So now what?

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Summary

Peter's back in Queens post-snap.
......but he's struggling.....

The world has gone on spinning for five years without him. He's confused by this new present, some things are different yet some the same, where does he fit in all of this? He has more questions then answers which is starting to overwhelm him. Not to mention closing his eyes every night causes memories he wishes to forget to replay in his mind.

A little pain can be quite grounding.
So can the love from those around him.
......which will he choose to help himself.....
Chapter 1

Peter Parker stares vacantly at the ceiling as occasional lights from outside reflect in through the window.

His ceiling.

His window.

He wasn’t used to those statements yet.

He and May had arrived back in Queens from Wakanda a week ago. Well technically Peter did. Shortly after Tony moved up the Glasgow Coma scale by actually being alert with eye tracking and basic movements, Aunt May took that as a sign that it was time for her to come back and get things set up. Happy had come back with her. He helped her find an apartment in a building near the Parker's old place. Helped her get the Parker family stuff out of storage that the Starks kept for them. Helped her go out and get her first desk job too.

Happy came back a week later saying he was supposed to bring Peter back to Queens. That he needed to prep for the start of the new school year coming up in a matter of two weeks. Peter didn’t want to leave Tony, but the doctors said he was safe to move to his lake house so long as a medical personal are present to monitor him and help him recover. Pepper wanted to get home. She had Stark Industries after her to come back, Morgan was crying more about wanting to go home, and the argument was made that Tony’s recovery would speed up more once he got home.

Tony spent a lot of time sleeping still but when he was awake he was able to have small and simple conversations with those around him which was quite a recovery from being a vegetable a week before. It was one of those alert moments that Tony was having as everyone began to load up on the planes. Alert enough to call Peter to his side and squeeze the teen’s hand and pull him into a hug.

“See yah soon kid,” he spoke into Peter’s ear before letting go.

With one last wave to Ms. Potts and a hug to Morgan, who cried and told Peter he needed to come home with them which thankfully Ms. Potts addressed, Peter boarded a different plane from the Starks to head back to Queens.
Now a week after that day, Peter lays staring at the unfamiliar ceiling surrounded by half unpacked boxes and wondering if he’ll ever fall asleep.

Listening closely he could hear his aunt’s even breathing indicating she’s asleep in the next room over. Quietly the teen gets up and reaches into his half opened closet door. Pulling out his first spiderman uniform from Tony, he slips it on rather then the iron spider. The nano tech swirls in its case on the floor charging. He would use it but that last incident of nearly peeing himself is still strong.

Peter dons the mask and slips out the window onto the fire escape, webbing the next building and taking flight.

“Hello Peter,” the feminine voice echoes in the mask.

“Hey Karen, good to hear from you.”

“Yes, it is good to hear from you too Peter. I have no new messages but I do have alerts from F.R.I.D.A.Y.”

“Oh?” Peter didn’t expect that. He thought the Stark family would be too busy with Tony’s recover that Peter wouldn’t hear from anyone over there for---well probably a long time. Even F.R.I.D.A.Y reaching out was unexpected to the teen.

Peter stops swinging around Queens, resting on a random roof. “Go ahead Karen.”

“F.R.I.D.A.Y has kept me updated with Mr. Stark’s recovery. It seems two days after arriving home he began to make attempts at getting up out of bed and was on semi-solid foods. By the fourth day he was able to stay awake for most of the day with small amounts of activity and was able to walk around the lower floor of the house with a mobility aid. The most recent update has Mr. Stark walking with a cane, eating regularly with only a few dietary restrictions, and practicing taking the stairs of his home. He so far has shown no hearing, visual, or speech difficulties. He does tire quickly sometimes while other times he struggles to sleep.”

Peter chuckles, “I know that feeling. Karen who told F.R.I.D.A.Y to give me these updates?”

The AI was silent for a moment before responding.
“According to F.R.I.D.A.Y Miss Morgan Stark said ‘tell my big brother how daddy’s doing because he will be worried.’ Mr. Stark’s AI connected that she was most likely talking about you.”

Peter smiled behind the mask. Morgan was right, he did worry.

“Hey Karen, can you tell F.R.I.D.A.Y to let Morgan know I’m really grateful for the updates.”

“Hey Karen, would it make me a bad person to just swing around and not stop crime?”

The AI was silent for a moment. “I do not believe so Peter. I’ve scanned you and found your body is not in top shape and you’re showing signs of tiredness. According to my calculations, I believe you will have higher risk of you using unsafe actions or choices if engaging with criminals in this state.”

“Is there any major emergencies that only spiderman can take care of?”

“I’ve scanned the area and the police scanners, there is nothing normal police cannot handle.”

Peter lets out a deep breath and stands, readying to launch another web.

“I don’t plan to fight crime then Karen. I’m just going to swing until I’m relaxed enough to fall asleep when I get home.”

“Understood. This doesn’t violate any protocols so I will not report these actions unless asked.”
Peter launches off the roof and proceeds to swing through the area, trying to keep to darker streets or higher areas to attract less attention. The rhythm of the releasing webs and his body swinging through the air lull his body into an autopilot state. His mind begins to wander through various thoughts as he lets his body just swing steadily. He was actually glad Karen told him he wasn’t in the right state to stop crime and that she would have to report him. It was like someone gave him permission to take a break.

He had been swinging through Queens, his mind racing about everything yet nothing. It was around the point his brain was wondering if he was still a teenager or not because of the five-year dusting incident that he realizes he had crossed out of his usual turf and towards the heart of the city.

He wasn’t sure where he was going. Just that he was going. He wasn’t sure what he was doing. Just that he wasn’t doing what he should be doing. He should be sleeping. Or at least stopping crime since he couldn’t sleep, that would be more productive.

But instead he swings swiftly between buildings, wondering how he will fill out the paperwork for his driver’s license when his date of birth puts him in his twenties yet he writes ‘16’ on the following line for age.

His swings taking him higher up into the sky with the higher buildings, Peter to high up to really attract much attention at this time of night. About the point he wonders if he can even be on the academic decathlon team since he’s missing five years of current events. There have been new scientific discoveries even with half the universe gone. New leaders. New politics. New technology. Will he have to study twice as hard now to catch up? Peter comes to stop on top of a rather tall building to take a breather.

Looking around he sees metal and glass of the buildings surrounding him. Little lights from the streets below bouncing off some while others are lite up with people in the rooms. But what catches his attention is the building sitting straight ahead in his line of sight a few blocks away.

It was then that Peter realizes he had come upon Avengers Tower.

Peter moves forward, sitting down on the edge of the roof he stands on, planting himself on the cement half wall that is supposed to protect people from fall over the edge on smoke breaks. Taking off his mask, Peter hears the distant voice of Karen but her words are lost to him. Rather he stares at the Avengers building quietly.

Is it Avenger’s tower? Was it now Stark Tower again? The avengers were given the compound but that was destroyed in the last battle. So, does that mean the avengers are back here? Wait, is there even an avengers team? Tony is retired. Captain America is taking a break of unspecified time,
Thor ran off with the guardians to look for his brother and do cool space stuff, Hawkeye retired to be with his family. Peter hadn’t a clue if Black Widow was still with Hawkeye or not. Peter hadn’t a clue where Doctor Banner went or all those others that helped at the battle. Is this even Mr. Stark’s tower anymore. Back at Wakanda Mr. Stark’s family always talked about the lake house away from the city and that’s where they are now, does that mean that Peter is now sitting in front of some other rich guy’s building? Peter doesn’t see the A or Stark on the tower anymore. Oh god, he’s sitting in front of a stranger’s building like a creeper.

Peter felt a pain in his head as these thoughts took off at an overwhelming speed. His chest feeling tight with each breath he takes.

If this isn’t Stark Tower or Avenger’s Tower anymore how will Tony fix my suit if it has problems? How will I be able to ask Tony about more training? We were in talks about having after school lab days before everything happened, back when we took that Stark Internship photo, does that still stand? Tony said I was going to get a sort-a real internship, I still have the certificate, is that null now that he doesn’t live in NYC? I was so looking forward to learning in the lab from him.

Peter rocks back and forth on the roof edge, hands twisting his mask, his chest squeezing painfully. His lungs complaining and straining but the teen continues to spiral in his thoughts. Thoughts and was so absorbed that he doesn’t hear the whine and blasting air despite its loudness until it was practically beside him. Nearly startled into falling off the edge of the roof he was perched on, Peter stares at an Ironman suit hoovering several feet in front of him.

“Listen kid, I love you coming to visit but sitting across the street for a half hour staring at the building at 2AM wasn’t quite what I had in mind.”

The Iron man suit floated in front of Peter, from the echo sound of Tony’s voice Peter knew it was empty and being remotely piloted.

“Shouldn’t you be more worried about Pepper catching you up late messing with suits?” Peter responded with but his witty remark sounded hallow and emotionless rather than snarky.

“Hitch a ride with the suit kid and get up here will yah? I’d feel better if you sat dangling off the side of my building where I can keep an eye on you.”

“Your building? I thought you moved out of the city? Wait how are you doing this from the lake house?”

Tony’s laugh echoes in the empty suit. “The lake house is our vacation house. But Pepper is still
the CEO of Stark Industries which means she must be near one of our headquarters. So either here or Malibu, which Malibu has better weather but there are some other factors here in New York that are more important than weather. Besides, Morgan is going into pre-k which there isn’t one out by the lake house. I love my daughter, but I don’t really feel pre-k teacher is something I’m equipped to put on my resume.”

“Wait so you’re at the tower now?”

“Just got in yesterday. Can we do twenty questions in the tower already. As you mentioned, I’m not fond of Pepper discovering me doing this.”

Peter sat there for a few seconds before sighing and putting his mask back on. Shooting his web, it latched onto the suit’s waist area. The suit slowly rose up bringing the skinny teen with it, Peter hanging on as the suit headed to the tower’s landing pad.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

time to bring Peter to a familiar place with a familiar face

Peter and Tony’s empty suit hit the landing pad faster then Peter could organize his thoughts. The red and gold machine enters a floor panel and begins to sink into the building leaving Peter to follow a line of blue lights that F.R.I.D.A.Y no doubt lit up for him. Passing through a pair of automatic glass doors, Peter finds the lights leading him down a darken hallway to a pair of metal doors that open for him.

An elevator.

Peter enters the elevator and finds it slightly familiar, the layout similar to the avenger compound elevator he saw when Tony first offered him a spot as an avenger.

“Hello Mr. Parker.”

Peter jumps slightly at the European female voice filling the small metal room.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y?” the teen inquires.

“That is correct Mr. Parker.”

Peter shifts his feet, “Peter. You can call me Peter.”

“Understood. My protocol has been amended for this. Karen expresses your satisfaction at being kept up to date about the Boss’ health.”

“Ah yeah,” Peter mumbles at his feet. “That was really nice actually.”
“I shall continue doing so as long as it does not conflict with any of my other protocols.”

“Thanks,” Peter glances upward towards the ceiling to look for a camera or speaker. “Hey F.R.I.D.A.Y, why are you talking to me?”

“My research shows that having small, simple conversations with people on friendly but neutral topics helps distract them enough to cause a slightly calming effect.”

“So you’re trying to calm me?” the teen finds the camera and looks at it.

“My protocols indicate I need to place your well-being in a high priority category. So yes. You arrived with a slightly elevated heart-rate, breathing rate, and beginning signs of heightened anxiety. My protocol indicates that I should attempt to indirectly calm you to prevent escalation of your physical symptoms.”

Peter stares into the camera in shock.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y I’m not part of the Stark family or an SI worker, you shouldn’t care so much.” Peter speaks quietly to the camera then turns to continue examining his feet.

“I am an artificial intelligence created by Mr. Stark, I’m not capable of “caring” like humans are. My “caring” as you term it comes from protocols that Mr. Stark himself wrote. So if anyone is “caring” for your well-being it is the Boss.”

Peter shoots a shocked glance at the camera.

“You-your saying….You mean, Mr. Stark cares about me?”

“Well the Boss was providing mentorship through verbal guidance and technology to you prior to the Thanos issues, it is obvious that he cares what happens to you.”

Peter’s attention caught on that sentence. The little voice in the back of his head whispers to him quietly and Peter can’t stop himself from verbalizing what he hears in his head.
“So your protocol to monitor my well-being comes from the protocols he put into place before I was dusted and then came back.”

“That is correct. Mr. Stark has not updated any protocols relating to you since before the first snap.”

“Ah,” Peter goes back to staring at his feet.

Peter focused on the information he was given. Tony---Mr. Stark, told his AI to keep an eye on the teen’s wellbeing back before the fiasco. Now five years later, that protocol is still there and unchanged because everything pertaining to Peter is unchanged.

That’s how it is, Peter is unchanged.

But the world has changed.

Everything around Peter has changed.

But Peter is still the same. The same teen from 2018 now stuck in the future.

“We have arrived at the lower floors Peter. Boss is waiting in the lab straight ahead for you.” The AI interrupts Peter’s thoughts.

“Thanks F.R.I.D.A.Y,” the teen mumbles and walks out of the metal box to a darken entry way.

Peter walks towards the bright lights coming from the glass walls straight ahead.

Peter gets closer and can see metal worktables covered with sheets. Well except one. Tony—Mr. Stark sits at it with blue images floating screenless in front of him, his back to the glass wall Peter stands at.
“There is a door to your left,” F.R.I.D.A.Y speaks up, “Boss has left access open so you can enter.

Peter looks over to see a metal handle. Touching it the glass beside it lights up to be a touch screen like panel that would have probably asked for an access code or something had the bright words “Open Access” not been blinking noticeably across the whole thing.

Tugging the door open, Peter enters the bright work room with a wince.

“Hey there Spider boy,” Tony turns in his rolling chair towards Peter.

Peter pauses. Tony looked better then he has since….well since before the whole space donut really. His skin is a healthier color, his facial scars looking less swollen and red, more pastel pink and flat. He wears a beat-up AC/DC t-shirt that looks like it actually fits better then the hospital gowns and shirts Peter had seen him wearing most of the time. Although the right sleeve dangles oddly from the lack of flesh filling it out.

Tony scooches his chair forward, “you with me kid arachnid?”

Peter clears his throat, “ah yeah. Just-“ Peter then shrugs. “What are you working on To-Mr. Stark?” the teen deflects to the glowing stuff behind the man.

Tony chuckles, “good deflect. Almost as good as my own.” The man turns and waves his good arm at the images. “We’ll come back to the fact you’re out and about at 2am after I show you this. Dum-E rolls us another chair.”

Peter is startled by the mechanical chirping noise. Turning he finds a motorized claw robot push a rolling stool towards the teen. Peter takes it tentatively while watching the claw spin and whistle at him as if it was waiting for something. Peter reaches out and pats the top of the claw like a person pets an animal.

It must’ve been the right move for the claw backed away chirping high pitch almost happy noises.

Peter sits and rolls up to the table.

“Pepper is letting me work down here as long as I do it sitting down, come up for meals, and not touch anything but this little project for now.”
Peter stares at the lights. A holographic projection of an Iron man arm schematic was up along side a projection of what looks like the arm Peter had seen on the Winter Soldier back in Germany last year.

No wait.

That’s not right.

Five years? Six?

He pushed the thoughts down into the back of mind.

“Going to make yourself one?” Peter nods at the images.

“You bet kid,” Tony gives his trademark smirk. “Looking to combine some of the Wakanda tech in Barnes’ new arm and some of my tech to create something new. Fun little adventure.”

“How far have you gotten To-Mr. Stark?”

The man laughs, “first kid, after all we’ve been through you can call me Tony. We hit the point of hugging on a battlefield, so I think we’re there. Second, F.R.I told me you were up swinging around right when I pulled these up, so this is as far as I’ve gotten.”

Peter felt his cheeks heat up a bit at the name comment. He wasn’t sure Tony had realized the change in title back in Wakanda due to the drugs they had him on, but it seems not to be any issue.

“Now,” Tony turned to Peter, “I’ve answered your questions. Time to answer mine. What are you doing swinging around New York City at 2am?”

Peter shrugs while looking at the holograms. “Don’t know.”
“Well what I do know is spiderlings should be sleeping at this time,” Tony corrects him.

“Couldn’t sleep,” Peter responds neutrally.

There is a silent pause between the pair, Peter refusing to look over at the man and him realize there’s more to the excuse then couldn’t sleep.

“I know the feeling,” Tony sighs.

Peter sighs internally too, glad the man wasn’t going to poke into the teens thoughts that lead him to not sleeping.

“I close my eyes and sometimes I’m back on that field or in a floating city or in a wormhole. Nights like that I end up down here or in my mini lab at the lake house.”

Tony takes Peter’s knee and turns the teen to face him. Peter stares at the man quietly. “You’re not sleeping because of bad dreams are you?”

Peter shakes his head, “not tonight. I mean it happens sometimes but not tonight.”

“What makes tonight different then?” The man prompts.

Peter shrugs again, “I couldn’t stop thinking.”

Tony nods, “I understand that too. Let’s do some brainstorming and see if that doesn’t tire out that genius mind of yours.”

Peter feels the first true smile in a while fill his face. “Sounds good sir.”

Tony turns them both back to the hologram, enlarging the images and pushing Barnes’ new arm images in front of Peter.
“Let’s talk about what we see here for the fingers, I have some ideas and what your opinion.”

And for the next hour Peter felt the little voice in his head become quiet, his questions fading away, his worry about little facts fall away. With each question and comment the teen has with his mentor he feels a muscle loosen and relax. Soon his smile gets a little bigger and reaches up into his once flickering eyes. His hands begin to move to his words the more he sees the Wakanda technology schematics, a glimpse of the Peter before Thanos finally making an appearance.

With each relaxed muscle and easy breath he takes, each silent moment without the little voice in his head, Peter feels his blinks becoming longer and more drawn out.

It was during Tony’s rant about nerve connections that Peter found less interesting that the teen began seeing more of his eyelids then his mentor’s profile. A final blink before slipping into darkness, Peter sees the man smiling at the hologram, his words distant but a calm constant that bridges the teen into sleep at last.
Chapter 3

The orange glow around Peter did not feel warm or comforting. Rather the color associated with warmth was nothing but cold and empty to him. Look downward, his Iron Spider clad feet were beginning to vanish from the orange rocky ground, a trail of campfire like ash where they once were. Peter could no longer feel his toes or ankles as the dust began to creep up his shins. Glancing at his hands Peter found a numbing cold that was seeping into the extremities was from them disappearing. His spider sense was buzzing in his head, he felt his body fight back, his cells trying to reform and repair but failing. Suddenly the gnawing hunger in his stomach from the energy he expanded in battle disappeared as his middle began to change into dust as well.

“No,” the teen whispered, “please!”

His knees and elbows gone.

“No,” he gasps as the air in his lungs begins to disappear with the organs.

“No!”

Peter screams and jerks. His body hits a hard surface, a surge of pain tingling up his left side alerting him to it being there.

Slowly opening his eyes, Peter continues to pant as he looks around.

He lay on the metal floor of Tony’s workshop; lights dim around him and only covered tables surround him. Peter hears a beeping noise to see Dum-E rolling towards him with a whine. Peter glances down to see his legs and lower body twisted in a blanket but still very much there.

“Peter do you require assistance?”

F.R.I.D.A.Y’s voice echoes in the room but on a quieter volume then when the teen first arrived who knows how long ago.

“I-ah-” Peter tried to catch his breath to answer the AI.
“You appear to be experiencing some distress, shall I call Boss?”

“Ah, no.” He inhales loudly, “I’ve got it,” he inhales again.

“I suggest you inspire for five and expire for five if you are going to self soothe,” the AI suggested.

“Yeah,” he inhales again loudly for the program to hear him, “I’ve got it.”

For an unknown amount of time, Peter lay there breathing. It wasn’t working. The teen’s breath continued to keep hitching and keeping to an uneven rhythm. Every breath he took he could feel the cold numb feeling still in his fingers and toes. The buzzing in his head dull but still present. The teen continues to find reality from his nightmare.

“Peter you appear to be struggling to self soothe, can I call Boss now?”

“No!” Peter gasps.

Peter rolls over in an attempt to stand but his vision spins as rises to his feet. The teen crashes against the metal worktable with a loud bang. A pain shoots harshly up his arm, chasing away the numbing cold that was there.

Looking down, he can see in the dim light that his suit is deflated around him. Peeling off the right arm he sees a small cut from the corner of the metal table from his fall into the surface.

It’s a small cut. Something that will heal by the end of the day and leave no scar behind.

But the pain was just enough to chase away the numbing cold, his fingers wiggling again, his breath becoming steady.

“Are you alright Peter?” the AI inquires.
“Yeah,” he finds his breath no longer catching, “yeah I’m good now.”

“You appear to have sustained an injury,” the AI probes.

“Yeah, just a scratch, it’s no big deal.”

“Understood. My scanners indicate that it should heal by the end of the day. Would you like a Band-Aid?”

“Nah I’m good,” he pokes the wound, the sharp twinge of pain clearing the memories of his nightmare from his mind. “I’m good now FRIDAY.”

“May I suggest going upstairs? You have not since your arrival five hours ago and your metabolism can’t go that long without sustenance,” the AI offers.

Peter looks up in surprise, “five hours?”

“Yes. Its currently seven forty-seven in the morning. Lady Boss is in the kitchen preparing breakfast. Little Lady is beginning to show signs of emergence from REM indicating she will wake up very soon. Boss is a bit deeper in REM but will probably awaken shortly after Little Lady since she likes to wake him for breakfast if he isn’t up yet.”

Looking down at his body seeing a blanket at his feet and his deflated suit hanging oddly around him, he couldn’t go up looking like this.

“FRIDAY I can’t go upstairs. I’m not dressed, and I have to tell May where I’m at.”

“Boss called your aunt already. She is aware you are here and is fine with it. As to the clothing, Boss couldn’t take you upstairs, so he left you to sleep here. He left sweats on the couch on the other side of the lab for you to put on. He indicated you can leave your suit here if you want or wear it under your sweats.”

Peter kicked off the blanket, tossing it onto the worktable. Going around the tables he comes to the couch where a dark pair of sweats sits waiting for him.
Peter thought about keeping his suit on under the sweats but the thought of having to strip completely to use the bathroom every time or get food on his suit gloves didn’t appeal to him. He wasn’t feeling up for all the work. He removed the suit, putting on the sweats and stuffing the fabric into the large front pocket. Peter was an average sized teen, especially with the spider bite giving him extra muscle bulk, but the sweats hung loosely around him. He wondered if these were Thor’s or something given the size.

Peter glances around for the face mask of his suit.

“The face mask of your suit fell from your hands while you fell asleep. Boss picked it up before going upstairs and sat it on his chair,” the AI informed him.

Peter doubled back and grabbed it from the spot the AI informed him. Stuffing it into the pocket, the front of the sweatshirt hanging lower now that it carried extra weight. But Peter didn’t mind. He didn’t want to leave his suit and then forget it later. Also, the pressure of the extra weight felt good on his body, the pressure on his shoulders and the bumping against his lower body reminding him that he still had those parts and they were not dusted away.
Peter left the workshop only to stare vacantly down the dim hallway.

“Ah FRIDAY?” Peter began to formulate a question, “where-“

“Straight ahead to the elevator, the lights are on,” the AI responds before Peter finishes.

Peter follows the same light trail from several hours earlier only backwards.

“You can turn up some of the lights FRIDAY,” Peter realizes that at no point did the lights around him come up from their dimmed state.

“Boss prefers lights to be kept at 25% or lower until 8am in order to make waking up less stressful on occupants.”

Strange. Peter never thought Tony was one for caring about lighting. Everything was always turned to the max when he used to come over. Although there were some days where dim lights like this would’ve been great for his senses.
The AI must’ve guessed Peter’s inner confusion for it spoke again.

“Boss read up on childcare and parenting. One of the books stated that sudden bright lighting can cause discomfort and confusion when a child is first waking up or awaken by a dream. Boss has since set protocols for lighting in every room there is a person in it.”

Peter snorts. Yeah, the lighting didn’t do much for his nightmare.

“Guess it only works on kids,” Peter mutters as he enters the shiny elevator where the lights are brighter than any other location he was in so far since waking.

The elevator ride is shorter than the ride he took hours ago. When the door opens Peter finds himself staring into an entry way that leads to an open concept living room. A living room that was brighter thanks to the morning sun shining through the tinted windows that make up the walls of half the room. Stepping out of the elevator and turning to the sound of scraping and sizzling, Peter sees the kitchen to the right where Pepper Potts cooks over the stove top.

Peter isn’t sure what to do. He doesn’t want to walk into the room and startle her, but how else can he announce his presence to the woman?

“Mama!”

A squeal cuts off Peter’s thoughts. Little Morgan jumps down the hallway between the kitchen and living room, her light blue pajamas wearing faces of characters he’s never seen before. Peter guesses the bedrooms are hidden beyond the far walls of the living room and kitchen since no windows are over there.

Pepper cleans off her hands and scoops up Morgan.

“Good morning princess. Sleep well?”

Morgan nods her head, her fly away hairs standing on end with what’s left of her ponytail flopping on her head.
Peter can’t help the small smile that tugs at his mouth.

“Mama can we go to the park today?”

Pepper hums for a moment in an overexaggerated thinking pose then smiles at the child.

“What don’t we do that? After breakfast we can get ready and go out on a family outing. Just you, me, and daddy. We need to have some more family time before you start school because you’ll be busy learning during the day.”

Family time.

The words echo in Peter’s ears, his smile falling some.

Pepper wants to have family time today.

Her, Tony, and Morgan.

Not him.

He’s not family.

He shouldn’t even be here.

Why was he here again?

Glancing backwards, Peter wonders if he can get back into the elevator without alerting the other two. Escape back to the apartment and let the Starks have their family day.

Because he isn’t a Stark. He’s a Parker. He isn’t family and its family day.
“That does sound nice,” a deep voice echoes down the hallway.

Tony walks down the hallway slowly, he leans on his cane while his shoulders tip some due to the lack of weight from his missing arm.

“Daddy you got up!”

Morgan wiggles free and attacks Tony’s legs with a big hug.

Peter moves closer to the elevator, his breathing coming shorter again as he anxiously searches for the button to open the metal box.

“Of course I’m up, I heard mommy making breakfast and I never miss mommy’s breakfast,” he chuckles and strokes Morgan’s head.

Peter’s fingers land on a metal panel and thankfully it lights up to reveal elevator-based commands.

“Peter the kitchen is the other way.”

FRIDAY cut the moment with a voice loud enough to alert everyone to Peter’s presence.

“Hey kid, stop standing in the doorway and get in here,” Tony chuckles.

Peter takes a breath, plastering the best smile he can muster up then turns and slowly walks further into the room, his anxiety shooting higher with three pairs of eyes on him.

“Peter!”

Morgan squeals and jumps at the teen. Peter catches her swiftly then lifts her up with ease in his arms.
“When did you come Peter?” she asks from her spot on his hip.

“I….ah…well….late last night?”

“You not sure about that kid,” Tony chuckles and slowly moves towards the pair.

“Well I didn’t exactly check the time,” Peter quips back with what energy he could muster.

Peter must have put enough effort into the statement for Tony just smiles and shakes his head as a response muttering something about teens.

“Peter its good to see you,” Pepper smiles and pats the teens shoulder as she reaches for Morgan, “come along young lady lets get you some eggs and toast.”

“Peter come have eggs with me!” she yanks on the teen as her mother pulls her away from him.

“Oh I don’t know, I mean I eat a lot Morgan.”

Peter feels nervous. His stomach twists ravenously and he knows the feeling. He knows he needs a large portion of food right now, it’s the ‘about to eat like five people’s worth of food’ hunger pains. He’s never eaten in front of Tony, let along his family. In fact May, Ned, and MJ have seen him eat but even then it isn’t the full amount. He usually eats more away from them.

“Then you can have some toast too!” the little girl giggles as her mother takes her into the kitchen.

