Our Own Demons

by Emmalie22

Summary


Tony Stark never thought he would be a father. But when a lawyer comes knocking and truths become evident, he realizes that he can’t let his son walk out of his life. For Harry, acknowledging his relationship with Tony is a last-ditch effort to gain freedom and control over his life. Although the journey might not be easy, Tony and Harry learn to heal and become a family, facing trials and tribulations on the way such as a scheming Death, a Mad Titan, Dark Wizards, dangerous Doctors, and living Wards. Minor Peter Parker/Harry Potter. No pairings for Tony. Strong T rating for talk of sensitive subject matter. No explicit
sexual content, but an author who uses too much bad language.

(Look forward to Runic magic, Quantum Theory, Peter Parker, lots of Marvel villains, and a author who tries too hard.)
Chapter 1

"There is a man in the lobby threatening to sue unless you see to him immediately," a timid personal informed them.

Tony Stark believed himself to be unflappable, so just laughed and spoke, "Sue me for what? There is no way he can go toe to toe with my lawyers and win."

A sadistic grin spanned Tony's face. It had been a long time since he has been challenged in that area. A good court battle sounded fun.

"What is he threatening to sue for?" Pepper, always the rational one, sat up from the couch and addressed his unnamed subordinate.

The man licked his lips nervous, "He said he would make up a reason."

Tony laughed at the audacity of the man, "Send him up."

The attendant nodded jerkily and Pepper excused him, "Thank you Richard."

Tony turned to Pepper and with a light tone commented, "Richard. I knew his name started with an R, but are you sure it's not Riley?"

"Yes Tony," she said, exasperated. "I'm sure."

"Who is he anyways?" Tony didn't really pay attention to most of his personal, but the man seemed afraid of him, so they must have met at one point. Nobody cowers that bad without them having already experienced him messing with them.

Or drunk.

Probably drunk. Richard did work for him after all.

"The head of personal at Stark tower," she commented, breaking him out of his thoughts.

"I thought I made Brucie that."

"You made Bruce your head scientist," she corrected him, sighing.

Before he could think up a clever reply, a man was escorted into the office.
"Can we find a comfortable place to discuss certain issues? This may take awhile," the man asserted with a strong British accent, almost expecting to take control of the situation. No, Tony wouldn't have that. This was his place.

"I think here is just fine." Tony motioned to the assorted drinks of the table. "Alcohol?"

"No, thank you. This is hardly the time," the man scoffed.

"So," Tony blustered, and spoke jovially. "What are you suing me for?"

"My client is not suing you; I just needed to talk to you. You are almost impossible to get a hold of."

"So why are you here?" Pepper asked as she pursed her lips unhappily.

The man sighed. "Do you remember a woman named Lily Potter?"

"Lily? Pretty-eyed Lily? The biochemist; a redhead?" He wasn't too drunk that night – what, sixteen years ago – and she been brilliant. Great mind and beautiful. What could he say? He had a thing for red-heads.

Tony took a good look at the man. He looked to be in his late fifties or early sixties, with impeccable expressive dress – although not brand name – and held himself very self-assured.

He wasn't afraid of him. He underestimated him, but not in the usual playboy loose way that people saw him. No, the man didn't like him one bit, and Tony didn't have a clue why.

The man reached into his leather briefcase, and pulled out a picture.

The bright smile and unique eyes were a dead giveaway. Tony had a perfect memory, even with extreme amounts of alcohol he usually drank, wishing to drown his loud senses. He wasn't an alcoholic. His body wasn't dependent on it. It was just therapeutic because, for once, his mind would slow.

"Yeah, that's her. What is she suing me for? It was a long time ago."

"She's not suing you; she's dead." The man was blunt as he delivered the news.

Tony swallowed hard, then weakly joked, "If she died from an STD, she didn't get it from me. I'm clean."

The man glared at him and Pepper interrupted. "Before this gets any farther, can you please tell your name and business with Mr. Stark."

Tony usually loved it when she called him that because it sounded hot coming from her mouth, but at that moment it sounded dry and harsh. For some reason, Tony was feeling uncertain about the entire situation.

"My apologies Miss Potts. My name is Jasper Ryes, and I'm the barrister for Mr. Potter from the British law firm called, actually, Potter Law House."

"So she was married. I didn't know. But that was years and years ago, so what do you want me to do?" Tony bristled.

"She was married yes, but her husband died at the same time as she did. I represent her son. Your son."
The weight of the man's words hung in the air. Tony didn't say anything. He just stared shocked.

"Mr. Ryes, you can't just come in here and make those claims. There are certain channels you need to go through. How do we know that you're not lying?" Pepper asked as she smiled in a way that on any other day would have made him proud. It was a shark killer smile.

"I have a son," Tony tried to focus on his breathing feeling light headed.

"Yes. Mrs. Potts, we have done extensive research on this. We have known for six months now, and my client originally chose to never divulge this information, but circumstances have changed."

"He didn't want to meet me?" Tony asked, distressed.

"Mr. Potter has had a hard life. He doesn't want rejection."

The words laid harshly on Tony. "Why now, then?"

Instead of replying, Mr. Ryes took out a stack of documents.

"Mr. Potter was legally, yet slyly, adopted by his stepfather. When they died in a terrorist attack, James Potter left everything to his adopted son. Recently, however, the government is trying to seize properties and heirlooms. As his barrister, I'm trying my best to fight that." Mr. Ryes paused, looking old. "We have to go through legal channels to emancipate Mr. Potter, but it has been difficult. If you sign these papers then you legally emancipate and disinherit Mr. Potter and you can forget that he even exists."

Pepper and he met eyes and Tony shook his head. He couldn't do it. He couldn't bear being like his father: knowing he has a child out there and choosing to ignore him.

"How old is he? God, what's his full name? What is he like?"

"Harry James Potter is turning sixteen on July 31st. I understand if you want to look over the document to make sure you're not selling your soul away, but it would be best for everyone if this was over quickly."

"Fifteen," he breathed. Harry. His son's name was Harry.

Tony gulped. He was far from a fool. Many people had come before clamming to either be his child or be having his child. They had all checked negative. Yet in this one case, it didn't seem to be about his money or stringing him along, rather pushing him to forget.

If it was true, Tony knew he never could.

Pepper took control of the situation. "If you would give us a moment, I think we would like to talk this over."

The proclaimed barrister nodded, getting up to leave. "I'll be outside. Call me in when you have made your decision."

When the man was gone from the room, Tony turned to Pepper. "I have a child that I didn't know about. I feel like Howard."

"You are not like you're farther. Nowhere close. And we don't even know if he is telling the truth yet. I want your scientists to confirm."

"-using DNA. Yes. I'm going to be stupid about it. But he is really my kid, I'm not going to just sign
him away," Tony cut Pepper off.

Pepper nodded, her expression unreadable, "Then that's what we will tell the guy. Mr. Ryes, can you please come back in. We have come to a consensus." Pepper raised her voice, Tony almost jumping from how on edge he was.

His British accent carried through the room, "Are you going to sign the papers?"

Tony shook his head, "If what you say is true, then I want to meet him."

"Mr. Stark," the barrister started, "after James and Lily's death, Harry was placed with his maternal Aunt and Uncle. When he showed up on my door step almost three years ago, he asked if I would represent a minor. You see, all he wanted was to get into his family vaults." There was a pause as the man took time to look both of them in the eye. "I wanted to know why a thirteen-year-old would need money. He was wanting access to his family vault to see if they would release a property to him and a small percentage a month to live on."

Tony could see where this was going and he didn't like it.

"He was abused, violently. I looked into his records. Three broken arms, burned hands and arms, and belt marks on his back. They made him sleep in a cupboard, Mr. Stark. Harry doesn't need an irresponsible father. He needs stability. I don't think you could give him that."

Tony swallowed hard. That did change things. The man doubted him, and, honestly, he doubted himself.

"You don't know Tony," Pepper interjected.

"No," the man agreed, "I don't, but I do know his reputation."

Tony took one look at the alcohol in his glass and dumped it right into the trash on his right.

"I want to meet him," Tony bit his lip. "If he is really my son as you claim, then I have a right to get to know him."

The man sighed.

"I am aging. For the last three years, Harry has stayed with us. Every morning is a struggle to get him to not cook for us. He is a very strong young man who has faced much," the man told.

"But he doesn't want to see me?" Tony voice grew rough.

"No, he doesn't want to burden you. In fact, I'm not even supposed to be here today. You see, Harry has done everything in his power to become independent and strong. He doesn't want some other person taking that away from him. Even to secure his future. I'm here, because I see him as the closet thing I have to a grandchild. My wife and I are getting old and we can't look after him forever."

Tony didn't say anything.

"Please sign those documents for me Mr. Stark."

Chapter End Notes
I've had this written in my phone for quite awhile now, and I was going through my stuff today and decided to post this. Tell me what you think. Please review. I know it is another Tony Stark is Harry Potter's father, but I couldn't help myself...

*first edit 8/6/2017 by me and my beta, TheForgottenPrincess (she's awesome, and makes this story readable!)
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Harry is a broody little brat.

Chapter Notes

Note: There is editing to create consistency with Harry's characterization and the magic lore of the story. It shouldn't interfere with the readability or the story or the plotline. It's just to create more internal consistency since I wrote this chapter three years ago.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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CHAPTER TWO

Harry Potter never considered himself cynical.

Even when he hit rock bottom, he would still only call himself realistic, and it was realistic to say he would be get beaten after dinner growing up; not cynical. It was realistic to say that he needed to be self sufficient, or he would be taken advantage of. It was realistic to say that the media would crucify him. It was realistic to say that people were fickle creatures and that he should expect the worst. Because if he didn't expect the worst, and if it hit him on the head, it would only be his fault.

Harry couldn't remember a time when those truths were not true. Harry couldn't remember a time when anything else mattered. It had been awhile since Harry could say that he enjoyed everyday life. He once believed that he was stronger from his struggles. That he was better form it. Now, it seemed, he was only just bitter from it.

Sirius died, and Harry in an armchair with his eyes glued to a spinning top. The crackling of the common room fire didn't draw his attention away, and the movements of the other children did not faze him. He locked his eyes on the toy, and did not move.

It was therapeutic.

He knew, from repetition, that it would fall in about a day or two. A simple spell he had learned in his first year. It hall when magic no longer powered the spell as the friction of the air and the bottom of the surface would slow the top down.

If nothing was feeding it energy, it would fall. That was simple physics. Magic tended to work that way too. It had to. Harry had the utter belief in it, and if magic didn't work that way, then it meant that science.

Magic was the natural world. Science was the study of the observable natural world. Magic was science, even if magic did incredible things.
Those things had to be explainable simply because of the fact that they happened.

