, I gave the speech you helped me write on autopilot cuz’ you drilled it with me so many times, but I was barely there. And then I came out here and collapsed on the floor like some…” he trailed off.

“Some kind of what, Peter?” asked Mr. Stark.

Peter thought back on all the years of failed classroom presentations marring otherwise perfect grades, of vomiting in the bathroom fifteen minutes before his eighth grade science fair, and then returning right after it was over to do it again only to get laughed at by Flash Thompson and his goon squad. He could only repeat what had been said to him then when he was slumped wet against the bathroom wall. “Some kind of pussy whose even scared of other people.” he said quietly. At least he wasn’t wet this time.

“That’s funny,” said Mr. Stark. “You’re the bravest person I’ve ever met.”

Peter turned his face away. “No,” he said. “It’s all a lie.”

“What do you mean?” asked Mr. Stark.
Peter tried to think of a way to tell him without revealing that he wasn’t worth his time. He really didn’t want to lose Mr. Stark’s time. Then he gave up because he didn’t want Mr. Stark’s time under false pretenses either. “It’s all about the mask.” he said, “I... before I became Spider-man, I was... scared of everybody. I barely said two words if I could help it, to people I didn’t know, and when I couldn’t keep quiet it was almost worse, because you know how I ramble and everything I say and I’m just... too much.”

“Too much?” asked Mr. Stark.

“Too loud, too opinionated. Too smart. Nobody likes what I have to say, especially when a lot of it is telling people they’re wrong. Before I... back when it wasn’t so much of an issue for me I would correct everybody. I was in trouble all the time for talking back at school. Now... It’s better if I just... don’t.”

“Mmmh. I see.” said Mr. Stark. “So what changed then? You’ve been pretty chatty the whole time I’ve known you, even during battles.”

Peter laughed. “The mask.” he said. “I... suddenly I had superpowers, and I could save people, and when you can do that you... I don’t know. Spider-man has always been a little bit of a different person than me. Or maybe not. Maybe it’s just me without all this” he gestured vaguely at his head, “stuff telling me I shouldn’t. Either way, that identity? I could make it whatever I wanted, and I wanted it to be able to say the things I... couldn’t.”

“I don’t really see a difference.” said Mr. Stark. “You’re a little shit either way.”

Peter’s laugh was nearly genuine. “You’re different Mr. Stark. You’ve always been. Talking to you is easy.”

“What about all the other people at the company?” asked Mr. Stark. “I’ve seen you get pretty opinionated there.”

Peter shook his head. “It’s sort of like another mask.” he said. “When I’m at the tower I’m not Peter Parker: Pathetic Teenager anymore. I’m Peter Parker: Intern to Tony Fucking Stark. It’s like being Spider-man. Without the bullet wounds, but still... when I leave, I go back to being just... me. I don’t... I don’t like it, but that’s how it is.”

“Just you? You’re not *just* anything.” said Mr. Stark. “You’re incredible Pete. Just now... Maybe you weren’t quite at your best, maybe you were panicking a little, but you didn’t give up and you pulled through and did a good job of it, and I’m very proud of you.”

Peter smiled. Mr. Stark was the sort of person who thought that the people he liked could do no wrong. “Ah yes.” he said, “I’m proud of all my panic attacks.”

“You should be Pete. You worked through something that can be pretty debilitating, hell it’s stopped me enough times, and I... I’m still proud of you. Panic attacks and all.”

Peter curled into him. “I’m still shitty at public speaking.” he said, “Or any kind of speaking really except with like... five people and also most scientists. And muggers.”

“Practice makes perfect.” said Mr. Stark. “Call it exposure therapy. We don’t have to throw you back in the deep end though, if you don’t want to. I... I didn’t know this was going to be a problem and if you wanted you don’t have to do it again, PR reps are a thing and-”

“No.” said Peter, cutting him off. He looked up, right into Mr. Stark’s eyes. “I don’t need to... I can’t stop. I just need to be better, get better at this. I still want to do it, the... Avenging thing. Can
“Yeah,” said Mr. Stark. “I will, if it’s what you want.”

Peter gave a hard nod. “Thanks,” he said.

“Anytime.” said Mr. Stark. “Now, what do you say we blow this joint? I don’t necessarily need to be here for the rest of it, and I’d rather go check out how the renovators are doing, move some of the lab stuff. Maybe get some ice-cream. You deserve it for a job well done.

Peter grinned up at him. “Yeah, that sounds good.” he said.

Mr. Stark stood and helped him up, even though it really should have been the other way around. “By the way,” he said as they were leaving the stairwell “For what it’s worth? I think the pathetic teenager is the one that’s the mask. My intern is definitely the genuine article.”

Chapter End Notes

i don’t know if I can make it to fictional christmas by real christmas, but y’all is getting daily updates until I do. Maybe I can aim for New Years...

also, three cheers for dissociation, and a resounding boo for Peter pushing himself into asking for more anxiety attacks in the name of pleasing his dad. hip hip hooray.
Being back in New York was like coming back to Earth. Geneva had been… strangely muted, like a dream. Clean, bright, and filled with people who were so far removed from Peter’s regular experience that he could hardly consider them the same species as those he interacted with on a regular basis.

As Peter exited the quinjet, he winced. New York’s ambient noise was about 25 decibels louder, and he could already smell the exhaust fumes and garbage even from the landing bay near the top of the tower. It was home, but it would take a little bit to re-acclimate to.

“You okay kiddo?” asked Mr. Stark, noticing the flinch.

“Yeah.” said Peter. “Coming out of noise control and filtered air is always a bit of an adjustment.”

Mr. Stark squinted at him. “Your senses?” he said. “You did say the first spidey-goggles were a lot for light filtering, but I thought you were mostly okay now.”

“Yeah.” said Peter “Techniques to deal with sensory over-stimulation was pretty much the first thing I googled after the spider-bite once I was finished wondering whether I was dying or not. A lot of it comes down to processing power, and I can at least say I have a lot of that.” He tapped his head in demonstration as he followed Mr. Stark into the elevator.

“Doesn’t make it fun.” said Mr. Stark. “You need anything to help?”

Peter waved him off. “I’ve got sunglasses.” he said, “And FRIDAY helped me rig a good pair of noise cancelling earbuds. If I remember to use fabric softener and work towards something instead of stewing in the noise I’m mostly fine, though… well, it doesn’t really matter.”

“Peter.” said Mr. Stark warningly.

Peter rolled his eyes, and escaped from the elevator into the newly refurbished ‘common area’ which now looked more like an actual open plan kitchen and living room. It was still completely bare of furniture, but it was much nicer and looked less abandoned. “Whoa, this place has gotten cool.” he said.

“Pete.” said Mr. Stark. Peter would not be getting away with a subject change.

“Since Dr. Cho’s health intervention,” said Peter, picking through the empty cupboards and playing with the lighting. “My body decided to go on another self-improvement drive. I picked up another fifteen pounds of muscle, and like an inch in height. And it’s still going. I could totally leap a mid-size suburban home in a single bound now, so that’s cool. Anyway, my senses are going wonky again, but I’ll get it under control. I did last time.”

“Why don’t you tell me exactly what’s been going on.” asked Mr. Stark, in a tone that invited no resistance. “Run through the five senses.”

Peter started wandering down the hall, peeking into rooms as he went, and Mr. Stark followed. Peter tried to be honest, but he couldn’t look at Mr. Stark while doing it because this was the
second conversation in a day about how weak Peter was. “The eyes aren’t too bad.” he said finally, after a few moments of contemplation. “Last time they went crazy, but this time I only have a bit more night vision. Touch… has been a bit of an adjustment. I don’t think I could wear jeans right now without the pantyhose and baby powder I stick on underneath, and the only reason I don’t have a rash right now is the crazy thread count of this suit. Even then it’s… distracting. Hearing… hearing isn’t good, but I’ve got the earbuds, and FRIDAY’s manufactured a smaller set so I don’t get in trouble at school. I’m mostly okay up here, it’s just in public. And I’m not gonna lie, it’s a little bit alarming all the stuff I can hear. Like, Mr. Stark, I can totally hear your heartbeat right now. And the nearest person four floors below us starting up a coffee machine. Pretty sure it’s Ms. Potts based on the heel clicking… But anyway, earbuds. Filtering. I’m mostly okay.”

He peeked into Mr. Stark’s bedroom, which hadn’t been changed at all except for a box of random personal effects from the rest of the place that FRIDAY had obviously directed the workers not to throw out. “You’re still missing two.” said Mr. Stark.