“Well,” Peter glances at the table and sees a small toast and Pepper begins to plate a few eggs from the stove after setting Morgan into her booster chair at the kitchen table. Peter knew there wasn’t enough food for him.

“Come on kid,” Tony lightly nudges Peter’s shoulder with his own injured one. “Come grab a bite.”
Peter slowly nods and Morgan squeals with delight.

“Sit by me Peter!” She smacks the chair next to her at the small table.

Peter moves and plops down beside her.

Tony takes the side next to Peter at the square table from Peter while Pepper sits on Morgan’s other side.

Pepper divides out two eggs to each adult along with two pieces of toast while Morgan gets one of each. Peter watches Tony and Pepper, trying to time his bites to theirs so he doesn’t devour all the food in seconds like his stomach was asking him to.

“Daddy,” Morgan cuts into the sounds of eating, “Mommy said we can go to the park today!”

“Did she now,” he grins a Pepper.

“Well we should do some fun things before school and work take over our lives again,” Pepper returns the grin.

“Peter,” he turns to the little girl, “are you going to go to school too?”

Peter nods, “yeah Morgan I start school soon too.”

“Peter goes to a fancy school for smart kids,” Tony leans in towards the little girl, “maybe you can go to that school too when you get older.”

The little girl bounces in her booster seat, “really?”

“Unless,” Pepper cuts in, “you are smart like mommy. Then you can go to a different fancy school for that.”
“Oh come on Pepper, she’s a Stark. She’s bound to be a genius,” Tony jokes lightheartedly.

“Why don’t you let Morgan decide when she’s older?” Peter cuts in.

All eyes look at Peter and he feels the heat shoot up his face in embarrassment. He glances down at the now eggless plate.

“I mean,” he murmurs, “you’re her parents so.....that is I meant.....never mind.” He takes a big bite of his toast to shut himself up.

Tony chuckles, “your correct bud, best wait and see what our princess decides.”

“I want to be a wizard when I grow up!” Morgan squeals.

Peter feels his grin come back as he looks at the excited little girl, “I believe you’d have to ask Dr. Strange about which school you’d have to go to for that.”

“Oh no,” Tony shakes his head dramatically, “that hocus pocus doctor isn’t taking my baby girl to some far away school.”

“Daddy!”

“Alright you two, finish your breakfasts like Peter did,” Pepper cuts in.

Peter looks down to realize in four bites he had finished not one but both toast pieces.

“Did you want more Peter,” Pepper asks.

Peter feels his anxiety start rising. He wants to say yes because his stomach twists with hunger pains still. But that means Pepper has to make him food. He doesn’t want to do that to her, she should sit and eat with her family.
The teen squeezes his arm where the cut from earlier sits. The pain of the action chases away the gnawing anxiety rising up in him.

“I’m, ah, good, Ms. Potts….I mean Ms. Stark,” Peter replies quietly while staring at the table center.

Peter’s stomach did not like that answer as it growls loudly for everyone in the room to hear.

Everyone but Peter began laughing.

“Peter, kid,” Tony spoke between chuckles, “your stomach is calling your bluff.”

“I’ll get you more Peter,” Pepper takes his plate to stand, “oh and its Pepper dear, no need for the formalities.”

“You don’t have to get me more Mrs.---I mean Pepper.” Peter shifts nervously, nails now digging into his cut. “I can grab more food later; you should sit and eat with Tony and Morgan.”

“Nonsense,” she chuckles as she pops more bread into the toaster, “what kind of mother would I be to send you out for your own food.”

“Its not a problem,” Peter replies as Pepper begins another pair of eggs. “I always go out for more food after I eat with Aunt May or eat at school.”

Tony frowns a little, “why would you do that?”

Peter shrugs, “since I got my powers, I’ve needed to eat more food more often. I don’t want to burden Aunt May, she already works hard enough, so I go out and do a few odd jobs sometimes to get some money for more food.”

“Well,” Pepper goes to the fridge, “I won’t be having none of that. How many eggs do you need Peter?”
Peter shrugged, “you can do up those two. I’ll be fine.”

Pepper fixes the teen with a stern look, “be honest with me Peter Parker, how many eggs do you need to eat to be full?”

Peter knew right then how come Tony always bent to Pepper’s wishes. That look was enough to strike fear into probably a handful of Avenger enemies.

“Ah, well,” he fidgets, “I usually eat a whole carton on my own when May isn’t home.”

Pepper pops open the carton and begins cracking every egg in it, “then the rest of the carton will be yours and I’ll do up several more pieces of toast to make up for the missing eggs.”

“But Pepper, you should sit and eat with your family!” He protests.

“Don’t try kid,” Tony cuts in. “Once Pepper is in mom mode there is no fighting it. Let her do this for you.” Tony holds up a hand at Peter’s opening mouth, “and if you say something about money, may I remind you that I’m a billionaire still. Now Morgan,” he turns to his daughter who had sat quietly watching the whole exchange oddly enough, “what should we do at the park today?”

Morgan launched into a conversation about horses and cheeseburgers, bouncing from the topics to a third topic quickly enough that Peter actually struggled to follow the childish train of thought.

Pepper sat down plates of food in front of Peter who ate quietly trying to keep up with Morgan’s sudden decision to narrate how she once saw dancing people in the park once.

Peter sat marveling how Tony and Pepper followed the bouncing train of thoughts from Morgan and her childish explanations for her reasons to do certain things in the park. Peter’s conversations with Tony usually involved the older man leading the conversation more then listening, it was surprising how long he sat there just nodding at his daughter.

Oh wait.

It’s been five years since those conversations.
Five years have passed and during that time Tony has changed.

But Peter hasn’t.

He hasn’t changed.

“Hey Morgan, why don’t you and mom go and get ready? I want to talk to Peter for a little bit.”

This statement caught Peter’s attention from watching the family talk back and forth.

Morgan reaches over her chair and hugs Peter’s arm, “thanks for eating with me.”

Peter can only smile at her cuteness, “thanks for the invite Morgan.”

Pepper takes Morgan from the table, leaving the dishes in their wake as she and Morgan discuss what to wear to the park.

“Ok kid,” Tony sits back in his chair, rubbing his armless shoulder. “Last night I let you fall asleep cuz you looked like you needed it. But there’s somethings I wanted to talk to you about. Been meaning to do so but I’ve been busy with healing and getting things settled.”

Peter glances from his last bite of eggs to Tony, his anxiety starting to spike as he meets the man’s serious gaze.
Peter felt his stomach twist anxiously as his mind began moving thoughts around at high speeds.

"Does he want the iron spider suit back? Does he want me to run an errand? Did I mess up some tech plans by sleeping on them last night? Does he want these sweats back? Oh god what is it?!

Peter’s anxiety begins to turn into panic, eyes darting around the room and his breath hitching every few short inhales.

“Hey Underoos look at me,” Tony gently probes the teen.

Peter’s eyes go back to the man only to see concern instead of seriousness that had been there.

“Easy kid, guess I should have started with a better statement. Nothing bad, I just want to ask you something.”

Peter nods slowly. How can he feel “easy”? He had no idea what Tony wants to ask.

“Well last night got me thinking and I was wondering. Well you see before—you know—” he waves his good hand towards the ceiling, “we were making plans for a real internship with me. If you’re still interested, I’d like for you to come over and do that with me still. We could start with official SI stuff or Spiderman stuff or well whatever you feel comfortable with.”

Peter exhaled and his shoulders dropped along with his anxious panic.

“Oh,” he sighs, “oh ok. Ah yeah. I mean yeah I’d like that. I was wondering, but then I realized you weren’t in the city but now you are in the city. But now you’re saying that we can and well that’s.” Peter’s rambling stops as he sees Tony just keep nodding, the teen realizing he’s rambling. “Yeah I’d like to help.”

Tony’s smile grew larger, “Ok, that’s great. I’ll have Pepper redo the paperwork since the stuff I had you fill out back, well back before, probably is out of date now.”
Peter nods, “will I start after we do the paperwork?”

“Normally yes, but you’re not a normal intern. I’ll call your aunt later to discuss it with her and we’ll iron out what days you can come over here.”

“Oh,” he nods rapidly, “yeah that’s ok.”

Tony claps his hands together, “great. Now, why don’t I get you home so you can get cleaned up and changed?”

“Nonsense! I’m a billionaire still even after everything that has happened. I’ll have a driver take you back. Actually better yet, I’ll drive us to the park and Happy can give you a lift home. He and your aunt seem to be talking a lot and not about you,” Tony winks at the boy.

Peter flushes because he is very aware of this fact. Happy spent a lot of time with his aunt, helping set up their new life, and every so often he has caught Aunt May on the phone giggling with a “Harold” and the only person Peter knew by that name was Happy. But Peter didn’t mind, he wants his aunt to be happy, especially after everything that’s happened. Even if things are now a little awkward.

“Hey kid,” Tony cut into Peter’s rapid thoughts. “Happy said come on downstairs and he’ll take you home,” Tony pockets his cell phone.

Peter grabs the plates in front of him, stacking the dirty platter ware quickly.

“Thanks kid but you don’t-”

“I want to Tony,” Peter cuts in with a smile as he steals the man’s empty plate.
Tony just shakes his head, “whatever kid.”

Peter places the items in the dishwasher, realizing as he pulls at the sweatshirt sleeves that he needs to give back the clothes.

“Ah Tony,” he gestures to his body, “where do you want the clothes?”

Tony waves him off, “keep them kid. They’re extras. Beside, can’t have you wandering around in your suit or underwear.”

Peter nods, “ok, well, ah, I’ll see you later?”

Tony nods, “absolutely kid. FRIDAY will take you down to the private garage.”

Peter nods and goes to leave the kitchen only to stop at a random thought he has.

“Hey Tony can we….maybe I could….do you think I could help you with your arm?”

Tony’s smile becomes soft, “yeah kid. I’d like that.”

Peter nods and with a wave, dashes off to the elevator.

FRIDAY opens the doors before he even reaches them, quietly taking him down the levels.

One of his burning questions has become answered. He still is an intern. He’s going to get lab time with Tony.

This is good.

Definitely good.
Peter could feel a small bit of relief fill his body for the first time since he “came back”.

“Hey kid!”

Happy greets Peter as soon as the door open which startles the teen.

“H-Hey Happy,” Peter smiles at the man.

“Right, lets get this show on the road.”

As Happy leads Peter to the car Peter realizes something else.

Happy’s different.

Not just the few gray hairs, the facial hair, and smile wrinkles around his eyes that he noticed back in Wakanda.

No Happy was nicer.

The Happy Peter remembers was annoyed by the teen whenever they interacted. This was the same man who kept hanging up on Ned Homecoming night. The same man who wouldn’t respond to Peter’s messages and the one time he does it to tell him to stop leaving the messages.

Happy was nice in Wakanda but Peter thought it was the stress of the situation.

But no. Happy was, well, nicer to him every time they interacted.

And that was before Happy and May started talking regularly.
“You alright kid?”

Peter snaps from his thoughts to see Happy holding the door of a dark audi open to him.

Happy was holding a door for him.

Happy asked about how he was feeling.

What was is this?

“I, ah, I’m fine,” Peter shrugs and gets into the car.

He watches Happy waiting for the man to say something snippy but it didn’t come.

“Good,” Happy closes the door then goes to the driver side, “I’m glad. I was a little worried when Tony told me you were here and needed a ride.”

They pull out of the garage.

“Ah yeah,” Peter shrugs, “I was up and wandering around late last night. Tony caught me and brought me here.”

Happy merges into city traffic, the movement a little jerky since people were still adjusting to the sudden population increase.

“Were you patrolling after curfew?” Happy asks with a frown.

Peter shakes his head, “no, just wandering.”

Although the teen wondered why it would matter to the man if he was or wasn’t patrolling.
“Hmmmm I see. Well if you have another night of feeling the need to wander, you can always call me kid. Tony used to do it all the time when he couldn’t sleep. Sometimes still does.”

Happy Hogan just offered Peter the chance to call him when he can’t sleep.

Happy Hogan.

Peter just stared at the man like he grew another head.

“You still have my number, right?”

Peter nods numbly, “Yeah. Pepper sent phones to May for me and her with numbers programmed into them.” Even if the new phone didn’t have the number programmed in it, Peter would still know it. He dialed it enough times to give patrol updates that he memorized Happy’s number long ago.

“Oh, you should shoot me a text when you get home, so I have your new number then. I don’t think Pepper gave me it. I have May’s but I’ll need to update yours.”

Peter’s phone number went back into the sea of phone numbers available after he and May vanished, their bills never paid and the phones no longer being online. Something else that has changed. A small change but a change. Now Peter had to think a little longer before telling his phone number since he isn’t even sure what it is half the time.

“Sure Happy,” Peter quietly responds.

They fall quiet, the silence filled with the hum of the city. Cars driving, honking, making car noises. The sounds of people talking occasionally heard off in a distance at a stop light while people crossed. Occasionally the sound of a helicopter in the distance could be heard.

City noises that Peter was familiar with.
City noises that lulled Peter into a daze as they drove.

A daze that is burst apart as the car comes to a stop and turns off.

Peter sees that somehow Happy managed to get a perfectly good parking spot out front of the apartment, a rarity most days.

“Come on kid, lets head up,” Happy says as he slips out of the car.

Peter jumps out of the car after Happy. “You don’t have to walk me in Happy!”

The man shrugs, “I don’t have to, but I want to kid. Come on, your aunt is waiting.”

To Peter’s surprise, the man who would probably toss him out of moving vehicle is now walking him upstairs to his apartment.

This new Happy Hogan confuses Peter.

Peter can only stare at the man as they go up to the floors to the new apartment where Happy knocks more gently then he did when he knocked in Germany on Peter’s hotel door.

Peter’s Aunt opens the door with a smile that grew twice as big when she saw Happy.

“Oh Harold thanks for bringing Peter home,” she flicks her hair. “Sorry I was unboxing more stuff,” she gestures to her t-shirt.

“Its fine May, I was sent out to do errands for the Boss anyway. And no worries, you look fine.”

Peter glances between the two and decides its best to slip into the apartment because he was definitely not sure what to make of any of this.
“Ah thanks Happy for the ride,” Peter says as he slithers around the man and ducks under his aunt’s arm. “I’ll see you later.”

“Alright kid,” Happy glances to Peter, “remember to shoot me that text.”

Peter nods and slides further into the apartment. With no one saying anything to stop him, Peter dashes to the bedroom with the sounds of the two adults talking in the doorway behind him.

The teen flops onto the bed, staring up at the ceiling.

His old ceiling had star constellations.

This one doesn’t.

“Hey Peter,” he hears his aunt enter the room, but he continues to stare at the ceiling. “Can we talk for a minute?”

“Sure Aunt May.”

“I know for sure when I went to bed at eleven you were tucked in bed, I even checked. Yet I wake up to a text message and a phone call from Tony Stark that you were at his tower over in Manhattan. Wanna tell me how that happened?”

Peter shrugs, still staring at the ceiling.

“I couldn’t sleep, decided to clear my head. Tony didn’t want me out and about that late on my own, so he picked me up. Fell asleep there. End of story,” he replies simply.

“Well I’m not fond of you getting up and leaving like that but I’m glad Tony got to you. Can you tell me why you couldn’t sleep?”

Peter wanted to say it. Say how 2023 confuses him. How this room confuses him. That he isn’t sure if he is supposed to be getting his permit or if he’s able to drink alcohol because of his age.
Ask if he’s going to fit into this new reality or if he’s always going to be confused.

But he doesn’t.

Peter squeezes his hands into fists, his nails digging into palms and chasing away the anxious thoughts.

“Just couldn’t get my mind to be quiet,” he turns towards his aunt. “You know how it is.”

A half-truth. Half-truths are better than full lies.

His aunt nods, “Yes I know sweetie. It’s always been hard for you.” She smiles and sits down on the edge of his bed. “I remember after you came to us, your uncle and I were always so worried because you struggled to slow down and relax. We thought it was because of your parents, that something was wrong. You just couldn’t seem to turn your brain off to sleep. But it turns out our little genius just had a super smart brain that didn’t know how to turn off or slow down.” She ruffles his hair.

Peter groans with a smile, “not the hair.”

The woman huffs, “not going to make a difference mister bedhead. Do you have any plans today?”

Peter shrugs again, “not at the moment.”

“Ok well I’m leaving for work soon. I’m going to be at the F.E.A.S.T headquarters working phones today. If you decide to go out and do something with your friends or go swinging around the area in your jumpsuit, please send me a text.”

“May,” Peter groans, “It’s not a jumpsuit. And I can’t just text you saying ‘out being Spiderman’. What if someone sees the message?”

“Then don’t say that. Send one of those emojis. I know there are Spiderman emojis, I’ve seen them! Just send one of those.”
Peter stares at her in shock, “what? Spiderman emojis?”

She rolls her eyes, “and you’re the younger generation here. Yes. After the whole, you know, thing, people made emojis of different heroes and you were one of them. Just download the set and send one to me if you go out.”

Giving his leg one last squeeze, she gets up and leaves the room, leaving the shocked teen in her wake.

Out of curiosity Peter grabs his phone off the side table he left it the night before. Sorting through the Stark Phone’s online shop he found not only Spiderman emojis but sure enough many other heroes too. Peter found himself downloading all the free hero emojis with glee.

“Heading out! Don’t forget to text Happy!”

“Yes Aunt May!” He shouts back.

Peter opens the texts as he hears the door close and lock.

**Hey Happy, this is Peter Parker. Here’s my number.**

He places the phone onto the side table.

It pings.

Peter looks.

**Thanks kid, message me if you need anything while your aunt is at work.**

Peter stares at the phone like it’s a foreign entity.
Happy responded quickly. And he responded with more than a couple words.

Peter sets the phone down again and goes back to staring at the ceiling.

This new Happy is weird.

Weird but maybe this new weird is ok.
There was just darkness. An expanse of nothing.

A raspy inhale fills the void of nothingness.

A shuddering exhale.

Peter knew whose breath that was.

The swift rhythm of a stressed heartbeat filled the void with sound along with the raspy inhale-exhale pattern.

Peter felt the sounds fill the void of darkness, vibrating his body and reassuring him that there is still life in the owner.

Suddenly it all stopped.

A final raspy exhale and then nothing.

Silence.

The owner was no more.

Peter felt the silence beginning to suffocate him.

“Tony!”

Peter jerks upright, his blanket flopping off his heaving chest and onto his trembling legs. His lungs gasp for air despite nothing interfering with his airways physically. He could hear his own heartbeat in his ears, the rhythm fast as if he just fought a battle again. The speedy thumping doesn’t comfort the teen, rather the more he focuses on the sound the shorter his breaths get. The teen starts frantically groping in the nighttime darkness for something, anything, his mind foggy from the dream to really think about his actions.

His hand collides with a solid surface that rocks from the momentum.

Pain shoots up his hand to his elbow and onward up to his shoulder.

The fog lifts just enough for his mind to realize what his eyes see in the darkness. Peter sees the silhouettes of a dresser, an open closet door, cardboard boxes, and random personal items strewn across open flat spaces.

He was in the bedroom.
His bedroom.

His breath still catches and hitches.

He feels the fog coming back, like a hand slowly grabbing around him.

Peter swings his hand again.

It collides again with the bedside table.

This time the effort caused the furniture to slide a bit to the side, items on top of it knocking over or shifting sideways.

But Peter didn’t notice.

Rather his eyes close as he focuses on the pain that seared up his arm from his hand. He focuses on the throbbing sensation from an obvious injury he has yet to look at. A painful throbbing that chases away the fog of his mind.

He’s in his new room.

It’s nighttime.

He had dinner. He took a shower. He texted Ned. He greeted May when she got home from work. They had a nighttime snack. He went to bed.

His breath evens out as his mind reassembles itself.

He opens his eyes and reaches for his phone with his non-injured hand. Flicking it on, the screen lights up telling him its only 3:47 am.
Well, 3:47am is better then last night.

Or the night before that.

And the one before that.

In fact sleeping from eleven something to 3:47 am is the best he’s done since…..well since before…..before things happened.

Peter knew he was up for the day. His body was on high alert and ready to spring to action. There was no sleeping like that.

Getting up as quietly as he can, Peter slips from his room towards the bathroom. He hears his aunt’s steady breathing from her room signaling that whatever just happened to him hadn’t affected her sleep. Peter wanders into the bathroom, flicking on the light and waiting for his eyes to adjust.

Glancing down he sees his right hand has a large red mark on the top of it, the center and some edges starting to discolor into a bruise.

Sighing, he moves on to rinse his face.

Washing away the grime from sleep, the teen feels even more awake now. He feels the start of his hunger digging into his stomach and knows in a matter of a few hours he’ll be hungry for a full meal.

Peter creeps through the apartment quietly, aiming for the kitchen rather then his bedroom.

Peter enters the kitchen and turns on the little lights above the counters that are hidden along the bottom of the cabinets. Just enough light to do something but not enough to disturb his aunt’s sound sleep. The woman worked hard enough to make a living for the pair, he wouldn’t let her peaceful sleep be bothered by his random bouts of insomnia.

The teen takes out a bag of chocolate chips and for a moment contemplates if he should just eat them from the bag or actually make cookies.
He decides to go with the cookies, that way his aunt will have something to take with her to work later. Much later.

Quietly getting out the items he needs, Peter began the process of making chocolate chip cookies according to the recipe on the bag.

The teen focuses solely on the task, mind emptying completely.

A dozen cookies.

Two dozen cookies.

The sun starts to show its first rays.

Three dozen cookies.

He starts pancake batter while the last batch of cookies cool.

Two buttermilk pancakes from the box mix.

The sun is now getting just high enough the light is starting to bounce off surfaces of the city.

Four buttermilk pancakes.

Six buttermilk pancakes.

The sun is getting high enough that the lights over the counters are no longer really needed.

Eight buttermilk pancakes.
Peter begins to think about making muffins as he finds the box mix behind the new bottle of maple syrup.

“Peter! What on earth?!”

Peter looks up from the box of muffin mix. His aunt stands the kitchen entryway clad in her bathrobe and pajamas.

Peter looks around to see the counter tops dusted with the aftermath of baking, a pile of cookies and pancakes sit on the small table, and the sink holds a pile of dirty dishes.

Blinking and focusing on these things the teen realizes he can’t remember much of the baking process and the reality of how much he made starts sinking in.

“I, ah, I woke up early and couldn’t get back to sleep. I made cookies for you to take to work.” He waves at the pile then glances at the pancakes, “and ah breakfast too.”

May looks him over slowly before nodding, “alright. Well let’s sit down and eat since you went through all this work.”

Peter sets down the muffin mix and joins her at the table with the syrup.

“So what made you wake up and want to back two bags of chocolate chips worth of cookies?”

Peter frowns, “I did one bag.”

May chuckles and points to the counter. Peter turns and sees two empty bags of chocolate chips.

Peter doesn’t remember picking up the second bag.

He tries to not look to confused.
“Oh, ah, I wanted there to be enough for you and the people you work with,” he covers up his little memory gap quickly.

May laughs, “I don’t work with that many people. I’ll take half of the cookies since I’ll be going to one of F.E.A.S.T’s clinics today to do paperwork. If the others working the clinic don’t eat them, I know one of the attending nurses, Rio, will take them home to her son.”

“And how is that?” Peter probes, “the new job I mean.”

May smiles, “its fun. I’ve met lots of different people and its great how we are helping everyone get back on their feet after the dusting. So many people weren’t as luck as you and me.”

“Yeah,” Peter mutters around a mouthful, “lucky.”

Peter’s stomach twisted.

He should feel grateful.

He and his aunt are together.

They have a home.

She has a job.

He has his friends and school.

Why didn’t he feel grateful?

“Does it bother you? That we could have easily been like those people?”
May pauses eating, looking at Peter, “sometimes. Sometimes it does. But I feel that things worked out for us so that we can help others. You help with Spiderman and I help this way. Had we been homeless and struggling like these people we couldn’t help them like we are now. When it does bother me, I just focus harder on helping those who need it.”

Peter nods with a smile, “guess helping those in need is a family thing.”

She chuckles, “yes I guess so. Oh,“ she perks up, “that reminds me. I’ll be done working around three today but I’m going to stop at a café near the clinic with friends today. I’ll be back for dinner but you know the drill, go out in anyway please send me a quick text.”

Peter nods again with a smile, “found those emojis yesterday afternoon you spoke about.”

His aunt laughs, “thought you’d like them.”

“So you’ve made new friends?” Peter probes again. Why? He wonders if May feels the same sense of confusion he does sometimes. She was dusted too after all.

“Some new and some old,” she replies between bites. “Julia from down below us? Well she wasn’t dusted along with Susan that I worked with before the whole thing. They’re coming down to catch me up. Turns out Julia finally did get married and wants to tell me about her step kids. Can you believe that? And Susan moved further into the city where she got a new job! I can’t wait to hear all the details.”

Peter could only nod as he eats his fourth pancake.

How could she be so happy? Miss Julia and Miss Susie have moved on and left May behind. How can May be excited to hear all those changes she missed?

“Are you,” he clears his throat, “are you, I don’t know, kinda bummed you missed all the stuff that happened with them?”

May shrugs, “I mean yes. I’m sad I didn’t get to go to the wedding for example, but I’m so happy they were able to move on. I’ve met people through work who did struggle with moving on after losing people.”
Peter shifted his body a few times, unable to meet his aunt’s eyes.

He was happy people had moved on. Happy Tony has a family. Happy that his classmates got to go to college despite the population issues. Happy that they could be happy.

But he didn’t feel so happy.

He didn’t think he was sad. Or angry. Or upset.

Confused?

Unsettled?

“Peter,” his aunt catches his attention.

He wonders if he was starting to look upset since she now watches him with concern.

“What helps,” she continues, “is that I’m looking at meeting with Julia and Susan this afternoon like a school reunion. That we went our separate ways for awhile and now we are coming together again to talk about the changes in our lives.”

Peter nods because that actually kinda does help. A little.

May reaches over and takes Peter’s hand, “why don’t you take the left-over cookies to Ned or Mr. Stark? You sat around yesterday after I left, you should go do something today. I’d feel better if you’re out with someone today instead of being here by yourself.”

“Ned’s family were moving into their new house yesterday, I offered to help but it was a family thing Ned said,” Peter defends himself. It’s the truth. He tried to offer to help but Ned tried to politely explain it was something his family was making into a family bonding moment since coming back.
Everyone did family stuff yesterday.

Peter laid at the apartment staring at the ceiling half the day and tinkering with stuff he got from the dumpster outside.

Because he isn’t part of Ned’s family. Or the Stark family. He’s a Parker.

“Then go over today if they’re done. If not, go see Tony. Oh and he called me about doing the internship!”

“He did?”

“Yes. We decided that you can go over twice a week after school to his place to work. I told him we will pick the days you don’t have after school clubs and let him know which days those are. He also asked my opinion on you spending a weekend at his place every so often.”

Peter sputtered his last bit of pancake all over the front of his pajama top. “What?”

May nods, “I said I’d talk to you about it, but I’m fine with it so long as you don’t over do the superhero-ing and science when you’re over there. You do need to eat and sleep regularly since you’re a teen still.”

Am I? he wonders. Am I still a teen?

Peter squeezes his bruised hand, the pressure and pain shoos away the confused thoughts about his age.

“Yeah, I’d like that.”

She nods, “I thought so.”

May gets up and begins to pack cookies into two large gallon bags. Peter takes the dishes to the sink only to realize he has to start washing since there is no room for the breakfast plates. He
begins the process only to pause when May sets down a bag of cookies beside him.

“T’im going to get ready to go,” she pats his shoulder, “takes these to either Ned or Tony. Or eat them yourself. If you do, don’t tell me. I want to pretend I feed you healthy food all the time like a good parent.”

Peter chuckles and leans into her touch, “you do a great job May.”