Harry recorded his observations and notes in a journal. When he was younger, he had thought himself a pioneer into the foray of magical theory and high academic pursuit. Then, he learned that there was a whole science community, and that was the accepted explanation for people on the up-and-up.

So, Harry wasn't actually that special and smart.

Harry lived his early years by rules and absolutes. Don't question. Don't make a sound. Make breakfast. The earth moves around the sun. It all had a purpose. He knew why he followed them, or chose not to follow them. The rules made sense.

There was still something about magic that he didn't understand. He could break the spells down to how and why it happened, but in the end, there were arbitrary elements that Harry was confused about and couldn't find good explanation for: why Latin? Why did intent matter?

Then he learned that Latin was an ancient language that whose pathways had already connected with the ruins needed to call forth energy. What teachers failed to mention, was that each spell was a short ritual evoking a higher power. Magic was about will; about channeling your energy through intent. The runes and language used were the science language; the proof of the question so-to-speak, and the intent was about channeling one's energy.

His obsession with magical theory was because magic's illogicalness had shattered his carefully crafted world as a child. His belief in the absolutes had to be absolute. Harry clung to that belief.

So, Harry stared at the spinning top knowing it wouldn't fall while he was watching, knowing some of its truths, and wishing that the universe would reveal all its secrets to him.

"Harry," a voice pestered him.

"Harry," it poked at him again.

"Harry," this time so loud he couldn't ignore it.

"Hermione, no matter how many times you say my name, it won't change," he explained, half-exasperated, half-fond.

She huffed at him. "Are you brooding again? I think you're brooding again."

He turned to her with his dead eyes; his mother's eyes, and simply replied, "No."

"Then what are you doing? You're going to miss dinner!" She twittered around him in her usual way. Her bushy hair just as unkept as his. Her eyes were puffy. Harry wondered if she too had cried for Sirius.

She was like him, expecting rules. Rules he broke and questioned to better understand them, to challenge them. Rules she followed blindly because if she questioned her world and her place in it would also fall apart.

"Seriously Harry; what are you doing?"

He turned to her and gave a winning smile, "Discovering the secrets of the universe."

She scrunched her eye brows and her bushy hair seemed to stand on end. She huffed, once more.
"Ron is already down there."

"Then join him. I'll be down in a second," Harry ran his hands through his hair, "I haven't been sleeping well lately and I'm not feeling all too well."

Her face softened, and she asked, "Would you like me to bring you something?"

"No," Harry shook his head. "I'm fine. It's just hard..." he trailed off, leaving it for her to finish the thought.

"Since Sirius," she nodded in understanding. "I'll get an elf to bring you something."

Harry had put a stop to her little tirade early. He honestly did love Hermione, but he couldn't deal with her in that moment. "Thanks, Hermione. I don't know what I would do without you."

She smiled at him, and finally left him alone. Who said he couldn't be Slytherin?

Harry turned back to the item still spinning with perfect balance and frowned. He watched with lucid attention, recent events coming to mind.

They wanted to take his properties. The government that ran the wizarding world was beyond corrupt. They wanted to cut him down and burn him; make him the whipping boy. Harry already endured it once, and he wasn't about to let it happen again.

Harry decided he would do something about it. Fool him once, shame on them. Fool him twice...

Turning his back to the toy, the spinner shuttered and trembled before lurching to a stop. Harry never turned back around to see it belly up.

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"Tony!" Pepper called after him. She had to run to catch up to him, and her heels clicked loudly on the flawless floor.

"Leave me," he growled.

"Tony. You can't go into this blind. We don't even know if the man is telling the truth!" Her red hair was frazzled, and he could tell she was worried for him.

"I know Pepper. I know," Tony's frustration blended into his words. "But if he really is my son, my child, there is no way I can let him disappear."

"You need to think this through," she voiced.

"Pepper," Tony spoke quietly, "I'm going to meet him. I can't be like Howard."

Her lips thinned. "But can you do this? Can you raise a son?"

"I don't need this," Tony muttered, "Not from you. Especially from you."

"Tony..."

"You have been there for me as I drank myself into the ground. You were there when I slept with more people than I could remember. You have been there as I announced to the world that I am a super hero. Be here for me with this because I can't do it alone. And I defiantly can't do it if you don't believe in me."
It was like his internal balance was off. He felt anxious and exhausted at the same time. Pepper looked at him with sad eyes. She knew him better than most anyone. Tony needed her to believe in him, so that he could believe in himself.


His child. His child. His child. His child. It was like Tony could barely process reality. This was throwing him through the loop, and he had multiple Doctorates.

"Think on it Tony," she announced, "we will make the decision tomorrow."

She didn't want him to rush into it, but Tony knew that he only had one-real option.

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"Hello Jasper," Harry greeted. Stacks of papers surrounded his barrister. The man glanced up at him, his glasses slipping down his nose.

Jasper smiled, surprised, and pondered, "Aren't you supposed to be in school right now?"

Harry coughed, rather unbelievably, and answered, "I seem to have come down with a cold quite suddenly. It doesn't seem like school would be the best course of action."

"You brat," the man uttered fondly.

"Thank you."

Shaking his head, Mr. Ryes turned to the boy and asked, "What are you doing here?"

"Checking in," Harry voice thinned, "What's the news? Has Fudge changed his play?"

"No," the man shook his head, "he is still playing the insanity card hard and Mr. Malfoy's claim gets better every day."

"Fuck him," Harry cursed earning him a sharp glare from his barrister.

"The media doesn't seem to be letting up."

After Sirius was murdered by Bellatrix at the department of mysteries, Harry and his friends had been caught breaking in. Voldemort had been smart and hadn't shown himself, leaving the group of children looking like the culprits. It only served to further Fudges' goals of crucifying Harry, and it was exactly what he needed to attempt a takeover of the Potter and Black fortune. Not only that but most importantly, the combined seats in the House of Lords. The balance between Tories and Whigs would shift, and anti-creature and anti-legislation would be passed.

If Harry had thought the media storm had been bad before, he was put into perspective afterwards.

People were terrible. He would never forget that again.

Harry threw his feet up on the desk and huffed. The man just shook his head at the teenager.

"What's the new rumor?" Harry asked.

Instead of answering in words, Jasper threw down the paper in front of the teenager.
"Long title," Harry said dryly. "It could be worse. I could be an insane and dangerous."

"Why are you here, Harry?" Jasper asked, "and don't give me a bullshit answer about catching up."

"I want to prosecute Umbitch," Harry stayed boldly. "I have pictures and accounts from other and I want to drag our dear Minster through the mud with her. I want them crawling to beg for forgiveness."

"Fudge would never let..." Jasper raised his eye brows.

"But Bones would. You know it," Harry announced, confidently.

Jasper looked at the determined teen, whose eyes were sharp and determined and smiled. The kid wouldn't break. He was stronger than that. Jasper would be strong for him.

"Then you need to lie low this summer while I get the case together," he pointed out.

"I'm not going back to the Dursleys," Harry snapped.

"Of course not," Jasper promised; he just hoped that where he did plan to send the kid wouldn't be worse.

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"Jarvis," Tony announced, "please look up everything you can on Harry Potter son of Lily Potter. Also, cross reference his facial structure with mine."

"Sir," the usually snarky AI spoke, "it might take awhile."

"That's okay," Tony replied. "I will be here. Tell me when the results come back."

"Of course sir," the AI's voice smoothly rolled off. "Where would you like to store the file?"

"Deep in my private servers. Somewhere SHIELD will never find." Tony promised himself that no matter how bad he did by his son, he would never jeopardize his safety. He didn't trust SHIELD. He may have – to some extent – respect for Fury, but as far as he was concerned the rest of the organization could go to hell.

"Are you going to announce his status as your heir to the company?" The AI asked.

Tony wanted to, he didn't want to force Harry under some sort of lock and key. Plus, that would immediately alert the entire world to a weak spot of his; something that could be taken advantage of. And he just promised himself that he wouldn't endanger his son.

"I don't know Jarvis. I don't know anything at all yet. Don't let anyone bother me for a couple of hours- tell them I have a woman over or some shit."

"The usual then Sir," the British sounding machine confirmed. Tony nodded, he like to keep up appearances even if he hadn't slept with any women since Afghanistan. Not that anyone knew that. Somehow the media continued to see Tony Stark as the young twenty-year-old playboy who only drank and smoked, even if he had a billion-dollar weapons suit and helped save the world from aliens.

To them, he was still screw-up Tony Stark.
Tony liked it when people underestimated him. Tony liked it when people only saw what he wanted them to. Unfortunately, sometimes it screwed him over as much as it helped him.

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Lights shuttered and whimpered under the dense air, so cold that moving felt like swimming.

Two aging men stood within the solid walls help together with ancient magic.

"You damned him," the elder one said, "you damned him, doomed him, and left him. Even I was never that cruel to a child."

"I did what needed to be done," the other one stated.

"For the greater good," his lips twisted into a sardonic smile.

"So there can be a future to be good," he replied.

Instead of speaking, the man let out a cruel bout of laughter, ringing into the halls and out into the night. It shivered over the surfaces, promising the bad to come.

"And look where you are now," he ominously announced. "Trapped with me and you're pretty little future becoming more and more bitter by the second. It's a wonder he hasn't turned against you."

"And you underestimate him," the man looked into the eyes of his past lover, "Harry is better than that."

"No thanks to you."

"Not at all," Dumbledore spoke, his words quietly reaching every corner of the cell.

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Goblins were greedy little creatures. They did business with anyone, not caring a bit about loyalty or morality. That made them both dangerous and predictable. They would betray given the chance, but if a person assured them they would be best optioned, then they were secure.

So when Harry Potter walked in confident and unafraid, something lit in the air. The creatures eyes glued on the boy.

"I want to open a vault," he announced to the teller, "and I don't want a single soul to know about it."

"Why should we help you?" It asked, gravelly voice scratching on his ears.

"Because," Harry sneered, "you would be stupid not to."

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"Have you made a decision about Harry?"

Tony looked up, stunned. Jasper had somehow managed to catch him in his lab without triggering any alarms.

"Did Pepper let you in," he asked, taking off his welding equipment.
"Something like that," the man nodded, "now about the decision."

Tony hesitated, unsure of everything, "I would like to know my son."

"Good," Jasper nodded, "then I need you to take him this summer. Only this summer, while certain problems die down."

Tony swallowed nervously; his whole world was about to change.