“Taste… taste has gotten really fucking weird.” said Peter. “I don’t… There’s a lot of stuff I can’t even try to eat anymore. I can taste the preservatives and stuff. And I don’t like things quite as sweet as I used to. That’s all… fine. It’s just weird. Especially on the other end. I like a lot of weird stuff. Used to be I couldn’t stand mushrooms, and now I can’t get enough of them. And bitter stuff too. Like, I totally love coffee black now, even though before it was just… ew. All that started with the spiderbite, though, it’s just gotten way more… pronounced.”

“Smell?” asked Mr. Stark.

Peter shook his head, he really didn’t want to admit to that. Then he sighed because it was getting unmanageable. “It fucking sucks.” he said. “It used to be useful. I can like smell bombs and dangerous chemicals and stuff, but now it’s getting really bad. I can’t even go into a public bathroom without wanting to die. Not to mention there’s other… weird stuff.”

“Weird stuff?” asked Mr. Stark.

“Well, I can smell people really well, you know, and I could sort of smell the difference, since everyone uses different stuff to wash, like you always smell like motor oil even when you’re freshly washed and covered in aftershave, but now it’s like… even more? People just… smell like themselves under all of it. And I can, like, smell a whole room of them at once and it’s just… way different. And sometimes there’s something else too. It’s… not a smell, exactly, and not like… sensing danger, but there’s a little… people vary a bit sometimes? And it’s mostly mood or health, or if they’ve taken drugs, but there’s a couple more intense ones that I really have no clue what they are.”

“Well then.” said Mr. Stark.

“Yeah.” said Peter. “It’s gotten… kind of intense.”

To avoid Mr. Stark’s gaze which was filled with a soft emotion Peter wasn’t experienced enough in the whole human thing to identify, Peter kept investigating the penthouse. The next door he tried, right across the hall from Mr. Stark’s bedroom left him… floored. Pun intended.

“Why is there flooring on the ceiling?” asked Peter.

Mr. Stark looked sheepish. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed.” he said, “But sometimes when you pace it includes the walls and ceiling.”

Peter blushed. He’d known that, but he actively tried not to do it. “Sorry.” he said, “I know it’s
“No,” said Mr. Stark. “It’s okay. It’s fine, I just figured in your room it might be nice to…” he trailed off, looking supremely uncomfortable.

It wasn’t until then that it really sunk in that the room was for Peter. “Oh my god,” said Peter. “I mean, I know we totally discussed me having a room, but I was thinking that meant let-Peter-choose-the-paint-colors-in-one-of-the-guest-rooms, not make what is obviously the sweetest bedroom on the planet, and this is like… not small. Not guest room size, and that’s definitely an original Star Wars poster, and you put flooring on the ceiling. And…”

Mr. Stark looked even more uncomfortable. “Surprise?” he asked.

Peter decided to not do the whole routine he had planned, starring concepts such as ‘you don’t need to do anything for me’ and ‘I definitely don’t deserve this’. Hugging Mr. Stark as hard as he could without damaging the man was far more important.

“You want to keep me.” whispered Peter. “Oh my god. I can’t… I’m not just… temporary. I mean. I knew that. I just.”

“I don’t know what will happen with May.” said Mr. Stark. “But. You’ll always have a place here. I want to… You’re stuck with me for life.”

Peter grinned into Mr. Stark’s shoulder. He said. Yeah Mr. Stark was annoying, but Peter was being treated almost like a... son. He felt sort of like he was Mr. Stark's kid. Or at least he could pretend he was in his own head. "Stuck with you?" he said “Pretty sure it's the other way around.”

“Yeah.” said Mr. Stark.

“You know,” said Peter, before it could get awkward. “You promised me ice cream.”

“Yeah huh. FRIDAY find a good place we haven’t tried before. And schedule another couple sessions with Cho while we're at it. Time to figure out Peter’s senses.”

“I hate you.” said Peter in the most loving manner he could. His face was still buried in Mr. Stark’s shoulder.

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“Peter.” was the first thing that May said to him when he returned from Geneva. It wasn’t any sort of greeting. Just his name. Neutral and impersonal, and it made him flinch.

“May.” he said back, like it didn’t hurt.

It was Tuesday evening, and he’d received a text at around noon telling him he could come home. It almost made him angry, how easy it seemed to be to her, to throw him away and then take him back again like it was nothing. Looking at her though, it was easy to see that it wasn’t nothing. There were bags under her red-rimmed eyes, and it was clear that she hadn’t been caring for herself properly. She was clean, her job at the hospital demanded no less, but her hair was a mess, and he knew for a fact that when she’d gotten home she’d simply taken off her scrubs and thrown on an already worn t-shirt from her floor. He could smell the carpet on her.

“Over Christmas break I’m going to Virginia.” she said.

“Oh?” asked Peter. He’d heard of various family members of May’s living in Virginia but hadn’t
“My aunt Susan had a stroke, and June just had another baby. I figure they could use the help. Will you be there?”

Peter tried to remember who Susan was. He was pretty sure she was the unmarried one who had so many uncountable health problems that she’d moved in with her niece (which might be June, or May’s other sister April, he wasn’t sure). Susan might also be the married one with uncountable health problems, but he was pretty sure that one was Sandra. It didn’t really matter who was who though because this was an olive branch. An invitation. “I can fly out for the second half, but it’s all hands on deck until the Accords signing at least.”

“That’s when, the twenty-first?” asked May

“Twenty-second, actually.” said Peter, “but I doubt I’ll be able to get out till a day or two after that. There’s going to be a lot of glad-handing, and Mr. Stark has an event on Christmas Eve for the disaster relief organizations he started after the Chitauri.”

“Try to be there in time for Christmas dinner,” said May. “I… we haven’t had a Christmas in a while. It’ll be… nice. June is making roast.”

Peter smiled a little bit painfully. Ben had died around Christmas time, and they hadn’t had the heart to celebrate that year. The years afterward had been hard, and May usually fell into a slump around then, so it was better to leave off the cheerful (and expensive) trappings and just curl up on the couch. “I’ll be there.” he said.

“That’s good.” said May. “You… haven’t been around much this year.”

It was then that Peter realized the absolutely unforgivable thing he’d done. Ben had died on the Seventh of December five years before, and Peter had been so self absorbed that he’d completely forgotten to mark the day. In his defense he’d been kicked out of the house the day before that, and May and him hadn’t ever really made any traditions attached to it (it was normally a regular, if shitty, day for him), but he had a feeling that the timing had a lot to do with why he’d been kicked out in the first place.

“I guess I’ve been…” said Peter. He remembered what Pepper said about excuses--that they didn’t get things done, and stopped. “I’m sorry. I’ll try to do better.”

“Just… be happy Peter.” said May. “That’s what I always wanted. What Ben wanted too. I… maybe I haven’t been so great either.”

“It’s okay.” said Peter. “Take whatever time you need.”

“No.” said May. “I mean yes. I should. Take time. But I can’t. There’s you. You’re… you’re a kid. You don’t deserve to have to deal with that.”

Peter was quiet for several seconds.

“I can go.” he said. “If you need a minute. I can go back to the tower and give you space.”

May looked up at him, and she seemed on the verge of crying again. “Peter.” she almost sobbed, “that’s not how it’s supposed to be. I’m… I’m the adult. I’m supposed to deal with my shit on my own time, not yours. You shouldn’t have to…”

“It doesn’t matter what it’s supposed to be like May. It’s about what its already like. You… You
have your own problems. I get that. You shut down occasionally, and that’s fine. I’m independent and I’ve always handled things myself. I just… I’m sick of having to wait for you to pick yourself up again. I don’t…”

May cried a little harder, and Peter gave up. Nothing constructive was going to happen during this conversation.

“Hey.” he said, hugging May. “It’s going to be fine. We’re going to be fine.”

“We used to be happy. When Ben… I just want things to go back to the way they were.”

Peter rubbed her back soothingly. “I don’t want them to go back.” he said, after a moment of thought. “I want them to get better.”

The next few days were tentative. Peter went to school, and his internship. May did her best to respect his boundaries, and asked after what was happening—though they were no where near the closeness they’d had before. It was… okay. More than that, it let a massive weight off of Peter’s shoulders. He was good at ignoring things so he hadn’t even really noticed how much it was stressing him out that May had gone off the deep end like an Olympic diver after a gold medal.

He had enough emotional space to focus, and that was very necessary. With the accords signing only two weeks away there was a lot to get done. Surrounding the signing there would be Events and when there was Events there had to be planning. Not that Mr. Stark himself was the person in charge of all that, but he was still helping, and signing off on various things, especially since he knew the most about what was happening with the accords and the people involved in it. Plus Mr. Stark was also still hacking at the accords themselves, and furthering his personal quest to neuter Ross and his peers and make sure they didn’t ruin everything. It was a lot, and that was on top of the regular duties in R&D.