“Glad for the reassurance,” she kisses his head. “Also make sure to clean up you baking mess completely before you go out.”

“Yes May,” he groans with a smile.

His aunt wanders off to get ready while Peter finishes cleaning the kitchen.

Going to his room Peter sits on his bed and stares at his phone for a moment.

Who should he text?

Where should he go?

He remembers this freedom being the thing he craved over summer breaks. Now he feels listless and lost with this free time.

Peter doesn’t realize how long he is sitting and staring until he hears a knock on the apartment door and May’s excited greeting.

Peter slips out of his room wondering who’d be coming by.

Happy Hogan stands in the door with a warm smile aimed at Peter’s aunt.
“Peter!”

May notices Peter beckoning him over to her.

“I’m heading out now,” she hugs him.

“Why are you here Happy?” Peter asks slowly.

“Well I’m running errands for Tony today and said I’d drop your aunt off on my way around the suburbs,” the man rubs his hands together, eyes shifting.

“Now Peter it’s just a ride,” May chides the teen, “please remember to text me when you decide to go out.”

“If I go out,” Peter sighs.

“Boss is free today. Pepper had to take Morgan school shopping, but Tony isn’t up for that yet physically. I can run my errands and come back for you and take you over if you want kid,” Happy fills in.

“Perfect!” May exclaims. “Go start getting ready Peter and Happy will take you over to Tony.”

She doesn’t give the teen time to protest, to say Tony probably has better things to do then keep a teen having an occasional existential crisis company, for she pushes Happy out the door and quickly closes it between them.

Peter sighs and wanders off to get pulled together.

A day with just Tony alone.

He could do that.
Right?
Chapter 6

Peter stares up at the metal and glass behemoth looming before him, his stomach starting to twist enough to create physical pain. Carrying a large ziplock bag of cookies and dressed in basic jeans with a science pun shirt, he knows he looks out of place in front of Tony’s large fancy building. How did he let May talk him into this? How did he let Happy’s opinion influence his choice? Bringing homemade chocolate chip cookies to THE Tony Stark, what is he thinking?

Peter taps the toes of his right foot roughly on the cement inside his sneakers.

Normally Happy would drive Peter to the garage, the teen entering the tower through the private elevator down there. Similar manner at the compound after Tony finished moving things there not to long after the Vulture incident.

Or windows. Peter has entered via windows due to being out as Spiderman.

But never the front door.

Peter has never entered the front door of the tower or compound.

Peter hits his sneaker on the sidewalk harder, his toes pushed to the front and beginning to throb.

In a rush, Happy dropped Peter off at the front door to catch up with Pepper and Morgan on their shopping adventure.

He feels the strong urge to turn tail and run, going through the front door was to much. Can he even get beyond the front desk? There is no way he will based solely on his appearance.

He smacks his toes even harder, suddenly a sharp pain shoots up to his knee and causes his thoughts to start fading.

His thoughts dissipating fully as his phone chimes.
Hey kid, told Tony you’re coming. Just go inside and head up, FRIDAY will help.

Happy to the rescue. Happy to condemn.

There’s no backing out now but maybe having FRIDAY alerted to his presence will help.

The teen squares up his shoulders, giving himself a ‘you’re spiderman’ pep talk, and walks through the glass doors.

The toes on his right foot ache as he walks.

But that’s ok. The pain keeps him focused.

The security guards within the doors eye him closely but don’t say or do anything. The large entry room is filled with sunlight and people milling about. The stairs and elevators, indicated by signs, are beyond a metal detector and card swiping unit.

Great.

Glancing from that he sees two of the three front desk staff watching him closely, the third busy with some guy with a fancy brown suit.

Tapping his pained toes and trying to ignore his completely messed up gut from nerves, Peter walks up to the desk.

“Can I help you?”

The man is smiling but it doesn’t reach his eyes at all, making Peter wish he had Ant man’s shrinking abilities about now.

“Ah,” he clears his throat, “I’m ah here to see Mr. Stark.”
“Who?” the man leans forward more.

Peter raises his voice a little, “I’m Peter. Ah Peter Parker. I’m here to see Mr. Stark.”

Peter focuses on tapping his toes again, trying not to squeeze the bag of cookies from nervousness.

“Well son,” the man’s polite smile doesn’t change, “I’m sure you have a good reason to want to see Mr. Stark but only people scheduled to meet him get to. If you want to give him something, we have a drop box over there for gifts, letters, or cards.” The man waves at a large red and gold box half full of small boxes and many card shaped envelopes.

“Ah no, you see, Mr. Stark is expecting me. You can call him or ask his AI FRIDAY,” Peter tries again.

Maybe he should’ve just climbed up the building. It would’ve been easier.

The man sighs, his polite smile twitching, “son, I don’t want to be rude but I highly doubt Mr. Stark is waiting to meet a kid like you,” he gestures up and down Peter’s body.

The words sting.

Peter stands there for a moment.

Why did Tony want to meet with a kid like him?

Someone who is smart but gets bullied. Someone who is like a curse, causing death and destruction in his wake. Someone who prefers to tinker then be in sports. Someone who prefers staying in with his small circle of people or even himself then go to teen parties or get-togethers.

People want to meet Spiderman.

Not Peter Parker.
Pain shoots up his leg to his hip. His thoughts suddenly halt at the shock of it.

The front desk man looks at him with concern. The lady does too. The man in the brown suit and the third front desk worker are also watching him.

It hits Peter that he had started by tapping his toes but now the ball and toes of his right foot are banging loudly on the tile floor, sneaker squeaking in the process.

He stops the action.

“Sorry,” he mutters.

“Derek,” the female desk worker steps up with a sigh.

She shoos the male desk worker away from Peter then fixes the teen with a genuine smile that the other guy-Derek didn’t have.

“How can I help you.”

“My name is Peter Parker,” the teen tries again but he hears no confidence in his voice, “I’m here to meet Mr. Stark. He’s expecting me. If you call him or his AI FRIDAY, they can confirm this.”

“Ok,” she nods and presses a button on the side of the computer screen. “FRIDAY is Mr. Stark expecting a Mr. Peter Parker?”

The woman barely releases the button when the familiar disembodied voice came from the device.

“The Boss is expecting Peter. Please escort Peter to the elevator and I’ll will deliver him.”

The man-Derek stared with wide eyes at the computer. The woman is unfazed.
“Right this way Peter,” she steps from behind the desk, extending her arm towards the direction of the elevator signs.

She walks him through a gate rather then through the security check system. Walking him right up to the alcove of elevators. She stops at the furthest one away.

“The other elevators only go to work floors. This one will let you reach the private floors.”

Peter nods quietly.

The doors open and the woman nudges the teen into the metal box.

“Have a good day Peter,” She waves at him as the doors close.

The elevator starts to move and Peter exhales slowly.

“Peter, you’re displaying signs of heightened anxiety as well as minor damage to the toes on your right foot,” the disembodied voice of FRIDAY fills the small box.

“Yeah, never came through the front door. I didn’t like it,” he sighs at the AI. “And don’t worry about the toes, they’ll heal in a couple hours.”

“What did you not like about coming through the front doors?” the AI inquires.

Peter shrugs, “don’t worry about it FRIDAY.”

There is silence as Peter watches the floor number increase on the screen.

“Peter,” FRIDAY’s voice comes through again, “after reviewing the security feeds I’ve informed the Boss of your difficulties at the front desk.”
“What?” Peter gasped, “no its ok FRIDAY. The guy was doing his job. I mean look at me! I don’t look like someone Tony Stark would call up to his private floors. I’ll just stick to coming here via the windows or with Happy.”

“The Boss has come up with a solution to this already.”

“Please tell me he didn’t fire them,” Peter moans.

“No Peter, Stark Industries employees must meet a certain criterion before they can be fired.”

Peter let out a long exhale in relief, “thank goodness.”

The elevator comes to a sudden stop and the doors open to the same living area that the teen had seen days before.

“Boss is the living room,” FRIDAY informs the teen as he exits the elevator.

Peter enters the entry way, wandering into the living room slowly, his foot aching still.

Tony sits on the couch, only the back of his head noticeable to Peter, as the large TV plays some random nature show.

“Hey kid, come on over!” Tony waves his good hand over his head.

Peter scrambles around the couch to see Tony over his Stark Pad typing furiously and a white card sticking out of the top of it like it was in some credit card reader.

Peter sits down on the edge of the couch watching the man type.

“One second kiddo,” he mutters.
The Stark Pad pings a few times and Tony pulls the card out of the device.

“Ok, now this is for you,” he hands the card to Peter.

The teen takes the card, a Stark Industries logo is on it along with the word ‘employee’, a square of silver lines on the bottom like a metallic QR code.

“What is it?”

“Your new Stark Industries card. This way you can just go through the front door and up to the security readers. Just scan this card and you’ll get right in next time.”

“Tony you don’t have to-“

The man waves his hand, “didn’t have to but I wanted to. Besides, if you’re going to be helping me out you need your own card so you can run me errands around this place.” Tony waves at his left leg, “this thing is still not quite right so I’ll need your young legs to dash about this building for me. You need this card for that. Also,” Tony reaches over and takes the card. He pulls something from his pocket which he attaches to the card. He hands it back to Peter who stares dumbly at it.


The man laughs, “I’m Tony Stark, I can get my hands on lots of things, including the perfect lanyard for my personal intern and biggest fan.”

Peter felt his checks heat up as he puts it around his neck.

“Just try not to lose it. Happy hates making multiples of these things and now I see why.”

Peter nods, “I’ll do my best to not lose it.”
Tony grins, “that’s all I can ask from a teenager I guess. So Happy said something about cookies?”

Peter sets the bag onto the coffee table, “yeah I kinda made to many for May and me.”

Tony opens the bag and begins eating one, “not bad kid.”

“Well its easy if you follow the directions on the bag,” Peter retorts.

“You’d be surprised how many people say they followed those directions but failed epically.”

Peter shoots a mischievous grin at the man, “speaking from experience?”

“I plead the fifth kid,” he chuckles.

They fall silent for a moment while Tony downs two more cookies.

“So,” the man cuts into the silence, “wanna sit here and talk or would you rather come down and help me in the lab?”

Peter’s whole being lights up, “can we work on an arm for you?”

“If that’s what you want to do today kid.”

Peter nods vigorously, “yeah I do. I mean Mr. Barnes’ arm is super cool, I got to touch it in our fight back in Berlin which was so cool. But I think we could make something even cooler.”

Tony chuckles, “ah yes, Berlin. Not one of my finest moments as a mentor.”

Peter’s smile falters, “what do you mean?”
Tony sits back, a touch of remorse in his eyes. “I shouldn’t have stolen a teen to fight my battles.”

“You didn’t steal me! I volunteered!” Peter defends.

“No I distinctly remember threatening you by telling your aunt about you being spiderman before you agreed.”

Peter shrugs, “so what. I was about to say yes anyway. Tony, even if our relationship started for a not so good reason: I don’t regret it for a moment. I mean I hate you calling my first suit a onesie but if you hadn’t upgraded my gear I probably would’ve died and stayed dead long before I ever got to meet you in person. And Berlin?Sure it was a bit of a mess but it gave me the chance to believe I could be something more. That maybe someday I could be strong and brave enough to save more than kittens in trees.”

Peter stops to take a long breath and notices now the shine in Tony’s eyes.

Had he said something wrong?

“Come here kid,” Tony holds out his good arm.

Peter goes forward and gets pulled into a one arm hug. The teen reaches around the man, realizing he was still too skinny then the teen would like.

“Thank Peter,” He murmurs into Peter’s ear.

“Any time Tony,” he says back, muffled by the man’s t-shirt.

The man pulls back, “well now I think we’ve had enough sitting and talking. Let’s take our cookies to the lab!”

“As long as we can bring some milk too,” Peter adds.

Peter stands and turns, Tony struggles for a moment before Peter bends and offers his hand. Peter
felt a surge of pride that Tony trusts him as the man takes the teens hand and uses him to get up and steady his body.

“I’m a little stiff today kid so I might be a little slower to getting around,” Tony winces as he takes his cane and manages a few steps.

“We can stay here and do a movie day Tony,” Peter quickly offers.

“Nonsense. I’ve been sitting up here doing movie days long enough. I want to work in the lab and today is perfect because I have you to help.”

The pair move slowly to the elevator where FRIDAY opens the door for them to take them to Tony’s lab.

Peter no longer feels the pain in his foot. Rather he feels excitement tickle his insides as the elevator descends downward through the tower.
Peter and Tony delved into plans for Tony’s new prosthetic arm with vigor. The pair were discussing the finer points of neuro connections using nanotechnology to allow the arm to feel sensations when the conversation is cut short with a thud.

Or more like a bang.

The pair spin from the worktable and hologram images displayed to see little Morgan against the glass door. Her little face pressed flat against the glass while her hands dance all over it, leaving a trail of smudges that would make any housekeeper shudder.

“Daddy come out!” the words sound muffled funny through the glass.

Both males laugh at her antics as she begins to wiggle against the glass even more.

“We should probably get out before she licks the glass,” Tony chuckles between words.

Peter’s laugh stops abruptly as he glances at the man, “wait. What?”

Tony sighs, “yeah recently she has started the habit of leaving grimy fingerprints and sometimes even licking the glass to annoy me and make me come out faster.”

Peter shudders at the idea, “doubt that is sanitary.”

Tony shrugs, “kids are magnets for germs but Pepper and I have been cleaning the glass regularly so its clean before she gets to it. No promise after she’s attacked the glass,” another thud and weird suction noise draws their attention.
Morgan was attempting to blow raspberries on the glass with the biggest mischievous grin.

“That’s gross,” Peter snorts.

“I’m sure if I call May she’ll tell me weird, gross things you did as a kid,” Tony retorts as he gets up and move towards the door.

“Please don’t,” Peter begs as he follows Tony.

“Hmmm, I could use that threat the next time you decide to fix your Spiderman injuries at home rather than here.”

“That was one time!” Peter sighs.

With that the conversation ends as Tony unlocks the lab door.

“Daddy! Peter!” Morgan bounds in, “mommy says its time to come up and eat something!”

“Did mommy tell you to get my windows grimy too?”

Peter notices Tony reach towards Morgan and stop, choosing to bend at the waist towards her.

“Mommy said I could do whatever I can to get you two out,” she puts her hands on her waist, a very Pepper look in Peter’s opinion.

Peter guesses Tony would normally pick up Morgan from the twitch of his fingers and prior reaching. The teen taking the initiative, he takes two steps and scoops up the child with a huff.

“Be glad your parents are nice, my uncle made me clean the windows every time I dirtied them on purpose,” Peter chides her as he faces Morgan towards her dad.
Tony straightens up and kisses Morgan on the head then shoots a grateful smile to the teen.

“I’ll have to keep that in mind next time Morguna.”

“Noo!” She shrieks and bounces in Peter’s arms, “Peter don’t tell daddy that stuff!”

“Or what?” the teen asks as they walk slowly towards the elevator.

“Or, or, or,” she looks at the teen with concentration, “or I’ll find something FRIDAY is hiding on you and tell daddy!”

“What? You think FRIDAY hasn’t told your dad everything? Isn’t that against the rules?”

The elevator doors close as FRIDAY’s voice cuts in.

“Well there is that report from Karen about the time you fell four stories that I have yet-“

“Stop!” Peter calls out to the disembodied voice.

“Peter,” Tony begins with a frown.

Morgan laughs, “ha ha Petey, FRIDAY told your secret!”

Peter rolls his eyes, “its no big deal. I wasn’t paying attention and smacked into the building and fell a little bit and landed safely. End of story.”

“What did you run into?” Tony prompts.

Peter felt his face begin to heat up. On the first night out on patrol since the who dusting situation
was definitely not his finest night.

“Some rando’s drone,” Peter mutters.

Tony starts laughing, “you ran into a drone?! Geez kid.”

“How was I supposed to know that drones are allowed to fly higher in the city now? I was gone,” Peter bemoans over the new rules letting drones fly higher in the city.

“Well that rule will probably be changed soon since the population is back up.” Tony stops chuckling, “but you fell four stories. Did you get hurt?”

“Not physically. I caught myself with a web. So just my pride as a superhero was damaged,” Peter sighs.

“Ah the life and times of Peter Parker,” Tony laughs again as the elevator opens.

“Ah Peter,” Pepper calls out as the group enters the kitchen, placing a pile of sandwiches down. “I made extras just for you but if you’re still hungry let me know.”

“Thanks Mis-Pepper, thanks,” Peter plops Morgan into her spot before dropping into the chair beside her.

Peter watches as Pepper hoovers beside Tony as the man slowly lowers himself into his chair with a grunt. The teen feels guilt pooling up into his gut. The man should probably be resting but instead he was entertaining a random teenager. Peter now zeros in on the man’s paler skin color and the slight shake to his only hand as he reaches for his cup.

Stupid, Peter chides himself mentally, should’ve suggested a movie day

Peter digs his nails into his thighs under the table as he feels the guilt grow in him and he tries to push his thoughts aside.
“Petey can you pass me a peanut butter and jelly?” Morgan catches his attention.

“Oh ah, sure Morgan,” the teen passes over two precut triangles to the girl.

“What did you boys work on today?” Pepper prompts.

“Oh well, Peter and I ran some ideas for a new prosthetic,” Tony began with a glance at Peter to prompt the teen into elaborating.

And that’s how the conversations went. Pepper initiated with a question, Tony would respond and prompt Peter to comment. Until Morgan got tired of science talk and chose to tell everyone about the stuff she got for school.

“…and I got two folders!” Morgan concluded her long list of purchases for school.

“Tell Peter and daddy what kind of folders they are,” Pepper encourages Morgan.

So far glitter and pastels are in season for Morgan’s age group, which was the majority of her purchases, Peter sat expecting something like tie-dye as a response.

“One has daddy, aunt Nat, and all my uncles on it. The other one has Peter on it!”

Peter coughs on his sandwich, he stopped counting after the fourth sandwich a while ago, the ham and cheese catching on his teeth.

“Easy Pete,” Tony nudges Peter’s cup towards him.

Peter gulps the liquid and clears his throat a few times.

“Wait, I’ll show you Petey!” Morgan bounces from the table and dashes away.
The sound of shopping bags rustling could be heard from the living room where the shopping bags sat and Morgan comes running back while holding up two plastic folders. She shoves them at Peter, his lunch plate moving aside with the force.

One folder is red with cartoon avengers on the front rushing into some battle.

Peter had to admit that the artwork was pretty good.

The second was a blue folder and on it swing a cartoon image of himself. Him. Spiderman. Small suburb hero.

“That’s me,” he touches the image gently.

“After Thanos,” Pepper begins, “people began to increase hero merchandise to help raise people’s moral. Now after the second snap people have put out even more merchandise to celebrate of sorts. Queens people definitely noticed your absence,” she says with an encouraging smile.

Peter couldn’t say anything, his mind blank in shock as Morgan takes her folders to her father to show off.

Peter felt his thoughts begin again as a little voice whispers ‘you don’t deserve to be on a folder’.

And it’s true.

He wasn’t strong enough to get the gauntlet off Thanos on Titan. If he had gotten it off then the first snap wouldn’t have happened. The second snap would not have been needed and Dr. Banner’s arm would have been fine. Then the third snap wouldn’t have been needed and Tony would be sitting here with two whole and healthy arms holding his little girl.

Titan.

Oh gosh.
Peter felt the tingling sensation in his fingers.

Where were his toes?

Did he have toes?

He dug his nails into his thighs, pinching at his flesh under his pants, using the pain to push away all things related to Titan.

“Peter.”

Peter glances up, blinking a few times to see the Starks looking at him with concern.

“Sorry, I ah, zoned out,” he clears his throat.

“I asked if you were going to get a folder with daddy on it for school,” Morgan repeats.

“Oh ah,” Peter plasters the best smile he can muster on his face, “I don’t know. I’ll have to see what’s at the store.”

“You haven’t gotten your school stuff yet?” she gasps.

Peter shrugs, “I will when Aunt May gets paid later this week. I’ll pick whatever is available at Target.”

Morgan appears satisfied with his answer and runs off to put away her folders at Pepper’s request.

“You ok kiddo?” Tony lowers his voice to avoid Morgan’s ears.

“Yeah,” Peter shrugs, “just had a little moment. I’m fine though.”
“Want stay or head back to your apartment?” Pepper speaks lower as well.

Peter wants to stay instead of go to the empty apartment, but he wants Tony to relax.

He takes his chance, “can I stay? Maybe we can do a movie or something until I have to go home when May gets off of work?”

Tony and Pepper smile, both nodding.

“Sounds good kid,” Tony agrees.

“That is a good idea,” Pepper also adds.

“What is?” Morgan interrupts as she jumps up in her chair.

“Peter suggested we have a movie day until he goes home,” Tony answers.

“Yeah!” The little girl bounces in her seat, “can we watch Finding Marlin?”

“Finding Marlin?” Peter hasn’t a clue who she is talking about.

“Despite the snap Disney found a way to keep on producing,” Pepper informs him, “Ellen got her Nemo trilogy since she and many from that movie series didn’t disappear.”

“Oh,” something else he missed while he was gone.

“Let’s watch it Peter, I promise I won’t tell you what happens,” Morgan begs.

“sounds good Morgan,” Peter agrees.
And with that, thoughts of Titan vanish from his mind completely as the family settles from the kitchen to the living room. Munching on his cookies he made, they watched more then one film before his phone pings with a message from his aunt. Bidding goodbye to Pepper, Tony, and a reluctant Morgan, Peter was shuffled off into a car with Happy towards Queens.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

fulfilling a fan request

Empty.
Nothing but orange rocks.
Dirt and dust.
Dust that comes from somewhere.
Peter looks around for the source of the swirling dust.
“Why couldn’t you have pulled harder kid?”
Peter looks and sees Quill watch him with accusing eyes. His body then disappears into a pile of floating dust.
“You’re a superhero, are you not?”
The bald man with red marks adds as he to turns to dust.
“If only you tried harder,” the lady with the bug bits on her head whispers as she disappears.
Looking down, Peter sees his own hands disappearing.
He felt nothing yet everything.
His brain screams of danger, his legs begin to disappear.
The weightless cold fills him as his lower torso begins to dust.
“I’m sorry,” he gasps.
.
.
Peter’s eyes snap open as he gasps for air.

Slapping his legs repetitively until the pain is enough for him to focus and feel his legs again.

Peter lay there catching his breath, focusing his inhales and exhales to his aunt’s in her bedroom nearby.
His left-hand digs into his hair, pulling. He tugs on his hair every exhale, pain zips through him each time. Nothing bad but just enough to further push the nightmare and memories aside.

He isn’t sure how long he lays there. But he does regain control of his body, so that’s a positive.

Reaching for his phone he scrolls through his short contacts list in a repetitive motion.

His aunt just went to bed a few hours ago. Peter didn’t really want to wake her, she had trouble falling asleep tonight and he felt bad just thinking about waking her for comfort.

Ned is out of the city bonding with his family since half were dusted and half were not. Peter wanted to call his friend but yet didn’t want to bother their family time.

Family time.

He definitely didn’t want to call Tony. The man is with his family and the image of his pale face and shaking hands at lunch the other day still haunts Peter’s mind.

But Peter wants---something----someone?

The teen tugs more at his hair, fighting the urge to cry that begins to fill him.

He stops sliding through his contacts mindlessly. Swiping, he finds someone who has a 50/50 of waking up.

He presses call.

Holding the phone to his ear, Peter rhythmically tugs his hair to keep his mind clear.

One ring.
Second ring.

Third ring.

“Hello?”

The groggy voice of Happy fills the speaker.

The man clears his throat, “Peter? You there kid?”

“I’m sorry,” Peter’s voice wobbles with the tears he’s fighting.

“Sorry for what kid? What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know,” Peter’s breath hitches, “I just---but I can’t---and yet---oh Happy,” he struggles to find words between gasps as he felt his emotions beginning to take over.

He yanks harder on his hair.

The pain was more but not enough to focus him like earlier.

“Hey easy kid.” Happy sounds more awake now. “Listen to me, listen to my voice. Are you hurt?”

“N-no,” Peter hiccups.

“Is May ok?”

“Y-yeah. She had trouble sleeping,” he gasps, “I didn’t want to wake her up.”
“So you’re at home?’’

“Yeah,’’ Peter exhales.

“Ok, alright. Hey want to here about my day today?’’

Odd turn of topic but Peter was fine with it.

“P-please.’’

Happy quickly launched into a narrative of his day, including every detail and word for word statement he could. Peter focuses on the man’s voice, occasionally a hiccups or gasp came out of his mouth. Happy only murmured for him to keep breathing before continuing his narration. Peter didn’t really hear Happy’s words. He heard but didn’t process what was being said. But Happy didn’t seem to mind.

Peter wasn’t sure how long Happy had been talking but eventually the story about Happy trying to convince Morgan to eat asparagus seemed to draw Peter’s attention.

“Aunt May had the neighbor lady make her seasoned asparagus for me because it’s the only way I’d eat it as a kid,’’ Peter murmurs into the phone.

“Maybe that woman can offer the recipe next time I’m over,’’ Happy chuckles. “You with me now kid?’’

“I think so. I’m sorry Happy,’’ Peter feels guilt in his gut for bothering the man.

“No worries Peter. I told you to call when you need me, if I had a time limit on that offer I’d have said so in the beginning. Besides Tony’s called me for weirder things later than this.’’

Peter chuckles at the thought, “I can’t even imagine what he called about.’’
“Yeah,” Happy laughs, “it was always so random back in the day. Sometimes about his ideas, sometimes about events, sometimes I think he didn’t realize he called me because I’d pick up and he’d be in the middle of a conversation with himself and never acknowledge me. Although I think I prefer the late night calls I’ve gotten over the last few years the most.”

Peter thinks and realizes the only thing different in the last few years is Tony’s marriage and fatherhood.

“Did he call a lot about Morgan?”

“Usually when Pepper is off working somewhere and he’s alone with Morgan. In the beginning it was calls about baby issues. Now its calls about random things Morgan does that are cute or funny.”

“Tony makes a good dad,” Peter murmurs as he remembers how Tony cuddled Morgan during movie time and let her play with his hair.

“Thanks to you kid.”

Peter sputters, “w-what? Me? What did I do?”

“Well I got slews of calls about you when Tony snatched you up for Germany. He kept checking in on how I’m taking care of you. Then after Germany he kept calling me about my opinion on updates for your suit. Then the ferry and vulture incidents he kept venting to me-“

“Sorry,” Peter cuts in sadly.

“Oh no, he was venting about how he wished he could’ve done things differently. I ended up searching some parenting advice on google but of course what I read to him he took the wrong way and decided to offer you a spot as an avenger. Honestly I’m glad you turned it down, I was hoping you’d finish your teens first before going big.”

“I’m still surprised you read him parenting advice from the internet,” Peter responds.
“Oh I was on those mommy blogs quite often after that. Tony kept calling about ideas for you and what he should say to you and how he could guide you better….in the end I just created a huge email with links to all the blogs for him.”

Peter laughs, he can imagine a disgruntle Happy putting together an email like that and demanding FRIDAY to read it.

“But it was you kid who got him wanting to be a parent. Having you made him want to learn more about parenting. He even started talking about having kids after those few times you two hung out in the lab to fix your suit after Homecoming. If he hadn’t met you I don’t know if Morgan would even be here. That’s all thanks to you Peter.”

“Wh-what? Really?”

“Yep. Sure Tony has met lots of kids in his meet and greets, he even met a kid who helped him in Tennessee. But it wasn’t until he met you that Tony really started working towards being involved and more parental.”

Peter can only stare at his ceiling in shock.

Tony decided to be a dad because of him?

But why? He’s just a kid from Queens? A random teen?

But this was Happy. Happy wouldn’t lie.

Peter could only gasp “wow” into the phone as a response.