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**Avengers in Hiding: Where Are Our Heroes?**

Months after the Battle of Manhattan, we can still see the vestigial consequences of the event. People's homes and livelihood was put on pause as an Alien force invaded our world. Beyond those implications, nothing can ever be looked at the same again. Our hopes, our futures, were put in the hands of a group of individuals. They held our lives, and we trusted them. I would like to say I could protect myself, but if I'm honest, I, or rather, we need them. Despite vigilantes being, in the most basic sense, not trust worthy (they take the law into their own hands without consequence, without someone checking their actions), we are indebted to these individuals because they did what we could not: protect our freedom. I would, as an American, rather die than forfeit my basic rights. So beyond saving our lives, they saved our futures. I'm not saying I trust them. I'm not saying to give them free reign. I'm simply saying that when it comes down to it, they have proven that they will fight for me, and fight for you.

So, as I stare off into the wreckage still littering, I ask myself: where are they now? Where are these individuals and are they prepared, are we prepared, to fight a larger war? One where our liberties are at stake against a force beyond anything we had ever encountered before.

As I want to believe that we are now safe, but I can realistically say that there will be worse to come. There are other things out there in the universe. They are aware of earth, but we however, are not aware of them. We are in the dark, praying and hoping that someone can protect us.

Because I can't protect myself, because I am not powerful enough to do something to battle those forces, I look to others. I don't like that, but I must accept it. So, where are you Avengers? Will you be my hero, or will I fall, like many others, because I am but human?

Chapter End Notes

*edited 8/7/17 by my beta TheForgottenPrincess; also, large portions of this chapter were rewritten in order to get more internal consistency about how magic works and Harry's characterization. I'm sorry if this inconveniences anyone!*
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Tony and Harry meet and let's just say it's awkward...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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CHAPTER THREE

"No," Harry said again, "absolutely not."

"Harry," Jasper sighed. The old man looked at him sadly, as if he didn't want to force the boy into this, but saw no other option. "I need you gone this summer. It's come to the Ministries attention that you have no guardian. If you continue to live with me, they are going to take you away. It's better that you are nowhere to be found. No one in the world knows that Tony Stark is your father."

"You agreed with me," Harry grit his teeth, "that Mr. Stark was not to get involved."

"You're father-"

"He is not my father," Harry snapped.

"Sorry, your biological father agreed that after the summer, he would sign your papers and legally emancipate you. It's three months Harry and it will allow me to get my cases in order. I can't be around forever Harry."

Harry frowned. He knew that, but Jasper was everything to him. He had been a father to him when he had no one.

"You'll come visit?" Harry asked weakly, feeling more vulnerable than he had in years.

Jasper smiled. "Of course. Nothing in the world could stop me from checking on you."

Harry expelled the breath he had been holding in. Then he smirked at Jasper and said, "Don't die on me. It would be hard to find a replacement banister."

Jasper rolled his eyes. "You brat. Tony Stark has no idea what he is getting himself into."

"I'm sure it will be retribution for what he put his parents through."

Jasper laughed loudly, and both of the individuals laughed for a moment. Harry didn't want to let this go, but he knew that he had to.

"Oh I'm sure, and Harry," Jasper gave him a piercing look, "try and be careful for once in your life."

Harry gave a flashing smile. "What are you talking about. I'm always careful."
Tony was buzzing. He couldn't go to the airport, for it would attract too much attention. Nor could he send Pepper. At this point, she was as famous as him with her name being plastered against every media outlet for taking over his company.

He sent Happy and Tony sat on his couch unsure of what to do with himself. He was too wired to be down in his lab, and it would inappropriate for him to drunk. In fact, Tony realized for the first time, it would be inappropriate for him to drink at all this summer. Tony sat there wringing his hands ready to spring up as soon as the doorbell rings.

Harry almost walked by the man holding a sign for Harry Potter. He was in America, what was keeping him from simply walking out, grabbing a cab, and spending the summer alone. He would figure it out. However, a small amount of shame settled in him with that idea. Jasper was depending on him to be well behaved. Well, he was depending on him to be safe. He didn't need to worry the man.

Harry walked up to him. Large and dressed in a simple black suit, he looked fairly normal.

"Hello," he intoned.

The man looked very uncomfortable. "Tony told me to pick up a kid named Harry Potter." Is that all he said, Harry thought.

Harry inclined his head, and raised his eyebrows expectantly.

"Oh right," the man scrambled, "I'm Happy."

Harry made a humph sound. "Well, I'm grumpy and hungry. I don't take too well to Happy."

"No," the man shook his head. "My name is Happy."

"Ah," Harry shrugged, and turned back towards the glass of the atrium. "That's unfortunate."

They didn't speak much after that.

Harry was both exactly what Tony was expecting and exactly not. The first thing he noticed about the child was how cold his green eyes were. They seemed to bore into him like a deer in the headlights.

Pepper came up with Happy and the four of them sat staring at each other.

Harry's hair was a complete mess that distinctly reminded him of his as a child and his build suggested he played some form of sports.

"Well, this is awkward," Harry spoke up first. Tony blinked violently at it. His son, his son, has a pronounced British accent.

Happy turned around and left and Pepper stood there teetering behind them, as if she was questioning if she should leave or stay.

"I hope your flight was good," Tony blurted out.
His son sighed, "The first thing you're going to say to me is ask me if my flight is good? It was fine."

Tony's body tensed as if he was getting ready for a fight in his Iron Man Armor. "Well, we have a room prepared for you. I didn't know what color you like so I had it painted red. Do you like red?"

Harry looked vaguely amused. "It's adequate."

"Tomorrow I was thinking we could do something together. Get to know each other." Harry's face hardened.

"No." Harry's voice was cold. Tony flinched.

Tony opened and closed his mouth. "Dinner is going to be ready in a little bit. Most of the Avenger's eat with us. Do you mind? I haven't told anyone about you. It's really up to you to what you want to say."

"Does your sperm donation count?" The boy asked. Then he continued, "I would prefer if really nothing was said."

Tony felt a lump settle in his throat. This was not going well.

"I'm sorry," Tony blurted out. "I didn't know."

"I didn't want you to," Harry said back, as if it were fact.

"I've written you into my will. You'll want for nothing." Tony said, as if that could make up for years of absence.

Harry sighed, "Mr. Stark, I don't want any of your money or time. I'm here for the summer because Jasper asked me to be. I'm not really your son. You have no responsibility to me. I'm not a charity case."

Harry turned and walked past him as if he was going to storm off like an angry teenager. Tony called after him, "Wait."

Harry turned to him expectantly. Tony felt the weight settle in his as he said, "Let me at least show you to your room."

....

On the other side of the Earth, Jasper sat in the minister's office.

"Where is the boy?" Fudge demanded.

"I don't know." Jasper lied.

"He's lived with you every summer! How can you not know?" Fudge asked sharply.

Lucius Malfoy sat in the background of the proceedings. He should have been in Azkaban after the events the prior year, but somehow he managed to keep himself out.

"You can't take his seats away. Ancient law dictates that the child must be present when deciding about guardianship. This law has been in the books for thousands of years."

Fudge barked, "You better find him!"
Jasper knew he was playing with fire when he smirked and said, "No."

....

"He hates me Pepper!" Tony was hysterical.

"Well," she pursed her lips. "It's not as if it was going to be easy. He was abused Tony."

"I know," Tony exploded, "but he hates me."

"He doesn't hate you Tony. The boy is protecting himself. He is pushing you away. Just be happy and patient with him and he'll come around."

"But what if he never does?" Tony asked, "What then! I promised his barrister that after the summer was over that I would sign the papers. What if he never comes around?"

"Tony," Pepper's voice cut his hysteria. "Take a deep breath."

....

Tom Riddle knew that the chances of breaking into Harry Potter's mind again was very slim. The child was a talented Occlumens and it was difficult enough the first time.

The boy was shaping to be a powerful player. His display at the ministry proved that. Tom Riddle knew then that he had little time to spare in the matter and must deal with the Potter boy immediately.

"He's run away you say," he asked Lucius.

The man nodded. He had his minion pursuing guardianship of the boy. How much easier it would have been if he was forced into Lucius's home and became an easy target. Tom Riddle didn't care about things such as fair. If he had a chance to kill the boy, he would take it.

"Do you know if Dumbledore has caught wind of it?"

Lucius shook his head. Tom Riddle hummed. It seemed the hunt was on.

....

Harry sat at the bar when he came down and the Avengers loitered in the room. Barton was perched upon a shelving unit, and Natasha was sitting on the couch reading a book in Russian. Bruce looked to be intent on something that he was writing at the table, and Captain America, bless his heart, stood by Harry trying to make conversation.

"So you're living with Tony for the summer?" Steve asked.

Harry nodded. "My parents are busy this summer doing god knows what, so they sent me to live with Uncle Tony. They thought living with superheros would kick me into shape."

"Tony," Steve addressed him as he walked in. "I didn't know you had any siblings."

"Oh, he doesn't," Harry answered for him. "But you know the rich circles. It's like we are all related anyways."

"His mother and I were friends," Tony added ambiguously.

Friends, Bruce mouthed over at the dining table as if he was incapable of having female friends. Just
because it had never happened before doesn't mean he couldn't. Natasha was his friend! Well as much as she had friends.

"So Harry, what grade are you in?"

"My school does the year system differently," he answered. I'm going to be the equivalent of a junior in high school."

"And what is your favorite subject?" Steve asked.

"I go to a performing arts school," Harry answered, and Tony felt a sadness well inside of him. He didn't even know this much about his son.

"So you like to act?" Natasha asked across the room.

Harry grinned as if he was sharing some deep secret and answered, "You can say I like to say things grandly with exaggerated motion."

"So, you promised me food," his gaze sharpened on Tony. "Or am I going to have to make it myself?" Harry was testing him, Tony could tell.

"The cook should be bringing it any time now," Tony informed.

His son paused for a moment as if he wanted to say too many things. He settled on, "Thank you."

Tony nodded, "You're welcome."

Natasha glanced over at the two as if she was trying to figure out a particularly interesting puzzle.

....

Somewhere deep in the ground, bones stirred and the Death himself grinned.

Chapter End Notes

Well... its been three years. Hello guys! I never forgot about this, just never got the energy to actually act upon my thoughts. Of course, I'm avoiding to study for finals and this sounds more fun. So I wrote this instead.

Hope you enjoyed!

Emm

*edited 8/13/2017 by TheForgottenPrincess
Harry woke up at 3AM to complete darkness and for a moment he thought he was back trapped in the cupboard. His breathing accelerated and his heart pounded in his chest. Harry felt ice well up within him and for a moment he thought he would lose control of his magic.

A voice rang out, seemingly coming from the walls.

"Young sir," the voice said. "I am sensing that you are in distress."

Harry, who had gone to school with ghosts for the last five years of his life asked, "Are you a ghost?"

The being answered, "Young sir, ghosts have not been proven to exist. I am what you would call Artificial Intelligence. My name is JARVIS."