Peter, as always, was a little bit surprised about how involved he ended up in things. Spider-Man received mail regarding how the accords would deal with the underage. Peter himself, in his civilian identity, found himself corresponding with many of the people he’d met at various functions. Apparently he had ‘contacts’ now. It was weird.

One of Peter’s biggest projects—eclipsing a lot of the other things he’d been doing, even the all important heartstrings project—was now the reverse engineering of the Captain America serum. He’d used it to bargain for a lot of concessions from those who wanted the ex-Avengers dead, Mr. Stark had backed him up and used it himself, and he needed to deliver on his promise. It was difficult work, and very frustrating. Dr. Cho was helping, but many of the sources he was using in his research were so heavily classified that he couldn’t tell her about them just to keep her out of the line of fire if it all went wrong.

Then, on Sunday night, almost a week after he’d come home from Geneva, he had a breakthrough.

Dr. Cho’s lab was dark, the only illumination coming from the sparkling lights of New York outside of the window and from the luminescent holograms Peter had before him. Peter had no mind to pay attention to any of it though, because the entirety of his brain power was focused inward on the terrible new knowledge he’d just found.

He wished he didn’t know it. He wanted to forget it, and already knew he would never be writing it down. He wouldn’t even be telling FRIDAY what it was, only that he had it. It just… Peter didn’t think it was something the world should have.
Peter had always known he was smart. How could he not, when his mind chewed up math problems like they were nothing, when every issue he had was examined and cross examined under a microscope until he was paralyzed from overthinking? He hadn’t thought it was important though. There were people who could draw, and people who were good at public speaking, and people who could know something was wrong with someone just by looking. Peter’s strengths weren’t any of those, but he had them, and that was that.

But now he thought about his strengths, and was reminded more than anything of two things. ‘There are a lot of kinds of power,’ echoed Mr. Stark. Another voice, from much longer ago continued. ‘and with great power—’

Peter cut off the memory of Uncle Ben with the great force of one who has long practiced the action. He knew the rest of that saying. What he didn’t know was how to deal with… this. This… responsibility.

Peter had always known he was smart. He hadn’t realized how bad that could be until now, when he felt the fate of the entire planet on his shoulders like a building crushing him, a little way off the beach and he couldn’t breathe. And maybe he should have known before. Maybe he should have realized that his idle thoughts about improving recombinant DNA processes would translate well into bio-warfare, should have considered when he was playing around with the arc-reactor designs that before he’d cleaned it up and fixed the issue he had unintentionally doodled out plans for something that could blow up bigger than any bomb ever made by a factor of ten.

Peter was the sort of smart that could irreparably damage the world with ease. And now he knew it, and knew ways he could do it. Ultron was created through a single insecure containment field and a moment of negligence. With what he knew, what he could do… Peter could create something just as bad easily. By accident even.

It wasn’t just the knowledge though. Peter had the tools, all the supplies he would ever need to make so many horrible things. He could destroy New York in a half an hour with nothing more than what was already on his favorite worktable in Mr. Stark’s lab. Bombs weren’t hard. If he had a weekend free and the mind to he could probably start the zombie apocalypse.

The talk about different kinds of power echoed through his mind. All the money, all the political influence, the unlimited access to the worlds secrets that Peter used as if it were his due. He’d made a video call to a minister in Russia the other day, to request the release of the files on the Red Rooms bastardization of the serum, and had fully expected it to be accepted. He’d redirected people to pick through Howard Stark’s physical files and labs to scan everything--over a thousand man-hours worth of work--as casually as he might ask FRIDAY to order pizza. He’d spent over a million dollars on research materials just on this one project, and nobody said a thing.

Peter was obscenely brilliant. FRIDAY could hack anything on the web, and Peter could get anything else with ease. They had a staff of 20,000 people who used to be spies and were perfectly willing to kill people as part of their day job. Mr. Stark had more spending power than any other entity on the planet besides possibly Wakanda.

And now…

“Peter?” came Mr. Stark’s voice softly from somewhere behind him. A hand brushed gently over his hair. “Peter FRIDAY says you stopped responding. Is everything okay?”

Peter snapped back into his body. He felt like a rubber band that had been stretched to the breaking point.
“Do you remember what they said about the other Winter Soldiers?” he asked hoarsely. The twinkling lights of New York seemed wrong in this realization, almost profane. Mr. Stark’s face creased with shadows of worry that were insufficient for the problem at hand. The disinfectant used on the counters was harsh on his nose, and it was all too much and not enough.

“Pete take a breath,” said Mr. Stark, putting his hands on Peter’s shoulders, stabilizing him. It didn’t work as well as it usually did, and Peter remained agitated.

“No. no no. I have to tell you. Because of what they said.”

“About the soldiers?” asked Mr. Stark.

“Yeah… yeah. The soldiers.” muttered Peter, waving vaguely at the holograms around him. Mr. Stark looked up at them, and was briefly lit up blue before he dismissed all of them with a gesture.

“Peter, what about them.”

Peter looked up into Mr. Stark’s eyes, deep as voids in the darkness. His hands came up almost of their own accord, reaching for Mr. Stark as much as the man was reaching for Peter. “They said. They said they could destroy a whole country in a night.” he said softly. “That they could have put HYDRA in charge of the whole world.”

“Maybe.” said Mr. Stark. “If there was no one to stop them.”

Peter curled into himself. “The most dangerous weapon ever made.” he whispered, quoting directly from one of the reports about the original soldier.

Mr. Stark seemed extremely confused, but didn’t say anything, even as Peter’s hands tightened on his forearms hard enough to bruise.

Eventually Peter looked up, so close he could see the fine lines of scars on Mr. Stark’s face, shrapnel from some conflict he probably didn’t even remember since he never kept track of what wound came from where. “The soldiers.” he said.

Mr. Stark nodded encouragingly, though he still seemed worried and confused.

Peter felt tremors beginning in his limbs. “The weapons.” he said. “I could. I can. I know… I could make more. As many as I…” he trailed off. “Did you ever think,” he said, after several moments of contemplation, “how easy it would be to take over the world.”

Something in Mr. Stark’s neck went taut, and his grip tightened. He seemed… haunted. “Yes.” he said finally. “I have. I”

Peter searched his face, though he wasn’t sure what he was looking for.

“I have the power to do it. Hell, you have the power to do it between your talents and what you’ve got here. That’s a dangerous thing to have for a lot of reasons. It means you could be forced to do dangerous things, and you can’t let that happen no matter what someone holds over your head. It means you need to be careful with what you say, always, because people could use what you know to do it. And it means that you… if you went off the deep end, if something happened, if you could justify it to yourself, you might do it. And that’s… terrifying. It was what kept me up after Ultron, knowing that my actions could have ended everything. It still keeps me up, because occasionally, I just…” he sighed, and took a moment.

“Sometimes I think I could do a better job,” Mr. Stark admitted once he was done thinking. “Fuck,
ending world hunger would cost only thirty billion a year. There are so many things wrong. And I do try to help. I run the only Fortune 500 company that doesn’t exploit any of its workers and pays them all living wages. I spend half my life saving the goddamn planet, fund more charities than I can count, and use every bit of my political power to try to stop the train-wreck of America’s democracy failing. And yet I still feel like it all means nothing because here we are, in a country where a law has a thirty percent chance of being passed whether everyone loves it or hates it, in a world where Ross’ version of the accords exist and where no one cares even though we’re tipping quickly past the point of irreversible climate change. It’s horrible. It infuriates me. I simply don’t have the time to change it, and don’t have the trust to let someone else do it. And sometimes I want to tear it all down, the whole system, just so that it would all… stop. So that I could stop feeling guilty about being… this person who benefits from inequality and exploitation.

“But here’s the thing you have to remember Peter. When you tear things like that down, people die, and afterwards the rest want to rise against you. You have to build something out of the ashes of what was there, and that costs a lot in blood. FRI’s run the simulations. If someone--anyone--took over the world, whether it was HYDRA or North Korea or us, or aliens or someone we haven’t even heard of yet, there would be about a billion deaths. Minimum. Probably more, but if they did it as carefully as they could and everything went right it would still be that many.”

Peter didn’t even know how to digest what he was hearing. It was horrifying, but it was also frustrating because all the things Mr. Stark had mentioned were true, and Peter hated the injustice. “Nothing’s worth that many lives.” he said finally.

“Yeah.” said Mr. Stark. “It’s awful, but you have to remember that.”

Peter shuddered. “But what if… I don’t even know, I can’t even imagine, but now that I know… this, about the serum, and all those other things, and have… I just. I’m scared. What if I messed up and…”

“You won’t.” said Mr. Stark. “I know you better than that.”

“I could though.” said Peter. “I could and I… I can’t imagine it, but you have to have thought of it. That I might.