“Do you want me to keep talking or are you good?” Happy cuts into Peter’s moment.

“Ah I’m good now Happy. You can go back to sleep.”

“Will you go back to sleep? Cuz I’m not hanging up until I know you are ok enough to sleep. Tony
has always been a crappy sleeper and I refuse to let you take on that habit of his.”

Peter chuckles and takes a breath.

He does feel better.

Not totally better.

But enough better.

“Yeah Happy, I might be able to fall back to sleep now.”

“OK. Oh and just as a heads up. Tony and Pepper were talking about borrowing you this weekend to help them move some stuff from the lake house to the tower. Guess its stuff Tony didn’t want the movers touching since he didn’t trust them. They will probably call tomorrow and ask your aunt.”

“You didn’t want to move the stuff?” Peter retorts.

“Kid I’ve been moving and picking up after Tony for decades, if I can pawn the job off on some teenagers then I will.”

“Gee thanks Happy.”

“You’re welcome kid,” the man laughs at Peter’s sarcasm, “get some sleep Peter.”

“You too Happy.”

With a small smile the teen hangs up and stares at his ceiling.

The pain and shock of the dream lingers, but more interesting images push them aside. Images of
Happy reading mommy blogs and Tony listening to him, cute things Morgan would do that Tony would call at all hours about, Happy moving gear place to place for Tony.

Peter felt a calm was over him.

He lowers his hand from his hair and takes a few deep breaths.

The echoes of Happy’s voice fill his mind and carries Peter back to sleep.
A few days after his encounter with Happy on the phone, Peter finds himself once again in the heart of Manhattan. True to Happy’s words, Pepper called up Aunt May requesting for Peter’s help on Saturday to move some “special” items from the lake house to the tower. So, Peter stands staring once again at the vast metal and glass giant that is the Stark building looming over him, only this time the teen enters the front door holding a white key card. Even with the key card though, Peter still glances nervously at the front desk workers as he walks to the security check point. Which then turns into a nervous glancing action towards the security officer watching him very closely as Peter moves up the line one person at a time.

When Peter reaches the card swipe check point, he swipes the card quickly as the security man watches him even more intently. The screen facing Peter lights up green with his name and high school yearbook photo popping up. Peter watches the security man check his screen, probably with the same name and photo on it.

“How’d a teen get alpha access?” the officer mutters and Peter’s super hearing catches.

“C-can I go through?” Peter inquires nervously.

The man waves Peter onward, “get going kid.”

Peter quickly leaves the check point, moving towards the elevators. Only to pause realizing he’s forgotten which elevator he’s supposed to take, yet four elevators stand around him. A knot forms in Peter’s gut. How could he forget which elevator to take? He’s been here enough times he should have this information stored somewhere in his brain. What kind of intern is he if he can’t even get to where he is going?

Peter squeezes his fists as people mill around him in and out of the elevators, his nails digging painfully into his palms. Peter focuses on the pain trying to reign in the gut twisting anxiety at bay.

Peter feels his pocket vibrate. Tugging out his phone he finds a text message on his screen.

: Use the elevator on the back left side—Tony

Peter exhales, with the air goes his anxiety, his gut untwisting some.
Peter moves to the elevator. No panels are beside it but it opens for Peter easily as if he had selected a button. Stepping in Peter recognizes the fancy touch panel, more of his anxiety slipping away with the familiar sight.

“Good day Peter,” FRIDAY’s Irish tinted voice fills the metal room as it begins moving.

“Hey FRIDAY,” Peter grins up at the camera in the corner, “will Tony be making me move his lab or something today?”

“Not today Peter. Boss and Mrs. Boss didn’t want movers touching their personal photos and files so you’ll be helping move those. I thank you for coming Peter. Boss is still recovering and Mrs. Boss often is distracted by Little Boss so my protocols indicate your presence will greatly relieve stress for them.”

“Oh, ah, Yeah. You’re welcome,” Peter shrugs.

The elevator continues in silence until it opens to the familiar living area. Stepping into the entry way, Peter slips around the shoe rack and coat closet to find Tony on the easy chair laughing as Morgan jumps around the coffee table and couch. Standing in the center for Morgan’s circular jumping path stands a dirty blonde teen holding two cookies up above his head. She keeps jumping while her arms reach up as she whines for a cookie while the teen just chuckles about a password.

“Petey help me! Harley won’t give me a cookie!” Morgan cries out as she spies Peter entering the room.

“Alright Harley, give the princess her cookie so we can head out since Underoos is here now,” Tony chuckles while eating his own cookie.

“Sorry I’m late,” Peter follows up since he didn’t know what else to say. Rather Peter’s eyes stay on the other teen.

“You’re not late kiddo, we technically didn’t given an exact leaving time.” Tony nods at the clock, “we just said morning and its nine am so it is definitely still morning. Besides Keener here had a head start since he arrived last night.”
Harley Keener. That’s the name of the jeans and plaid dressed teen standing in the living room eating a cookie and staring at Peter.

Peter’s brain moved into overdrive at the sight of the teen. He’s friendly with the Starks. Did he know them? Did he know them well? Was he around when Peter was gone? Peter’s mind blasts thought after thought rapidly.

Harley moves around the couch, reaching out a hand to Peter for a handshake.

“I’m Harley Keener.”

“Peter Parker.”

“Yeah I know,” Harley nods towards Morgan, “she told me about you.”

“Of course I did!” Morgan shouts over the couch back, “Peter’s my big brother!”

“Oh,” Harley raises his eyebrows at Morgan, “then what am I?”

Morgan’s face screws up for a second, “I guess you can be my brother too since you did save daddy. But Peter was first so he’s the big brother.”

“What?!” Harley places his hand on his heart in mocking, “how can he be the big brother? I’m older. I started college after all.”

Morgan shrugs, “cuz I said so.”

Tony throws back his head in a deep laugh, “you heard her Keener, Princess Stark has spoken.”

“That’s President Stark Daddy!” Morgan frowns.
“Oh my bad President Stark,” Tony does a mocking salute, “finish your snack because we are leaving as soon as mommy is back from her phone call. You two boys play nice while I run to the bathroom.”

“I don’t think the doctor has cleared you for running yet,” Peter found himself quipping at the man.

“Ha ha funny kid, just remember whose lab you use,” Tony grunts as he pushes himself into a stand.

Peter’s smile falters a little, his hands institutionally moving forward in the desire to help Tony. But Peter quickly pulls back knowing the man will ask when he needs help. Glancing over, Peter sees the Keener guy also pulling his hands back from the same gesture.

“You two relax, I can get to the bathroom on my own just fine,” Tony sighs as he glances at the pair before limping down the hallway.

Peter glances at Keener and their eyes meet. Both glance away, hands fumbling for placement.

As the tapping of Tony’s cane becomes more distant, Peter begins to wonder what he should do or say as the silence became more noticeable.

“So,” Harley finally spoke up, “you disappear too?”

Peter squeezes his fists tighter at his side, nails digging into his palms to remind him his hands are still there and not turning to dust.

“Yeah. You?”

Harley nods, “yeah. Your family?”

“My aunt went too.”
“Lucky,” Harley sighs. “I came back and my baby sister is almost my age living with a new family while my mom lost it after I disappeared. I couldn’t stay there after that, it’s not home anymore.”

Peter nods, “it’s the same but yet not the same and that small difference just digs at you little by little till you want to scream?”

Peter suddenly realizes what he’s done. Glances up in panic, waiting for Harley Keener to start looking at him judgingly.

Rather Harley just nods, “that’s exactly it man. I decided to come up to NYU for college this year rather then my original plans, get a new start completely away from everything. Maybe this will help me adjust.”

Peter still stares, shock rendering him to only nod. He thought Harley would judge him but instead the other teen agrees.

Maybe Peter isn’t alone in his thoughts.

Peter clears his throat, “so how’d you meet Tony?”

“When his suit was blasted off into no man’s land during the Mandarin attack, well that no-man land he landed in was my crummy hometown. Found him, hid him, and helped him with his suit.”

Peter bites his lip. This kid helped with the suit? He is just as good as Peter? Suddenly Peter began to worry for his position as Tony’s lab assistant.

“You know how to fix his suit?” Peter tests.

“Naw, I just helped him get parts and put things places and press buttons. Yeah I like building things but I’m no genius like Tony. But you, Tony talked about you sometimes when he called to check in on me. He says you’re a genius, like a bonified genius.”

Peter shrugs, shocked that Tony would boast such a thing to another kid, “I don’t know about genius but I do like science.”
“Don’t sell yourself short Peter,” Harley touches Peter’s shoulder gently. The younger teen glances up and meets the older one’s eyes, there is no judgement or anger or envy in them, Peter just sees a friendly teen looking at him. The twinge of worry in Peter’s gut slowly relaxes. Maybe he isn’t being replaced.

“So despite what President Stark said, since I’m older and met Tony first I think I technically should be called the big brother,” Harley smiles as he moves onto a lighter topic.

Peter accepts the topic as a smile grows on his lips. Harley wants to play this way well Peter’s got some secrets up his sleeve too.

“Well you might be older but I definitely met Tony first,” Peter smugly eyes his finger nails.

“No,” Harley frowns, “you came around a few years ago.”

Peter smirks at the older boy, “actually I met Tony at the Stark Expo where the Hammer suits attacked everyone. Thought the plastic Iron Man mask and glove that protected me at home could protect me when one of those robots dropped down to get me. Tony showed up and shot the thing into oblivion. Said-“

“Good job kid,” Tony’s voice finishes the story.

Both teens look at the man standing in the doorway with smiles only to see Tony staring with wide eyes at them.

“That was you Peter?” Tony asks as he steps towards the two teens, “you were that kid?”

Peter nods, confusion as to why this seems to bother Tony.

“Jeez,” Tony sighs and sits down in his chair again, “trying to save the day even as delicate baby.”

“Hey,” Peter frowns, “I was an elementary student, not a delicate baby.”
“Well I’m still older,” Harley cuts in.

“What are you boys arguing about?”

Pepper steps into the room, glancing around the room.

“Peter almost died as a little kid but daddy saved him. Harley saved daddy as a kid. And now they’re talking about who is going to be the big brother,” Morgan responds as she dashes to Pepper.

“Well then, that leaves me with a few questions,” Pepper eyes the teens, “but for now lets grab our lunches and head out. If we want to be done before bedtime, we need to get on the road.”

“Lunches?” Harley asks

“Daddy packed us lunch!” Morgan dashes off to the kitchen.

The little girl returns with several lunch boxes. She hands a blue cloth one to Pepper then trots to her father and hands him a red bag. She then provides Harley with a metal box with the avengers on it while Peter gets one with Iron Man on it. Hers has space on it.

Both teens stare at their boxes.

“I’m feeling there is a subtle message here,” Harley mutters.

“Ok kiddos, Stark express is a go!” Tony calls out as he stands up with a huff.

Morgan squeals excitedly and runs for the elevator while Pepper ushers the teens to tag along.

“This is going to be so much fun!” Morgan giggles
Peter and Harley glance at each other with hesitant smiles.

“Its going to be interesting,” Harley replies to the little girl.

“Yeah,” Peter nods, “interesting.”
Upon arriving at Stark family lake house Peter learns several facts.

Fact number one: Tony owns an SUV that is family friendly. In all the times he got a ride, Peter was always in a car and didn’t think Tony owned anything bigger than that. But there the teen sat in the back row with Harley Keener while Morgan sat singing some kid’s songs between Pepper and Tony in the second row. Surprisingly there was no divider so Happy had to drive listening to the little girl’s sing-along rather than the radio. Peter could bet Happy probably wishes there was a divider by time Morgan was singing that Old McDonald had a lizard on his farm.

Fact number two: Tony’s lake house was not what Peter expected. The man was usually surrounded with modern and expensive items, even his lab was equipped with things that always reminded Peter that the man had a ridiculous amount of money. But the lake house? Well the log house looked like a normal family home Peter would see in the magazines of doctor offices. A porch, a kids play area outside, a garage, warm family friendly yard décor, and even a random pet.

Fact number three: Tony has an alpaca as a pet. Not a dog. Not a cat. An alpaca. Gerald according to Morgan. Harley and Peter both stare at the fuzzy long neck animal, unsure how to proceed.

“You’re from the farmland,” Peter nudges Harley towards the animal as Morgan beckons them to come pet it.

“Yeah like cows, goats, sheep, normal farm animals. Not alpacas.” Harley pushes back at Peter’s shoulder, “you’re her favorite.”

“Don’t tell me you two young men are afraid of a grass eating fuzz ball?” Tony calls from the porch.

“No!” the pair shout in unison.

“Together?” Harley mutters.

Peter nods. The pair approach together and found the alpaca accepting of their pets. Morgan was satisfied with this and dragged the pair off onto the rest of the house tour.
“Wonder where they’ll put Gerald,” Harley says as Morgan drags the pair up the porch.

“Daddy built a green house for Gerald on the balcony,” Morgan replies.

“Of course,” Harley sighs, “perks of being the pet of a rich family.”

Fact number four: Happy was good to his word from the phone call the other day and did not help move any of the left-over things. The man went right up onto the porch and sat down with his StarkPad, only looking up at the kids as they entered the house to remind Peter and Harley “you’re here to move things kids”.

Peter and Harley both take a sharp inhale upon entering.

It’s a cozy family home inside as much as the outside with the interior filled with comfy furniture, well loved books here and there, rustic, clay vases and plater wear, overall warm and inviting by appearance. But both boys shock was over the fact the house looked ready to live in, not almost moved out.

“So when you say a few things,” Harley starts, “you mean the whole house still needs to be moved?”

Tony chuckles and hobbles over to the couch, “Naw. I’m a billionaire so I can afford to have two homes fully furnished and stocked. We have a housekeeper coming to maintain this place while we are in the city and same for our city penthouse when we are here.”

Harley groans and nudges Peter’s arm, “rich people.”

Peter gives a breathy chuckle since he too couldn’t comprehend having enough money to do such a thing.

“So what are we moving?” Harley speaks louder, “cuz if we are riding with a llama in the back seat with me and Pete then I’m definitely hitchhiking back to the city.”
“It’s an alpaca!” Morgan snaps before dragging a book from the bookcase to her father.

“No we have someone coming tomorrow to move Gerald with an animal tow,” Tony clarifies as he helps tug Morgan onto his lap.

“So what are we moving?” Peter wonders, looking around and seeing no moving boxes around.

“Well Pepper has some family mementos upstairs that needs to go in the back of the SUV and whoever is left can go put the pile of family photos on the kitchen table into the box in the kitchen.”

“1, 2, 3 not it!” Harley shouts and dashes to the steps, “pictures are heavy, I pass that to you Peter since Morgan has made you the designated older brother!”

“Oh now I’m suddenly the older one?” Peter snaps at the older boy.

Harley just laughs and takes the steps two by two.

With a sigh and one last glance at Tony settling in to read to Morgan, Peter retreats to the kitchen area. True to Tony’s words a couple brown boxes sit waiting on the floor beside the small kitchen table with stacks of photos still in their picture frames waiting to go in. Looking down, Peter finds bubble wrap and tape in the boxes.

Pulling the kitchen chair out, the teen sets up a little station and proceeds to wrap the photos.

The first couple were cute. Photos of Morgan probably a handful of months ago playing in various locations, sometimes with Tony and/or Pepper while others had her by herself. The next few were birthday photos. There weren’t as many as May’s collection in her bedroom of Peter, but they had the same theme: smiling parents, party table, cake, and Morgan covered in varying amounts of food. Her first birthday picture had her almost head to toe in cake in a way even Peter never achieved as a child. The next photo has Peter pause. Tony sits in his lab back in the city with Dum-E, Butterfingers, and U around him while he holds a very young baby Morgan for the photo. What catches his eye is the small 4 x 6 photo was date stamped. The date was for a year after Titan. A year after Peter was gone Tony was smiling a soft but proud smile while holding his own daughter, a wedding ring on his finger.
Peter felt his eyes burn a little as his gut tosses and turns. He realizes this photo shows Tony got his happily ever after.

Tony deserves a happily ever after.

But Peter felt he was invading that happily ever after.

Each photo of Tony and his little family. A photo of the few avengers who survived the snap visiting the hospital with Pepper, Tony, and newborn Morgan. A photo of Morgan walking. A photo of Tony sleeping while Gerald eats his shoelaces. These are snaps of Tony’s life, a life Peter doesn’t know. A soft smiling and gentle Tony that Peter doesn’t know.

Peter felt his breath start catching.

He keeps wrapping the photos.

He keeps blinking his eyes, pushing the tears aside.

He starts pushing his left foot onto his right foot toes, trying to focus on the pain of his toes rather then the weird emotions in his chest.

He shouldn’t feel sad.

He has no right.

But he does. He feels sad.

He missed all of this.

He missed so much.
So many people have moved on with their lives. So much has changed.

He comes to a photo of Tony and Pepper’s wedding.

He sees his hands are shaking now as the pictures trembles a little.

“I told Tony that after all he’s put me through, our wedding photo was going to be perfect so I can show it off forever. A little snobbish but having the perfect wedding photo was a dream of mine since I was a kid.”

Peter nearly drops the picture frame as Pepper steps up beside him.

For someone with super hearing, he totally missed her coming in.

Peter clears his throat, “it’s very nice. You and Tony look really happy.”

“It was the first time Tony really smiled since you were gone,” Pepper sighs, gently putting her hand on Peter’s shoulder.

“I would’ve liked to have been there,” Peter speaks quietly at the picture. “It would have been the first time I got to wear a suit and not go to a funeral,” he gives a sad chuckle.

Pepper’s hand begins to rub across Peter’s back gently, something May does to comfort Peter sometimes.

“Well Tony and I have been tossing around the idea of renewing our vows in the near future. Now that several of the avengers are back, you’re back, and Harley’s back, well we kind of feel like we should so you all can be part of what you missed. Plus Morgan is always upset she wasn’t at our wedding.”

Peter glances up at the woman, “Oh? You sure she wasn’t at the wedding?”

Pepper laughs and smacks Peter’s arm playfully, “yes well she might have been a little bean at the
“A bean Pepper? From these photos I’m thinking might be a little bigger than a bean,” Peter holds up the photo of Tony, baby Morgan, and robots while pointing to the date in the corner.

Pepper rolls her eyes, “you’ve been hanging with Tony too much.”

Pepper begins to shift the photos on the table some, “want to see which is Tony’s favorite?”

“Sure.”

Peter waits, expecting Pepper to pull out a photo of Tony with newborn Morgan. Or maybe a photo of pregnant Pepper. Something super family-ish. Pepper finds what she is looking for and sets the small photo down in front of Peter.

Peter looks at it for a moment in confusion and then glances at her.

“This one?” He asks in confusion.

“Yep. This is Tony’s treasured photo. Not even Morgan or I were allowed to touch it.”

Staring down Peter finds himself looking at a photo of Tony with himself. The Peter in the photo is smile while holding his Stark internship certificate and giving his mentor bunny ears. Tony’s fingers also adorn Peter’s head. Peter can’t believe that Pepper, May, or Happy didn’t say anything that day about the certificate being upside down.

Pepper’s hand begins rubbing Peter’s upper back again, “this photo went everywhere with us. He had it in his suit jacket at our wedding. In the lab at the penthouse. Here at this house. I’m sure there is one in garage too since that’s where he keeps his mini-lab out here. This is Tony’s treasure.”

“Why,” Peter whispers between the rapid blinks his eyes do to keep the water in them. “I’m just some kid.”
“You’re not just some kid Peter.” Pepper bends down, drawing Peter’s attention to her face. “Tony was becoming a better man, year after year, since becoming Iron Man. But his biggest change came when you showed up. He began to think twice. He decided to work on fixing the Accords because he didn’t want the laws to harm underaged supers. He didn’t want Ross to get to you. He didn’t start fixing them for the other Avengers, but for you.”

Peter’s breath hitches. He digs his nails into his thigh. He refuses to cry in front of Pepper.

The woman doesn’t seem to notice, she continues to speak. “Tony was struggling with being at Avengers Compound all the time with the team split. But then you showed up and he changed his mind about the Tower. He stopped trying to sell it and stayed here in the city to keep an eye on you. After the Vulture incident he began to read parenting books, I found several in his office about parenting teens too. After seeing him do that to help mentor you I began to realize that maybe Tony could possibly one day be a full-time parent. And let me just say,” Pepper plays with Peter’s hair, “he told the Avengers to shove off when they came to ask for Tony to build a time travel machine to help them reverse the snap. But he took one look at your photo and changed his mind.”

Peter squeezes his nails into his leg harder, “wh-what?”

“Tony realized he got his happily ever after but at the cost of losing you. It ate Tony up that he lost you. When he realized he had the chance to get you back, well he jumped right back into work.”

“But,” Peter clears his throat to move the lodged emotion there, “he could have lost you and Morgan if he messed up. He almost died to fix the snap. How am I—why would he—he was happy! He almost lost everything because of me! I’m just, me. I’m not worth—the risk,” Peter struggled for the words, his breathing coming shorter and shorter.

Pepper squeezes Peter’s shoulders, “breathe Peter. It’s ok. Morgan and I are ok. Tony’s ok. It’s all ok, don’t think about the what-ifs.”

Pepper’s hands move down Peter’s arms to the teen’s hands.

Taking Peter's hand in her own, she smooths out his fingers. Pepper gently touches the teens legs, rubbing where his nails had dug in. She then takes his hands in her own, gently rubbing his palms. She says nothing about the small cuts from earlier that Peter is sure she feels. Instead she just gently rubs his hands.
“it’s ok to cry,” Pepper murmurs as she leans in.

Peter’s breath hitches more noticeably, he feels a trickle of warms down his cheek. A few small tears escape his blinking eyes.

“You are worth Tony’s risk,” Pepper whispers, “you’re his kid. You were his kid before Morgan and even with Morgan here now, you’re still his kid.”

Pepper reaches out and pull Peter towards her. Peter lets the woman do this.

Peter’s tears come more now as Pepper Potts the wife of Tony Stark holds him close in a warm motherly hug.

Peter can’t remember his mother’s hugs. He was too little. May hugged him like this a little kid but as an older child and teen Peter only got one arm hugs.

It’s been so long since he got a two-arm hug that lasts longer than a few seconds.

And he melts into it.

Pepper rubs his back as he tries to inhale. His trembling hands holding tightly to the back of her shirt.

Peter isn’t sure how long he and Pepper are like this. But when his breath finally calms, he manages to control his tears again, he pulls back.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers hoarsely as he rubs his face.

Pepper smiles and rubs Peter’s cheek, “don’t be sorry. I think you’ve needed that for a while.”

Peter nods numbly. He feels the pain in his throat and gut now gone. Maybe he did need a moment to cry.
“Take a moment to gather yourself. I’ll finish the photos and you can go out and help Harley. Some of those boxes are a little too heavy for him so you may need to carry them little Spider.”

Peter nods. He could do that. Carry heavy boxes. That was definitely better than staring at someone else’s happily ever after photos.
After taking a moment to clean his face and taking a few more deep breaths, Peter left Pepper to pack photos while going upstairs. On his way he sees Tony is on the fourth children’s book for Morgan. Peter had no doubts Pepper and Happy asked her to sit there with Tony to make sure the man didn’t go overexerting himself.

Peter enters the second floor full of bedrooms, using his super hearing to locate Harley since all he could hear is Tony reading, Morgan commenting, and Pepper packing.

He finds the older boy sitting in what is probably a guest room from his basic and bland appearance.

The blonde’s head is ducked down as he sits on the bed.

“Harley? You ok?” Peter asks quietly, trying not to startle the older boy.

Harley nods, rubbing his face before looking up at Peter.

Red rimmed eyes and blotchy nose matching Peter’s. Harley had been crying too. Suddenly Peter doesn’t feel so bad about his moment downstairs.

Harley clears his throat, “did you know that this room and the one across the hall from it are empty?”

“Guest rooms?” Peter asks.

“I thought so too,” Harley sighs and stands up. “Pepper told me that this room,” Harley coughs and looks up at the ceiling, “Tony saved this room for me. I was supposed to have this room.”

“Harley-“

“The one across the hall,” Harley continues, “that’s your room. Even though we both disappeared
in the snap, Tony still built a house with rooms for you and me. As if we may come back someday.”

Peter froze.

He didn’t know what to do. He didn’t know what to say.

Harley takes a deep shuddering breath and takes Peter by the shoulders, “enough moping. Pepper says you’re rather strong for a small skinny dude so you can move these two boxes in here.”

Harley steers Peter to what is probably the master bedroom from the size of it. Three boxes sit on the floor in the doorway.

“I can get this one,” Harley lifts the medium sized box. “The small one has some metal stuff in it and the big one is just stuffed with Morgan’s collections so they’re a bit heavy.”

Peter bends down and stacks the small box on top of the big one, hefting both with a single breath.

“Oh, ah, ok,” Harley blinks a few times, “wow.”

Peter realizes right that second he may have just outed himself as an enhanced.

“Morgan said you were Spiderman but I didn’t believe her. Guess next time I shouldn’t doubt the kid.”

Harley turns away to walk down to the first floor as if he just commented on the sky is blue.

“Wait,” Peter rushes after the teen, “she told you?”

“Yeah but Tony yelled at her for spilling secrets. I also talked to her about keeping certain secrets within the family. I just didn’t think it was true cuz well,” Harley waves the box from Peter’s head to toe, “you look so normal. But no normal person can heft those boxes so easily. Anyway, I won’t tell anyone, promise.”
Peter nods numbly and just follows the older teen down the stairs.

“Actually,” Harley pauses on the stairs, “I’ll trade you secrets so you’ll know I’ll keep yours.”

Harley leans in as far as the boxes allowed him.

“I’ve switched my major. I’m minoring in engineering and I’m going to major in business. I haven’t told Tony or Pepper but I want to get my education so I can help Pepper with SI. Maybe even be one of her assistants. That way she can spend more time with Tony and Morgan. I also applied for a business internship with SI which I haven’t told them about yet.”

Peter blinks and nods slowly.

Harley sighs, “I have to tell them sometime, but I haven’t decided when. I’m worried Tony will be upset cuz all I talked about was learning to build things with him but now,” Harley shrugs. “I’m not a building genius. I mean I’m good, maybe a little above average. But not something that keep up with Tony or even some of the people at SI. Plus, in high school I found having deadlines for my engineering projects just made my work worse, I do best at my own pace which is fine but not good for business in general.”

“I won’t tell them,” Peter affirms.

Harley nods, “thanks Peter.”

The teens finish descending the stairs to see Pepper has now joined Tony and Morgan, the woman sitting on the couch sipping a warm drink while watching her daughter “read” a book to her father. Both Peter and Harley are sure that the ugly duckling doesn’t have wolves and magic beans in it but according to Morgan it does.

Both teens pause at the sight.

“Feels like your looking into someone else’s happily ever after?”
Peter jolts out of his thoughts to Harley’s words.

“Yeah,” Peter whispers as he glances back at Tony tickling Morgan now.

Harley nudges Peter out the door with the box in his hand. The pair pass Happy on the porch and place their boxes beside a fourth that had magically appeared.

Peter recognized the bubble wrap oozing out of it. Happy probably helped Pepper bring it out.

Setting their boxes down Harley sighs and sits on the edge of the trunk.

“You know,” Harley waves Peter to sit down, “When Tony fell into my life, quite literally, I knew he’d leave me someday. I tried not to get attached because I knew he’d leave. My dad left. My mom’s boyfriends left. My uncle left. Then Tony left. But unlike the others Tony gave me a parting gift and he even called to check in on me a couple times a year which is better than all the other guys. But then one day he started calling me more often. Started offering me chances to come up to NYC to spend time in his lab. He offered to help me take tests for schools. He even started sending SI workers to check my living conditions! It was so weird. I mean one day he sometimes exist in my life and the next he starts being a bit of a helicopter parent.”