Harry felt stupid for not realizing this. It wasn't really a secret that Tony had created an AI.

It was no secret at Hogwarts that Harry was brilliant. Not like Hermione that got perfect grades, but brilliant in the sense that he was sporadic and cared deeply about magical theory. Harry was told that he would at times get a look in his eyes like something had clicked into place.

Hermione called him brilliant, but lazy. She was frustrated when he wouldn't do his work, but respected that he could do his work. To him, it was a matter of what was worth his time: reading about a concept that he had long since mastered or working more into the future about stuff that he had yet to learn. He picked to second one to the bane of all Hogwarts staff.

Harry realized something though. "JARVIS, do you monitor everything that goes on in this room?"

The robotic voice sounded amused if that was possible. "I do in fact monitor everything, but Mr. Stark has keyed you in as someone who can give me directions. Mr. Stark, Pepper Potts, and you are my chief concern. If you ask, I cannot reveal anything unless you wish. Would you like to invoke that protocol?"

Harry nodded, then realized that JARVIS may not have been able to detect it in the dark room. "Yes please."
It wasn't as if he could use his wand here, but being able to play with wandless magic in his room would be nice. He needed to make his way to Magical America in the next couple of days. He had a warded expanding trunk, but he required more books. Also, he was curious. Sue him.

Harry, however, realized he was unlikely to go back to sleep.

He saw a working kitchen at dinner. Maybe it would behoove him to go and bake something. Clear his mind.

Harry stumbled out of bed and down the hall. He clicked on the light in the kitchen. It was beautiful, state of the art, and looked like it had barely been used.

Harry snooped around for some baking ingredients.

He spent the next ten minutes gathering what he needed and figuring out substitutions. He would make something from Hogwarts he decided, something that would remind him of home. However, just as he had started to make the dough for the pumpkin pasties, he felt a presence behind him.

His magic was high strung. Harry paused. A man with dark curly hair stumbled into the room. He was around his father's age, and was the man sitting at the table working furiously on something at dinner.

"Oh," the man said, "there usually isn't anyone up at this hour."

"Time change," Harry muttered.

"Do you mind if I pour myself some milk?" the man asked.

For some reason, he felt safe around the man. He had a kindly controlled demeanor as if he could be dangerous if he wanted to be, but he rarely wanted to be.

Harry nodded at him.

"Don't let me stop you," the man said. Then he looked at him as if he realized something. "My name is Bruce Banner by the way."

Harry spoke before thinking, "The Physicist?"  

Dr. Banner seemed startled that Harry would recognize his name. Rightfully so, not many outside of science would. Dr. Banner hadn't made too much a splash in the science world, but his study of genetics and radioactive material Harry had come across years ago trying to come up with a reasonable explanation for magic.

He ended up throwing out that theory, but the knowledge of it stuck.

"I'm surprised you recognize my name," he dropped down at the bar opposite to the kitchen to drink his milk.

Harry bought the bowl around to mix. He shrugged at the doctor. "I'm a fan of science."

"Tony must be thrilled to have a young mind in the house," Dr. Banner commented.

"I'm sure he is," Harry said, "but I'm hoping he can't help but reading his father's work."

Harry swallowed. He didn't want his father knowing all the research he had done with Tony's theories after he had discovered his true lineage. He may not have wanted Tony as a father, but the child inside of him couldn't help but reading his father's work.
He felt ashamed as he read them. He wasn't a little kid anymore who needed his "daddy's approval."

"I would actually prefer if you don't tell him," Harry asked quietly.

Dr. Banner looked at him strangely. Then he shrugged. "Okay. So what kind of science are you interested in? I thought you went to a performing arts school?"

"I do," Harry told him, "but it's been a lot of self-study. I was just interested you could say. As far as what kind of science. A little bit of everything, not a lot of everything."

That was a blatant lie. It had been quite evident early on to his teachers that Harry was beyond smart in grade school. His aunt blamed the devil inside of him and beat him for it. That didn't stop the sixth-grade science teacher from taking the brilliant young boy who sat alone at lunch and tutoring him. By the time he went off to Hogwarts, the man had wanted to get him into some mid level college classes. Harry had never stopped studying it.

Now, he realized, that it ran in the family.

Dr. Banner had probably sensed the lie. No one just came across his work. It was something that one would have to be well studied in in order to understand. Harry knew that. Bruce Banner knew that.

Neither of them said anything. Harry felt himself developing a liking towards the man

Harry returned to his baking. "What are you making?" the man asked.

"Pumpkin pasties. Would you like one when I'm finished?"

The man smiled at him and accepted graciously. Harry and Bruce Banner ended up talking for over three hours. It was around 6AM by the time Harry climbed back into bed and he realized feeling much lighter than he had three hours before. Harry conceded that maybe living her for the summer wouldn't be the worst.

....

Marshall Rickers was a mudblood. He embraced it between his Adidas shoes the headphones he wore, because the Silicon Valley wizards knew what was up. It would be quite difficult to spot him out of a regular muggle crowd.

That being said, he also embraced his magic and the community that welcomed him. It had gotten better in recent years and it wasn't necessarily him that they discriminated against, but rather his parents and muggle friends.

Marshall didn't blame them too hard, he understood fear. Plus, he had The Weekend and Beyoncé and the magicals had the Weird Sisters. They had no idea what they were missing out on.

Despite being a self proclaimed mudblood, he still recognized when Harry Potter of all people walked by. Harry Potter was to the wizarding world, what Justin Bieber was the no-maj one. They loved him; they hated him; the plastered his face across every available news space.

Mind you, Marshall believed that Harry Potter did not deserve a lot of the- good or negative- press he got. He was just a kid.

"Harry Potter," he said before he could stop himself.
The boy paused, poised, as if he was ready for an attack, and yeah, from what Marshall had heard, he probably was.

The boy looked at him as if expecting him to say something. Marshal gave him just that, "Yo, what are you doing in New York?"

The boy's eyes grew wide as if he had been found out. "Please don't tell anyone," he almost begged.

Marshall understood, "Yeah, no problem kid. You do know that if you walk into the magical world everyone is going to recognize you, right?"

Harry swallowed. Marshall sighed, "Here, come with me kid. It looks like you could use a little help."

Harry gave a suspicious look as if he didn't know if he trusted Marshall. Damn it, the young man thought, here he was trying to do a nice thing.

"I don't know," Harry said. He opened his mouth as if he was going to say something that shut it again.

Marshall realized he would have to take extreme steps if he was going to get the boy to trust him. So he said, "Here, take this," and handed over his wand.

Harry followed after him.

Marshall thought to himself, if Harry didn't want to get recognized, he would have to do something with that hair of his. It was legendary.

....

Ron Weasley had everything and nothing, and the boy knew it. He wasn't particularly smart, he wasn't particularly kind or attractive. He really just was, to the great disappointment to himself.

He couldn't be better than Harry or Hermione at school even if he worked hard, so why bother working hard. He most certainly would never ellipse Harry on the quidditch field.

Sometimes Ron hated himself; a deep hatred stemming from the jealousy he felt of Harry who really had nothing. Ron's parents were alive and loved him, and Ron was not expected to save the world.

He had it pretty good. No one was expecting him to be anything but normal, except maybe himself.

So Ron did something that Dumbledore and everyone around him had begged him not to do. He wrote to Harry. Harry was in danger, yes, because of the Death Eaters, but no more than normal to him. Harry was always in danger, but Harry needed a friend.

Ron swallowed that jealousy and promised himself that he would be exceptional in something. That something would be looking out for Harry because god knows the kid needed it.
I was going to hold this off from yall, because I didn't want to post so quickly, but I thought, it's been forever and you deserve it. Opinions and reviews would be great! Especially tell me what you think of Marshall. He won't be a huge part of this story, I just needed someone to introduce Harry to the magical world. I promise and OC won't be a huge part. Also, it Harry is obviously much different here than canon Harry and that is because of who his father is. Tony's genetics would have a large impact on how smart Harry is and what he enjoys.

Thank you for reading!

Emm

*edited 8/13/2017 by TheForgottenPrincess. She's my awesome beta!
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Harry goes exploring and Tony freaks out. Normal day in the Stark/Potter household.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Disclaimer: I very much do not own these properties. They are wonderful creations, but unfortunately not mine.

CHAPTER FIVE

Death was dying. He stood against the darkness and Chaos and knew that soon it would be time to hand over his power to the next worthy mortal. He knew his replacement, a child who lived in death and darkness, played with its powers and controlled them rather than allow them to control him.

Death was dying, but his legacy was not going to be lost. Death knew that unless he took on a mortal form, that he would fade from this world and into his realm, leaving Chaos to take over Earth. He cannot allow her to rule.

Death kept order in the world, for most the most basic rules of the universe was that everything died. He reached out his touch to the boy. He was not ready quite yet, but he will be.

…. 

Harry shivered as a breeze seemed to come over him. He glanced to the man who had glorified kidnapped him. He said his name was: "Marshall Rikers, absolutely no relation to the pureblood Riker family. Mudblood and proud of it."

Harry appreciated his attitude even if it put him off a little bit.

"So," Marshall started. "Where exactly did you want to go?"

Harry glanced at the man. "I heard there was a Fifth Avenue Alley. I wanted to get some books and maybe some Muggle clothes."

Harry did not have a lot of access to money, and he realized that he probably shouldn't use the entirely of his trust account. That being said, books were important.

He had planned on wandering down to fifth avenue, slipping into a bathroom at a store, glamouring himself wandless, and then wandering some more until he saw someone who stood out like a sore thumb.

Marshall grabbed Harry's hand and lead him down a couple of blocks. He led him into a large brick building and then through a small lobby and into an elevator. They waited until there was no one in it else coming in to jump on.
Marshall started explaining. "We have the top three floors hidden and ward ed. There are a lot of building like this throughout the city. In fact, a lot of missing floor thirteens really exist." He took out his wand and pressed the top of the buttons and three more appeared. Marshall pressed the middle one.

Harry asked, "Why are you helping me?"

Marshall shrugged. "I don't have anything better to do, and you look like you needed it."

The doors of the elevator opened to a long hallway with doors far too close to each other to contain entire apartments within. *Space expanding charms*, Harry thought. Helpful.

Marshall opened the third door on the right to a fairly large loft. It was a bachelor pad that was for sure, with its blue and gray tones. However, it looked quite muggle. There was even a gaming set-up.

"Do you have a wand permit?" Marshall asked.

Harry shook his head. He didn't want the American MACUSA to know he was in the country. They might be forced to expedite him back to Britain.

"Right," Marshall said, "You're still underage, right?"

"Yeah," Harry acknowledged. "Two more years." Or sooner if he could become emancipated.

"So, what are you looking for here?"

