Summary

Peter’s not exactly known for his brilliant strategies.

Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own Guardians of the Galaxy.

A/N: Fills my “restrained” prompt for hc_bingo. Beta with thanks to lena7142. Set sometime post movie.

Dangling from the ceiling, Peter pulls at the restraints. He knows better -- he really does from the last twelve times he’s already tried -- but he has issues with learning.

And also, it’s something to do. When the alternative is to hang idly while waiting to be beaten--

Peter winces, just barely biting back a cry as the whip lashes into him again. It’s only been twenty minutes, but his shirt is already shredded and he can literally feel strips of his flesh loose against his body.

He wonders if this is what it would have been like if Yondu had let the crew eat him.

There’s another lash, this one cutting over a still weeping wound. Peter’s cry is strangled this time, and hot tears burn down his cheeks.
This is worse than being eaten, he decides. At least, if they ate him, they probably would have killed him outright. Clean and simple and to the point.

A fresh pull of the whip cuts across the tender skin on his abdomen, and he hisses a string of profanities until another blow steals his breath and knocks him off his feet.

The restraints catch him, yanking on his distended shoulders, and the agony is instantaneous. The pain receptors are flaring across his body, and he sucks in heavy breaths through his nose in a desperate attempt not to cry.

Yondu’s crew, though, he thinks. Peter lived with them for years. He’d seen them play with their food. Maybe this is better.

Then another cut slices him across the front of his shoulders, lancing into his neck. He gurgles, fresh blood spilling down his front as he sways listlessly from the ceiling.

Screw it, Peter decides. It doesn’t matter which is worse. Shit is shit is shit, and Peter never seems to catch a break.

Or maybe he catches too many breaks, he reflects as another lash crisscrosses his back. Another and another and another. Peter’s been breaking since he was six damn years old, and he just never quite falls apart.

In the small lull that follows, Peter’s head bobs forward and he’s way too tired to try picking it up again. Sweat drips off his forehead, and it’s hard to tell if it’s blood or sweat running down his back. His chest is a mess, inflamed and red with deep cuts slicing over most of it. He tries to get his footing, but his legs won’t hold him any longer, and the pull on his shoulder is starting to feel numb.

Numb is good. Peter can live with numb. Numbness like cold ice through his shoulders and his back and…

“Hey,” a gruff voice says as a hand grabs his chin and lifts it. “You do not get to take the easy way out.”

Peter recoils, as much from the foul breath as the spittle that splatters over his face. “Oh, come on, man,” he mutters.

The face sneers. “Begging for your life, then?”

“No,” Peter says. “Begging for a break from your breath. Do you even floss?”

The expression darkens. The fingers around his chin tighten, craning his neck up until Peter’s looking fully up at the man.

*Man* is putting it generously. Kevlin is a mix of races Peter can’t identify, and quite frankly, he’s never cared enough to ask. After all, it’s not his DNA that is particularly important. It’s the fact that he’s a murderous psychopath that’s really more of a concern.

Peter’s run into Kevlin a time or two, and in the past, he’s been pretty content to let the madman go on his murderous way. He’d been working for Yondu then, and Kevlin had been a means to an end, and as long as Peter got paid, then what the hell.

That had been fine, then. When Peter had been scraping by, trying generally not to get eaten, killed or arrested.
But now.

Now Peter’s one of the Guardians of the Galaxy. Now he’s a big damn hero. Now when Kevlin sets out to annihilate a peaceful settlement of religious pilgrims in order to mine their land, it actually matters to him.

This whole hero thing had its drawbacks. Being a person capable of compassion and sympathy and altruism--

It could be kind of a drag.

Sure, it eases the conscience, and it’s not a bad ploy with the ladies, but when you’re hanging from the ceiling being beaten by a psychopath, it definitely has a few shortcomings.

Kevlin jerks his chin again. “Did you hear me, slime?” he seethes.

Peter blinks, trying to focus his vision. “Honestly? Not really,” he says. “You should enunciate--”

The fingers tighten painfully, digging into his cheek as Kevlin draws him closer and presses something against his stomach.

Something sharp.

Peter’s breath catches when he realizes it’s a knife. He fumbles to get his footing and steady himself, but he can feel the tip pressed precariously against the already damaged flesh.

“Let me make my point,” Kevlin says. “I am not amused by your posturing. Nor am I impressed by what I’m sure you consider fortitude. I only want to know who you work for and why you are here.”