Peter nods and sits down beside Harley, “if think that’s bad you should hear all the protocols he has in my suits to keep me ‘safe’” Peter quotes.

Harley laughs, “yeah that’s a parent thing. But anyway. I was wondering what made Tony from being a random checking in kinda guy to a more active person in my life. I did some digging. I discovered that the only thing different with Tony at the time was that he had been seen hanging around a superhero from Queens named Spiderman. I didn’t know Spiderman was a kid my age or anything, I just knew that Tony’s interest in me peeked because of Spiderman. At first it was annoying but then I realized deep down I like his attention. I never had a male role model and all of a sudden Tony was becoming that even if it was long distance. And then I vanished.”

Peter nods, “I wish I could forget that day.”

“I think many people wish that,” Harley replies.

“Do you?” Peter inquires
“I don’t remember much. I was walking my sister home from school and I remember my feet feeling weird. I remember looking down and seeing my legs disappearing. Then my hands. And as the rest of me went all I can remember is hearing my sister screaming.”

“I’m sorry,” Peter whispers.

“Nothing you can do. I came back and found my sister. Luckily her new family helped her come to terms with what she saw but I could still see the stress in her eyes when she saw me. The night I slept over I heard her have nightmares and calling out for me. I couldn’t stay knowing I was causing that. Also, it was super weird that my baby sister is now my age so it was kind of awkward being around. So as I said back at the tower: time for a new start.”

A silence fills between the two of the teens for a moment. Peter feels the need to share, Harley barely knows him and he shared.

“I felt it,” Peter whispers.

“Felt what?”

“The snap. My powers, they kept trying to fight the snap’s effects. So I felt my body starting to fall apart and my powers trying to fix my body. It hurt so much. I felt each cell die, each inch begin to crumble painfully. The others around me, they went so quickly and easily. But it took me so long to go. I was the last to go.”

“Dang dude,” Harley whispers. “Have you talked to someone about this?”

Peter shrugs, “I’m talking to you.”

“Well I’m not much help. I mean I’m messed up too. Maybe we should talk to Tony about this. Maybe he can help with me hearing my sister’s screams and you feeling that pain.”

Peter shrugs again, “maybe. But I don’t want to bother him. He’s still recovering and now with the move.”
“Yeah I get it.”

They sit quietly for a moment more.

“Got a phone?” Harley finally speaks again.

“Yeah, why?”

Harley holds out his hand. Peter gives him the phone. Harley plays with it and then hands it back.

“That’s my number,” the older teen points out. “if you ever need anything feel free to talk to me as long as you let me do the same back.”

Peter smiles, “sure thing.”

“Good,” the older teen nods, “I’ll be in the city for college and probably around the tower too. Tony’s trying to talk me into staying at the tower instead of campus in fact. And one more thing,” Harley leans over to Peter and holds out his hand, “lets make a deal. If you think I’m struggling with my issues you have permission to tell Tony or Pepper so they can help me, as long as I can do the same for you.”

Peter thinks for a moment.

Perhaps it was a good idea.

After all, Peter hasn’t spoken to anyone really.

And he did just cry all over Pepper.

Maybe this could help.
Peter takes the older teen’s hand and shakes it, “deal.”

“Are you two just slacking off over there?!”

Happy interrupts the moment from the porch with his shout.

“No Happy, we’re taking a break!” Harley shouts back.

“Well get up here and move the last two boxes,” Happy snaps back but with a smile.

“well,” Harley slips off the trunk edge, “back to free slave labor.”

“I’m told at school that’s why people have kids,” Peter adds with a smirk, feeling a bit lighter inside.

“ Totally true,” Harley laughs as the two teens walk back to the house.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Trigger warning....just FYI

Chapter Notes

adding tags as we go FYI

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Five days.

School starts in five days.

His first day back to school since the snapping fiasco is the Wednesday after Labor Day.

Peter continues to stare at the calendar Aunt May hung on his wall like it offended him in some way.

Five days to prepare seeing more change.

But then again, in five days he’ll see Ned and MJ.

Thank goodness they also vanished in the snap; Peter still cannot fathom moving through school without them. He can’t imagine Ned not sitting beside him to talk about science, movies, and all things nerdy. He can’t imagine looking up and not seeing MJ drawing in her crisis book while smirking at him.

But knowing his friends will be there waiting still doesn’t make the knot in his gut lessen any. After helping Tony over the weekend and spending the start of his week tinkering at home, Peter had slept rather peacefully for the first time in a while.
Until tonight.

Peter had woken with gasps and the pain of his hand hitting the side table again. But he didn’t want to have a repeat of the baking incident from last week so instead of getting up after the nightmare he spent the last four hours staring vacantly at the bedroom walls thinking about the new school year, his friends, his decision if he should join clubs again this year, and anything else he can think of that isn’t about the nightmare.

Peter hears the noise of his aunt’s work alarm going off in the next room.

Hearing her groan and get up, the click of the bathroom door following the noises, Peter decides to get up too.

Scratching his bedhead to make it look like he slept more then he really did, Peter enters the kitchen area with the intention to make something to eat.

He pauses when he sees the pile of mail aunt May picked up yesterday before work.

Nothing abnormal.

Expect what sat at the top of the pile.

Peter stares at the small plastic card on the kitchen table.

His face is on it. The picture from the beginning of the school year.

Or rather.

Five years ago.

But there it is, his photo with his name and birthdate on it along with a “left date” and “returned date”.
“Oh good you found it.”

May steps into the room adjusting her blouse and skirt.

“What is this?” Peter picks up the card and looks at it closely.

“It’s a Blip card. Everyone who vanished and came back gets one. Well, little kids are too young to carry a card so their parents will hang onto them until their older.”

“Blip?”

“Goodness Peter, you’re the teen shouldn’t you be the one all over social media catching up on things?” May jokes with a smile. “It’s what people are calling the five year vanish period: The Blip. To make sure there aren’t physically underage kids using their IDs for illegal stuff and for several other reasons I don’t quite have time to go over before work, everyone who went in the Blip gets an ID card if they don’t have a driver’s license or passport. Once you get those things there will be a line on those IDs indicating we were in the Blip so our age is a little off.”

Peter nods and picks up the plastic card, unsure what to do with it.

“Stick it in your wallet hun,” May adds as she starts the coffee, her travel tumbler under the spout instead of the pot.

“I’ll be back around three today sweetie.” She grabs a breakfast bar from the cupboard, “remember to text me if you go off somewhere. Especially if you decide to go swinging around.”

Peter hums for a moment.

“I’m kinda shocked you keep suggesting I go out swinging,” Peter speaks quietly.

May laughs as she adds cream to the tumbler, “I know I can’t stop you when you do decide to go out.”
She caps the lid and turns to Peter, “I lub you sweetie.”

With a kiss on the head, his aunt dashes out of the door at this ridiculously early morning, leaving Peter staring after her wondering what to do with himself.

He didn’t want to bother Tony, Happy, or Pepper. They’re probably busy doing work things or family things.

He’ll see Ned at school soon so no point in bothering his friend while he’s getting his last few days of family bonding in.

He could go out as Spiderman. But he honestly still isn’t quite up for it yet, it's still to early in the morning.

Sighing Peter decides to do the next best thing.

Two bowls of cereal later and Peter sits in front of his laptop reading up on ‘the Blip’ and more things he missed while he was gone. He remains there for a few hours until the pain in his neck tells him its time to stop hunching over the desk.

Venturing to the living room, Peter flips on the TV in hopes of finding something else to do. Peter keeps flipping through the channels, unable to focus on any one channel in particular. In the end he decides to go make a snack for his never filled stomach. Leaving the TV on a random channel the teen steps into the kitchen to create a sandwich for himself.

The commercial ends.

“In today’s ten o’clock news”

Peter groans. Of course it’s a news channel. Totally not what he wants to see.

“we are celebrating some of the heartwarming stories of our viewers after the Blip.”
Oh no way. Peter was not in the mood or mindset to listen to these. Yes he is glad that people are having good moments in their lives despite the chaos of the Blip but this is not what he wants to watch on one of his last days before school absorbs his life.

The teen steps out of the kitchen with his plated sandwich and water glass to change the channel but pauses as his eyes look at the small screen.

“As our viewers can remember, the Blip was unexpected and unsettling,” the anchor continues.

The news anchor’s face falls away and clips fill the screen of personal cameras of people turning to dust. A clip of a news floor being filled with dust. A clip of a park where almost everyone present vanishes in puffs.

Peter feels his heart race. His breath catches.

His feet? Where are his feet?

Peter tries to move his toes but he can’t feel them. Where are his toes?

The plate and sandwich fall to the floor quickly followed by the glass of water, everything breaking into pieces.

Did his hands just dust? Did he drop those because his hands are gone? Where are his fingers? He can’t feel his fingers!

Peter drops to his knees, the room beginning to tilt sideways.

Where are his legs?

Why can’t he breathe? Are his lungs disappearing again?
“No,” he whispers, “no please.”

He moans and grabs at his middle, hoping the pressure will keep him held together and not dust away again.

“Not again,” he hiccups.

He tries to catch a breath only for it to taste like dirt, choking him into a cough.

Was he coughing normal? Was that dust he’s coughing up?

Suddenly the orange blanket on the back of the couch begins to morph, the orange stretching out in his vision. The taste of dirt becomes stronger along with the sudden heat creeping across Peter’s skin.

No! no he’s not on Titan! There’s no way!

Reaching out blindly, Peter’s hands seek a way to reassure him his eyes are not telling the truth.

Pain sears up his hand and wrist as his palm hits something sharp.

Just like that, the pain pushes the orange back into the shape of a blanket on the back of the couch.

Peter reaches out and grabs the sharp object. He squeezes it in his palm.

The next wave of pain pushes the imagined heat away and the scent of dirt is now replaced with the smell of peanut butter.

Peter squeezes again, this time able to take a deeper but stuttered breath as the pain tells him the appendage is there.
Looking down Peter finds himself kneeling in the peanut butter and jelly mess on the floor. Shatter plate pieces and cup pieces lay around the sandwich, the water making the bread and jelly seep into his pants. The items are tainted by slow but steady red drips from his hand.

Blood.

His hand holds a piece of the plate, the large shard drawing blood from the cuts its made from him squeezing it.

With one last squeeze he feels the pain seep into his hand, aching up his arm to his shoulder. It chases away the last of thoughts, allowing him to think clearly.

And the first thing Peter realizes is what a mess he has made.

Quickly dropping the shard, Peter scrambles into the kitchen. Grabbing paper towels and an old bag, Peter scoops the mess up quickly, leaving a trail of blood and occasional hiss of pain from the ache in his hand. He is internally thankful for the hardwood floors as he sprays the floor to clean the blood he keeps dripping. He squeezes a paper towel into his palm to reducing the dripping.

He will definitely need some band aids.

Peter tosses the mess into the garbage.

Everything but the large plate shard that is.

Peter stares at the shard in his paper towel clad hand.

Maybe he should keep it. What if he thinks he is turning to dust again? A quick prick or squeeze won’t hurt him in the long run but it may chase away the thoughts like it did this time.

Where would he keep it?

He can’t put it under his pillow.
Suddenly the air is filled with loud music, Black Sabbath’s ‘I am iron man’ chorus playing repeatedly.

Startled, Peter drops the shard into the garbage and refusing to dig it out of the mess in the bag. Choosing to run to his room as Tony's ringtone keeps playing.

Holding his injured hand above his head to prevent any blood from dripping, Peter uses his other hand to grab the phone from the bedside table and flicking it on.

“Hello?”

“Peter!” the loud squeal of Morgan’s voice causes the teen to pull it away from his ear momentarily. “Petey its me! Morgan!”

“Yes I hear you Morgan,” Peter chuckles, “what are you doing with your dad’s phone?”

“I miss you Peter! Can you come play with me? You’ve been gone for a long time,” she whines dramatically.

“We saw each other Saturday,” Peter smiles.

“But that was so long ago! Can you please come play with me? Pretty please with an arc reactor on top?”

Peter hears another voice in the background. A deep voice of a man he recognizes.

“But daddy! Peter has to come play with me, I’m his sister!” Morgan whines a little away from the phone.
There’s rustling and more whining on Morgan’s part before Tony’s voice fills the speaker.

“Hey Peter. Morgan was calling to see if your free today or tomorrow. She was wondering if you’d come over and play legos or something with her.”

“Yeah I’m free,” Peter can’t help the smile growing bigger on his face, “I can come over today.”

“Great,” Peter hears rustling and Tony telling Morgan. The squealing in the background was quite loud, indicating that Peter probably just made her day.

“Ok kid,” Tony’s voice returns to the speaker, “I’ll send Happy your way when you’re ready.”

Peter goes to say Happy can come right over.

Only he glances up at his hand that is still above his head.

He should fix that, can’t have Morgan seeing that.

“I’ll be ready in an hour,” Peter decides.

“Awesome kid. I’ll see you soon!”

“Bye bye Peter!” Morgan screams from the background.

Peter hangs up the phone, staring at his hand.

“Now to Morgan, Tony, and Happy proof this,” he mutters.

Chapter End Notes
I also started a Avengers + service dogs + no powers au fic recently, feel free to check it out
For once Peter finds himself happy for his spider DNA issue outside of being Spiderman. Normally Peter finds his crazy fast metabolism a struggle to care for, the occasionally sticking to things when not paying attention a pain, the constant monitoring of his strength exhausting, the struggle to focus around his heightened senses annoying, and when his body either overheats or becomes hypothermic at least twice as fast as normal person’s he fights the urge to scream.

But not today.

Today he simply tells Happy he’s feeling a chill from the overcast weather this late August day when the man raises and eyebrow at Peter’s choice to wear a thin hoodie with extra long sleeves. But the man doesn’t argue, having been present at one of Peter’s body temperature mishaps months ago.

Wait.

Years ago.

That mishap in the rain was years ago.

Peter squeezes his injured hand tighter, the pain pushing away the thoughts.

“You alright kid?”

Happy catches the teen’s attention from the driver seat. The man eyes Peter in the rear-view mirror as they wait for the light to turn green.

“Yeah. Yeah I’m fine, why?”

“Oh I don’t know,” Happy shrugs, “maybe I’m asking since normally you’re talking my ear off by
now about something or another.”

Peter nervously picks at the sleeve of his hoodie, “just don’t have much to share. Haven’t been doing a whole lot.”

That didn’t seem to appease the man. Rather Peter can see Happy’s frown deepen as the teen glances nervously at the mirror.

“Did you have a rough night last night?” Happy probes as the car moves onward.

Peter shrugs, “I don’t remember anything,” he partially lies, “I just well, I woke up—” he ends with another shrug.

“I get it kid. Nothing happening yet you wake up feeling a little off. I’m sure coming over will have you ironed out in no time.”

Peter sees Happy accept the situation with a nod. Peter didn’t look anymore at the man, afraid he’d see the small tell signs of Peter’s lie.

The car pulls into the garage where the familiar elevator waits for the teen. Happy waves Peter onward with a murmur about running an errand of some kind.

“Good day Peter,” FRIDAY greets the teen in the elevator as it ascends the many stories.

“Hey FRIDAY, how is Tony and Morgan today?”

“Boss is doing alright, its one of his better pain days. Little Boss is what the Boss calls ‘stir crazy’ and is currently running circles around the living room waiting for your arrival.”

Peter can’t help but laugh at the image in his mind of the little girl dashing around the apartment while harassing her father with a million questions.

“Peter I’m picking up damage to your hand, would you like to stop at medical before going to the
Peter tugs the sleeve down more to hide his hands, “its ok FRIDAY, just a small cut from earlier. Just caught something wrong.”

“My sensors are indicating it doesn’t register as a small cut but rather a moderate level one. Because I cannot see it on the cameras I cannot advise you to get stitches or not but it is advisable to be careful and change your dressings every day to prevent infections.”

“Thanks FRIDAY,” Peter sighs, “its not that big of a deal. It’ll heal in a day or two. I’ll keep it clean if you don’t go reporting it.”

“Understood. I will not report it unless Boss specifically requests for information or I deem your injury uncared for.”

Peter let out a long held breath.

The elevator comes to a stop and the doors begin opening, allowing Peter’s ears to be filled with childish squealing.

“Peter’s here! Peter’s here! Yay Petey!”

Morgan’s voice is followed by her body, the child barrels into Peter’s legs as he exits the elevator with enough energy to making the teen stumble some.

“Hey Morgan,” Peter pats her head, “you dad not playing with you?”

Morgan shakes her head, “mommy says daddy can’t play because of his booboos so I’m bored.”

Peter squeezes his wounded palm, freezing the smile on his face, “Oh well good thing I came over then.”

“Yes! Now I have someone to play President with,” she grins up at him.
“Don’t let that little monster trick you,” Tony’s voice calls from the living room, “I’m having a good day today. Someone is having sibling withdrawal.”

Peter picks up Morgan, carrying the giggling girl into the room to dump her on the couch.

“I’m going to get my toys,” she squeals and runs off.

Peter sits beside Tony, the man playing with something on his tablet.

Peter leans in to see words across the top of a page of code.

‘E.A.R.L
Even After Retirement I’m Limitless’

“Pepper’s going to cut something important off if you’re going to keep working as Iron Man,” Peter murmurs.

Tony chuckles and closes down the program. “It’s not for me. Gotta make things to take up the slack of my retirement.”

The man eyes Peter closely, “you okay kid? You’re looking a little pale today.”

Peter shrugs and goes to pick at his sleeves more, “I’m fine.”

“And I’m on Steve Roger’s speed dial,” Tony scoffs, “really kid. I know you well enough to see you looking a little off. Not to mention what’s with the hoodie in August?”

“Just had a rough morning, nothing to crazy or bad,” Peter shrugs, “and the hoodie is cuz I’m cold. I don’t really thermoregulate well since the spider bite.”

“Woah wait,” Tony holds up his good hand and Peter glances up, “what the what with
thermoregulating?"

Peter clears his throat, “I don’t thermoregulate very well anymore. I get overheated twice as fast and I become hypothermic twice as fast. I’ve come up with solutions,” he gestures at the hoodie.

“Ok, why didn’t I know about this?” Tony’s frown increases.

“Well I didn’t know till a few months ago,” Peter pauses and clears his throat, “I mean a few months before the Blip. I got caught out in a rainstorm shortly after the Vulture incident. Karen called Happy because my readings were all weird and he picked me up. After sleeping for almost a whole day I did some research.”

“Why did Karen call Happy?”

Peter glances down at the hoodie, picking imaginary lint off it, “you were at some gala thingy that was important. Since I wasn’t like dying or anything FRIDAY redirected Karen’s call to Happy."

“Ok, alright,” Tony sighs, “that won’t happen again. Also we need to discuss updates to your suit. Actually scratch that. I want to make you a new suit with some updates. Especially with tech to help keep you cool and warm.”

“The suit I have has the heater,” Peter protests, knowing the man will go overboard and he isn’t in any condition for that.

“That’s another thing. I’m aware that wearing the Iron Spider suit may not be something high on your to-do list because of what happened the last time you wore it, but you need an update since that other suit is a few years to old.”

Tony picks up his tablet and begins tapping away at it, “also maybe I can come up with some kind of improved underarmor for you to help keep you warm and cold in your normal clothes. Maybe I can make it cheap enough to mass produce, I’m sure Pepper can find a use for it somewhere."

“Tony!” Peter whines, “You’re supposed to be taking it easy! I don’t want Pepper getting mad because I made you start working again.”
“You’re not making me do anything,” Tony sighs, “Besides Pepper doesn’t want me doing major work. I’m allowed to create plans on the tablet and have FRIDAY run data and create products for me. Now do you want to stick with the red and blue theme or do you want to move towards a slightly different color scheme. I mean we can do like a darker blue or maybe even a black color for more stealthy look. Oh we can even update your spider logo!” Peter felt his breath catching, he can’t let Tony do this. The man is supposed to be relaxing, not creating new suits and fabric for Peter.

“Tony!” Peter snaps while looking at his knees, “don’t do that!”

The older man’s fingers stop making tapping noises on the tablet.

“Ok, ok. I’m stopping Peter. I need you to talk to me Underoos. I see you’re upset, you need to tell me why.”

“You’re supposed to be resting, you’re supposed to be spending family time with Morgan and Pepper, you’re supposed to be recovering.” Peter’s hand pops out of the hoodie, he presses the wound to push away the tears in his eyes. “Making me a new suit? Coming up with clothing so I’m not freezing all the time or dying of heat every other day? That’s work. I’m not going to let you do that, its not helping you recover.” Peter squeezes the wound harder, “I can’t let you end up getting sick because you spent to much time working on my account. I’m not worth risking your health and recovery.”

Peter’s hand and arm throb with pain, but it keeps his head in the moment. The memories of Tony’s injuries try to emerge but the pain pushes them back down.

“Listen kid,” Tony tries to gain Peter’s attention.

The teen keeps looking downward, squeezing his palm has hard as he can.

“Peter,” Tony takes Peter’s hands, “Peter stop,” he whispers.

Peter lets go of his palm, taking a chance to look at the man.

Tony is eyeing Peter’s wounded palm, the bandage starting to tint red from the wound under it being aggravated. With a sigh, Tony covers both hands with his own and moves them onto his own
knees. He holds Peter’s hands gently and firmly.

“Look up at me Peter, show me those brown eyes.”

Peter glances up nervously and meets the man’s gaze.

“Making a suit and designing you clothes are not going to jeopardize my recovery. Even if I wanted to stay up all night working I can’t, Pepper’s put in some protocols on FRIDAY and with Morgan—well she is good at keeping me on track with a normal schedule. Sure it’ll take me longer to make things, but making you things will not make me worse.”

Tony releases Peter’s uninjured hand, squeezing the teen’s shoulder, “And what is this about not being worth it? You are worth it kid. Never doubt that. Besides, I giving people I care about gifts is my thing. Now I need you to verbally confirm you hear me,” Tony probes the teen.

Peter nods, “I hear you,” he whispers.

“Ok then what did I say?”

Peter gives a small smile, “that making me things won’t hurt you.”

“And?”

“And,” Peter frowns at the man, “and?”

“And that your worth making things for.”

“Oh,” Peter clears his throat, “i-I’m, ah, I’m,” Peter wiggles his injured hand while looking away.

The words on the tip of his tongue. But he can’t say them.
He doesn’t believe them.

How can he be worth it?

How can he be worth anything?

“Hey, hey none of that,” Tony leans into Peter’s view, “ok we’ll work on that second part. Now focus here. I need to know how you hurt your hand.”

Peter shrugs, “I dropped a plate and wasn’t paying attention when I cleaned it up.”

“So,” Tony hesitantly speaks, “you didn’t do this on purpose?”

Peter shook his head.

It’s the truth.

He didn’t mean to hurt himself. He just, well, did it.

He can’t talk about afterwards. Those thoughts that came later.

Tony doesn’t ask about those thoughts thankfully.

“Ok, ok. We can work with this. I’m going to fix up your hand and I want you to be careful with it, especially with Morgan. She isn’t always as gentle as she thinks she is.” Tony sighs.

The man taps the coffee table, the top of it sliding open revealing contents inside it. Tony takes out a first aid kit with his good hand.

“What? Why do you have that there?”
“When you have an accident prone daughter, and two teenage boys who are prone to getting injured, and several superhero friends I find it best to keep a kit in each room just in case.”

Tony begins to rummage through the box, “I’ll need you to take off the bandage buddy. I’m going to help you re-wrap it.”

“I can do that,” Peter removes the bandage but holds his palm towards himself, “you should probably go find Morgan since she’s been gone way to long.”

“FRIDAY what has Morgan been doing?”

“Little Boss switched her outfit three times. After doing so she piled her favorite items into her wagon. Currently she is in your closet trying to decide on a pair of sunglasses to steal from you,” FRIDAY sounded amused.

“FRIDAY can you tell her I have sunglasses for her to use here in the living room.”

“Message relayed. Little Boss is pulling her wagon this direction.”

“Now Peter,” Tony fixed a look at Peter that he can only think looks fatherly, “give me your hand kid. If you’re good I might give you a juice pop.”

Peter lowers his hand for the man to see.

Tony gives a low whistle, “well this isn’t pretty but I don’t think you need stitches.”

“I believe you to be correct Boss,” FRIDAY chirps in.

“Petey! You got hurt?!?”

Morgan enters dragging a wagon full of stuffed animals and pillows, a clipboard with paper balancing on the top of the pile.
The girl drops the handle and dashes to the teen’s side, Peter wonders why the little girl now wears a plain gray dress that is obviously a size to big for her.

“It’s ok Morgan, I wasn’t being careful this morning picking up some glass.”

“Oh,” her eyes widen, “mommy and daddy don’t let me touch broken glass. You need to not do that anymore Peter.”

“And I’m sure he won’t,” Tony adds as he tightly secures the bandage in place with surprising ease for a man with one hand, “and daddy has him all fixed up. Just be careful with his hand when you play Morgan.”

“I will daddy! We’re just going to play President,” the little girl grins as she hugs Peter’s leg. “Petey can I kiss your booboo?”

Peter feels the warm feeling in his gut reach up through his body, “sure Morgan.”

The little girl places a dramatically noisy kiss on the bandage.

“I’m going to set up our advisors!” She exclaims, running to her plushies.

Peter inspects the bandage, “not bad for a one arm man.”

Tony laughs, “you’d be surprised how often I had to bandage my own injured hands over the years. Now you belong to President Morgan until mealtime or you need a break.”

Peter nods, “how do I play that?”

“Its easy. She’s the President and you just do what she says to do.”

“Oh, I can do that.”
“Good. Also Peter,” Tony leans closer as Morgan sets her toys on the ottoman near them, “if you ever feel the need to do this on purpose,” he touches Peter’s hand, “please let me know kid.”

“I’m ok Tony, it was just an accident.”

The man nods and reaches for his tablet.

Peter glances away and watches Morgan.

He didn’t want Tony to see the guilt in his eyes.

It started as an accident.

But he didn’t stop.

He almost kept the shard.

He didn’t keep it.

But he almost did.

Peter glances at Tony. The older man winces and stretches his arm some, rolling his neck too.

No he won’t tell Tony those thoughts.

Not right now.

He’ll be alright.
Maybe.

Chapter End Notes

in regards to E.A.R.L.......well we can't have E.D.I.T.H if Tony lives but he definitely
would come up with a program to help out where he can't any more

the new spider suit is references to the one in FFH
Playing ‘President’ with Morgan Stark was not quite what Peter Parker expected.

Peter won’t admit it, but he had glanced over some “mommy blogs” after talking to Happy to get some ideas on how to interact more with the little girl. He’s never had a sibling, a cousin, or even a neighbor he’s really attached to that’s so young, he needed some ideas.

The sites talk about pretend play, how kids tend to pick types of pretend that mimics what they see in their environments. Like copying characters on TV shows or people in stories or jobs people in their lives do around them.

Peter was ready to play pretend, to be a dragon or evil villain to her heroine. To be the spouse in her pretend house play, to be a pet, or even a customer.

Instead he’s her secret service bodyguard with the job of following her around wearing Tony’s spare sunglasses while she conducts “important meetings with del-li-li-gats” which were her plushies. As she talks about things like peanut butter to jelly ratios and the next step to prevent further deforestation of the rainforest, Peter is reminded that she is half Pepper’s kid.

“Now I want to talk about our problem,” the little girl says very seriously as she folds her hands on the coffee table while eyeing a rather targeted stuffed lamb. “We need to talk about time travel.”

Peter quickly kneels down beside Morgan, “ah Morgan how did you hear about time travel?”

Morgan turns and leans back against the couch, “daddy did time travel.”

“Do you even know what time travel is Morgan?” Peter sighs.

She nods, “FRIDAY told me its when people go back to before I was born to make changes.”

Peter raises an eyebrow, “how did you even hear about this stuff?”

“Captain came to the house and asked daddy to do time travel. To go back before I was born and fix everything. Daddy said no first but then he said yes?”