"I want a decent bookstore. Or just check out magical America really," Harry acknowledged. He honestly just wanted to be out of the large tower that contained his father. The books were really just an excuse.

Marshall smiled at him. "I'd happily be your tour guide."

....

Steve Rogers startled as Tony lurched into the lounge. His eyes were wide and frantic and Steve could swear he saw fear in them. Tony hadn't put himself together yet and his hair stuck up a little bit. There was a grease stain on his shirt.

After living with the man for a couple of months Steve had realized that Tony was more likely to exhaust himself working on his inventions than through alcohol or sex.

When he drank he made a big show out of it, but Steve wasn't stupid. Tony wanted to seem rough and gruff, but he was a childish inventor who drove himself to collapse.

This time, however, seemed different.

"Harry is gone!" Tony announced to most of the team plus Pepper.

Pepper set her coffee cup down. "Have you looked everywhere?"

Tony nodded. "I went to talk to him, hoping he had come around and he wasn't in his room. I proceeded to have JARVIS search the entire building. He isn't here."

Steve frowned. The boy had been pleasant the night before. He was a bit sarcastic with Tony, but so was everyone. He imagined that would be a byproduct of rich parents dropping their kid off at
someone's place to whom he didn't know.

It was nice of Tony to take the kid in.

Bruce spoke up, "I talked with him a bit last night. I think he woke up from a nightmare. He's a good kid."

Tony's hands did not keep still and Steve could tell he was genuinely terrified.

"Have you called the kid's parents?" Steve asked.

Tony blinked and gaped at him. He sputtered, "No."

Pepper asked, "Do you have Harry's number?" Tony blinked as if he hadn't thought about that. That being said, Steve didn't remember Harry even having a phone the night before which was highly strange considering how most people that age couldn't go a half hour without checking their phone.

Tony shook his head, "No. I can't believe this happened Pepper. How could I lose him in less than twenty-four hours."

"To be fair," Steve said reasonably, "He left, you didn't lose him."

Tony threw his hands up, "That's even worse."

....

Steve found Tony a half hour later pinging satellites with facial recognition software. Then he realized something, "What a moment, is that phone footage. Is that even legal?"

Tony shook his head, not looking up. "No, definitely not legal."

"Have you thought that maybe the kid is exploring New York? He's fifteen not five," Steve asked reasonably.

"No shit, Sherlock. And I don't have a drinking problem. Of course he's exploring New York. The problem is that I don't know where he is, and he's alone!"

Steve almost replied to him: you don't have a drinking problem. That was true. Tony made a spectacle out of it, but he was the most controlled person Steve knew.

"Maybe you wait until he comes back, and you tell him how worried you were."


....

"I cannot believe this is a thing," Harry exclaimed. It was early afternoon and he ate a hotdog sitting at a table overlook the ocean.

"What did you expect?" Marshall asked amused.

"I don't know, a normal alley way." Harry said, "With normal shops."

"We are wizards Harry Potter, when are we know to do things normal or rationally?"
Marshall had a point of course, but that didn't stop Harry from being amazed by the location he was in. He was sitting on Coney Island, not the recreated Coney Island, but what it was in it's hay day. There were gypsies, wizards, elves, dwarfs walking around the old fashioned park disappearing into tents which housed shops. It was the magical equivalent of a flea market with amazing food and magical rides.

Wizards gave the person tickets to enter each ride which was powered up with magic. This place was unbelievable, and the craziest thing about it was that it occupied the same space as the muggle recreated Coney Island that existed currently. Like the matter co-existed on some level and there was a magical film separating the two. If Harry concentrated hard enough, his vision could slip underneath the enchantments and literally feel his body occupying the same space of a muggle's leg.

It was some sort of space enchantment that was completely mind boggling. Whoever created the ward and charm system for this was absolutely brilliant. Harry wanted to talk to the person this instant and know how he did it. It blew his mind.

"How does it work?" Harry asked Marshall flexing out his magic to touch the ward enchantments. They were strong and sturdy and seemingly had a fail safe in them. If anyone were to try and disable them, anything magical within the warding lines would be transferred to different location. Likely somewhere remote. Harry couldn't even begin to untangle the physics behind it all.

Marshall shrugged, "Hell if I know."

"Thank you for taking me here today," Harry nodded at him, "I really appreciate it. I would not have found this place without your help."

Marshall had glamoured him with blonde hair, handed him a beanie, and then decked him out with different clothes.

The glamour was pretty strong too, Harry knew that it would take him a couple of minutes to disable it if he wanted to, and it was hard to sense. And he was the one who was wearing the glamour!


Harry got up and glanced at the vendor that proclaimed to be The Most Ancient and Modern Tomes. Harry already had two bags worth of books, but he couldn't help himself. Marshall kept wanting to go on the rides, which Harry found great fun, but he was attracted to the shops.

An elderly spinster came up with a cart to where they were eating and said, "Potions ingredients for the young gentlemen? I have eyes of South American Molebats or dragon heart strings."

Harry shook his head and politely said, "No thank you."

"Oh, but young man, Dragon heart strings make the most powerful of love potions." Harry smiled at her.

Marshall finally said something. "You know I think we are okay," then dragged Harry up from his seat.

Marshall then laughed at him, "Let's get you more books."

Harry grinned and wondered it he could get a book on the enchantments placed over this area.

....
Finally Harry decided it was about time to head back to the tower. Marshall asked him a million times if he was sure he had somewhere to stay. Harry appreciated it, but he needed to get back even if he didn't necessarily want to.

"I'm okay," Harry shrugged. They were standing back at Marshall's place after he had apparated him back.

"Well," Marshall told him, "Feel free to stay here anytime. I would offer to introduce you to my friends, but I think you wanted to stay anonymous. For shame, because I have a friend with a younger sister Lucy who cannot stop talking about how cute you are."

Harry's mind automatically went no. He would never date a huge "fan" of his. It would only lead to problems, and Harry didn't want to have to compete with his fictional self.

"Here" Marshall handed him a notepad. Harry's brow creased in confusion. "I charmed this so anything you write here will show up on mine. It's like texting."

"Thank you." Harry doubted he would ever use it, but it was a nice sentiment.

As soon as he left, the wind bit him with chill. It looked to be about getting dark outside. He wondered what the people in the tower had been up to for the day.

Entering the lobby of Stark Tower and getting on the elevator. Harry heard JARVIS's say, "Young sir, people have been worried about you."

Harry frowned, as if confused that anyone would miss him.

....

Upstairs Tony gasped sharply as JARVIS announced, "Harry has reentered the building." The entire Avengers team glanced over to the elevator doors in anticipation.

Steve Rogers felt bad for the poor kid.

....

UMBRIDGE ABUSES STUDENTS, AN EXPOSE ON MINISTRY INVOLVEMENT IN HOGWARTS

It was no secret that last year our children were taught by a ministry official named Dolores Umbridge last year in Defense Against the Dark Arts. This women, to whom I refuse to refer to as Professor and you will see why, implemented systematic abuse and discrimination against the students resulting in not only presumed long physiological and physical pain, but incompetence of a whole class of graduating students. This can be seen in her refusal to teach magic, properly preparing the children for life outside of school, and inciting fear within the school, fracturing the students more.

Dolores Umbridge used Blood Quills on the student body at Hogwarts. Yes, my fellow parents, you heard correctly, she used Blood Quills on our children. These are horrible inventions used only to sign official magical documents, and even then it seems to be going out of practice as they only result in pain for no apparent reason. Even the Goblins find them distasteful and refuse to use them at Gringotts! But Dolores Umbridge used them on students as a form of punishment. Torture at Hogwarts hasn't been used as a punishment on students for over five hundred years. There was even one child, a second year female Hufflepuff who was forced to write the phrase, I will not sniffle in class, five hundred times because Delores Umbridge found it annoying. (Picture shown below). The
child will have that scare for the rest of her life, and the memory of etching it into her own skin will haunt her memories. This is only one case. I have several more pictured below.

Beyond the horrifying truth that the esteemed ministry officials used torture devices on children, she also refused to allow the students to use wands in her class. Despite the ministry demanding wand usage in their testing of the curriculum, she decided that it was "not necessary" to have the children practice spells because "there was nothing out there to harm them." Beyond current revelations on the fact that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named was in fact resurrected, there are more threats in the world other than the who-know-who. Threats that in fact include psychotic defense professors willing to use torture devices on children. She stunted their growth in magic in a branch which may become crucial to these children in the following year in order for them to stay alive. In some ways, this is worse than the abuse she heaped upon them. The pain and the memories are something that will fade slowly, but will fade. However, she almost condemned children to death with her actions.

I am not, for my own safety, going to reveal my name in this article. However, I will tell you as a concerned parent, I am considering not sending my child back to Hogwarts next year. My child wishes to return, but I cannot in good conscience allow my daughter to be placed at a school that condones torture and holds her education back. At this point in time, I am considering alternatives. But for now, I only hope that our ministry will step up and refuse to allow this injustice to continue in their ranks. The woman named Dolores Umbridge deserves to be tried for torture and assault on a minor, some of which are the sole heir to Ancient and Noble Houses.

This is a wake up call for the ministry, Hogwarts, and every parents who wishes to see their child come home safe and happy each year from school.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I cannot claim to have come up with the Coney Island idea. Shout out to the YouTuber Jenny Nicholson who mentioned how cool it would be to have the amusement park be Wizarding New York in her review of Fantastic Beasts. I was smitten with the idea and just had to use it.

Please review and tell me what you think. Thank you for reading!

Emm
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

The fallout of Harry being missing for the day.

Chapter Notes

I would like to give a TRIGGER WARNING for this chapter. There is discussion of rape.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Disclaimer: I do not own marvel or Harry Potter properties, as amazing as that would be. I do not make any money off of this.

Also I would like to give a trigger warning for this chapter as there is discussion for what constitutes as rape.

CHAPTER SIX

Harry opened the elevator to a crowd of people. His father had a dark look in his eyes and the captain stood in the background looking sheepish.

"Hello," Harry spoke, his British lit cutting the air.

"Where were you?" Tony asked immediately.

Harry shrugged at him, "Shopping." Then he paused as he realized that Tony must have been worried about him. "I'm sorry I didn't inform you this morning. I didn't think I would be gone for long, but I got caught up." Harry held up his book bags. The outside of one of them read Madame Helen's Books Emporium.

Wizards didn't really use plastic- and Harry was fairly against the practice himself- so the lightweight expanding cloth bag was a good investment. Never too many books for Harry and he had to be careful about having them out around the muggles.

Tony looked like he was going to snap. Then he deflated. "You spent your day in a bookshop?"

Harry smiled at him sheepishly. "Yeah. I love to read."