Mr Stark sighed, and rubbed his eyes, face set in a rictus of guilt. “You… I. I don’t know how to say this, but. It’s.”

Peter waited, and Mr. Stark looked more and more guilty. He tried to be comforting, but Mr. Stark just looked even guiltier.

“Ever since Obadiah, I’ve done risk assessments on everyone around me.” he admitted finally, voice soft but harsh, emotionless. “No respect for privacy, no holding back. I figure everything out, and run it through every simulation I can think of. Then I come up with ways to stop all of them. I know exactly how fast Pepper could tank the company if she betrayed me, and how I would stop it. I know every single secret Natasha Romanov ever had, and all the best ways to make her crack. I’ve extrapolated from the information I have on him the precise moment that Nick Fury would break under torture, and the window of time I’d have to either rescue him or kill him so he won’t tell what he knows, adjusted for the capabilities of every enemy he has. I… everyone. Every scenario, Peter, you know I would never think…”

“You’ve done me.” said Peter.

Mr. Stark looked at him with a flat and clinical gaze, as emotive as a stone. “Yes.” he said. “Some before I recruited you, and more as I’ve come to know your capabilities better. Every time you
learn a new company secret FRIDAY runs through every possible thing you could do with it. Peter, you…” he stopped to breathe harshly, guilt and something else returning in a wave.

“Tell me.” said Peter pleadingly.

“With the resources you have access to as part of Stark Industries and my protoje you are one of the most dangerous people on the planet.” said Mr. Stark, voice flattening out again until it was as toneless a report as he could give. “If you went rogue I estimate you’d be able to make off with the materials for whatever you needed for any plan, not to mention the groundwork you could lay before hand for any other resources you could possibly require. FRIDAY is wonderful, but you outstrip her lateral thinking abilities to such an extent that I have no doubt you would be able to avoid her oversight on any unapproved action. You could quite easily use your resources to do incalculable damage to any target without any of us suspecting a thing until it was done.

“Even outside of the power granted by myself and your work here, you remain highly dangerous as a free agent, with the potential to again become one of the most dangerous people on the planet. Were I to remove everything I ever gave you, I imagine you would bounce back in a matter of months, your natural charisma and hacking abilities compensating for your lack of access to databases, and your physical skills more than enough to overcome any security and seize physical resources.

“Physically you are unmatched by almost any other enhanced--with the suit even more so, and don’t think I don’t know about the terrifying ideas you have on your private server that you rejected for being just too much. You are competent, careful, and as time goes on you only become more so, with a learning curve and adaptability that is unprecedented. Under the guidance of an organization or individual with the requisite supplies and knowledge you could achieve proficiency in any skills required for your plans--a dangerous factor that makes your moves even more unpredictable as I must always keep in mind that what I know of you can change in an instant. Alone you could achieve the same skills, if slower, but that unpredictability would increase. You could easily become an unparalleled agent of chaos.

“The most dangerous part of you though will always be your mind. You are unpredictable, intuitive, adaptive, and extremely intelligent. I can keep up with you only by merit of being one of the smartest people on the planet, most others cannot say the same. Worse, you are a creative and experienced engineer with an eidetic memory. I daresay you could build anything you’ve ever seen, up to and including an Iron Man suit, and improve on it in ways I could never think of. In other areas, such as biotech, you tend towards the same competency, and indeed synthesizing the Super Serum is not even among the top ten worst things you could do. Peter, I know you only brought that up, but I know for a fact that with the research you’ve just completed you could make Hulks. Or plagues. Science is terrifying that way. In short I would definitely place you as an Avengers level threat, about on par with how Loki was in 2012 for the danger of your plans.”

Peter didn’t know how to react. He’d known, in an abstract sort of way, that Spider-Man could be dangerous if he wasn’t a ‘good guy’ but until the serum research he hadn’t even considered what any of it meant, especially what any of his knowledge meant. And now Mr. Stark was saying he was as dangerous as Loki. It was… unthinkable.

“He had an army.” said Peter weakly.

“We had a Hulk.” said Mr. Stark, the corner of his mouth quirking up in something that wasn’t a smile. “And yet we still barely won.”

Peter wrapped his arms around himself, feeling suddenly cold. “If I’m… If I’m that dangerous.” he said, “Then why…” he stopped. “You’re making me more dangerous. Why would you do that.
“Risk assessment Peter.” said Mr. Stark. “If I just went by that part then I wouldn’t tell you anything. You’d be locked up somewhere you couldn’t touch anything. Possibly sedated. Possibly dead. However dangerous you are I am more so, and I’m not kind to my enemies the way you are. There’s a second part though, Peter. I don’t just figure out what someone could do. I figure out how likely it is that they would do it. Rogers… Rogers only blindsided me because I didn’t know that Barnes was a factor. If I had… I wouldn’t have been surprised at all. I certainly wasn’t when Romanov turned. That whole ‘Civil War’ played out pretty much like something I’d already predicted, with the exception of T’Challa and Barnes. It’s why I brought you into that fight, because I’d run the numbers and I knew that without a wild card of my own someone would die.

“I guess what I’m saying is that I know you Peter. I know your capabilities better than anyone else on the planet, but I also know you. I know you’re empathetic. I know you’re kind, that you have an ironclad set of principles you would not willingly break for anything. I can hazard a very accurate guess at what circumstances would force you to kill someone, and the answer is usually ‘not if there’s any other way’. That’s why I trust you, because you are trustworthy. You are one of the best people I know.”

“But what if someone took me?” asked Peter. “Like the Winter Soldier, or your scenario with Nick Fury. I’m not immune to torture.”

Mr. Stark looked pained. “I would rescue you.” he said.

“And if you couldn’t?” asked Peter.

Mr. Stark didn’t answer, but it was an answer all on its own. Steve Rogers might burn the world for his Bucky, but Mr. Stark had always been more pragmatic than that. Peter wasn’t sure why, but somehow it was comforting, in a cold sort of way. Peter probably shouldn’t feel that way about his boss offering to kill him, but it was like a safety net. Not something you wanted to fall into, but better than the ground.

“Good.” said Peter finally. “Good, that’s good. If I ever…”

Mr. Stark looked away. “I wouldn’t.”

Peter didn’t believe him, but chose not to bring it up. “I still don’t understand why you keep making me dangerous.” he said instead.

Mr. Stark sighed, and turned haunted eyes on him. “We’ve had this conversation before.” he said. Peter remembered. Geneva. The thousands of ex-agents of SHIELD. The heavy responsibility of protecting the enhanced if Mr. Stark was ever gone.

“You let me become dangerous because you want me to be.” said Peter. “To do something.”

“Powerful,” said Mr. Stark, “And yeah, dangerous, but mostly powerful. I want… I want you to be able to fight. Every dangerous thing in the universe, what I saw through the portal during the battle of New York. All of it is there… waiting. I don’t want to leave the Earth undefended. And it kills me every day knowing that I’m setting you up to get hurt, but I can’t…”

“The world needs heroes,” said Peter.

Mr. Stark nodded, looking pained. “You’re one of the only people I feel like I can trust with that.” he said, “It’s a lot of responsibility, and I really shouldn’t be putting it on you. It’s… very wrong of
me. Very fucked up to be setting up a child as some kind of last ditch defense, definitely child endangerment of the worst kind. Also making a child soldier. Human rights violation and all that. And I’d understand if you wanted to refuse it. You should refuse it, and you shouldn’t worry about more than your next English test, but I know you won’t. Because I know you, and I know you’re just as self-sacrificing as me at my worst. You’ll always do your damnedest to save the world. That’s something I can trust. And I’m a very cold bastard for using that, and I hate myself every day for it, but I’m also honest enough to realize that there isn’t anything that would stop me. So yeah, I’m going to give you all the tools to make yourself powerful. And yeah, I’m going to let you throw yourself at every threat you try to, partly because I can’t stop you, but also because someone needs to stop the threat and I’m willing to use you to do it. I… I’m not a good person Peter. And you’re going to get hurt. I don’t…”

Peter had started crying somewhere around the part about child endangerment, and now he was so distraught that he could barely focus, though his tears remained mostly silent. Clearly Mr. Stark could see what was happening though, and so he acted on the habits and instincts they’d just begun to build together and gathered Peter into his arms. He was hesitant though, almost shy, and though Peter could tell he hadn’t meant to be heard, Peter heard him anyway. “You should hate me.” he said.

Peter clung to him all the tighter, and shook his head. “I won’t.” he said “Hate you, I mean. I can’t.”

“I don’t understand that.” said Mr. Stark. “You’re too good, and you shouldn’t… I… I’m using you. I’m hurting you, even though I…”

Peter hugged him tighter. “You’re not using me.” he said. “I want to be here.”