Peter grips has bad hand a little tighter, “why? Morgan why did your daddy change his mind?”

The little girl makes a face, “he’s your daddy too silly,” she corrects. “And daddy went back to save you. He said he had to save you.”

Peter felt the bottom of his stomach drop.

The old saying ‘out of mouths of babes’ enters his mind.

“Are-are you sure Morgan? Maybe dad changed his mind cuz it was the right thing,” the teen probes.

“Nope” she pops her ‘p’ like Tony, “daddy went back to save you.”

The little girl fixes her toys into another sitting position on the coffee table.
But Peter’s eyes focus beyond that.

Peter’s heart hammers in his chest loudly.

Tony went back to save him?

Peter couldn’t understand.

Morgan wouldn’t lie. She kinda can’t since she’s such a little thing.

Why would Tony do that?

He had heard in Wakanda how time travel was risky. How so much could’ve gone wrong vs right.

Peter suddenly feels warm.

His breath starts coming shorter, straining for air.

The air was thin, why is it thin?

“Peter?”

Why would Tony risk Morgan?

“Peter are you ok?”

Is he?

Peter feels his hand, the pain from it going up his arm, but not enough to catch his thoughts as they fly off into the ‘what if’ scenarios filling him.

“Peter if you don’t verbally respond I will need to call Boss from the study.”

Study?

Where is he?

“Peter, buddy, look at me.”

Peter knows that voice.

Tony.

Tony fixes everything.

But where is Tony?

“W-where? Tony where-where are you?” Peter chokes out.

“I’m right here Underoos,” Tony’s voice fills the orange void.

Peter feels something warm.

Something heavy and warm holds his hand.

A sensation traveling up his arm and back down.
“Focus on me buddy, come on back,” Tony coaxes him.

Peter finally realizes he needs to blink.

Blinking away the colored blurs in his vision, the color shifts and fades into the golden orange hue of the sun through the tinted apartment windows.

Warmth and pressure continues to travel up and down his uninjured hand and arm.

Warmth and pressure from Tony’s uninjured hand as it rubs rapidly up and down, squeezing intermittently.

“Hey Underoos,” Tony coos at him.

Peter’s eyes focus on the man sitting on the edge of the coffee table gazing down at Peter.

“Tony?”

“Welcome back Parker. You went on a little journey there for a moment,” Tony quietly says with a smile that doesn’t reach his eyes.

“I’m sorry Tony,” Peter gasps. He looks around to see Morgan standing beside the ottoman holding her stuffed lamb looking rather sad. “Oh Morgan I’m sorry.”

“You ok Petey?” she asks carefully.

“I am now, I’m sorry if I scared you,” Peter hopes he didn’t just traumatize Tony’s kid.

She shakes her head, “I’m ok. I just thought I hurt you.”

“You didn’t hurt me Morgan,” Peter reaches over and pats her head.

“Are you sure?” she looks him over carefully.

“I’m sure. Sometimes this happens Morgan, I’m sorry I scared you,” Peter puts on his best smile he can

Tony smiles, “why don’t I order pizza and we do movie time?”

“Yes!” Morgan’s mood does a quick 180 so fast that Peter can’t help but chuckle.

“FRIDAY order us the usual plus two extra peperoni and sausage for my spiderling.”

“Right away Boss,” the AI responds with a rather amused tone.

“Morgan go put some of your toys away so we can eat at the coffee table,” Tony suggests.

“And not tell mommy?”

Tony nods, “you got it baby.”

Morgan gathers up her toys into her wagon, dragging the item down the hall to her room.

“Lets move to the couch kiddo,” Tony prompts.

Peter gets up and plops on the couch while Tony moves more cautiously before flopping down.
“So, FRIDAY told me Morgan triggered your little mental vacation,” Tony starts quietly. “We need to talk about this kiddo.”

“I’m sorry Tony, I didn’t mean to hurt Morgan,” Peter whispers.

“Oh buddy you didn’t hurt her. She got a little startled but nothing that won’t blow over with a little love from you,” Tony squeezes the teen’s arm. “Can you tell me what happened or should I talk to FRIDAY?”

Peter sits silently breathing for a moment.

“She brought up time travel,” Peter begins tentatively.

“Oh,” Tony nods, “what about time travel that set you off?”

“She said you did it for me,” Peter whispers, “that you said no first to Captain Rogers but then changed your mind because of me.”

“She’s correct,” Tony confirms.

Peter winces, “why?”

“Why what Underoos?”

“Why’d you change your mind?! I heard what they said at Wakanda!” Peter’s voice raises, “I hear the Princess say how risky what you did was. How there was more chances of messing up then succeeding. You risked your life with Pepper and Morgan because of me? I’m not worth that big of risk, so why’d you do it?”

“Peter!”

Peter winces and glances at Tony.

Tony sighs and rubs Peter’s arm.

“Listen kid, you were worth the risk. You always will be worth the risk. That moment I held you in my arms as you turned to dust I realized not only did I fail but I lost someone important. I lost MY kid.”

“Morgan’s your kid.”

“So are you and Harley. Heck I’d even lump Nebula into that group since we practically died together and I had to teach her how to play games,” Tony chuckles. “But you’re my kid and I’ll do everything I can to keep you here safe with me and the other people who love you. Do you understand Peter?”

Peter shrugs, “I guess.”

“Repeat after me: I’m worth the risk.”


“Because that’s what the parenting books say. Make the kid repeat the important stuff so it sinks in. So repeat with me: I’m worth the risk.”

Peter frowns but realizes Tony is serious after a few seconds of a stare off.
“Fine. I’m worth the risk,” Peter sighs.

“I’m Tony’s kid too,” Tony adds.

Peter makes a face “I’m Tony’s kid too.”

“Hey what’s with the face. Remember I’m buying dinner,” Tony smiles.

Peter sighs, “it’s just weird to keep saying this.”

“Then repeat one more time and I’ll let you free: I’m worth the risk and I’m Tony’s kid.”

Peter sighs loudly, “I’m worth the risk and I’m Tony’s kid.”

Tony nods, “good. Now I’ll let you pick first movie since I’m sure Morgan will have us re-watch her favorite Disney films.”

“Can we watch something from before I—” Peter waves his hand, “you know---puffed?”

“So like a film from 2018 or earlier? What like Coco?”

Peter winces, “ah maybe a movie without the ideas of death involved.”

Tony’s eyes widen, “oh yeah kid, bad idea, sorry.”

“Why don’t we just put on Moana?” Peter suggests, “I’m sure Morgan will like it.”

“Like what?”

The little girl comes bounding in and flops onto the couch beside Peter.

“Watching Moana first,” Peter replies.

“Oh yes, let’s watch that! Maybe we can watch Frozen 2 after that!”

Peter glances between the pair, “there’s a frozen two?”

Tony nods “yep. And its like any Disney movie with its addictive songs that follow you to bed.”

Peter shrugs, “I’m fine with that too.”

“Yay! FRIDAY get Moana!”

“Yes Little Boss,” the AI responds with what might be a chuckle, the large TV popping to life.

Morgan leans onto Peter, “Petey can I sit on your lap?”

Peter chuckles, “sure Morgan.”

The little girl squeals and plops onto his thighs.

Peter didn’t mind.

The weight felt nice.

It made him remember she was there and he’s there with her.
Slowly, Peter wraps his arms around the small body, hugging Morgan close.

She responds by leaning back into his chest.

Peter focused on that feeling.

Morgan leaning on him.

Tony beside him.

He’s ok.

He’s safe.

Chapter End Notes

Short chapter...decided to break up the incoming angst moments into separate chapters instead of one big chapter...
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

trigger warning from here on out people

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Peter stares quietly at his right wrist, the morning glow highlighting the black band around it. The teen has been lounging in bed for several hours, looking at the band from different angles. He had woken before May but he did not move even after she woke up, got ready, and left for work. She probably thought he was still asleep in Peter’s opinion. But all he can care about is the new accessory on his wrist.

A Stark Watch.

It tells time, is linked to his phone, registers how many steps he’s taken, and other normal smart watch functions.

It also has “upgrades” specially made by Tony making this watch one of a kind.

A button straight to FRIDAY for emergencies. An app like link to Karen, who is now in his phone. A GPS tracker that FRIDAY refers to as a ‘Stark Staple’, hinting that Tony has slipped such trackers onto his wife and daughter’s person. And there are probably other features that Tony put in that Peter may or may not figure out one day.

But what has the teen up and focused on the device isn’t the features or unknown protocols on it.

It’s the fact that Tony gave it to him.

The man took a Stark Watch prototype and altered it while Peter was watching movies with Morgan the other day. When he was supposed to be relaxing with his daughter, the man was typing furiously and occasionally trying to tinker with it using his less dominant and only hand to do so. That bothered Peter too, seeing the man fumble more then he’s used to seeing.

And why?

Why had Tony been so determined to get this watch up and going before the teen went home for the day?

Tony could’ve done this at some later time.

But he didn’t.

He did it as soon as he could.

And that unanswered ‘why’ continues to nag at Peter’s mind.

With a sigh the teen rises from bed, moving slowly towards the bathroom. He can at least occupy
his thoughts with the motions of starting his day and push the nagging ‘why’ question.

Did Tony give it as a gift? Is there a meaning to it? Is the watch supposed to be a sign of Tony’s affections for him? If so, why now and why a watch? The man seems like the type to give a car to a teenager rather then a watch. Or is this something to keep track of Peter? Did Tony create this so he can keep an eye on Peter at all times? Its understandable considering all that man has been through but wouldn’t Tony just come out and say something if it is just a set of eyes on Peter?

But then Tony was also working on E.A.R.L the same day too. Is that and the watch connected? Tony’s creating and AI to do his work without him present, to aid others in his absence.

Wait?

Is that what the watch is for?

To aid Peter in Tony’s absence?

Peter slows his morning bathroom routine with that thought.

If Tony’s creating the new AI and Peter’s watch to aid in his absence, does that mean Tony is going to start stepping back from Peter’s life?

Peter’s complained about all the suit protocols but if Tony leaves him on his own?

Last time Tony left Peter on his own was the Homecoming incident.

Peter suddenly feels a heavy pressure on his chest. He struggles to inhale properly. He can taste dust and rock when he does breathe in. The gray wall of the bathroom grows and shifts in shape until large slabs of concrete start coming closer and closer, looming over Peter.

Peter’s blurry thoughts becomes interrupted with a sharp pain.

Looking down he finds hand soap having leaked into his bandage from being held to long. With a hiss, Peter rinses his hands clean, gently patting them dry. Peter pulls the ever stocked first aid kit from under the sink, something his aunt is sure to have ready at any point with her superhero nephew.

Unwrapping his hand he finds it partially healed already. The cut thinner, the skin gap less pronounced, the flesh red and new.

But the cut is still there.

And it still hurts.

Peter cleans it up, puts on ointment, and wraps it up again.

Taking a few deep breathes to steady himself, sitting down on the toilet seat, Peter’s mind begins to filter back to his previous thoughts.

Especially the idea of Tony leaving Peter to fend for himself.

Peter didn’t like this train of thought.

Tony had only been mentoring him for less than a year.

Oh wait.
There was the five years.

So only less than a year of dealing with Peter but more years than that dealing with his own personal things.

Tony deserves a break.

A retirement.

But Peter wants a mentor still. Someone to talk to when things get tough. Someone to spend late nights with just talking about minor daily nonsense to avoid the heaviness of a rough mission. Someone to help him learn to skills to better his superhero self. Even skills to help him through his teenage life. Sure he doesn’t like the protocols but he needs someone to help point him in the right direction.

Not an AI.

A person.

Peter loves Karen. He enjoys FRIDAY.

But he loves having a person to talk to, someone who can understand the human issues in his work.

And if Tony completely retires, passes his suits to an AI until someone else takes up the job.

Peter felt his heart pick up.

Someone else be Iron Man?

No, no, no! Peter will not accept that fact. No one can be Iron man except Tony. Not even a super smart AI.

Peter feels his body rocking, his breath struggling.

He needs to stop thinking about this stuff.

But what can he think about?

“Go away, go away,” he whispers to the intruding thoughts.

He needs something. Something to clear the thoughts away. Something to focus on.

Peter jumps up and grabs the razor sitting on the edge of the sink, the rarely used red item for his face that’s never really grown any hair.

Bringing the metal across his exposed left arm, between his elbow and wrist.

He doesn’t need much.

Just a quick little prick.

That’ll make all those thoughts go away.

The razor blades cut small red lines into his flesh. Nothing bad, just the annoying pain of tiny papercuts.

Okay, Peter will admit it hurts a little more than paper cuts.
Definitely bleeds more than papercuts.

But all that matters is his mind focuses on those cuts, watching a few blood droplets trickle across his pale skin.

Taking a deep breath, Peter exhales and leans back against the toilet again, closing his eyes as he focuses only on the throbbing of his arm.

But in that moment of mental silence he hears it.

The ring of a phone.

A ringtone he recognizes.

Putting toilet paper on his arm, Peter shuffles back to his room, to the singing device on the bedside table.

Tony’s name dances across the screen if the ringtone hadn’t been enough to warn Peter who’s on the other end.

“He—” Peter clears his throat, “Hello?”

“Hey kiddo,” Tony’s voice fills the speaker and Peter lets it wash over him.

Peter feels his shoulders lower as his muscles relax some.

When did Tony’s voice become a source of comfort?

“What yah up to this morning?” Tony continues.

“Ah nothing really,” Peter replies, plopping down on the bed.

“Where you at?”

“I’m at the apartment, why?”

“Your aunt there?”

“No she left awhile ago for work. Is there something you need Tony?”

“Well you see, Pepper took Morgan out today to do some mother-daughter brunch thingy so I’m here alone at the tower and well I was wondering if you wanted to come over. I really want to try getting a prototype done for a new arm and if I have you here, this can get done twice as fast. Heck we could probably finish something by dinner time today. Whatcha think? Wanna come help and old man out?”

“Sure Tony,” Peter feels excitement fill him. Tony needs him. Tony wants him. Tony is giving him something to focus on. “I can come over as soon as I get pulled together.”

Tony laughs. Not a deep laugh. One of those laughs Peter’s heard him do on TV.

Why did Tony just fake laugh?

“Just waking up? Jeez kid, you’re definitely getting the most of these last few days of vacation. Anyway, I’ll send Happy over to get you. See you soon.”
The man cuts the conversation off before Peter could argue that he is fully capable of walking and taking the subway to SI.

Peter sighs.

Guess he better get ready for Happy to show up.

Peter puts his phone back but something catches his attention.

The face of his Stark Watch is yellow.

The screen continues to show the time and date.

But the teen would swear up and down that the screen had been glowing blue before.

Strange.

Peter decides to ask Tony about it later. There is no way the teen is that crazy that he can’t remember what color the watch screen glows.

First to find another shirt to cover up his arms.

Well maybe some Band-Aids first then the shirt.

Chapter End Notes

Hmmm.....wonder why Peter's watch changed its screen color....right after a moment of distress....strange....coincidence maybe?
“Hey Tony?”

Peter glances around the well lit lab, his mentor not at the only open workstation. Odd since this is where Peter was told to go by both Happy and FRIDAY.

The claw on wheels robot whistles at Peter, reaching out and tapping the teen’s head.

Peter can’t help but smile at the bot he just recently got acquainted with.

“Hey Dum-E, where’s Tony boy?”

Peter felt like he was talking to Lassie.

“Boss is in the mini kitchen,” FRIDAY supplies.

“Underoos!” Tony appears from a tucked away corner that Peter always assumed was a closet but thanks to FRIDAY he now knows it’s a mini-kitchen.

Peter moves towards the man only for Tony to hold out a tall red cup to the teen.

“Thought I’d make you a shake. It’s chocolate.”

Pausing, Peter eyes the man carefully and the shake. The teen accepts the beverage slowly, “ah thanks but why’d you make me something?”

“Oh,” Tony glances around with a shrug, “ah, well you see….you said you need more calories so I thought I’d give you something to snack on while we work that doesn’t involve dirty fingers.”

Sipping the beverage, Peter gives a small nod and hum of approval, “Oh this tastes pretty good.”

“If you think that’s good, you should try my hot cocoa. I have a secret recipe passed down to me from Jarvis himself. The original, human, Jarvis that is.”

“Oh, really?” the teen sips more of the beverage.

“Yes. Jarvis would always make me hot cocoa after a rough incident. Sometimes my mom would even slip me a piece of chocolate as a kid when she felt my dad was to much. Guess chocolate is now my go to comfort item.”

“I thought coffee was,” Peter wonders since Tony is known for having coffee all the time.

“Yeah well not all the time. I may secretly have some hot cocoa in my mug from time to time. Coffee is my go-to for ‘stay awake and work’ mode. Just don’t go blabbing that info, can’t have the public knowing my secret.”

“The great Tony Stark is really a chocolate addict, the horror,” Peter gasps sarcastically.

Tony chuckles and toss the towel sitting on the workstation at the teen.

Peter catches it without looking, mid sip of his drink.

Shaking his head Tony plops down into a rolling chair Peter’s never seen in the room before,
pushing the rolling stool to Peter.

The stool that usually Tony sits in.

“You can have that kid,” Tony motions to the stool, “Pepper made me upgrade to this fancy chair with a back the other day. Says its better for me.”

“Oh, ok,” Peter lowers himself onto the stool, sipping the shake.

“So ah kid,” Peter glances up at the man who shifts in his seat a few extra times, “how was your morning?”

Peter shrugs and focuses on his drink, “it was fine. Didn’t do much. Just woke up, laid around, used the bathroom, and then you called.”

“Oh, ah, um, didn’t happen to slip or cut yourself shaving today did you? I mean nothings worse than a cut shaving. Did your uncle teach you to shave?”

Tony spoke in such a rush that Peter had to pause for a moment to separate and process the sentences.

Odd, why would Tony care about a teen’s bathroom routine?

:wait! Does he know? How would he know? Think Peter, fix this!

“Oh,” Peter licks his lips, “n-no I didn’t cut myself shaving. I mean I don’t really need to shave much right now. Uncle Ben said I’m a late bloomer.” Peter tries to focus on the cup in his hand, the wall, the worktable, anything but Tony’s gaze, “Ben did show me years ago, I’m sure I have a basic idea.”

Deciding to avoid things further, Peter quickly moves the topic, “anyways who cares about my bathroom habits. I thought we were going to work on your arm.”

Tony clears his throat, “ah yes we are. I was just asking to make sure my little spiderling is all good in life.” The man turns to the table, still nervously shifting. “You know,” he continues while typing into the console, “you can tell me anything Peter. I won’t judge you. I’m here to listen and help if I can.”

Peter looks at the man’s profile, “I know Tony.”

The man glances over, catching Peter’s gaze, “do you? Do you know? Because you’re my kid Peter, as much as Morgan is. I’ll do anything for kiddo.”

Peter hesitates for a second.

He knows Tony will go through these lengths.

Peter’s been told this by several others.

Supposedly the man messed with time just for Peter.

Peter nods slowly, “yeah I know.”

“Oh. Ok,” Tony sighs and rubs his face. Peter watches as the man bites at his lower lip for a second before tapping the worktable, “FRIDAY bring up the file, we have an arm to build.”
Up popped the hologram blueprints of the arm. Tony obviously worked on it more since the rendering was now more precise and there was even color to it.

“Red and gold? Though you’d want to go with something more natural?”

“Well I was thinking of trying to get Bruce to help me synthesize a fake skin material but then I decided otherwise. I mean I’m Iron Man, how could I not have red and gold arm. Besides I was thinking that if its like my armor it will remind people that I may be short a limb but I’m still Tony Stark and very capable of handling danger still.”

“Ah, Pepper may not like hearing you say that,” Peter responded.

“I don’t mean using it to go out finding trouble. Just that if trouble finds me or my girls or you, I’ll still be able to defend us.”

Peter nods with understanding.

He has a habit of wearing his webshooters outside of his suit at times. Right after the Vulture incident it helped him feel safe and sleep better knowing he had them on to protect May and himself if Mr. Toomes decided to come get the teen.

“Well if its just for defense then I’ll back you up with Pepper,” Peter pokes at the hologram causing the list of features to pop up. “Why’s the list in two colors?”

“Well the Blue list is for sure going into the arm and the red list is the maybe items.”

Peter eyed the blue list. Repulsor, FRIDAY link, E.A.R.L link. Peter selects the ‘sheild panels’ only for the hologram show panels popping up from the arm and forming a shield points with energy stretching between the points. A small addition to a finger as a port that can link into technology that Tony calls ‘FRIDAY’s keys’. Peter can only laugh at it. There are other small extensions to help Tony work in the lab as well as features to keep the arm steady.

The teen keeps paging through the small list.

Most of it made sense.

Glancing at the red list, Peter pauses at the first idea.

First aid.

That’s all it says.

“What’s this one?” Peter inquires.

“You know, I was thinking of adding a first aid kind of feature. Like have antiseptic spray in a finger and a bandage compartment in the wrist or something.”

“Why’d you want that?”

“Well I have a clumsy five-year-old and an often beat up spider-kid, just seems like a good idea.”

“But you’d have to change out the antiseptic stuff and clean the compartment every so many days.”

Tony’s face doesn’t falter but Peter can see his eyes shift from excited to neutral, “ah guess you’re right. Just was trying to find a way to still be helpful.”
Peter knaws on his lip for a second, thinking to himself.

“Well if we the antiseptic stuff in capsules like my webbing then it won’t need to be changed out, just restocked. Like the capsule can eject through the finger like my web capsule and as it passes down the channel that can strip the exterior off causing the fluid to come out the end.”

Peter watches as Tony’s eyes widen, “holy crap kid that’s genius.”

Peter just shrugs and sips his drink.

With that the pair launch into debates and ideas over the maybe list.

Two hours in and they’ve got the final list prepared for the prototype and the list prepared for the next version after testing the prototype.

Peter sets about trying to make Tony’s idea of antiseptic capsules come true while the man has his machines begin creating the arm parts as he codes and primes the arm core.

At this point Peter no longer sees time as something relevant. Rather finishing the prototype and the capsules are his goal.

On test thirty-two, Peter has the capsule idea functioning enough to move onto helping Tony complete the prototype wiring.

Tony wants to neural interface his arm like Mr. Barnes’ but the prototype has Tony wearing a band on his head to test it before making permanent body modifications. A headband that keeps making the fingers flex every time Peter tried to finish wiring the pinky.

“Tony, come on!”

“What Underoos?” Tony says innocently with eyes filled with mischief.

“Dude we are so close, can we just finish the prototype?”

“Goodness someone is crabby,” Tony smirks.

“May I intrude sir. Peter maybe crabby due to being hungry. It is well past the time the young man’s lunch time.”

“I’m not hungry,” Peter snaps.

His stomach takes this moment to clench itself and growl angrily.

Tony just laughs as Peter lowers his head in embarrassment.

“Oh kiddo you’re stomach says otherwise. Let’s table this for now and get something to eat. Pepper and May will have a field day yelling at me if they find out I neglected proper child care.”

“I’m not a child,” Peter snaps.

“Come one Mr. Crabby, lets go eat.”

“But Tony, we are only a few wiring bits, sticking the plates on, and downloading the coding away from being done!”

“And it will remain that way while we eat. Come on kid, let me tell you its not good to start habits
like this at a young age. Eat and then we will finish.”

“Fine,” Peter sighs as his stomach clenches again.

With a nod, Tony tugs the teen off the stool.

Peter sways as the world spins.

“Peter!”

Suddenly Peter finds himself staring at the lab floor, a warm hand rubbing his back.

“FRIDAY call someone from medical!”

“Already did Boss, someone is on their way now.”

“I-I’m ok Tony,” Peter mutters, pushing himself onto all fours.

“Stay down kid, you just nose dived on my floor. I want someone to take a look at you before we try walking again.”

“I’m sure I just stood up to fast,” Peter sighs as he feels Tony pushing at his back to lay down again.

“Please just lay down or sit or something kid,” Tony begs.

Peter gives into the man’s pleas, turning over slowly and laying on his back as the world continues to spin. Closing his eyes makes the world stop moving.

“Tony, your AI told me to come here?” a new voice fills the room.

“Yes, yes, my kid just took a nose dive standing up Helen. I just want to make sure he’s ok.”

“Alright, if you let me,” there is the sound of movement. Tony’s hand leaves Peter’s shoulder.

Peter feels a small whine leave him at the loss of warmth.

“I’m right here kid,” Tony responds, the hand rubbing Peter’s chest.

Peter feels a smaller hand take his wrist, holding at the pulse point. This hand is joined by a second hand, both moving to key points on Peter’s body. Peter doesn’t move or open his eyes until something pricks his finger.

“Its ok Pete,” Tony soothes him.

The teen opens his eyes to find Tony and an Asian woman checking a small device in her hand.

“Good lord!” the woman cuts into the moment

She shows the device to Tony, “his sugar is completely trash Tony. When was the last time he ate?”

“I ah, he had a milkshake earlier,” the man fumbles and glances around for a clock.

“If I may,” FRIDAY cuts in, “Peter had a milkshake five hours ago shortly after arriving.”

“Peter did you have breakfast?” the woman—Helen asks.
“Yeah some.”

“Peter, Helen works with the avengers a lot,” Tony speaks up tentatively, “can I—” he does a webshooting motion with his one hand.

Peter bites his lip.

He doesn’t want a lot of people to know.

But she’s the avenger’s doctor.

“I-uh—sure,” Peter mutters.

Tony nods.

“Peter here is Spiderman. He has heightened senses and reflexes, increased strength, metabolism, and healing ability. I’m sure there’s more details but that’s the important stuff.”

The doctor, Helen, nods slowly.

“Ok, well first do you have soda or juice down here?”

“Ah lemonade?”

“That’s fine,” Helen nods, “go grab it please. We can get his sugar up then we can get him upstairs to really eat.”

Tony gets up, swaying to get his balance before moving quickly for the lemonade. Returning with a blue cup.

“Can you sit up some Peter?” Helen asks.

Peter nods and slowly raises his body, Tony putting the drink to Peter’s lips without asking.

Peter begins sipping only for his stomach to clench as it hits the pit of his stomach. Those sips turn into gulps quickly as his stomach screams for more calories.

“Easy kid,” Tony murmurs.

Tony pulls the cup away for a moment while Peter catches his breath.

“Let that sit for a moment,” Helen speaks up, “then try moving again.”

Peter nods.

“You said enhanced metabolism?” Helen inquires.

“Yeah he says he has to eat a lot,” Tony replies.

“And all the time,” Peter mutters as he sips more lemonade.

“Any testing been done?” the doctor asks.

Tony shakes his head, “I’d like to look into that though.”

“How about the senses,” Helen inquires as she begins typing on the phone she pulls from her pocket, “any testing done with that?”
“Nothings really been tested,” Tony sighs, “we hadn’t been together for very long before the dusting situation. Now we’re just trying to get back into some sort of normal.”

Helen looks at Peter, “Peter I’d really like to draw some blood and run tests. I’m guessing with a heightened metabolism and healing factor that medicine isn’t something that works for you?”

The teen shook his head, “I tried advil once, took nearly half the bottle to deal with a headache from my senses. It didn’t work. I now just try to sleep off anything.”

“Geez kid,” Tony whispers.

“Ok here’s what I want to do,” Helen cuts in, “since I’m here for the week, I want you to go up and eat something Peter. FRIDAY set an alarm so that two hours after Peter finishes his meal to come to medical so I can draw blood. I want to see what we’ve go going on as soon as possible before I’m back overseas to work again.”

“Yes Dr. Cho.”

“Also since Peter’s coming down, Tony I want to run your bloodwork again. Just check your levels.”

Tony smiles at Peter, “guess the prototype will have to wait, blood work buddy.”

Peter just groans.

“We were so close,” he whispers.

“Hey kid there is no rush, it will get done,” Tony comforts the teen.