“I need a reason?” Peter asks, working his jaw carefully around the iron grip. “Maybe your company is just that good--”

The quip is cut off with a backhand across his jaw. He tastes blood and feels a tooth pop lose. Cursing, he flops forward as Kevlin lets him go and he spits vehemently, blood stringing down his chin as the small white object clatters uselessly by his feet.

“Son of a bitch,” he breathes, swinging by his arms again. “That was my tooth.”

Kevlin rolls his eyes. “Consider it the most fortunate part of you.”

Peter makes a face, craning his neck up again. “What?”

“It’s the only part of you that will be spared all that is to come,” Kevlin tells him with a sinister smile.

Peter stares at him a moment.

Kevlin smirks back.

Peter shakes his head. “Really?” he asks. “My broken tooth is lucky?”

“You’re about to be mercilessly tortured,” Kevlin tells him.

“Yeah, sure, I get that,” Peter says with an inexplicable air of exasperation. “Whipped and beaten until I’m bloody and lifeless. It’s horrible, I know, but it’s a broken tooth. It’s lying right there on the ground. I’m not sure you can call it lucky.”
Kevlin’s face darkens. “Does it matter?”

“I think so,” Peter says. “Unless you’re going to torture me with bad descriptions. I mean, in that case, it’s pretty ingenious—”

“Shut up, you insolent wretch—”

“It just killed the moment, man,” Peter says, shaking his head. “I’m sorry—”

Kevlin growls, surging forward and catching Peter across the face again, using the hilt of the knife to deepen the blow. Peter feels his nose break, and blood spills out over his lips but before he can cry out, Kevlin knees him viciously in the gut. Peter recoils helplessly, dangling like a worm on a hook while he gasps fruitlessly for air.

Stepping away, Kevlin eyes him with disdain. “You were saying?”

Peter moans, breath wheezing and strained. “That…,” he starts, breathing harshly. “That one definitely got you...back on track.”

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Peter’s never been tortured before.

However, he quickly discovers that torture is really just an endless, somewhat creative beating.

With questions.

In short, it’s like being beat up by the class bully while trying to pass a test in school.

Peter’s used to being beat up. He’s also sort of used to not passing tests. So, really, torture isn’t all that new or noteworthy.

Something cold washes over him, and he splutters, coming cruelly back to consciousness.

It’s not new or noteworthy, but it’s really not that much fun.

“Come now,” Kevlin sneers, tossing the now empty bucket to the floor with a clatter. “You always did seem like the type to take the easy way out.”

Peter laughs, briefly getting his feet beneath him before his knees give out again and he hangs limply from his restraints. “Hell, yeah,” he says, trying to keep his head from bobbing forward again. He can’t see out of his left eye and the right one is all blurry. He can feel his lip so swollen that it’s split, and basically everything hurts. “Life’s hard enough without doing things all complicated.”


Peter scrunches his nose. “Maybe you can repeat the question?”

Kevlin surges forward, and Peter belatedly braces for impact. Instead, though, Kevlin reaches up and grabs him by the hair, jerking his neck back painfully as he hisses in his face. “Your humor grows tedious,” he says.

Half choking, Peter grunts. “I get that sometimes,” he croaks. “But I’m inclined to think it’s you, not me—”

Kevlin reaches up with his other hand, grabbing Peter by the throat and squeezing enough to cut off
Peter’s words. With his oxygen intake compromise, Peter falters and his heart flutters as he scrambles to push himself up with his feet and take a few staggering gulps of air.

“Tell me,” Kevlin says again. “Who do you work for?”

“Bite me, jackass,” Peter says, voice thin and wispy but full of venom.

Kevlin’s face darkens.

This time, Peter braces for impact.

But it’s not enough.

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This time, he’s soaking wet and Kevlin’s tapping him viciously on the cheek. “--you pathetic excuse for a being,” he mutters. “Wake up.”

Peter’s eyes roll up and back, but Kevlin jostles him, hitting an exposed injury on his arm that causes him to cry out, pulling him back to awareness roughly. He groans -- or tries to -- but his throat seems almost incapable of making actual words now.

Worse, he can’t really see. His vision is double, and his concentration is fleeting. He feels out of synch, like watching a badly dubbed movie.

Only this is real life.