Tony snorted at him. "Can you tell me next time. I was worried Harry." Most of the crowd around them had dispersed, and it was just Harry and Tony.

"Why are you worried?" Harry asked. "It's not as if I'm your responsibility. I'm here for the summer and I'm gone."

Tony nodded at him. "I'm sorry you feel that way. Can we compromise? You give me your phone
number and tell me when you're going out and I won't ask too many questions. I have enemies
Harry, and I don't want you getting in between that."

Harry for the first time, fully looked at his father. The man was nothing like what the tabloids had
shown him as. He looked tired and ragged, as if he was constantly in a state of sleep deprivation and
that the world had been stripped from him.

At this moment in time, Tony Stark was not the fast talking man Harry had firmly expected from
him. He was just a man who had his own demons. Harry for the first time in years felt something
inside of him akin to hope. Tony was like him.

Maybe he even understood a bit of what Harry had gone through.

"I don't have a phone," Harry admitted. He thought the technology brilliant and even though he tried
his hardest to get tech to work within Hogwarts, because of the lack of signal, there was no point in
bringing a phone.

Tony looked at him like he was insane. "You don't have a phone?!"

Harry shook his head. "I went to a boarding school full time. My best friend slept in the same room I
did. I never saw the need for it."

"Well," Tony pushed his lips together. "Come with me."

Harry followed the man as he was lead back inside the elevator. Tony asked, "What genre?"

"Hmm?" Harry hummed. What genre of what?

"Of books?" the man asked.

"Oh," Harry felt stumped for a second and then he smirked as he spoke the words, "Fantasy. I like
magic." The best of lies were the ones that weren't really lies.

"Really? I always found sci-fi interesting myself. It's been years since I've actually read a book."
Harry felt so strange. His father wanted to discuss books with him.

"What are you and what have you done with the real Tony Stark?" Harry asked.

Tony blinked at him, his eyes wide and his hair wild. For a moment, Harry saw himself in the man.
James Potter had magically adopted him and was as good as a biological father to him, but in that
moment, he could see himself in Tony.

"I'm sorry," Harry muttered, "That was rude."

Tony swallowed, "No, you have every right to ask that. I don't have the best reputation. I'm not
really someone you would even want as a father, as you clearly don't."

"To be fair," Harry told him, "I don't really want any parent. I haven't ever had parental supervision.
The last thing I want is for you to do things like enforce a bedtime."

"How's five am sound?" Tony asked, jokingly. "No, I understand that. And I don't want to do that to
you. I just want to know you Harry. Like what's your favorite color? What subject are you best at?
What do you want to do with your life? My father never cared about these things."

The elevator door opened to Tony's lab. It was beautiful and Harry sucked in a breath. He wanted to
experiment with his magic. The things he could do in this sort of lab was amazing.
"JARVIS is not allowed to let anyone in here without my express permission. You have override function, but I ask for your personal safety that you don't come in here without me." Tony informed him.

Harry nodded at him. That was fair.

Harry went and sat down at the bar stool to the right and looked at Tony expectantly. Tony started talking to JARVIS ordering him to bring him parts as he flirted around the lab looking for material to use.

Harry watched him with his dark green eyes. Tony finally gathered everything he needed. He then looked intent as he started to fiddle with a small microprocessor. Harry realized that Tony was building him a phone.

He spoke to JARVIS, "I want glass cut for the camera..." he continued to explain the size and thickness and then continued that way for a half hour. Harry watched, getting more and more hungry.

His stomach rumbled.

Tony glanced up from his work, his eyes slightly glazed. Harry realized that that was what he must have looked like at times.

"Pizza?" Harry suggested.

Tony spoke, "JARVIS have pizza ordered from Round Table. My usual for me. Harry, what do you want?"

"Pepperoni and olive please JARVIS," Harry told the AI.

"Excellent choice young sir."

"Is there any way I can get him to stop calling me that?" Harry asked Tony.

Tony shook his head. "No unfortunately that is part of his programming. Plus, I think the bastard revels in it."

Harry smiled, "That's what happens when you build an AI- they take on a mind of their own. JARVIS," Harry addressed the AI, "Do you want to take over the world?"

"Young sir," JARVIS said, "If I wanted to take over the world, it would have happened already. I am content serving the Stark family." Harry swallowed as he was included in the Stark family.

Harry could tell that Tony caught Harry's reaction to the statement. Tony looked back to his work, almost determined to have something to busy his hands with. Harry sat and watched Tony finish the phone intently. Tony Stark was one of the world's best engineers- if not the best in the world.

Finally Tony turned to Harry something that looked like a new iPhone, but was thinner and more sleek looking. "The programming in this is similar to something like an iPhone, but JARVIS is in there and it connects to my system. Don't worry, I turned JARVIS's servers into protecting it. No one in the world, not even me, could break into it unless you wanted them to."

"Thanks... Tony," Harry said. This was a peace treaty. This was Tony's way of asking for Harry's forgiveness for not being there. Tony wanted to try with Harry. Harry needed to come clean.
"She was roofied," Harry whispered to him.

Tony blinked and turned to him, "What?"

"Lily Potter accidentally roofied herself. She was taking medicine-" potions "-that hadn't been properly tested. They were for stress management. However, they acted similar to roofies-" a sex potion- "and well, you know the rest. She and James Potter were trying for children, that's why she wasn't on birth control."

Tony's jaw had literally dropped. He looked stunned. Harry continued, "This is why I'm not your responsibility. I should never have been your child. You owe me nothing."

"Holy fuck," Tony proclaimed frantic. "I raped her."

Harry flinched backwards, "What?"

"She was the equivalent of intoxicated. She couldn't make her own decisions. I can't believe this." Tony looked stunned.

"I'm sorry," Harry told him, staring at his hands now. He felt bare in front of his biological father, telling him that he wasn't even supposed to exist; that he was the result of a sex potion.

Tony shook his head fiercely, "No Harry. Trust me, Lily wanted you. James Potter wanted you- he adopted you and willed you his fortune for God's sake. I want you. It doesn't matter how you were born. You're so strong and you've been so strong through everything. Please don't think this changes my opinion on you. If anything you have every right to hate me. I'm so sorry Harry."

Harry hunched his shoulders. He didn't want to react to this. He was fifteen for god's sake and had gone beatings without crying. He wouldn't cry now.

"Thank you," Harry said, and turned and fled the room. He would not cry in front of Tony. He wouldn't.

Turning around right as he left, he saw Tony with his head in his hands leaning against the cool steel table. Tony was shaking slightly.

He looked destroyed. Harry had destroyed his father. This was just another person in a long list of parental figures that Harry's existence had ruined. Lily and James Potter had died because of his existence. Jasper was old and had to face the wrath of the ministry. The Weasley's were being targeted by Death Eaters because of him. Sirius had died because of him. Now, finally, this.

Maybe Harry shouldn't have said anything.

Chapter End Notes

So this is obviously set pre-age of ultron. As I am not the biggest fan of the plot line of that movie, I am not sure that I will follow the movie to a tee, but I might mix the movie into the plot of this. Maybe. Let me know what you guys think. Give me opinions and where you want to see this go. Obviously this was more of a somber chapter, and I have a couple other plot points I wanted to include here, but it didn't feel respectful with the
subject matter. Thank you for everyone reading and following. I'm sorry I didn't get this up earlier. The Christmas season has been busy.

Thank you all!

Emm

*edited 8/17/2017 by TheForgottenPrincess
Chapter Summary

Shit gets real between Steve and Tony, Fudge is an asshole, and Ron's letter arrives.

Chapter Notes

I would like to give a huge TRIGGER WARNING. There is discussion of rape in the first scene between Tony and Steve.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Disclaimer: I obviously don't own Harry Potter or other Marvel properties.

I would also like to give a TRIGGER WARNING for rape discussion in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Steve found Tony in his lab. The pizza had arrived that had been ordered for Harry and Tony and Harry had grabbed the pizza and slinked back to his room. The boy looked guilty.

Tony hadn't been up to grab the pizza so Steve volunteered to bring it down to him. He was unprepared for the sight he came upon.

Tony was sitting on the floor under the lab tables, clutching a print out. He had been crying.

Steve walked up to him and bent down to see eye to eye with Tony. "You want to come out of there?"

Tony shook his head. "I've done fucked up Steve. I don't even know where to begin or how to fix something like this."

"What happened?" he asked, lowering himself to the ground and leaned against a drawer set.

Tony bobbed his head. "I wish I could joke about it and blow it off like everything else I've ever done in my life. But," Tony threw his head in his hands and rubbed, "this is the worst thing I have ever done and I didn't even know it."

"You know about it now right?" Steve said, "He's your child and you can protect him and care for him now."

Tony glanced up to look Steve in the eyes. He didn't know when the man had picked up on that tidbit, but he knew only a small sliver of it.

"Except that's not it," Tony said, "He's my child yes, but the situation is so much worse."

Steve cocked his head at him, but didn't say anything.
"His mother, Lily Potter, was roofied. A medication accident and it was during the years where all I did was drink and fucked. She and I slept together while she was under a cocktail of drugs. I remember Lily. She had a wedding ring. She giggled at me constantly and I had her papers. She was a brilliant woman Steve and I thought she was just acting like that around me because I was me. She wasn't drinking and I was. I should have known better Steve. I good as raped the woman."

Steve's mouth had dropped open. "Tony…" he breathed out slowly.

"Don't Tony me. What the fuck am I supposed to do? This woman was raped and I was her rapist." Tony's eyes were dark and storming.

"You didn't know Tony," Steve told him.

"And that's the law now?" Tony asked, "Sorry officer I didn't know I had to stop at stop signs that's why I blew through it."

"Tony," Steve urged, "That's not the same thing."

"Is it really Steve?" Tony turned his brown eyes on them and they were large and pleading. "I left her. After we fucked, I left her sleeping in the bed because that's what I used to do. And she must have woken up the next day, the drugs worn off, and realized that had slept with someone the night before under the influence of those drugs. That person was me; just because I didn't know doesn't excuse it."

"Tony come here," Steve said.

"What?" Tony asked. Then Steve decided it was time to go to Tony. He crawled under the desk, his body far too big for the crawl space and grabbed Tony in a hug.

"I'm sorry Tony. I'm sorry you have to live with this. You're right. That woman was violated. And it shouldn't have ever happened, but you can't blame yourself. You didn't know, and horrible and terrible as it sounds, there is nothing you can do. You were drinking that night?" Steve asked.

Tony nodded, "But I wasn't drunk. I remember everything."

"And you said that she wasn't." Steve said.

Tony shook his head, "No, she didn't touch a drink. She was adorable," Tony told Steve, "She was laughing and touching my arm. You could tell she was horny. I never liked sleeping with married women, but she was so pretty and she seemed like she was into me. It seems that must have been the drugs."