“But I want it done soon! You can’t even lift Morgan or hug Pepper without it! I want to finish it so you can do that,” Peter squeezes his free hand into a fist, nails digging in.

“Hey buddy,” Tony guides the teens eyes upward, “yeah kid I’d like to do that soon but there is no rush. It will get done today or tomorrow and that’s fine. Sure this isn’t the normal pace I work at but it will get done. Now stop worry about me and worry about getting that sugar level up,” the man taps the cup again.

“Think you can try getting up again Peter?” the doctor asks.

Peter responds by sighing and pulling himself upward.

Swaying a little, the room didn’t spin and he found himself finding his balance to walk again.

“Ok Tony, take him upstairs and I’ll see you all in a bit,” Helen says with a nod.

Tony thanks her and guides Peter to the elevator.

Peter presses the button for the apartment.

He sees his watch.

Its yellow again.

“Yellow?” Peter says as he pokes it.

“Yellow for caution kiddo. Its warning you that you that something isn’t quite right.”
Peter glances up at the man with a glare, “it’s warning you too, isn’t it? Are you spying on me? Tony this isn’t cool.”

The man shakes his head, “it’s not quite like that kid. Let’s get you some food so you can stop being crabby and I’ll explain the yellow.”

“You better,” the teen snaps quietly.

Tony sighs as the doors open, “come on kid. Let’s feed you.”

Peter followed with a frown.

He doesn’t want Tony stalking him.

He wants to finish the arm.

He wants….

He wants….

Peter squeezes his hand again, willing his nails to cut into this injured palm.

“Come on Underoos.” Tony shouts.

Peter snaps from his thoughts, stalking to the kitchen quietly.

Seeing the bowl of pasta salad and soda waiting for him, Peter’s stomach growls loudly.

Maybe food is a good idea first.

Food.

Then answers.

Then arm.

He can do this.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

trigger warning....like from here on out people....

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Peter won’t admit it.

He would rather do a dozen other things then admit the honest truth to the grown man spending time with him.

The truth? The adults were right, Peter had been angry from hunger.

Because as soon as Peter downed the pasta salad, two sandwiches, three cups of soda, and an ice cream bar the world seem like a much better place.

But he won’t admit that.

Tony probably knows.

He had that trademark smirk on his face while Peter ate.

Now the pair sit quietly watching the telemarketing channel, they wait for FRIDAY’s timer to go off for their bloodwork, while commenting on each new item displayed on the TV.

Peter didn’t mind at first. It was fun discussing how they could have made a better vacuum then the one on the screen. Or proclaim no understanding for the female fashion item on display. Or say how they might just actually need that special knife for the kitchen.

But then it happened. Just as the conversation twisted from wrist watches, a thought pushed its way into Peter’s head. A thought kept nagging at him. Twisting the wristband of the new watch on his arm, Peter’s thoughts kept going back to the yellow screen.

Should he ask?

Won’t that reveal his own secret this morning?

But he doesn’t want Tony spying on him, he’s a teenager after all and doesn’t need a babysitter.

“So Tony,” Peter clears his throat, “about the watch screen turning yellow.”

“Ah that,” Tony sits back and rubs his stump slowly, “it isn’t anything super invasive. Just when a vital function starts going out of whack, like breathing or heartrate or blood pressure, the watch will signal you the yellow caution light.”

“And it alerts you?” Peter sighs.

“Not necessarily. Well I’ve had a few years to think and listen to all the parenting advice and I
learned my lesson. When you hacked my suit and Morgan tossed her monitoring necklace in the lake it was a sign that I need to be just a little less…well…um…”

“Overbearing? Helicopter parent? Worried over our every breathing second in life?” Peter offered with a smirk.

Clearing his throat, Tony shifts in his seat, “yes that. Anyway, it will warn you with the light and the information will go to Karen and FRIDAY. They will run a risk assessment first before deciding to send an alert to me.”

Peter glances at the blue screen for a moment.

“Is there something bothering you Peter?”

Yes. The teen wants to ask about how Tony brought up the bathroom after Peter arrived. If the AIs ran a risk assessment, how was Tony so specific?

“So, it alerts the AIs….does it also have a camera?”

“Nope,” Tony pops the ‘p’. “It does the functions I told you about before. It has the alert for your health. If you get an injury that is within so many inches of the watch sensors, that will be picked up. Like if an unlucky spider-boy gets sliced with a knife on the arms or you rest the watch near an injured spot on your body, the sensors can pick that up.”

“I see,” the teen whispers.

“I did that so if you do get hurt and call for help, I can have you move the watch near the injury so I can assess how to help you best.”

Peter sits for a moment absorbing the information.

Does this bother him?

It’s a good idea for someone with Peter’s luck.

But does PETER like it for HIMSELF?

“Peter? Is there something bothering you? Something you want to talk about?”

Tony continues to look at him. Peter felt his heart speed up with his thoughts.

:He know:

Peter knows Tony knows. There’s no way Tony doesn’t know. Not with that function on the watch.

Should he admit to what he did?

If he says something that will just be another burden for Tony.

But maybe if he says something, just maybe Tony might be able to help.

Or he could just stress the man out more.

What to do?
“Peter!”

The teen blinks and focuses his eyes, finding Tony leaning closely, “did you hear me kid?”

“W-what?”

“I said the timer went off, do you want to talk or go do bloodwork?”

“Blood work, yeah, ah lets go take care of that,” the teen decides.

He needs some time to think.

Just a little bit of time.

“So,” Tony speaks up as the pair make their way to the med area, “The lady earlier was Helen Cho. She’s a friend and a doctor. She actually created the cradle that made Vision’s body and repaired injuries some of the avengers go. Especially since most of us don’t have fancy healing powers like you,” the man winks. “She tends to be busy all over the place but she’s here this week to help me with the neuro interfaces that I received from Wakanda for the new arm.”

“So we need to finish that prototype asap,” Peter hums.

“Not necessarily. With Barnes’ arm the neuro interfaces were placed surgically. Due to my heart, surgery isn’t a good option in general. We are currently doing research on using the nano tech to attach the interfaces without major surgery. So there is no official date yet on when we’ll have that operational.”

“Peter! Tony!”

The pair enter the medical area to find Helen Cho waiting by the reception desk for the pair.

“This way,” she waves them down the hall to a private room. “I want to assure you both that Peter’s blood work and information will remain with me and no other worker will have access to it without permission.” The woman turns to Peter, “I’m sorry our meeting has been rather rushed and stressful, but it is a pleasure to meet you Peter.”

“Its nice to meet you too ma’am,” the teen responds.

“Now both of you take a seat in the chairs so we can make this quick. I’m sure you two have things to get to,” she winks.

The pair sit in the chairs in the exam room, each chair has the arm pieces to strap down arms for blood work on both sides. Peter places his right arm up, his bandaged hand on display.

“Oh dear, what happened here?” Doctor Cho gently touches Peter’s hand.

“Cut it on a broken plate the other day,” Peter replies quietly.

“Can I look at it?” the doctor’s fingers hover near the bandage clasps.

“Sure,” Peter shrugs, “its just a cut.”

The woman makes quick work of the bandage, eyeing the half healed wound.

“When did you get hurt?”
“Yesterday morning,” Tony cuts in, “as you can see his healing is quite impressive.”

“Yes it is,” the doctor murmurs as she touches his hand with gloved fingers. “Can I take a photo Peter? Just to document the healing?”

Peter nods and the doctor uses her tablet to photo the injury.

“I wish I had a shot of this when it happened.”

“FRIDAY can send you an image,” Tony supplies, “FRIDAY send whatever stills you have of the injury.”

“Sent boss.”

For a second the doctor stares at her tablet.

A ping.

She flicks her ungloved fingers on the screen.

A gasp.

“My word! That’s impressive. Just 24 hours?”

Tony nods, “just 24 hours.”

For a moment the woman just stares at the screen and flips through items on it.

Tony clears his throat, “ah Helen, I know you’re excited but we kinda need to move on.”

“Oh yes, excuse me gentlemen. Just so interesting.”

She puts on her other glove and preps it items on her tray.

“Now Tony, since you’re the adult, you can go first. Peter you’ll go second and then I’m going to put some medicine on your hand and wrap that up. After that, you boys can go back to your little lab.”

Both nod.

Tony flexes his arm, placing it in the holder for the doctor.

She quickly gets to work on Tony’s arm, Peter turns away.

He can’t watch it happen.

It’s not that he hates needles.

He just hates seeing Tony’s blood.

Tony hurt.

Tony bruised.

Tony bleeding.

Memories of the fight with Thanos threaten Peter’s mind. Images of Tony’s face with bruises filter
behind his eyelids. Images of charred and destroyed skin on his arm wiggle around those.

Peter squeezes his bad hand.

Nails dig into the half-healed injury.

“Peter,” Tony murmurs.

Peter ignores the man.

Focusing on his breathing and the bland colored cupboards.

“All done,” the doctor calls out.

Peter glances back over to see Doctor Cho step away and Tony reaches for Peter with his only hand.

The man smooths Peter’s fingers out from the wound on his palm.

“Its ok kid, I’m ok,” he murmurs to the teen.

Peter bites his bottom lip and focuses on his lap rather than Tony’s face.

“Ok Peter,” the doctor comes into Peter’s view, “you’re next.”

Tony lets go of Peter’s right hand, the teen places it in the holder.

“Actually,” the doctor reaches out, “I want to draw from your non-damaged side.”

“Wait!” Peter gasps.

Before Peter can stop her, the doctor pulls on Peter’s left sleeve.

The loose sleeve gives away easily, revealing the angry red cuts on his lower arm.

Peter feels his breath catch.

His legs start shaking.

Both adults look at the arm quietly.

Doctor Cho clears her throat, slowly lowering the sleeve, “its alright Peter. Lets just move back to the right side.”

Peter barely hears her.

He focuses on the floor.

His mind races.

Both saw.

They both saw it.

They both know.

They know those cuts aren’t accidents.
He barely felt the prick of the needle. Subconsciously he feels his blood leave his body. Consciously he struggles with finding a train of thought that will help him explain this away.

“Alright, I’m just taking these two vials for now,” Doctor Cho’s voice pushes through Peter’s thoughts.

She walks away but Peter doesn’t do much aside from pull down his shirt.

“No baindaid kid?” Tony asks lightly.

Peter shakes his head, “the cotton ball is fine,” he whispers.

“Peter,” Doctor Cho fills Peter’s vision. The woman bends down at his knees to get into his line of sight. “I’m going to clean and put medicine on you bad palm and wrap it up. I also will do the same to your cuts on the left arm. They need to be treated for health reasons. If you get infections, we don’t have medicine that will help you fight that.”

“For now,” Tony adds.

Doctor Cho nods, “for now. Peter, will you let me touch your wounds?”

Peter nods, not looking up at all.

The woman pulls up a rolling chair and begins working on Peter, he continues to stare at the floor.

A few moments of silence ends when Doctor Cho starts talking.

“I’ve been having a hard time with coming back,” she sighs, “it’s like I went to sleep and woke up. Only I didn’t. The world moved on when I wasn’t here.”

Peter doesn’t speak.

But Tony does.

“Has it been hard Helen? I haven’t sat down and really spoken outside of medical stuff.”

“Yes,” she whispers. “I had a little boy. My little boy. He wasn’t dusted.”

“What was his name again?” Tony asks, “Adam? Adrian? Anakin?”

Peter snorts at the last name.

“You know it Tony. Amadeus. My sweet genius was just a child and I came back to discover a young teenager. It’s been—hard.”

“Where is he now?” Peter whispers.

“He’s upstairs in my office finishing a project. We’re going to grab a snack after this at the cafeteria.”

“Is he mad? That you missed those years?” Peter asks.

“A little. Rationally he knows this wasn’t something that could be controlled. But I think the kid in him is still a little mad. But I’m trying to make up for all that by keeping him with me when I travel.”
“What about his schooling?” Tony inquires.

The woman laughs, “Tony, when I said my kid is a genius I wasn’t being a boastful parent. He’s tested and proven to be a genius and has finished most of his education for fun because he was bored. Currently he’s working on some projects to get him into some kind of internship. Once he decides where he wants to intern at. I don’t go around broadcasting his intelligence because I want him to make his own decisions for his future without people hounding him.”

“Well,” Tony says and Peter can hear the smile in his voice, “FRIDAY set up a spare lab in the east wing for Amadeus. Helen I want you and your kid make a list of what he’s going to want in there to work with and I’ll have it set up. Nothings worse than an idle genius.”

“Tony you don’t have to,” Helen sighs as she finishes wrapping Peter’s last injury.

“But I want to. Don’t stop me Helen.”

The woman laughs, “alright Tony.”

The woman pulls Peter’s sleeves down, “all done Peter. Now I’m off to take care of your blood samples and have snacks with my son. This room is free for the day so no rush leaving.”

Peter feels her touch his shoulder gently, “asking for help isn’t a failure, it takes courage to do that. I know this for a fact.”

Without adding anymore details the woman leaves the room.

Peter continues to stare at the floor.

Tony hasn’t said anything.

Peter feels himself struggle to breathe.

He hears Tony sigh.

The man shuffles and soon his legs are in Peter’s sight as he sits on the empty rolling stool.

“Ok kid, we need to talk.”

“I’m sorry,” Peter whispers.

“No, no kid don’t be sorry. I don’t even know the whole story so I don’t know what you would apologize for. Can you tell me?”

“Tell you what?”

“How did you get those cuts?”

“You know.”

“No, no I don’t. All I know is FRIDAY gave me an alert you had minor cuts to your arm, your breathing and heart rate were all over the place. I wanted you to tell me yourself what happened. I want you to tell me without me having to pry into your privacy. I want you to tell me because you trust me.”

“I do trust you Tony,” Peter gasps and looks up at the man.
Peter feels his eyes burn as tears begin to fill them.

“Then can you talk to me?”

Biting his lip Peter shakes his head.

“Can you tell me why you can’t talk to me?”

Peter takes a shaky breath, “you—you’ve been through so much. You’re still—still recovering….and you have you own—own problems….you don’t need my problems. You—you need to heal.”

Peter nearly jumps when Tony makes a strange buzzer noise.

“Wrong Parker. Yes I’m still recovering, but that doesn’t mean I don’t have time to help my Spider-kid with his problems.”

“But you don’t have to—”

“I want to Peter,” Tony reaches for Peter.

Peter glances around until finally he’s looking back at the man, “why?”

“Because kid.” Tony takes a shaky breath, “after you were gone I realized that not only did I fail as a mentor but that I lost MY kid. It took you dying in my arms to realize how much I cared about you and how much regret I had from losing you.”

“But why?” Peter gasps angerly, “why me?”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m—I’m just…well…Peter!” Peter feels the pandora’s box of words spill out of his mouth, “Why do you care? Why do you like me? I always thought everything you did was because I’m Spider-man, that I need another enhanced person as an ally. But then I came back! And Happy says you became a dad because of me! Harley says you started caring more about him because of me! You brought me back, you saved me and May’s things, you call me to come over and hangout. Why is that? I’m just Peter Parker! I’m just a nerd from Queens. A parentless nobody. I’m the butt of people’s jokes. I have very few friends. I’m awkward in social situations. I’m smart but there are so many other people out there smarter then me. Without Spiderman or my powers I’m nothing! I don’t understand why you care so much and everyone says I made things better. Only Spiderman makes things better and sometimes even that isn’t true.”

Peter stops to breath, realizing now that tears are falling freely down his face.

“Ok kid, you’ve had your moment now sit quietly so I can have mine.” Tony sits forward and takes Peter’s hand in his one, “Yes Spiderman is an important piece of you and to many people but you are so much more than Spiderman. Sure Spiderman has powers and saves the day but you Peter Parker are just as amazing. You are smart kid, a genius like me smart. You are only a teenager yet you keep up with me and some of the greatest minds at SI. Heck in a handful of years I’m sure you’ll pass me or come super close. You, Peter Parker, are full of kindness and compassion that makes Spiderman endearing to others. Peter Parker, not Spiderman, helped keep my baby girl happy when everyone around her was worried I’d die or wake up more broken then I did. No one asked you to, you just did it. You only met the Avengers a few times and that was enough for them to see how kind and caring you are to make them start caring for you in return. Heck I’ve got Bruce messaging me every so often asking about you, even Thor left a message about how great my kids are. You, Peter Parker, asked me questions about the Accords and the Avengers making me decide
to revamp everything to do with those. Sure the snap ended up putting those plans on hold. But you made me think, you made my look at things twice. Trying to mentor you I realized I needed to be better because how I can ask that of you if I can’t ask it of myself. Heck there were times I was like “what would Peter say or do” in attempt to make a better choice. I can keep going because the list goes on, but what I want you to understand is that you Peter Parker are an amazing young man who is very important to lots of people, especially to me. What makes Spiderman a great hero isn’t his powers, it’s the guy underneath the mask making the choices.”

Tony’s now crying.

Peter’s still crying.


Tony reaches out and pulls the teen into a warm, one arm hug. “I know kid. I know.”

Peter cries into the man’s shoulder for a bit before Tony speaks again.

“Is this the first time?”

Peter nods into the man’s shoulder, “there were accidents before, but this time---this time it was on purpose.”

“Ok kid, we can work with this,” Tony murmurs into Peter’s hair as he rubs Peter’s back.

They sit quietly for a few more minutes until Peter’s sobs have become quiet little tears and hiccups.

“Peter, can you tell me what thoughts made you go to cutting your arm? What was in that noggin of yours that drew you to that?”

Peter takes a few breaths first.

“I—it made things quiet. Made things better.”

“What do you mean by ‘quiet’?”

“My thoughts. Sometimes I think about things that make it hard to breath, hard to focus, hard to be here and I can’t stop my head from doing that.” He takes a shuddering breath, “I accidently hurt myself when I was having those thoughts. The pain made all the thoughts go away and I was back in the here.”

Tony hums and kisses Peter’s hair, “what kinds of thoughts?”

“All kinds,” Peter replies.

“Titan?”

“Sometimes. Sometimes the battle. Sometimes its me turning into dust. Sometimes its you in the hospital. Sometimes its just the sound of your heart stopping that haunts me.”

“My—my heart? Kid what?” Tony gasps.

“On the battlefield,” Peter begins sobbing again, “there were so many hearts. So many breaths. So many people. But the moment you went down, all I could do was focus on you. All I could hear was your body slowly shutting down. All I could think was ‘there goes another man in my life’.
Dumb Parker luck strikes again.”

“Oh kid,” Tony tightens his hold, “why didn’t you tell me?”

“How could I? You died! You’ve been hurt! You’re adjusting to life with all these changes!” Peter pulls back and waves at Tony’s missing arm, “How can I tell you when I see you hurting already? I don’t want to hurt you more,” Peter moans.

Tony pulls Peter back into his chest and the teen lets him. For a moment Peter just breathes unevenly.

“Kid I still dream of you dying.” Tony murmurs.

“Wh—what?” Peter glances up at the man’s face from his spot.

“Yeah I still dream of you turning to dust into my arms. For years it was the wormhole in New York, the visions Wanda put in my head, the torture from my kidnapping. I’d gotten better with help, but the moment I lost you, god I lost it. I was a mess for months after I came back from Titan. Even now I wake up and ask FRIDAY about you because I still dream of you disappearing. But one thing I want you to know, there is nothing wrong with you. You’ve been through so much and it makes sense your body and mind struggle with processing it all. And its ok to need help processing. I needed help, it took me forever but I got help. Heck Pepper has a whole program up and going for people to enroll in across the USA to help them process everything with everything that has happened. So you aren’t alone.”

The two sit quietly for a few more minutes.

Peter tries to process everything that has happened in these moments.

“Now what?” Peter whispers.

“Well we just had some very big feelings just now and I don’t know about you but I think watching a movie on the couch is sounding really good right now.”

Peter pulls away slowly, “big feelings?”

“Yep,” Tony nods and wipes his face, “now how does a movie sound?”

Peter nods, “ok.”

“And while we relax I’m going to make a plan for what we will do next.”

Peter nods.

Then a thought catches his mind.

“Are you going to tell Pepper and May?”

Tony sighs, “what do you want to do?”

Peter bites his bottom lip, “I don’t want to stress May out more. And Pepper has enough with work, you, and Morgan.”

“Ok then how about this: if you start doing more,” he gestures at Peter’s arm, “then we talk to the women. But lets make a plan between us for now.”
Peter nods, “yeah, yeah, that, ah works.”

“OK. Movie, plan, and sleep over.”

“Sleep over?”

“Yeah kiddo, how about you sleep over tonight? I’ll talk to May. That way if you have trouble tonight you can come to me and not bother May? You had some pretty big feels that might bleed into your sleep tonight.”

Peter thinks for a moment.

He doesn’t want to bother May.

But he didn’t bring any clothes.

“I don’t have clothes.”

Tony laughs, “Peter I’ve had a room for you here for years. I even ordered clothes and such recently hoping you’d spend the night sometime soon.”

“Oh. Yeah. Ok.”

“Good, I’ll message May as soon as we get settled upstairs with a movie.”

“And then we’ll make a plan?”

“Yeah kid, we’ll make a plan. Write out some triggers or times of day where these thoughts keep popping up. Come up with some ideas on what you can do to get out of those moments without it being you hurting yourself.”

“W-what if I do it again?” Peter whispers.

“Then we’ll cross that bridge when we get there. Lets focus on the now. Now is the movie and a plan and a sleepover.”

Peter nods slowly.

He was tired.

He just wants to sleep.

And have someone else fix his head.

But sleep sounds good.

“Ok kiddo, lets go upstairs.”

Peter allows the man to guide him out of the room slowly, Tony’s arm never leaving its place on Peter’s shoulders, just shifting position.

Peter didn’t mind.

Feeling it helped him focus on the now.

Movie, plan, sleepover.
Focus on the now.

Chapter End Notes

some big feels.....and more to come cuz we've only just hit one portion of the problem....

Also, anyone recognize the name drop in there?
Chapter 18

The credits of A New Hope roll on the large TV screen, Peter sits watching the names come and go.

Peter remembers watching the intro.
Watching Leia get caught.
Luke meeting up with Ben.
But now it’s the credits, where did the middle go?
Also, where did the pillow come from?
Peter leans against a pillow larger than his torso, the kind normally found on a bed instead of a couch. It hadn’t been there at the start of the movie.

Glancing over, he finds Tony staring at the tablet in his lap, tapping away at the screen with a stylis. Tony had pulled it out back at the start of the movie but that didn’t bother Peter, he just liked having the man’s legs press close to his own as a stable anchor. A pressure that is still present and noticeable to the teen.

He’d really like Tony to put an arm around him.
But that’s impossible right now with only one arm.

Soon.
Soon Peter will help him finish that arm and everything will be better.

Soon.
“Tony?”
The man starts, glancing over at Peter quickly, “oh welcome back to the real world Underoos.”

“Huh?”
Tony just chuckles, “you fell asleep shortly into the film.”

“Oh.”
Tony smiles more and darkens his tablet’s screen, “Ok do you need a bathroom break? Snack break? More sleep?—”

“I’m fine Tony,” Peter cuts the man off with a smile.

“Good, good,” Tony rubs his hand along his thigh, “so kid lets talk.”

Peter shifts nervously. He had hoped after Tony brought him to the living room that the man would get distracted and forget or maybe Pepper come back early with Morgan. Part of him worries about opening up and burdening Tony more.

“Hey Pete,” Tony cuts into Peter’s spiraling thoughts, “eyes on me kid.”
Peter looks the man in the eyes, only for a moment before going back to looking elsewhere.

“Where did you just go kid? What just went through that brain?” Tony leans in, taking Peter’s hand in his own.

“IT was—”

“Peter Parker don’t you dare say ‘it was nothing’,” Tony sighs, “Peter, buddy, I know that before the whole Thanos thing I wasn’t communicating with you very well. Heck even during the Thanos thing I wasn’t really talking with you—”

“Yes you were,” Peter cuts in, “you talked to me. You told me what to do and we did it the best we could.”

“That’s just it Peter, I talked TO you not WITH you. I learned these last few years while raising Morgan that talking TO a kid is different from talking WITH a kid. So its my fault our relationship started with questionable communication as a foundation.” Tony holds up a hand to stop Peter’s second outburst, “don’t fight it Underoos, its true. So it is time we worked on our communication skills. Lets start with you telling me where that big brain of yours just went a moment ago.”

Peter sits for a moment.

Tony continues to stare at him with no evidence he’s going to give in.

The teen sighs, “I’m worried that telling you everything will be a burden.”

Tony makes a buzzer noise, “wrong. You are not a burden. Remember that conversation we had a little over an hour ago in the medbay? It hasn’t changed just because we moved upstairs. You are not a burden. Repeat that after me kid.”

“W-what?”

“Parenting blogs and books say to make a kid truly remember something you need to have them repeat it back a couple times. Now repeat after me kid: I’m not a burden to Tony.”

Peter stares at the man, was he serious?

“I’ve got all day Parker and all night, so better do it now just to end the struggle,” Tony smiles.

“I—I’m not a burden,” Peter sighs quietly.

“to?”

“To Tony.”

“Good, now again with more confidence.”

“Tony,” Peter whines to the man.

“Nope, not backing off.”

“I’m not a burden to Tony,” Peter says again louder with a frown.

“Well we will work on that attitude, but I’ll take it.” Tony smirks.

Peter can only roll his eyes.
“So let’s talk. Earlier you said that this was the first time you,” Tony waves his hand at Peter’s arm, “on purpose but that you’d done other things by accident earlier. Can you tell me what you mean by ‘accident’?”

Peter just shrugs, “nothing to bad. Just accidentally smacked my hand when trying to grab something to steady myself or bumping into a table when I’m trying to find a safe spot.”

Tony nods, “ok. Now I have to ask: your big cut, was that one of those accidents?”

Peter swallows and begins to toy with the bottom of his shirt, “yes.”

“How was it an accident?”

“I-I was picking up the plate pieces and was squeezing to hard when I was trying to focus back.”

“Ok, alright,” Tony nods. “Now I’m going to ask, can I have FRIDAY take notes right now? I would do it myself but I think its best that I give you something to focus on while we talk,” Tony squeezes Peter’s hand, “ok?”

Peter nods, “sure, whatever.”

Tony nods, “FRIDAY can you start notes from Peter waking up and continue until I say so?”

“Yes Boss.”

“Peter,” Tony squeezes the teen’s hand again, “when you have these accidents and when your arm got hurt, you said you weren’t focused. Downstairs you said your thoughts wouldn’t stop and that the pain made them stop and go away.”

Peter nods, there was no question in the statement so the teen waits for Tony to say more.

“So is it safe for me to assume that these past few times you’ve struggled its because your mind is overwhelmed.”

Peter nods again.

“Now I need you to be honest Peter, have you had thoughts that perhaps you’re unworthy? That you deserve to hurt? That maybe you need to punish yourself?”

Peter shakes his head, “I’m, I’m just, you know it gets to be to much. Not like, too much I need to end things or punish myself, but to much like I can’t turn my brain off. I get these thoughts and they just loud in my head until all I can hear is them.”

“What kind of thoughts?”

Peter shrugs, “I guess it depends on the moment and what is happening. Its kinda hard to really pin it all down.”

“Boss if I may,” FRIDAY suddenly cuts in.

“Yes FRIDAY?” Tony frowns at the ceiling.

“Since Peter has begun to visit the tower more, I’ve been collecting data on his health each time he is here per your protocol.”

“Protocol?” Tony frowns, “which one? I can’t remember that.”
“Over five years ago you attempted to offer Peter a spot on the Avengers. After he declined you decided to update my protocols to include Peter in my health scans and distress monitoring when he is within range of my scanners and cameras. This protocol was changed to have others added but Peter was never removed. As such I’ve continued to collect data.”

“Huh,” Tony lifts an eyebrow, “look it that, more proactive then I thought I was. FRIDAY what can you offer here?”