Of course it’s real life. It’s his life. He’s the kid who never had a dad, whose mom died, who got abducted by aliens, who was raised to be a thief by a bunch of marauders who wanted to eat him, who had been arrested and incarcerated and still somehow saved the whole damn galaxy.

Real life is a mess.

Even when he’s not being tortured.

“Come on, Quill,” Kevlin coaxes, propping his chin up again. “It doesn’t have to end this way.”

Peter’s not sure what he’s talking about, but an ending sounds okay to him. A nice, simple ending where it’s dark and quiet and--

“Damn it,” Kevlin says, pressing the tip of his blade into one of his open wounds. “Just tell me what I want to know.”

Peter’s head lolls, and his mouth is hanging open but he can’t seem to do anything about it. It’s a little ironic, really. That someone thinks he has the answers for once. No one has ever wanted his opinion. His ideas are usually mocked and scorned, and he is heaped with derision for the very effort of thinking.

And why not? He only has 12 percent of any idea, and he’s not exactly known for his brilliant strategies. The fact that he prevented the destruction of a planet by proposing a dance off only worked because it’s so unbelievably stupid that no one else would even think of it.

He tries to frown, looking at Kevlin. He wonders briefly if that might work here.

Kevlin wouldn’t have many moves, but then again, neither would Peter at the moment. Which might make it the most awesome dance off ever.
Amused, he laughs.

Apparently, that’s not the answer Kevlin is looking for. “You think this is funny?” he asks in outright incredulity.

Peter knows he shouldn’t, but the question is so damn funny. “I don’t have any idea,” he says, the words slurring together. “But I think I’ve got a concussion, and you know, possible internal bleeding, so who the hell cares?”

“How is that remotely amusing?” Kevlin demands.

“Because!” Peter says, nodding his head forward so far that he almost can’t pick it up again. “You, man! Look at you!”

Kevlin stares at him.

Peter attempts to shrugs but mostly just tips his head to the side while he dangles. “All pissed off with your little whip and your little knife,” he goes on. “Torture! Torture, torture, torture!”

Kevlin almost looks confused. “Well, that is the general idea, yes.”

Peter nods again. “I gotta say,” he continues. “Not really your best idea.”

“Because you’ll never talk, I suppose,” Kevlin says tiredly.

“Hey, don’t take it personally,” Peter tells him earnestly. “It has nothing to do with your torture skills, which, honestly, I think are just up to snuff.”

“Then what does it have to do with?” Kevlin asks, sounding annoyed now.

Peter groans, letting his head fall back as he looks absently up at the point where the chains binding his hands are connected to the ceiling. “Because,” he says, dropping his view again. “There’s nothing to say.”

Kevlin grits his teeth. “Tell me who you are working for,” he says. “And we can make your death quick. Or, quicker.”

“That’s the thing,” Peter says. “I’m not working for anyone.”

Kevlin snarls, charging at him with a fresh volley of punches to his midsection that leave Peter swinging and breathless. “You lie,” Kevlin says, all but spitting the word. “Whoever you work for, are they worth dying for?”

“I’m not!” Peter yells, heaving for air now. “I’m not working for anyone.”

Kevlin’s face contorts and he tenses with his knife in hand, ready to strike.

“But,” Peter continues as he labors for air. “I’m working with some people.”

Kevlin’s eyes narrow.

Peter works to control his breathing, to steady himself. “Maybe you’ve heard of them,” he continues. He waits a beat, just for effect. “The Guardians of the Galaxy.”

Kevlin makes a face. “Who?”

Kevlin looks blank.

“Oh, come on!” Peter says. “Have you been under a rock for the last two years! The Guardians of the Galaxy! We stopped the destruction of a planet and regained control of one of the most destructive elements in the universe!”

“Well, I have been exploring the mines on this moon,” Kevlin reminds him.

“Oh,” Peter says. “So you have been under a rock.”

Kevlin huffs. “It’s not really important,” he says. “These Guardians, as you call them. Whoever they may be, the most important thing to you is that they are not here.”

“For now,” Peter says. “But I don’t work alone. Not anymore. We have a higher calling; we have a more important bond. So, when I say they’re coming, trust me. They’re coming. And when they get here, you’re going to be very, very sorry.”

It’s a pretty good speech.

Especially considering the torture. Kevlin almost looks impressed for about two seconds.

It would be a lot better if his team was actually there, though.