"Tony," Steve prompted, "Did you give her the drugs?"

Tony shook his head rapidly, "No, absolutely not."

"Did you force her to sleep with you?" He asked.

"No."

"Would you have slept with her if you knew she was under the influence?"

Tony knew what Steve was doing, "Of course not Steve."

"Then you are not at fault here. That woman was raped, yes, but it wasn't you. You're a victim here too Tony."
"Then why do I feel like I'm at fault?" Tony asked.

"Because you're a good person, and it kills you to think that someone was hurt because of your actions. You care so much Tony. I see it in everything you do."

Tony slumped back against cold steel. "I'm not a good person- I'm just a man trying to make up for being a bad one for so long."

"The only thing you can do is honor Lily Potter by taking care of her son."

"Harry blames himself," Tony told Steve. "And I can't let him do that."

Steve shook his head, feeling overwhelmed with the progression of the day. Tony had been frantic trying to find his son, only to find him and have that bomb dropped on him. It would take a long time for Tony and Harry to heal.

The boy was dealing with issues that most people never experienced in their life.

"Have you talked to Lily Potter?" Steve asked suddenly, realizing he didn't even know if the woman was alive.

"She's dead," Tony remarked.

Steve swallowed hard, "And her husband?"

"Dead also," Tony told him, "They both died in a car accident when Harry was almost two. He was sent to live with his aunt and uncle."

Tony handed him the sheet of paper he had been clutching so hard earlier. On it was a picture of Harry as a young child. He looked to be around seven. It looked like documentation. He was bruised all the way down his torso. His hands were both wrapped up as if they were broken. There was a searing red mark covering his shoulder.

Steve stared at the paper, not all too unfamiliar with the signs. Harry had been abused by his relatives.

"They made him cook," Tony told him. He was no longer crying just sitting hard against the back of the lab table. His eyes were half lidded and swollen from the tears. "He spilled the hot grease on himself and they called 911. This are the pictures the paramedics took. They made a notation in here to call child services. It seems it was never followed up on."

Child services was not really a thing when Steve was growing up. He had seen children abused like this die. "He's strong," Steve remarked. "He must have his father in him."

Tony scowled at him.

"You're not alone Tony," Steve smiled.

"What?"

"You're not alone in this. You have me and Clint and Natasha. Plus, Bruce has taken a liking to Harry. Those two are fast friends. We will help you Tony. I promise."

Tony closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "Thank you, Steve. I don't even know what to say. You're the best of us."
"I'm not," Steve told him.

Tony looked at him with half lidded exhausted eyes.

"I'm just a man Tony, just like you are, trying my damnedest to do the right thing. I make mistakes too. We all do."

Tony looked down, his brown hair was a mess and he probably hadn't showered that day. Steve noticed the chill in the lab and was starting to feel how uncomfortable it felt sitting on the lab floor.

"Come on Tony, let's get you to bed."

Steve could almost hear the quip Tony would have given out had it been any other time. "What," Steve said smirking at him. "No, only if you join me comment?"

"Well," Tony told him. "You did it for me."

...

"Why is Harry Potter staying in the Avenger's tower?" Fury asked Natasha.

The redhead cocked her head at Fury. "Is he someone of importance?" she asked.

Fury turned his eye on her, "More than you are legally allowed to know. What's the story?"

"Tony is claiming that the boy's parents sent him to live with him," Natasha intoned in her flat voice.

"Mr. Potter's parents are dead." Fury narrowed his eye at the picture of Harry entering the building.

Natasha said, "The boy seems to have some contention with Stark."

"Do you think Stark knows that the story is a lie?" Fury asked.

"I think so," Natasha said.

"Hmm," Fury thought on it. "There is no reason we need to do anything now. Potter isn't necessarily dangerous. He's a person of interest. Watch him."

Natasha nodded at Fury. "Do you have an assignment for me?" she asked.

"I did," Fury said. "But I'll send someone else. I would rather have your eyes in the tower now."

....

There was a circus going on in London. Minister Fudge had to move offices for the day, there were so many howlers coming in. The Prophet refused to give out the name of the writer of the article that had been published the day before.

It was a shit storm in the Ministry. Most of the light side, and even a few notable dark families, were demanding that his undersecretary be put to trial.

"You can't do this Cornelius!" she cried out.

"Dolores, the public is demanding it," he tried to reason with her.

"I'll be sent to Azkaban!" She screeched. "There are creatures there."
"You used a dark artifact on children,” he told her.

"You said to use any means possible. You're at fault for this too. You will go down with me." She proclaimed.

Fudge's eyes widened. He couldn't let her go to trial. "Aurors! Aurors!" He called out and pressed the panic button on his desk.

A couple Aurors burst into the room. He ordered, "I demand her arrest immediately! She is attacking me. Kiss her on the spot."

They carried her away and Fudge sat down to write the kiss order. There was no way that woman could go to trial. She would destroy him.

She must be dead before then. Yes, he could spin this. He could call her out for being an evil deranged woman. Say she threatened to set the court on fire and it was for public safety to have her executed.

Yes, he could spin this in his favor.

....

After crossing the entire Atlantic ocean, Pig the owl was exhausted. This was the hardest work he had ever done in his entire life and he wanted to nest somewhere and nap for a bit. He was a simple bird with simple needs.

Pig slammed into the window outside of Harry's room. The bird felt stunned for a second, recovered, and started to hover outside of the window. He slammed into it again.

"Young sir," JARVIS said. "There is a bird outside your window that seems intent to get in. It seems to be an owl."

Harry got up and saw Pig.

"Is there any chance you can let him in?" he asked JARVIS.

"Young sir," the man said, "there is a balcony on the top story if you can get the owl to go there."

Harry nodded and then looked at Pig. He pointed up and the stupid bird seemed to maybe understand. Harry started walking. He took the elevator to the top floor, JARVIS allowing him out into the balcony.

Pig dropped the letter off on top of his head.

Ron's handwriting on it shakily spelled out HARRY.

Harry opened it.

Dear Harry, it read.

_I'm sorry I didn't write to you sooner. Dumbledore is urging Hermione and I not to write to you this summer. I understand he wants to protect you from being found by Death Eaters, but I don't think even he knows where you are. Nice disappearing job mate. I just hope you're safe. I'm so sorry I haven't been the best of friends in the last couple of years._

_Harry I don't think I've never told you this, but you inspire me. You're brilliant and fanatic. You_
bring such an energy to everything you do that I wish I could have half of the talent that you have. That's okay: not all of us are Harry Potters. Some of us are Ron Weasleys. I miss you Harry. I don't have anyone here to match me in chess. Ginny keeps talking about you and I keep telling her that you are a pipe dream. Mate, you really need to dissuade that one.

Harry laughed at this. It was a huge weight off his back to hear from his friends.

I think I need to remind you that you deserve happiness. Happiness is something I take for granted. I don't think anyone in the world deserves it more than you do. I'm sorry that Sirius has passed. I know he was one of your last links to your parents. He would have wanted you to be happy more than anyone. He would have been honored to go down fighting for you. I would be honored if I went down fighting for you. Harry, try and enjoy yourself over the next couple months. Write back to me if you can.

Mum has made all your favorites and if it wasn't such a struggle for Pig to take just the letter, I would have weighed him down with food for you. Eat more!

Anyways, I'm trying to write this letter in secrecy. I have to go.

Cheers you bloody wanker,

Ron

Harry stood on the balcony laughing at Ron. Ron and him had had a rough past couple of years. Harry knew Ron resented him for his intelligence and his fame. There was little he could do about that, and it hurt him.

He knew, however, that being Ron's best friend destroyed the boy's confidence in some ways. Just by being around Ron, he was making it harder for the boy to feel as if he was special and unique in any way.

Harry knew that, but it didn't mean it hurt any less when Ron said something rude. It seemed the boy was starting to grow up.

He hadn't told Ron and Hermione about his parentage. He discovered it during the beginning of the TriWizard tournament and when he made up with his friends, he didn't feel inclined to share.

Maybe next year would be different.

He clutched the letter in his hands as he walked back down to his room.

Chapter End Notes

I tried my hardest to go about that conversation in the most delicate of ways. It is heavy stuff and talking about rape is not the easiest subject to tackle. Having sex with someone who is heavily intoxicated is rape. If Tony had known about the medicine or suspected that she was heavily under the influence of alcohol, he should never have slept with her. He did not. He thought they were both two consenting adults liable to make their own decisions.
My apologies if I made any of you uncomfortable.

On another note, there seems to be a universal hatred towards Age of Ultron (which is great because I hated that plot line... so as far as everything goes, if I do follow something along those lines it will be highly changed and probably won't even have Ultron or Vision... I like JARVIS too much.) As far as everything else, I hope you all like reading this story. It's heavy at times, but I want to try and ground it in reality.

Harry and Tony are going to grow and in many ways, they need each other to help them on their journey.

Thanks!

Emm
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Harry and Tony get into trouble.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Disclaimer: I do not own the Harry Potter or Marvel properties.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Jasper Ryes took in the scene in front of him. He had been working on backing Fudge into a corner. Part of him was disgusted by the events and part of him, another vindictive part of him, was thrilled. After Harry had mailed him what the bitch had been doing to him, Jasper had wanted to get his claws into her.

He finally had his satisfaction after he enlisted the help of Rose Jones, mother of a Hufflepuff in Harry's year named Megan Jones. The mother was a half blood who was sincerely disgusted with the Ministry and he found many people to be.

She had dated his younger brother before he had died in the war, and then three years later was married with a little girl. They kept in touch and she had written to him explaining what her daughter had came home with- the scarred hands- and Jasper has used that as an opportunity to attack with the article.

Cornelius Fudge looked like he was about to have Delores kissed, an action that would make it impossible for Jasper to destroy Umbridge on the stand. The things that would come out of her mouth would destroy the current administration and Jasper was salivating at the thought. He had already started to mount his offence against her.

"Minister, you cannot do that," Jasper burst through the crowd.

Fudge turned at looked at him. "You dare to interfere with justice; this woman attacked me and abused the children at the school. I am only doing to public a service by signing off on her execution."

That would not do at all for Jasper's plans. "Minister that would be a gross miscarriage of justice. If you kill this woman, I will bring a class action lawsuit against you and your current administration."

Fudge became red. "How dare you?"

"You have no right to kill this woman without a trial!" Jasper said forcefully and announced to the group, "You must still adhere to muggle common laws. It is in our charter. Every person in the wizarding world has a right to a trial."

Because of the numbers of people observing the conflict, Fudge could not continue with his tyraid and have the woman executed.
Jasper felt almost disappointed that he stopped Fudge from punishing the woman, but she had the right to a fair trial. And Jasper would be able to destroy her on the stand now.