“According to my data Peter experienced his first moment of heightened emotional distress the first night he stayed over. He fell asleep in the lab in his Spiderman outfit. During that time he had a nightmare which led him to flail in distress and disorientation, which caused him to hurt his hand. After that Peter attempted to self-sooth with my instructions.”

“But that was a nightmare FRIDAY,” Peter sighs, “not like that can be controlled.”

“No,” FRIDAY continues, “but you were fully alert the second time your health readings spiked into a distress level.”

“When was that?” Tony squeezes Peter’s hand.

“Minutes later. Peter had gone to the apartment for breakfast, upon entering he was fine but began showing signs of distress when Morgan and Pepper were talking.”

Peter winces, he remembers that one.

“What was said that bothered you?” Tony leans into Peter’s space.

“FRIDAY can just tell you,” Peter murmurs.

“But I want to hear it from you kid. Its your life and your emotions and your head, I want you to tell me.”

Peter shrugs, “it was stupid. Morgan and Pepper were talking about having family time together with you. I just realized I wasn’t family and that I should go home and then my thoughts just took over.”

“What were they sayings?”

Peter starts shaking his legs slightly, trying to relieve the anxiety curling in his stomach at recalling the thoughts.

“Do you hear those thoughts right now Peter?”

Peter nods and bites his bottom lip.

“Let me hear them Peter,” Tony whispers to the teen.

“You’re not family,” Peter whispers, “you’re not their family. Go away. Let them have their family time. You’re not a Stark, you’re a Parker. Why are you here?”

Tony reaches from Peter’s hand to squeeze the teen’s shoulders, “you’re here because you’re family. You’re a Parker but doesn’t mean you are any less family. My family is more then just Pepper and Morgan. I created my family. Some robots here, an AI there, Rhodey, Happy, and even the Avengers. None of us are joined by blood or name or even species if you take Vision and the bots into account. But we are all family.”
Peter nods and sniffs as his eyes burn with unshed tears.

“Would you like to tell me more or should I let FRIDAY?” Tony asks softly, rubbing away a tear that did manage to escape the teen’s eye.

“FRIDAY,” Peter whispers. He’d rather the AI voices it, he can’t trust himself.

“There were minor flares in his vitals after that moment, but the next spike was when Peter was at the Tower’s front desk and was being denied access to your floor. At that time he attempted to self soothe by banging his toes against the flooring with force. This was interrupted by a staff who was willing to assist. Peter.”

“That was a rough moment,” Tony smiles and strokes Peter’s hand again, “was it the fact they were not letting you come up that got you upset?”

Peter shrugs.

“Peter’s vitals spiked when the staff said “son, I don’t want to be rude but I highly doubt Mr. Stark is waiting for a kid like you”, at that point Peter’s vitals spiked.”

Tony tsks, “I should’ve sent Pepper down there to scare that guy senseless.”

“No its ok Tony,” Peter sighs, “he was right after all.”

“What do you mean?”

“Look at me Tony, I’m just some random loser from Queens.”

“You’re not a loser,” Tony snaps.

“But that’s what everyone else sees Tony,” Peter stresses, “I know you don’t think I’m a loser but that’s what the rest of the world thinks when they see me.”

“Well the world is fu---flaming wrong,” Tony snaps, “you’re not a loser. Just like I said downstairs: you’re a smart kid with a kind heart. People who don’t see that are losers.”

“I wish I could be as confident as you,” Peter murmurs.

“Well you know what,” Tony leans in, “sometimes I’m not that confident but what I do is pretend I am. My sunglasses? I often wear them to hide the fact my eyes aren’t as confident as I’m trying to pretend.”

“Really?”

Tony nods, “really. Perhaps I can give you some ‘fake it till you make it’ lessons.”

Peter smiles, “sure Tony.”

“Shall I continue?” FRIDAY cuts in.

“There’s more,” Tony murmurs.

“I’m sorry Tony,” Peter quickly speaks up, “I’m sorry.”

“No its not that kid,” Tony quickly hushes the teen, “I’m meant it for myself. That I didn’t notice these little moments of you struggling even though I’m sitting right there.”
“No, no it’s not your fault,” Peter claims, “you’re recovering. You’re sore. You’re trying to adjust to life. Worrying about a teen’s little thoughts isn’t your responsibility.”

“It’s not a responsibility I’ve been given but it’s one I’ve taken because I want to,” Tony corrects, “I want to be here for you, no one is making me, I’m choosing to because I care about your Peter.”

Peter blinks at the returning burn of his eyes, tears threatening again.

“Ready boss?” FRIDAY asks.

“Hit me baby girl.”

“Another point Peter’s vitals spiked was when Morgan was showing him her school supplies. I cannot distinguish any part of that conversation as a trigger though.”

“Do you remember,” Tony prompts Peter.

The teen shakes his head, “not really.”

“Ok, thank you for being honest,” Tony goes on to rub Peter’s upper arm.

“The next time was at the Lake House but Pepper addressed the moment of distress with Peter,” FRIDAY responded.

Tony nods, “Pepper mentioned that.”

“The next time his vitals spike, Peter was playing with Morgan. After she mentioned you went back in time to save him Peter began displaying heightened emotional distress. You then arrived and helped him recover Boss.”

Tony nods, “I remember that.”

“And the next was today. Several times his vitals spiked in relation to conversations around his injuries or potential things that could expose his injuries.”

“So that’s not bad,” Tony sighs.

“Not bad,” Peter snorts, “FRIDAY literally indicated I’ve been having regular emotional breakdowns. Gawd I’m a mess,” Peter rubs his hand through his hair.

“No Peter you’re not. That list was small and short. Wait,” Tony eyes the teen, “was there more moments elsewhere?”

Peter shrugs.

Then nods.

“Ok, ok. Do you want to talk more about those?”

Peter shakes his head, “can we move on.”

“Yeah we can,” Tony pulls Peter in for a hug, “I want you to know I’m proud of you Peter for letting me know and letting me ask questions. I know its hard and you may think this is just going to make things worse for me but I want you to know it won’t. You’re not a burden. You’re my brilliant, kind, genius who I care about. I’m sure your aunt would say the same thing if she was right here.”
“Thank you Tony,” Peter’s word muffle in the man’s shirt as the teen hugs tightly.

“Ok so lets talk about my ‘Peter Plan’,” Tony pulls back and grabs his tablet.

“Peter Plan,” Peter wrinkles his nose.

“Yep,” Tony ruffles the boy’s hair, “now we need to create a plan for what you can do when the thoughts are to much for you, something that can distract you from those thoughts.”

Peter nods, “ok…right…a distraction….I’ve got no ideas.”

“Well I do,” Tony begins to swipe on his tablet. “So here’s what I’m thinking. We make a code word, so you can text me or tell Karen to text me the word, and when I get the word I know you’re not in super danger and just need a distraction from those not so happy thoughts,” the man taps Peter’s temple.

“Why a code word?”

“Well I was thinking that a code word would help since you won’t have to explain stuff in a message or if you need to have Pepper get ahold of me, you don’t have to give lots of details. Plus it you just say ‘help’ I might send a suit thinking you’re dying somewhere,” Tony smirks.

Peter winces.

“Oh sorry kid,” Tony rubs Peter’s shoulder, “to soon for the dying jokes.”

“Sometimes.”

“Ok, I’ll keep that in mind. But what do you think, of the code word?”

The teen nods, “That’s fine with me.”

“I was thinking ‘Firetruck’,” Tony smirks.

Peter can only smirk and chuckle, “why?”

“Why not? Its not a word we use regularly in our conversations or get mixed up when talk.”

“Fine,” Peter sighs, “I message you ‘firetruck’ when things get wonky. Then what? You send a suit or something?”

Tony snorts, “don’t be so dramatic kid. I’d just call you. If you don’t pick up then I’ll get my butt to you.”

“So, code word then we talk or something?”

“Yes,” Tony pops the ‘p’, “we can talk or you can come here to do something or I can send Happy to take you out if you don’t want me around or just something distracting.”

“Then what? We go back to whatever I interrupted?”

“Well no. Once we get everyone in a good headspace then we would need to talk about what got you to that point. This way we can identify the triggers and address them.”

Peter nods.

It sounds simple enough.
Maybe it will work.

_But what if it doesn’t:_ the voice in the back of Peter’s mind whispers.

“Talk to me kid, you got that glass look again just now.”

“What if this doesn’t work?”

“Don’t focus on the ‘what ifs’ kid, we haven’t even tried this yet. Let’s try this first. If it doesn’t work then we can talk about maybe getting more people involved.”

“Like May?”

“Like May. Or Happy. Maybe even my therapist.”

“Wait! Your therapist?”

“Well yes,” Tony scoffs, “I’ve been through my share of traumas, so I’ve had a therapist for quite some time now. I didn’t want one at first but in the last several years I’ve found that I was overdue to see someone. It definitely helps.”

Tony pats Peter’s shoulders, “but first lets try this plan before we get all worried about the next step if this fails.”

Peter nods slowly in agreement.

He can do this.

Firetruck.

A simple word with more meaning now.

He could do this.

Right?
Orange and gold.
Colors fading into a warm glow.
Peter watches the sunset shift in front of him as he lays on some kind of beach somewhere.
The warmth on his face, the heat on his back, the sound of waves.
Its just like that time Ben took him to the beach as a kid.
He lets the warmth and sound fill him up.
A wave sounds rather loud and close.
Perhaps he should move.
The wave sounds more like a crack then a crash.
Another waves. Another crack. This one sounds closer.
Opening his eyes, Peter gasps.
He isn’t on a beach with a sunset.
Rocks fall toward him as he lays on orange dirt.
Crawling swiftly away, a large boulder cracks into the ground where he once was.
The sunset is now just the orange glow of the dirt and rocks around him, reflecting from the large orb in the sky.
Titan.
He’s on Titan again.
“No,” he chokes.
Peter tries getting up but his body is heavy, weighing him down, slowing him down.
He crawls slowly, trying to avoid the falling boulders around him.
“Peter!”
The teen looks up with great effort.
Thanos kneels while the Guardian’s and Tony hold tight.
“Come on kid!” Tony calls.
With a grunt, Peter manages to haul himself onto his feet.
With slow shaky steps, Peter reaches the struggling group.
Reaching out, Peter tries to grasp the purple giant’s glove.

Only for his hands to pass right through as they turn to dust.

“Come on kid!” Tony snaps at him.

“I—I’m…” Peter looks down to see his toes starting to turn to dust.

“Peter!” Tony calls again

“I can’t—I can’t” the teen gasps, watching his arms start to melt away into dust.

“Peter! WAKE UP!”

Peter jerks with a gasp, eyes snapping open.

Gasping into the dark room he doesn’t recognize, Peter tries to find something familiar.

“Peter, buddy come on.”

Twisting his head, Peter sees Tony leaning over him, a subtle glow behind him from an open door to a dim hallway.

Peter tries to speak.

But chokes.

A raspy gasping noise.

He tries to move his arms.

He can’t feel them.

Where are his arms?!

His legs!

He can’t feel them!

He’s dusting!

Oh gawd he’s disappearing again.

“Peter! Look at me, eyes on me, eyes here Underoos.”

Peter looks back at Tony.

“Breath in with me,” Tony demands, “you’re ok.”

“N-no,” Peter grunts between gritted teeth.

“Breath with me son, hear me and copy. I know you can, you have super hearing.”

Peter takes in a shaky breath.
Coughs on the exhale.
Tries to inhale and chokes again.
Coughs on the exhale.

“Peter, listen to me, You’re ok.”

“NO,” Peter moans, “no, Tony my legs.”

“What about your legs kiddo?”

“I can’t feel them,” Peter gasps, “they’re disappearing. Tony!”

“No their not, they’re right here kid.”

Tony’s arm moves from laying across Peter’s chest down the bed.

When did Tony put his arm there?

Why didn’t Peter feel Tony’s arm on his chest?

Peter feels his breathing pick up, he starts gasping again.

“I’m disappearing! I can’t feel you! Oh Tony don’t let me go.”

“Tony?”

Peter hears Pepper, but she sounds so far away.

Are his ears turning to dust now too?

“Pepper get me Morgan’s two weighted blankets. Hurry!”

“I don’t,” gasp, “I don’t want,” cough, “Tony don’t let,” gasp, “don’t let me,” gasp, “go!”

“I’m not Underoos, I’m not letting you go.” Tony leans closer to Peter till it’s the only thing filling Peter’s vision, “do you feel me kid? Do you feel me leaning on you?”

Peter tries to wiggle his shoulders to shrug, but meets resistance.

Something’s there.

Glancing down, he tries to see in the dim light.

Tony’s good arm is back on Peter’s shoulders and chest.

When did that come back?

He didn’t feel it come back!

Peter continues to gasp, he feels a moan trying to come out of his throat.

“Focus on me kid,” Tony murmurs to the teen, “hear my breathing. Focus on my heartbeat. Find me kid, focus on me.”

Peter gasps and choke. He tries to listen.
There!

The swift rhythm.


Peter listens quietly, focusing on Tony’s body.

“Copy me kid, just listen and copy.”

More thumping.

More shaky inhales.

More shuddering exhales.

“Tony!”

Peter can hear Pepper, she sounds distant beyond the sounds of Tony’s heart and lungs.

“Place those on his legs Pep,” Tony’s voice vibrates Peter’s chest. “And get on the bed, I need you to press down with all your weight on him.”

Peter feels a rocking motion in his torso.

He still can’t find his arms.

He still can’t find his legs.

They’re gone.

He will soon be gone.

Suddenly something heavy lands on his legs.

Legs?

He has legs?

Yes, he has legs. Something heavy is on his legs.

Peter stares into Tony’s face.

The man continues to breathe loudly.

“Hey kid,” Tony smiles, “want to wiggle those toes for me?”

Peter gives a jerky nod.

He feels the weight shift on his legs.

He feels his toes.

He wiggles them.
“Good kid, good,” Tony’s smile gets bigger, “you got feet, you feel them?”

Peter gives a jerky nod.

“Good, now bend those knees.”

“I can’t,” Peter starts.

“Shhh,” Tony cuts him off, “you can. You can because you have feet which means you must have knees.”

Peter trusts Tony.

Tony wouldn’t lie.

The teen bends his knees against the weight that lays on them.

“Great Underoos, you have legs. You feel your torso right?”

Peter nods.

“Good. Now how about you wiggle those baby fingers of yours.”

“Not,” Peter gasps, “baby.”

“Of course not,” Tony chuckles.

Peter wiggles his fingers, feeling them curl and uncurl.

There’s something soft rubbing against his left hand.

He curls his fingers around it, rubbing his fingers across whatever it is.

Soft.

“Feeling those fingers?”

Peter nods, “y-yeah.”

“Ready for us to sit up or do you need a minute?”

“Sit up,” Peter exhales loudly.

Tony begins to retreat from Peter’s vision.

The room is lit with the dim hall light and the lap beside the bed that at some point was turned on.

He recognizes the posters.

He knows that bedspread.

That’s his science pun t-shirts in the closet that is open at the end of his bed.

This is his room in the tower.

The room Tony made for him.
Peter slowly sits up, he feel’s Tony’s hand pushing at his back to help.

“Peter dear, you’re going to have to let go.”

Glancing down Peter finds Pepper leaning across his legs with two strange black blankets under her.

She can’t move since Peter is holding part of her ponytail.

“Oh Pepper, I’m sorry,” Peter lets go as if her hair was fire.

The woman just chuckles as she kneels on the bed, “sweetie don’t worry. Morgan did worse as a baby. Speaking of Morgan,” Pepper squeezes Peter’s legs, “I’m going to check on her. Will you two be ok?”

Peter gives a jerky nod.

“Go ahead sweetheart,” Tony smiles.

Pepper squeezes Peter’s legs on last time, climbing over the teen and kissing Tony before stepping out of the room.

“Ok kid,” Tony sighs, “that was quite a nightmare huh.”

Peter nods, “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be kid,” Tony adjusts his sitting position on the edge of the bed, “I’ve had worse. Heck one time a suit attacked Pepper it was so bad. You didn’t use your powers or anything so you’re no where as bad as I was.”

“I don’t know if that makes me feel better,” Peter whispers.

“Wanna tell me what the nightmare was about?” Tony asks as he gently rubs Peter’s arm with his good hand.

Peter shrugs.

“Can I make a guess?”

Peter shrugs again.

“You were dreaming of Titan and getting dusted weren’t you?”

Peter goes to shrug. Pauses. Nods.

“I’m so sorry kid, I’m sorry that happened.”

“It’s not your fault,” Peter sighs, “it was mine.”

Tony’s hand pauses in its movements. “What?! Titan was NOT your fault,” Tony’s voice grows louder.

Peter shudders and turns away, staring at the wall of Star Wars posters beside his bed.

“Peter,” Tony squeezes the teen’s shoulder. “Peter, buddy,” Tony’s hand moves to Peter’s neck trying to turn the teen’s face. “Peter please look at me.”
Peter shakes his head.

“Ok, ok. Well I can say for sure Titan is not your fault. You going away like that, Thanos winning, none of that is your fault.”

Peter shakes his head more, “You don’t get it! It’s my fault the first snap happened! I should’ve pulled the gauntlet off, I’m Spiderman after all! I have superstrength! I was the only super powered person on Titan and I failed. That’s on me.”

Tony’s hand forces Peter to turn to face the man at the edge of the bed.

Tony seems to smile a little at finally getting the teen to look at him, “It’s not your fault kid. If you want to blame someone then blame me for not being able to stop the aliens from taking the Doctor. Blame me for not upgrading our suits more. Blame the Doctor for giving over his stone rather than portaling away and leaving us. Blame Quill for punching the purple grape instead of helping us remove the gauntlet. If you want to blame someone, blame one of us but don’t blame yourself. You did your best and that best was amazing for a kid. Now repeat after me ‘Titan’s not my fault.’”

“Titan’s not my fault.”

“I did my best.”

“I did my best.”

“Titan’s not my fault.”

Peter hesitates but with a nod from Tony he repeats, “Titan’s not my fault.”

“I did my best.”

Peter pauses.

He hears the grunts of him and Tony pulling on the gauntlet. He hears the suits strain as they go over their maximum. He feels his muscles burn from pushing himself. He was at his limit on Titan.


“Yeah kid,” the man smiles, “you did do your best.”

Tony pulls the teen back into a one arm hug. This time Peter clings to the man, laying his head near the beating of the man’s heart.

“So,” after a few moments Peter finally speaks, “you’re really loving the repeating thing from that mommy blog, huh?”

“Da—ang right kid,” Tony murmurs into the teen’s hair.

Peter sighs, “you are a good dad.”

“Thanks kid,” Peter can hear Tony’s breath catch, “that means a lot to me.”

They stay like that for a moment longer before Tony speaks again.

“Do you wake up a lot thinking you’re turning to dust?”
Peter shrugs into Tony’s chest, “not every night. Just some nights. And sometimes during the day.”

“Did one of your ‘accidents’ happen from feeling like you were turning back to dust?”

Peter nods into the man’s chest.

“Ok, well I have some ideas but how about we try to get a few more hours of sleep before we tackle this?”

“I can’t sleep after a nightmare,” Peter admits quietly.

“Then I’ll sleep beside you so you can relax and if you start struggling then I’ll wake you again.”

Peter pulls away, “but Tony—”

“Nope,” Tony shakes his head, “it’s a dad’s job. I’ve slept with Morgan enough times because of nightmares that this isn’t a big deal. Now let’s get comfy my little burrito.”

Tony pushes Peter to lay down, while nudging the teen closer to the wall so the man can take up a part of the bed for himself.

Tony pulls the blankets over Peter, tucking them tightly against the teen’s body.

“Are you trying to swaddle me?” Peter snorts.

“Yes,” Tony admits as he pulls the weighted blankets into positions on Peter’s body. “Just adding some pressure so you can feel your body is there and not disappearing.”

Peter feels his eyes beginning to water at the man’s care.

“Thank you Tony,” Peter gasps quietly.

Tony finishes and leans back smiling at Peter, “anything for my other baby.”

The man leans in, kissing Peter’s forehead.

Peter is unable to do a thing as his body is tightly wrapped.

“Sleep kiddo. We’ll discuss more about this disappearing thing in the morning.”

With that Tony turns off the light.

The room goes dim and the hall light also turning off. Probably FRIDAY did that. Or Pepper.

Peter takes a deep breath, trying to focus on anything but his thoughts.

“Focus on my heartbeat kid,” Tony whispers into Peter’s hair as the man wiggles closer to Peter, “listen to my heartbeat.”

Turning some, Peter faces the man’s chest.

Tony’s on his left uninjured side. He watches the teen with a warm smile.

“Close your eyes kiddo, close your eyes and listen to my heart.”

Peter nods.
He closes his eyes.

He listens to Tony’s heart.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

Thump. Thump.

Thump.
Peter woke slowly.

He relishes the feeling of being cocooned in a heavy warmth, especially whatever is against his back.

He becomes aware of his legs twitching into alertness.

His arms shifting as he rolls slightly onto his back, ready to push the pile of blankets that are probably the source of the warmth at his back.

Only to stop when he pushes against something solid and definitely not blankets.

Twisting slightly, as much as the solid warmth would let him, the teen opened his eyes to see what is there.

Only for his vision to be unfocused andblurry.

Blinking in the early morning light trying to slip into the room, the blue and white form with black highlights takes on proper definition.

Tony.

THE Tony Stark lays beside Peter, boxing the teen in between his body and wall of the room.

The man lays in his white pajama top and blue bottoms, his right stump resting onto Peter’s shoulder while his good arm lays under his own heads to be a pillow since Peter has the only one on the bed and that is currently under the teen’s head.

Why is the man here?

Peter twists back over to face the wall as the answer to the question starts trickling back into his head.

He had a nightmare.

Tony came.

Tony never left.

Now what?

The answer came with the sound of the teen’s bedroom door opening softly and someone walking slowly and quietly across his carpeted floor.

Peter closes his eyes, silently tensing for anything.

“Tony,” a gentle whisper fills the air.

Pepper.

“Tony, you need to wake up,” she tries again.

Peter can feel the subtle vibrations of her gently shaking Tony as his body bumps Peter’s.
“Tony you need to wake up. The guests will be here in a couple hours.”

A moan came from behind Peter signaling the man is entering the land of the living.

“Pepper?”

“Hey sweetie, you scheduled the guys to come by in a couple hours. Did you want me to reschedule?”

“No, no I’m good.”

“You sure?”

“I’ve ran on less Pepper.”

The woman sighs, she knows there’s no point in arguing with the man, just as Peter knows too as he lays silently still pretending to sleep.

“Did he wake up again?”

Peter feels Tony’s body shift some and the bed dips a few times to signal that perhaps the adults were sitting beside him.

“No, he stayed asleep once he went down.”

“Did he say anything? What brought it on? Do these happen a lot?”

There was a sigh from the man, “he dreamed of turning to dust on Titan again.”

“That explains why he kept saying he couldn’t feel his body,” Pepper replies.

There was a moment of silence in the room and Peter decides he should ‘wake up’ before the conversation goes on about something he shouldn’t hear.

Taking in a deep breath, Peter shifts in his “sleep”.

“He must know we were talking about him,” Pepper chuckles softly.

A warm, heavy object begins to rub against Peter’s shoulder and back.

“Come on kiddo, I’m sure that super metabolism is ready for refueling,” Tony’s voice comes closer to Peter’s ears.

Rolling over, the teen rubs his eyes dramatically, hoping he is selling the ‘just woke up’ act.

“T’ny,” he rasps.

Well his voice is definitely playing the part without any acting needed.

“Hey Peter,” Tony smiles softly and ruffles the teen’s hair, “ready to face the world?”

“Oh Tony,” Pepper laughs as she stands up, “what a horrid wake up question. You need to work on that before Morgan becomes a teen.”

The man rolls his eyes.

“Good morning Peter, sorry for coming in without permission,” Pepper murmurs and rubs Peter’s
shoulder.

“Its ok Pepper.”

She nods, “well I have pancakes waiting for everyone in the kitchen. Tony has guests coming today in a couple hours—”

“Do I need to leave?” Peter interrupts her.

Tony shakes his head, “its just a quick favor, nothing serious or work related. I think you’d like to hang around in fact.”

“Who is it?”

“Well I think I’ll leave it as a surprise for you,” the man answers.

“I’ll call your aunt Peter,” Pepper adds as she pats both of guys on the shoulders before wandering out of the room.

Peter sits up and stretches more while watching Tony rotate his good arm carefully.

“I’m sorry Tony,” Peter sighs.

“Naw it’s my fault for not ordering more pillows for your bed kiddo,” the man stands and stretches more.

“But you shouldn’t need to sleep in here. I’m old enough to deal with things on my own.”

“Yes but I don’t want you to deal with things on your own, not if I’m here to help.”

Peter can only shrug at the statement.

“So,” Tony sits again, “about last night.”

Peter finds his fingers rather fun to look at now.

“Peter,” Tony sighs, “can you look at me buddy?”

The teen just shrugs, still finding his nails rather fun to focus on.

“Alright. Ok. Well can we talk about last night?”

The teen shrugs again and begins to poke at the heavy blanket on his legs, a strange noise coming from it.

“So that was intense last night,” Tony continues, “and I’d like to run some ideas past you on things we could probably do to help you have less intense moments.”

“Like what?” the teen glances at the man.

“Well we can start by you telling me what you think of your legs right now.”

Peter glances at his legs, “what do you mean?”

“I had Pepper put Morgan’s two weighted blankets on your legs to add some pressure.”

“They’re not that heavy,” Peter interrupts while lifting both legs easily.
Tony rolls his eyes, “it’s not about the weight kid, I asked about the pressure. The pressure of the weight on your legs to remind you that they are there.”

Peter wiggles some more under the blankets and nods, “it’s a weird feeling. Not bad, just different. It isn’t heavy but I feel the pressure, I think.”

“Well perhaps we can look into ankle wraps or wrist wraps that can constrict to add pressure to your joints when you have moments during the day like this.”

“You’d do that?” Peter gasps.

“If it helps keep your head straight without you getting hurt, I’ll make you anything kid.”

Peter blinks away the warmth in his eyes, refusing to cry more in front of this man.

“Does your aunt have trouble with her memories of dusting too?” Tony probes.

Peter shakes his head, “not like this. I talked to her the first time it happened because I broke a lamp and sent a side table flying back in Wakanda. She remembers seeing herself vanish but it was so fast and she just remembers thinking then being gone. She asked some people at work too and everyone says they had a moment to realize what was happening but that’s it. No one felt what I felt.”

“What did you feel Peter,” Tony pushes, hoping the teen will open up more.

“It felt like when you rip a Band-Aid off your skin, it burns and hurts like you pulled off a few layers of skin. But instead of it going away its followed with a numbing feeling. Like your limbs are falling asleep fast. I’ve thought about it. I think my spider DNA was trying to heal and prevent the dusting but just couldn’t.”

“Geez kid,” Tony reaches out and pulls Peter to him with a one arm hug. “I’m so sorry. I wanted to keep you from experiencing the worst of the world and in the end you did.”

“It’s not your fault Tony,” Peter mumbles into the man’s chest.

Tony only chuckles.

Peter pulls back and frowns at the man, “repeat after me ‘it’s not my fault’.”

“Peter,” Tony laughs more.

“Tony,” the teen tries his best to look angry at him.

“Fine: its not my fault.”

The teen nods, “I’ll remind you of that.”

“And I’ll remind you too kid,” Tony ruffles Peter’s hair with a small smile.

“So who’s coming over today?” Peter slyly slips in the question.

“Good try Underoos, you’ll have to wait and see,” Tony stands up off the bed with a grunt.

“Rats,” Peter slides out from under the pile of blankets.

“Come on kiddo, before Morgan uses all the syrup,” Tony pulls the teen close to him as they walk
from the bedroom.

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