After five seconds of silence pass, however, Kevlin looks less impressed.

Peter sighs, going lax in his restraints again. “Damn it,” he says. “I played that line too early. My timing’s all off. Did I mention the concussion?”

Kevlin lifts the knife, stalking closer to Peter again.

Sensing the shift in Kevlin’s demeanor, Peter starts to struggle again. “Whoa,” he says. “Okay, this is a little embarrassing, but I swear, they’re coming. I mean, they might have gotten a little delayed or something like that, but--”

“Enough of your prattling,” Kevlin says, circling Peter as if looking for the best place to strike. “You say everything except what I need to hear.”

“Well, maybe you don’t know what you need to hear?” Peter offers. “’Cause I got more. A lot more. We can tell jokes; we can sing songs; we can--”

Kevlin comes forward, taking a fistful of Peter’s hair and wrenching his head back again. This time, he lifts the blade settling it against the exposed skin. Peter cuts off with a whimper, and the blade dips beneath the flesh.

“You will die alone,” Kevlin murmurs in his hair, starting to pull the blade across as it digs into Peter’s skin. The blood wells up, and Peter’s vision starts to dim.

But then, he sees a flash of green and a blur of gray. He hears the faintest rustling of leaves before something furry brushes against him.

Peter passes out with a grin on his face.

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When he wakes up, he’s not restrained anymore.

That’s a relief.

He is, however, laid out on the floor next to a puddle of what he can almost imagine is his own blood.

Which is much less of a relief.

Still, looking up, he sees Gamora and Drax and Groot and Rocket.

He sees his team.

He grins, at least he tries to. With the swelling and the cuts and the bruises, it’s probably a little hard to tell. Nevertheless, he thinks it’s the thought that counts. “You came!”

Gamora sighs, sounding put out. “Of course we came,” she says. “That was the plan.”

“I know,” Peter says. “I had just thought you’d come sooner. Not to be ungrateful, but we should work on your timing a bit more.”

“Our timing?” Rocket says indignantly. “We were right on time. You’re the one hanging around getting tortured like you have nothing better to do.”

“I should think Quill had many things better to do,” Drax says.

“I am Groot,” Groot informs them with a steady nod.

“That doesn’t make him less of an idiot,” Rocket mutters.

“Um, okay,” Peter says. “But hey, at least Kevlin was distracted. Did you guys secure the settlement?”

“Their security is reinforced, and all of Kevlin’s setup has been dismantled,” Gamora tells him.

“Indeed, it was a most successful mission!” Drax boasts.

“Except for the part where Star-moron got himself captured and tortured,” Rocket points out.

Gamora looks at him sternly. “When you said you had a plan to preoccupy the seller, we took your word for it.”

“Well,” Peter says, nodding to the so-called torture chamber. “This is a plan.”

Gamora looks unimpressed. “Getting tortured is a plan?”

“To be fair, I didn’t expect it to be torture,” Peter says.

“This guy’s a maniac!” Rocket says. “Everyone he works with ends up dead.”

“I am Groot,” Groot adds with a sage nod.

“That’s right!” Rocket says. “Including his brother.”

Peter frowns over the pounding in his head. And the throbbing in his chest. And the nonstop, persistent ache in his stomach. “Well, I didn’t say it was a good plan.”
“It’s a terrible plan,” Gamora says emphatically.

“But I knew you’d come!”

“But what if we were late?” Gamora asks. “What if he decided to kill you instead of torture you? What if we ran into other complications?”

Peter thinks about that. “Huh,” he says. “Honestly, I didn’t think of that.”

Gamora throws her hands up. “Ugh,” she says. “Because it’s a terrible plan!”

Peter looks at Gamora. He looks at Rocket and Drax and Groot.

And he can only smile.

Sure, he almost got tortured to death. Maybe his plan was the worst plan ever. But there’s still one thing that matters. Still one truth that trumps all the rest. “But you know what?” he asks. “It worked.”

To that, Gamora can say nothing. Rocket scowls at him, and Drax nods in agreement. Groot sprouts something new on his head.

That’s how it is with them, Peter thinks. Nothing about them should work as a team, and no one can really understand it, but it always works.

Maybe they’re lucky.

Maybe they’re good.

Maybe it’s just meant to be.

Peter doesn’t actually care about that, though.

He just cares that he has a team he can count on no matter what.

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