“You’re going to get hurt. Because of me.”

“No,” said Peter. “If I get hurt it’s because I choose to fight. And it’s worth it. You know I decided that a long time ago.”

“Pete… I.”

“I’d be doing it even if you weren’t there.” said Peter, interrupting him before he could go on., “You just… you make me better. I like being better I can… I lose people less often now. I… know more, can help more, and I…”

Mr. Stark seemed almost lost. “Peter, I.” he stopped and started again. “Originally, I didn’t intend to. I thought you would be just--”

Peter waited. Things had gotten emotional, and while he was getting better, Mr. Stark was still abysmal when it came to discussing such things. It wasn’t hard to be better at emotions than Mr. Stark had been when Peter had first met him.

“You were just another hero.” he said finally, “Somebody I had to protect under the accords, who was useful when Rogers went rogue. Then you were… a responsibility. I gave you the suit, agreed to help you, and I had to. And after that, you were just… you’re Peter.” he said, as if it was something important. “I started to… care. A little. A lot. I don’t know. Now I just… I don’t like the path I set you on. And it’s worse, because if it were anyone else I’d be fine with it, but you’re… I don’t like how often you get flung off of buildings.”

Peter’s head fell forward onto Mr. Stark’s shoulder, and he chuckled despite himself. Maybe it wasn’t an appropriate reaction, especially in such an emotionally charged moment, but--“Mr. Stark,
I fling myself off of buildings. Other people hardly ever manage it."

“And that’s exactly my point.” said Mr. Stark. “I can’t stop you. I won’t stop you--I need you too much. But I can’t… I don’t want to live in a world where a fourteen year old has to fling himself off buildings. I hate that you have to. I hate that I make everything worse by enabling the habit. I hate-”

Peter sighed and shook his head. “Shut up.” he said. “I’m fifteen and you’re being stupid.”

Mr. Stark pulled together an impressive bitch face considering his obvious distress. “I’m not the one flinging myself of buildings.” he attempted to deadpan.

Peter wasn’t fooled. “You are somehow convinced,” he said, “That you’re a horrible person whose fooled everyone around you into thinking you’re good. I’m really not sure how, but you’ve also decided to also feel guilty about the fact that you’ve ‘fooled’ us all. That’s bullshit. You’re… you’re a manipulative bastard. You’re pragmatic. Yeah, those things are true, but they’re what make you the sort of person I want to follow. If you were someone like Rogers… I’d be scared of that. He was able to lose sight of literally the main goal you guys had been working towards for years just because his childhood best friend showed up. Well, also because his reservations about the accords which were valid, but mostly Bucky. And maybe that makes him a good friend, or a good person even. Maybe I would do that if something happened to someone I loved. I don’t know. I do know you wouldn’t. You’re better than that, and even if your choices aren’t good they’re usually right. And that’s why I trust you.”

“You have no idea,” said Mr. Stark, “what I would do if somebody hurt y--someone I… loved.”

“I do know that nobody innocent would get killed in the process,” said Peter. “I also know that before you did you’d think it all the way through.”

“You shouldn’t… you can’t just trust people like that.” said Mr. Stark.

“I don’t trust some nebulous concept of people.” said Peter, “Not like that, not all the way. I don’t know them well enough. I trust you though. I know you, I know what you’ll do. And I have to trust someone, because if I didn’t… I don’t know what would happen, but it wouldn’t be good. Probably more Winter Soldiers. They are… shockingly easy to make. Actually it’s not shocking. You can do it with 40s tech. Still, I… If there weren’t people like you I would be very scared about what people like me would end up doing. Just… even on accident.”

“People like you… if there were more people like you, nobody would ever have to worry about anything, especially not me. You’re… better than I ever could be.”

Peter hugged him tight. He didn’t really know what to say, and now they were just going in circles, so the conversation was pointless anyway. “You’re weirdly bad at this for someone whose so good at manipulating people.” he said.

“What, no I… what?”

“You just tried comforting me by telling me that what I was worried about was even worse than I thought.” said Peter.

There was a long silence. Then, “Did it work?”

Peter chuckled, and buried his face in Mr. Stark’s shoulder. “Yeah,” he said, voice muffled by Mr. Stark’s shoulder, “It worked.”
He would have some things to think about later, and he just knew he’d be panicking about it quite a bit, but that was a problem for Future Peter to deal with. Now Peter was content knowing that Mr. Stark was there, and trusted Peter to do what was right, and would help if he wasn’t sure. It was nice. Almost like… Peter cut off the thought. He was perfectly content with how things were. He didn’t need… that. This was fine.

Chapter End Notes

I HATE MY LIFE. CAPS LOCK IS still on from writing the title. Notre Dame was far too difficult a building to select as my gingerbread house this year. I especially shouldn't have made it almost two feet tall. It weighs forty pounds. I'll show u pics when I finish it--also probably post christmas. because I'm a faliure. Yep, we're definitely not making it. I have it written, but I accidentally wrote like 10k words before that and I still need to edit and shit.

Anyway, here's an extra extra long chapter in which (by popular demand) Peter realizes he's one of the most powerful characters in the MCU and basically Tony's kid, and reacts in the healthiest manner possible (that was sarcasm). So you guys got what you wanted, briefly, but Peter's an efficient person and is already coming up with reasons to go back into the denial phase.

also the rant about how terrifying Peter is is based on my thoughts during FFH about how the ability to create a cloaked global drone system with the ability to find and kill anyone is a) terrifying and b) on brand for Tony Stark and those adjacent to him. These people are terrifying and could totally take over the world in ten minutes. They only don't because they have like four morals. Everyone is right to fear the avengers.

Anywhoo I love you all, happy holidays my bitches.
Peter’s first day working for Pepper went… okay. He didn’t feel like he’d done a particularly awful job, but it was a whole new world of things he had no idea how to deal with, so he’d been reeling from a whole truckload of culture shock. The first surprise came with how early it started. Pepper came into the office at half past six. On a Saturday. Apparently, she took her weekend on Monday and Tuesday, since those were the slowest business days. Peter supposed that made sense.

He’d woken in the lab, face down on the table at five-thirty to the smell of coffee and the sound of incessant mocking from FRIDAY, who informed him firstly of the failure of his experiment as a direct result of his ‘ill-timed shutdown’, and secondly that Ms. Potts was en route to the tower, and if he wanted to beat her into the office he’d better hustle, since he really needed a shower.

After all that, a pot of coffee, and a panic attack about what exactly an intern whose working on the businessy side of things wore (he wore t-shirts as an R&D person but he didn’t think that was going to cut it), he had only to scarf down his breakfast bars and sprint out the door. He still arrived after her by a solid ten minutes.

Then it was time to start all over again at the bottom of a horrifyingly steep learning curve he wasn’t sure he could climb.

Not knowing what to do (did he just walk in?), Peter knocked on the side of the door-frame and stood awkwardly while Pepper finished doing… something. Then she looked up with a warm smile. “Hi Peter, what can I do for you?”

Peter briefly forgot why he was there and stared in incomprehension for several seconds. Then his brain quit lagging, and he smiled back--though apparently his muscular control had cut out at some point and there was now a dent in the door-frame he’d been holding onto. “Mr. Stark said I was going to work for you for a bit at some point, and he keeps not doing his job because of the accords stuff, and you seemed really stressed, and FRIDAY said you were taking on a lot of his admin duties, and you said I could come by any time and then I decided to, and Mr. Stark said that was good because he had shit--stuff, sorry--to do, so I guess… hi.”

“Well that’s good. Especially since my PA’s just gone on maternity leave. Why don’t you sit down.”

Peter did, and then fidgeted for a second. “I’m not really sure how helpful I’ll be,” he said at last. “I don’t even really know what your job is.”

“It’s a little bit of everything.” said Pepper. “Even a lot of CEO’s aren’t really sure what they’re doing.”

“Really?” asked Peter.

“Yes.” said Pepper, “And SI is a little different in the sense that even though I’m CEO I’m not actually in charge.”

“Because Mr. Stark owns the company.”

“57% of the company, but yes.” said Pepper, “We’re technically a publicly owned company as
well--Howard Stark went public in 1953 to start the growth needed to supply weapons in the cold war--and that means there’s also a board of directors, which is a thing a lot of CEO's have to deal with. They have less power in SI though, since Tony owns such a large majority. That said… Tony’s the one who decides a lot of our strategy and vision, something the CEO would normally be doing.”

“Strategy and vision?” asked Peter.

“What markets we enter, what products we put out. What makes us special.” said Pepper. “I do some--I arrange how things are sold or marketed, for example--but Tony’s the one who decides where we’re going, and none of the rest of us mind as long as he still fulfills the promised contracts, and makes sure the products that need it get the promised updates. Generally, I investigate the options, collect the most profitable seeming contract bids, and then he picks and chooses what he wants. I can also request things for our non-contract products that the Market Research team thinks are good possibilities--things like new updates for the StarkPhone.

“Since Tony's CTO and head of R&D, he decides which ones are feasible, and his executive team does cost benefit analysis on them, then they say what’s going to happen. It also goes the other way. As I’m sure you’re aware, R&D comes up with all sorts of things that end up going out.”

“Yeah.” said Peter, “I think it’s really cool how anybody can propose a project.”

Pepper smiled, “That’s one of our biggest strengths as a company. It increases our ability to diversify into different markets by quite a bit, and keeps employees from going out and making startups. Here they can get their ideas made and marketed, and have health benefits and job security while they do it. And diversifying is how we went from being a defense contractor worth several billion to the largest company on the planet. We’re the first company in history to be worth more than a trillion.”

“That’s cool.” said Peter. “And, well, I have been wondering why we make planes, and phones, and car engines, and also medical supplies and… well. It sort of seemed random.”

“It makes money, which is honestly the only thing our various diverse interests have in common.” said Pepper, “And, well, you know Tony. His mind is random.”

“Uh-huh.” said Peter, “So, strategy, vision. Making Mr. Stark do his job. That probably takes up a lot of time.”

Pepper smiled even wider. “Almost daily meetings with Tony, monthly board meetings, scattered talks with individual board members, daily meetings with the COO, CAO--that’s analytics, CMO--that’s marketing, and half the rest of the C-level executives, and evaluating a lot of contracts. Several are even pitched to me directly. And that’s still not even half my job.”

“Oh god.” said Peter, “You must be even more overworked than Mr. Stark.”

“I delegate a lot.” returned Pepper. “And some of my other duties are more… subtle or sporadic. For example, I cultivate the culture of the company, and am responsible for building and maintaining the senior executive team. Hiring and firing only happens once in a while, and the rest happens all the time alongside my other duties. Otherwise… my job is mostly setting budgets, and troubleshooting problem areas within the company. Essentially accounting, which is what I was hired for in the first place.”

Peter was confused. “You were an accountant?” he asked.
Pepper smiled. “I graduated from Harvard Business School in 1994, but unfortunately it was the nineties, so nobody would hire me for my actual degree, which was how I ended up in the revenue offices. I started as a temp, checking peoples data entries for accuracy, and was working up to becoming an actual accountant. I was even in school for it as a Masters. Then I became Tony’s PA when I found a math error he made while he was between CFOs. I basically assaulted him. Used pepper spray on his bodyguards.”

“Oh! That’s how you got your name.” said Peter.

Pepper grinned. “Happy still hasn’t forgiven me.” she said.

“I can see him doing that,” said Peter, “He still hasn’t forgiven me for existing.”

That got him a laugh. “You’re wrong,” said Pepper, “He likes you almost as much as he likes Tony, and that’s saying something. He doesn’t willingly drive just anyone around.”

An alert popped up for a call, and Pepper sighed. “Be quiet, but listen in. I think I’ll have you just follow me around for a little bit ‘til you’ve got a good sense of what’s going on.”

Peter nodded, and Pepper answered the phone while he listened and learned more than he’d ever wanted to know about the factory safety compliance standards of the StarkPhone production line.

That evening, Peter was still reeling from the information dump Pepper had landed on him.

Because of that, when he stumbled into Stark Tower from a meeting spent in the North Building--Peppers last that day though she'd stayed to gossip with a friend--he had FRIDAY reschedule most of his afternoon, something that wasn’t difficult since he was ahead on all the R&D stuff, finished with all the Accords stuff (for now--it was the gift that kept on giving), and had mostly been planning to track down Pepper again and do what she told him to. The elevator took him straight past the lab, dumping him directly into the penthouse which had begun to acquire furnishings and a number of printed photos--several of them humiliating for Peter.

Mr. Stark was in the kitchen frowning at a large ball of dough and an arcane attachment to the stand mixer. He looked up and started to speak, but before he could say anything beyond “Peter-” Peter crashed into him, uncaring of the flour covered apron.

“Whoa, Peter, what’s… are you okay?” asked Mr. Stark

Peter made an inspecific noise of distress and refused to let go. Mr. Stark accepted that with a minimum of fuss because Peter had an excellent… mentor. A few moments later he let go and sighed, backing away to lean against the counter.

“Do you want to talk about it?” asked Mr. Stark.

Peter thought about that for a second. “No,” he said, “I’m fine. Just give me a second--I’m a bit overwhelmed.”

Mr. Stark nodded his agreement. “M-kay. Just tell me if you need anything.”

Peter smiled. This was why Mr. Stark was his favorite. “Thanks,” he said. “So… what’s this all about.”

That netted him a grin. “This, Peter, will soon become a lasagna of epic proportions.”
Peter was incredibly confused. “You’re making noodles? You know you can get those in boxes, right?”

“The Italian half of me just made an offended gasp and ran off to fan itself.” said Mr. Stark. “No really, I’m having palpitations. Noodles from a box.”

“God, you don’t need to be a pretentious jerk about it.”

“And you don’t need to eat dried noodles, Peter.” said Mr. Stark, “We have a kitchen now, and if you have the option you should always do noodles fresh. Dried noodles are practically a different ingredient. I mean, they’re edible, but at what cost.”

“Bold words coming from a man who has eaten nothing but takeout and reheated frozen foods for multiple decades.”

“I make eggs sometimes! And back when I lived in Malibu I cooked a lot more.”

Peter rolled his eyes, “Mr. Stark, yesterday we had chicken nuggets for dinner and you were impressed with yourself for cooking them in the oven instead of the microwave.”

“I came out to have a good time and I’m honestly feeling so attacked right now. Honestly, Peter, casting aspersions on the nuggets I so lovingly prepared for you. I’d also like to point out that there was broccoli, which I also made.”

“Mmm,” said Peter, “Truly you are the most talented chef of this age. A regular Julia Child. Slaving daily over masterpieces of culinary skill, creating beautiful--what the fuck are you doing with that rolling pin?”

“Making noodles. Now wash your hands and help. You don’t deserve the fruits of my labor so you’re going to have to make do with your own.”

“Slave driver,” said Peter, washing his hands.

“Ungrateful whelp.” returned Mr. Stark.

An assembly line was quickly established, with Mr. Stark rolling out sections of dough and Peter feeding them into the mixer attachment before laying them out on the counter. As soon as he’d gotten the hang of it, he started side-eying Mr. Stark suspiciously.

“What?” asked Mr. Stark.

“I don’t know,” said Peter, “This is just weird. I mean, a few weeks ago you didn’t even own flour and now you’re making literal pasta which I have a feeling is generally assumed to be a difficult and advanced cooking skill. Where did you get these skills and why are you using them?”

“First of all, it’s not difficult, just time consuming, and second of all, Lasagna is literally the only food I know how to make from start to finish. My mom used to do it about, eh, twice a year whenever she was feeling particularly homesick. She never learned to cook in actual Italy so she just adjusted the American recipe to be closer to the flavors of her childhood, or whatever. I wanted attention and was interested in the pasta machine, hence… all this.”

“You randomly creating a home-cooked meal.”

“Indeed. Which brings me to my next point--home-cooked meals. Meal planning. Eating food that’s not in a box.”
“All good things.” said Peter. “We have been doing that more often haven’t we? I think you’ve made real food like… at least three times in the past month, not counting the mental breakdown pancakes.”

“Yeah. Real food.” said Mr. Stark, “Now, as much as I love takeout, I’m fairly sure it’s not the best option here, and now that I’ve got the space, and the time since the accords are… calming down, I want to try it.”

“Okay, that’s valid I guess.” said Peter, “What have I got to do with it?”

“Well you’re here, obviously, and ‘microwave meals for one’ is a pathetic title for a recipe book anyway, so clearly you’ve got to be involved in this. It’s necessary. FRIDAY and I have agreed on this. So. Input. What’s your schedule like and what do you want for dinner?”

“Um… I’ll be here tomorrow, but not Monday, and May’s leaving Tuesday at three so I’ll be here after that, and then… I don’t even know after the holiday.”

“All right, cool. Requests?”

“Don’t put me on the spot like this Mr. Stark. When you ask personal questions I forget everything about myself. I don’t know if I’ve ever eaten food before in my life.”

“You are literally snitching the cheese as we speak, but okay. Luck of the draw.”

“I have preferences,” chimed in FRIDAY.

“But FRIDAY, you really haven’t eaten anything before in your life!” teased Peter, “What if you try to feed us something awful… like brussel sprouts.”

“Just for that, Peter, I’ve added brussel sprouts to the menu.” said FRIDAY. “You should trust me though, I really do know what’s best for you. Would you like to see it?”

Peter was afraid, very afraid. “OK skynet,” he said, “bring it on.”

“And don’t let him try to change the brussel sprouts. He deserves it for that comment.” said Mr. Stark. “Calling your own sisterm--I mean system--skynet, how could you Peter.”

Peter rolled his eyes, and glanced at the hologram while grabbing his next dough section. “I hate you all.” he said.

“Did you remember your toothbrush?” asked Peter, “and your phone charger. I always forget my phone charger--you packed one right?”

“Stop stressing.” said May shoving her pile of sweaters violently into her suitcase. She seemed a little off balance and it was clear she’d been crying earlier, “I’ve got everything, and it’s not like Virginia is a wasteland. There are stores there.”

“I know, I just… I worry. You don’t seem to be doing so well and usually you don’t leave the city without me.”

May huffed, “I just go and stay at a friends house because that’s so much better.” she muttered.

“What?” asked Peter.
May’s hands stilled. “Look,” she said, “I don’t… I’ve been thinking a lot about us about… I don’t even know. And since Ben… since Ben I haven’t really been in the best place and I keep letting you down because of that. I fly off the handle, I go off for days at a time to ‘cool down’, I hardly ever actually cook. You pick up so much of my slack it’s almost embarrassing. You’ve done my damn taxes since you were ten. And if I’m honest with myself I can’t even regret any of it most of the time. I want to be sorry so badly but it’s all… so overwhelming and I just dump all the responsibility on you--way more than you should have.”

Peter opened his mouth to refute that, but then realized that he really had no notion of what reasonable teenage responsibilities were, so he changed tack. “You were grieving,” he said, “You were grieving and I don’t think it’s really reasonable to expect perfection while you were doing that. While you are doing that.”

May looked him dead in the eye. “You were grieving too,” she said.

Peter shrugged. “I was ten,” he said, “My concept of mortality was a bit limited so I don’t think it hit me as hard.”

“That’s bullshit and we both know it.” said May. “You’re a fucking genius and you’d already lost your parents. You knew exactly what was going on.”

“And I dealt with it just fine.” Peter said.

“You do not deal with it at all Peter.”

“What do you mean?” asked Peter.

“While I was packing…” said May. “I found the… I found your suit.”

Peter froze. “So you know I…”

“Yes,” said May, “And my first instinct was to forbid you. Stop the whole internship--if it’s even real--and wrap you up in bubble wrap.”

“You didn’t.” said Peter.

“No, I didn’t,” said May, “Because I don’t… I don’t feel like I have the right to. I haven’t told you what to do with your time for years. The first time I’ve tried to enforce any sort of house rules since… Ben was two weeks ago and look how that turned out. You basically raised yourself and I… I wasn’t there. I didn’t do the parenting so I don’t get the benefits. Hell, I hardly know you.”

“You’re exaggerating a bit.” said Peter.

“I’m slightly drunk and in the middle of a mental breakdown over the fact that my nephew is Spider-Man I’ll exaggerate as little as I want.” said May. She sighed, “I guess what I’m saying is… I’m not in charge of you. I’m not going to try to be in charge of you. I’m going to Virginia and I’m trusting you to take care of yourself. And when you come down you’ll do it alone, and when we get back you can do what you want.”

“You’re giving up on me?” asked Peter.

“No.” said May, “I… I’ve been talking to someone. A therapist. After I kicked you out I realized something had to change and it wasn’t you We’ve had four sessions so far, started a couple weeks before I did kick you out. And she told me that at the beginning of every relationship--even the parental ones--love and control are the same thing. You do things for someone because you love
them too much to refuse. But that’s unhealthy and codependent if they’re old enough to make their own choices and… I don’t even know. All I know is I love you. And I love you enough that I’d rather keep the love than the control. One or the other has to give eventually.”

“Just like that?” asked Peter.

“It’s going to be a process,” said May. “Jen said that I should tell you though. Make a commitment. But yeah. You’ve had adult responsibilities for years. Time you had the perks as well. And I… I’ve been talking to Stark too. He’ll probably keep you from doing anything too stupid.”

Peter still felt a little abandoned by the sudden and abrupt turn around in May’s opinion, the shocking and random revelation about Spider-Man and… everything else, but he… well. What could he do. (And if he was honest with himself, it might not have been that sudden, it might only be that he hadn’t spoken--really spoken--with May in months. Not since… God, not since before Spider-Man)

After a protracted awkward silence, he heard a noise from the street far below them. “Your taxi is here.” he said.

“Really?” asked May, “How…”

“Enhanced hearing.” said Peter. He went in for a hug then, because he would regret it if he didn’t, and May let him. “I still wish you’d let me call you a car. And maybe a plane. It’s flu season and I’m worried you’ll get sick in economy.”

“You are sickeningly privileged sometimes.” said May. “I… I’ll be fine. And I’ll see you on Christmas.”

“You will.” said Peter. He tried to make it sound like a promise.

Chapter End Notes

A few items of note:

1. I lived bitches

2. The update schedule fell apart again. That said, tomorrow is a job interview, my court date, and the due date for the massive paper I was working on, so maybe it can return after. Who knows. At least there will be less stress

3. Wish me luck on the aforementioned court date. Also the job interview. The paper will be fine. If my teacher doesn't appreciate Artemisia Gentileschi's contributions to feminism through her portrayal of Judith Slaying Holofernes and the reflection of her ideal female hero contrasted against the standards for feminine perfection as shown in Caravaggio's Judith Beheading Holofernes, then that's a her problem and not a me problem.

4. You may have noticed that this is now a series. Outtakes! Yay. I am taking prompts for that--just pop them in the comments over there. For more information, see the AN over there.

5. Also, re the series thing, I've been thinking about the plot and have cut my story arc
in half--so there will be a sequel eventually. This one's about 1/2-2/3 done depending on how talkative the characters are, and will run you through the end of the school year/Pete's high school graduation. The next one will pick up where that one let off. I don't know if this is useful information to you, but I guess there you have it, and maybe switch your subscription over to the series instead of the work? IDK. I don't even know why I told you that.

6. I'm going through a very hard time right now. I was doing better for a bit, but my manic phases have always been short anyway so we're back in a slump. This is also not useful information, but I wanted you guys to know because even though I don't have the mental energy to respond to many of them I do read your comments and I deeply appreciate the outpouring of love I've found there. Sometimes you gotta have reasons to keep going even if their dumb ones, and knowing that y'all want to know what happens to my Peter is one of mine. I can't write for you if I'm dead, no?

7. Anyway, I love you all, look up Artemisia Gentileschi and her painting of a gal straight up killing a dude, and enjoy the sweet sweet sounds of Tony Stark accidentally calling FRIDAY Peter's sister.
Hey Pepper, did you know that interns have the lowest retention rate of any area in this whole company?"

Peter had seen through the window that she was speaking with someone, but he’d been leaning over her desk aggressively, and while Pepper was perfectly capable of taking care of that, she didn’t have to. A quick conversation with FRIDAY confirmed it: a meeting with a General McCrow was running over by ten minutes.

Hence Peter feeling justified in barging in.

Pepper looked up from her desk and smiled. “That’s interesting. Can you walk me through your thought process?”

“Excuse me but I wasn’t done yet.” said the General belligerently.”

“And I wasn’t speaking to you,” said Peter. “So. The interns. I noticed you had a quarterly review about it coming up, and decided to do it for you. Fascinating stuff. Anyway—“

“Hey, I wasn’t done-“

“Dude, your meeting has been over for like ten minutes and the CEO is a busy lady.”

“That is true, I am busy,” said Pepper. “I told you we cannot take that contract General and I don’t really see any other point to this conversation.”

“Weapons guidance systems aren’t weapons ma’am if you’d just-“

“Do you think he knows what no means?” asked Peter.

The corners of Peppers mouth tilted up. Meanwhile the General started spluttering.

“I’m so sorry you wasted your time coming here,” said Peter. “Next time just look up the weapons contract policy. It’s on the website, can’t miss it, have a lovely day.”

As he spoke, Peter shuffled the man out the door through the subtle application of super strength and closed the door behind him. “So. Interns and retention rates.” He said.

“Go ahead.” said Pepper.

“The report has all the data sorted by division and every single one of them is both high and fairly equal. Good job the workers like you and you can sign off on it. At first I thought that too. But then I, like the good little data scientist I am, decided to sort it all the other ways. By level, seniority, location... all the good stuff. Anyway, when I was comparing retention within departments by position title I noticed that only 76% of Interns who are offered a position at the end of their contract actually stayed. Which is weird because we treat them better than anyone else. I am literally the only intern here that doesn’t get paid.”

“You’re not getting paid!?” Asked Pepper.
“Originally this internship was fake, and then we never got around to it. Not important. Anyway, obviously we want them all to stay, so I did some research and I think there’s a couple areas that are issues.”

“Which are?” asked Pepper.

“First of all, the Planning division rarely accepts projects proposed by interns. I reviewed some of the proposals though and lots were good enough. They’re just biased. Also, interns don’t end up on projects for longer terms than a couple months which is good educationally, but from a practical standpoint makes their schedules tight with no room to play around and create stuff. Worse, it excludes them from the company culture. They rarely go to events, or actually connect with people since they don’t stick around long enough.”

“Okay.” said Pepper. “And how are you going to fix it?”

Peter opened and closed his mouth several times.

“I gotta go think about that.” He said.

“Make sure it’s a fix that will stick!” called Pepper after he left.

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When Peter burst into the penthouse he stopped and stared, which was a common occurrence. It seemed like every time he came he caught Mr. Stark doing something even weirder and more domestic. The lasagne had only been the start, and things had gotten worse from there. The other day, Peter had caught him bringing in houseplants, and he’d also acquired a cookie jar full of cookies, which he’d made.

It was apparently a universal fact that Tony Stark went overboard, whether it be on weapons system redundancies or homemaking.

This time the homemaking appeared to come in the form of a flat packed piece of furniture that Mr. Stark was attempting to assemble. It wasn’t going well for him. “Oh hey Pete, hows it going?” said Mr Stark.

Peter grinned. “I have a project.” He said.

“You have a lot of projects.” said Mr Stark.

“This ones new.” said Peter. “So what’s up with you?”

“I’ve decided we are a shoes off household,” said Mr Stark.

“Um, okay.” said Peter. “Why?”

“Various reasons.” said Mr Stark.

“Mostly it is to disassociate ‘work’ areas from ‘home’ areas using definite physical cues.” chimed in FRIDAY.

“Apparently it will help my work life balance to have separate areas for these things. Who knew. I’m also no longer allowed to take paperwork to bed.”

“You’ll have no choice but to sleep.” said FRIDAY.
Peter gasped dramatically. “Does that mean you’re getting rid of your bedside clipboard?”

“I wouldn’t go that far. It’s a process. Now grab a screwdriver. This shoe shelf is lots more complicated than it needs to be.”

“Did you try reading the directions?”

“They were in mysterious hieroglyphics. It was a fruitless endeavor.”

“How fun,” said Peter, flopping down near a pile of miscellaneous hardware.

“So. New project. For Pepper?” asked Mr. Stark, handing Peter the worthless directions.

“Yeah. I’m going to fix Intern retention rates.”

“Sounds fun. Got any ideas?”

“A few. It’s going to take a lot of time though.”

“A lot of time. Typical. Are we going to have to have another talk about reasonable work life balance?”

“No.” said Peter. “As soon as the Accords business is done I’m gonna have like... so much free time.”

“Oh god that sounds wonderful.” said Mr Stark. “Full nights of sleep, projects just for the fun of it...”

“Yeah.” said Peter. “The dream life of working only one intense more than full time job.”

“Now you’re getting it. Maybe we could even head down to the garage so I can teach you more about cars. Hell, I’m about ready to get a new one, you could pick it.”

“What? Me? What are the criteria? and how even-“

“Expensive, fast, vintage, and very broken down. Also cool looking. Don’t worry about it. It’ll be fun.”

“Okay... that sounds nice. Now I’m looking forward to this being over even more.”

They were interrupted by a sudden phone call “Stark.” said Mr. Stark, answering.

Peter tuned him out and finally managed to put the shelves of the shoe rack the right way around so they’d actually slot in. It was so close to being done, he just needed to find the screws to attach the coatrack portion to the top...

“Hey Pete,” said Mr. Stark as Peter finished up. “Go dig out the spare sheets from the linen closet and set them up in the guest room.”

He was still on the phone, so Peter didn’t ask why and just did as he was told. Mr Stark came in a minute later and grabbed the other side of the fitted sheet.

“So whose the guest?” asked Peter.

“T’Challa and crew are about a half hour out, and they’re carrying a prisoner. One of the rogues worked out a plea deal. I think there’s a couple more in the works, but this one will go through as
soon as the accords do. He was supposed to be turned over to the FBI, but Ross is making a play. Since the plea deal is dependent on the amended accords and those aren’t through yet he’s claiming only parties that are rated for the risk of detaining an enhanced under the original ones count. Which is mostly just him, and if he gets the guys suit we’ll have all sorts of problems. Fortunately for us, active Avengers can hold enhanced under the old system so...

“Guest.” said Peter.

“All right,” said Mr Stark, cracking his back and straightening up. “You move that shoe shelf over by the elevator and I’ll get started on dinner.”

“What are we having?” asked Peter.

“Whatever I can find that cooks fast. We don’t have time to wait for takeout.”

“Nice.”

T’Challa arrived as the hashbrowns were just finishing. FRIDAY put his ship right through.

“Oh you guys are parking here. There should be an open Quin bay if that will fit you.”

“We shall not stay long.” said T’Challa.

“Landing pad it is. When you get in just come straight up.”

“My thanks.”

“No biggie,” said Mr. Stark, but T’Challa had already hung up on them.

A minute later, the elevator dinged open just as Mr Stark was threatening Peter with a spatula Peter shamelessly enjoying the stolen sausage that had caused such offense. “At least wait till it’s on a plate you heathen!”

“I’m a heathen? You’re a heathen. You were snitching too.”

“I’m the cook, I’m allowed to... Oh hi kitty cat, what’s up.”

Peter wheeled around and saw the newcomers. T’Challa, Shuri and a random new guy in an ugly hoodie looking a bit confused. He looked at Mr. Stark, and then at Peter, and then at Mr Stark.

Then it hit Peter. “Oh my god, Shuri!”

“Oh my god you actually know my name.” said Shuri, taking of her shoes and putting them next to Peters on the newly installed shoe shelf.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about your worshipfulness.”

“Pfft,” scoffed Shuri. “Wait, are those hash browns?”

“Yes?” said Peter.

“Give over.”

“What? No! These are mine.”
“Typical. He promises to give me hash-browns when I come to New York and then doesn’t deliver I should-”

“This is my dinner.” said Peter.

“Hand over a plate, white boy.”

“Don’t do it Peter.” put in Mr Stark “These ‘taters will be served at a table or not at all. In fact, Princess, if you’re so determined to have some, why don’t you help set it.”

“Are we intruding?” said New Guy to T’Challa.

“As far as I can tell they’re always like this. Shuri certainly is.”

“Do you guys want some too?” asked Peter, counting heads and plates (“No over there-don’t drop that”)

“I do admit we haven’t eaten yet.” said T’Challa.

“Great.” said Peter.

Mr. Stark glances over from his place juggling several cups. “I’ll put on some more eggs.”

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Scott was... He didn’t have a clue. What he was doing, what was happening.

He was sitting at a table with a king, a princess, an avenger and... whoever that Peter kid was (Tony Stark’s son? He didn’t want to assume but...)

“Peter, swallow before you speak”

Case in point. Dad vibes. Which was the weirdest part of this, even more so than the... other weird domesticity going on. Being inside Iron Man's house had the same sort of uncomfortable feeling you’d have seeing the President in the local Denny’s. It was... surreal. Obviously he hadn’t expected the man to be in a suit, or a Suit, but still.

It was just too weird.

Chapter End Notes

Me: We have 3 midterms tomorrow. We should study
Me to Me: Or--and hear me out here--we could stay up all night, write 12k words in a single sitting, and post another chapter of MPDC

I was doing a little bit of a semi hiatus (ie not doing 'distractions' like writing until midterms are done) but no...

also--and this information is completely useless and unrelated to the story so feel free to ignore it--I want you all to know that the name of General McCrow (which I made when I was coming up with asshole military names and googling things because Ross is overused and also the Secretary of State) is based on Admiral McRaven, who is an...
interesting dude who appears not to understand the place of helicopters in combat and is the reason the raid on Osama Bin Laden almost failed. He said 'lets use the experimental stealth helicopters' and the chief said 'how about no' and McRaven said 'how about I threaten to court martial you' and then every single one of the helicopters crashed and the mission only succeeded because the chief had a bad feeling about them and had kept all the SEALs running downed helicopter scenarios for weeks. so in summary force sensitivity does exist, updrafts crash helicopters, the brass has no clue what they're doing, and the Navy SEALs remain one of the best trained teams of military operatives worldwide.

Works inspired by this [Denfics] Mr. Parker Declined to Comment by NonExistentArtist

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