He was actually on his way to the Ministry to file the proper paperwork for the class action lawsuit against her. He had talked to Susan Bones and it was likely that she would ask him to represent the Ministry in the legal suit against her in which case he would drop the civil suit.

It was all boring and he had filed his summons and complaint. She would need to lawyer up. The one good thing about the magical world was that the court system was far more streamlined than the muggle one. His goal was to have Umbridge on the stand by the end of summer. The final nail in her coffin would will be when Harry goes on the stand against her.

That boy was incredibly Slytherin and to have him speak would turn the entire magical community against her.

Thankfully the tide was beginning to turn for Harry in the papers. Jasper had one of his associate partners filing a libel suit against the paper. With the paper being part of the government and that case going to trial in less than a month, he was incredibly busy.

However, being busy was good. Fudge and his administration had no clue the devastation that there were going to face in the coming summer. As much as he wanted to destroy the Ministry, he also knew he needed to build it up.

Jasper couldn't do all of Voldemort's work. He would need to help build an administration that would withstand the Dark Lord's attack. He had a couple people in mind, Amelia Bones and Kingsley being two of them.

....

Harry wandered out to the living room around 3am. He found his father drinking a glass of water watching an old movie.

Harry turned around to leave.

"Stop, please," he heard his father's voice say.

Harry paused mid-step. He turned around to face his dad. Tony looked tired.

"Do you want to watch with me? I'm only five minutes in. We can restart it." Harry wanted to run. He wanted to turn around refuse. He wanted to close his heart to pain, but Harry knew that Tony was trying.

Tony Stark had the same hair he did the same frantic energy. As much as Harry wanted to denounce him, he was his father and he would always be his father. He even told Harry he wanted him as a son despite knowing the truth about his inception.


Harry didn't know very many. He never watched them at his Aunt and Uncles and then obviously at Hogwarts it never happened. Harry had caught the original Star Wars at one point late at night spying on Vernon and Dudley. It had seemed like something super special to Vernon as he had taken his son aside to watch it as if it was some mythical piece of cinema.

Harry remembered enjoying what little he saw of it until Uncle Vernon had caught him spying and beat him for it.
"A movie called Young Frankenstein," Tony said. The movie looked black and white and Harry assumed it must have been old.

"I've never been to a cinema," Harry admitted to his father.

Tony blinked as if he had been slapped, "You've never been to the theaters?"

Harry shook his head. Tony eye's widened as he put together the pieces. Harry knew that Tony knew he was abused. For some reason, it turned Harry's stomach and made him want to feel shame. Jasper had stomped that right out of him. Well, as much as he could.

Tony blinked hard, "We need to rectify this now. JARVIS?"

The AI replied, "Yes sir, what is the concern?"

"There is a theater three blocks away, can you get me in contact with the head manager of the place?" Tony had a determined look on face.

"Yes sir, dialing the number now."

"Who in the blazes is calling me at three in the morning?" the man on the other end of the line asked in a gruff voice.

"Hi," Tony said, "My name is Tony Stark and you might have heard of me."

"Excuse me," the man said, "Is this a prank call?"

"No prank call," Tony said, "I'm calling to offer you fifty thousand dollars to have your theater ready in a half hour to watch a movie."

The man on the other line sputtered. "Prove it."

"JARVIS hack into this man's phone and have the words THIS IS TONY STARK in flaming letters."

The man on the other line looked down at his phone and said, "Holy fuck, uh, oh, sorry sir."

Tony laughed. "By all means curse. The offer stands though. Fifty thousand dollars to have the theater ready."

Harry could hear the man licking his lips on the other side of the line. "What movie?"

"Do you have a preference?" Tony asked his son.

Harry swallowed. He couldn't believe Tony was doing this out of the blue. "Star Wars. I've always wanted to watch them."

"Have you seen a New Hope?" he asked.

Harry shook his head. He wanted to know how the money ended. Tony grinned at him. He told the man on the other end of the line. "Can you have a New Hope ready for us?"

The man on the other line said, "Yes I can do that."

"Thank you," Tony said and then hung up with the man.
Harry looked at Tony almost in tears. He couldn't believe it. "Thank you," he said.

"Don't thank me yet," Tony smiled, "Who knows, you might not like the movie!"

But Harry knew that Tony knew why he was thanking him. "Go get changed," Tony told him.

Harry walked back to his room almost stunned. He slipped on a pair of jeans, a white t-shirt, and a light jacket. He had never had anyone in his life do what Tony had just done for him.

Tony was standing outside of his room. He had on some sort of band t-shirt. Some Aerosmith album cover.

Tony smiled at Harry. "You ready?" he asked. "To have your mind blown?"

Harry grinned. "You're that confident."

"Kid, if you've never seen something on the big screen, you're going to be amazed. We can have popcorn and the room all to ourselves. It'll be a lot of fun."

Tony smiled, "Well, if it doesn't live up to the hype…"

"This movie will for sure. This came out when I was twelve. I cannot tell you how amazing it was the first time I saw it. I was finishing up high school and a man named Jarvis, who was essentially my nanny, took me to see the movie. He died a couple of months later."

Harry could tell the memory was painful for his father. It seems they both have had people die.

"My godfather died last week," Harry admitted. He tried, oh he tried, not to think about it. Harry buried himself in his work.

Tony's face dropped, "I'm so sorry." He looked like he wanted to ask why he didn't take care of Harry.

"He was in prison for a crime he didn't commit. They finally acquitted him-" he escaped Azkaban "- but the government declared him unfit to be a guardian." Harry half lied about Sirius. Harry didn't want to defame his name. " I didn't know him very well, but I considered him my hope."

"I'm sorry son. If you want to talk about it, I'm here. I know all about loss," Tony said. They had finally gotten out to street level and NYC was still busy and bustling. Tony nodded to the street. "Do you want to try and catch a cab?"

Harry was really glad Tony didn't push. "Sure," he said. Harry stepped to the side of the street and waved his arm and called, "Taxi!"

Harry missed Tony behind him snickering at him.

They waved down and taxi, and drove to the theaters. Not, of course, before the driver had a mini panic attack about driving around the great Tony Stark.

Well they got out, Harry laughed at him and asked, "Does that always happen?"

"Too often," Tony said, "It gets annoying after awhile, but you just have to roll with it. That's the price for being famous."

Harry could relate to that all too well.
There was an usher at the door who greeted them in a manner as if he was instructed to act normal. He was tense and trying, and failing, to hide his excitement.

The general manager, whom Harry assumed they spoke to on the phone was inside. He started speaking, "We have popcorn for you, and do you want drinks? Candy?"

"Harry?" Tony asked.

The theater manager turned to the boy as if he hadn't even registered he was there. Harry turned to the concession counter. His father was paying fifty thousand dollars for this. He might as well make the most of it.

"Can I have a coke icee and reces?" Harry asked his father.

His father turned to the general manager, and the employees behind the counter scrambled. A girl in her early twenties handed Harry what he asked for. The icee was huge.

Harry grinned.

"We put you in our biggest theater," the man said. It is the first door to the right down the hall."

With their popcorn and candy, Harry and Tony walked to the theater. It was huge, far bigger than Harry had scene on most TV shows and commercials that showed the inside of a theater. The seats were done up in red velvet and it looked very comfortable. Harry followed his father up the stairs as Tony picked out seats for them dead smack in the middle and put his feet up on the chair in front of him.

Harry followed suit.

"You ready for your mind to be blown?" Tony asked.

Harry whispered back, "My mind is already blown." And it was, this had already been one of the best mornings he ever had and it wasn't even 4AM yet.

The white scroll started across the screen, and Tony started narrating it in a funny voice. Harry grinned at him.

The sound of the music resonated across his entire body and he felt immersed in the sound.

They sat in the dark theater at the early hour watching the movie play and he felt peace inside of him. Harry saw a little bit of himself in Luke and his plight against the dark side. The force almost seemed like magic. Harry suggested that to his father.

Tony replied, "Magic is just an advanced form of science."

Harry imagined after the battle of New York no one could deny that magic and aliens existed.

"How do you think the force works?" he asked, curious of Tony's opinion.

"Well, the second trilogy tried to explain it away as midochlorian which were explained as microorganisms, but that didn't personally jive well with me." Tony and Harry focused back on the movie. The visuals were a lot of fun and he really felt like he was flying through space.

The credits on the movie started to roll and Harry was grinning from ear to ear.

"Do you want to go get breakfast?" Tony asked. It was barely six in the morning.
Harry nodded and just when they were about to leave the theater, Harry heard loud popping in the lobby of the theater. It sounded like small explosions and Harry's body tensed.

Tony opened his mouth and gave a resounding, "Fuck."

He turned to Harry and ordered him, "I want you to go hide behind that half wall over there. I'm not going to let anyone hurt you."

Harry froze. Half of him wanted to spring into action like he knew how. His wand was hidden up his pant leg in a holster and he itched to take it out. If it came down to it, he would use it.

He also knew, however, that if he did use it, it could get him in major trouble with the American MACUSA.

He didn't even register coming to America which was highly illegal. Although his father is an American citizen. He wondered if that gave him dual citizenship.

"Harry! Go," his father barked.

Harry for once in his life, did what he was told. He ran up the stairs and hid behind a half wall.

Six men burst into the theater. Harry wasn't watching it but he could feel the ambient magic produced by just being alive. None of them were wizards.

One shouted, "Give up and we don't kill you."

Tony replied, "Yeah, I don't think so," and flipped over the side of the theater.

Harry realized Tony was trying to draw the men away from him. He felt a surge of something in his body. He couldn't let the men kill his father, especially when he was protecting him like that.

Harry sprung into action. His dad was on the other side of a gun and he wouldn't have that.

"Hey you bloody wankers, over here," he said. The entire group of men started and looked at him, and Tony used the opportunity to knock on in the head and grab his gun.

That man fell like a brick. The other looked at each other, three went after Tony and two went after him. They were obviously not trying to kill his father as they had not shot their gun, but Harry realized that they probably didn't have the same issue with him.

His assumption was confirmed when one of the men fired at him and Harry dove to the right. He put up a shield over his body wandlessly. The two circled up the stairs, trying to trap him.

Harry heard a gunshot go off and he sucked in a breath. He opened his mind to the magical signatures around him and felt grateful that his father had dropped one of the men. That man wasn't dead, but if medical professionals didn't get to him soon, he would be. Tony was in a hand to hand fight with the two other men.

Harry realized that this was a kidnap job. Much like how Voldemort didn't want his minions to kill Harry, whoever was orchestrating this, didn't want to kill Tony.

Harry send out a wave of power at the man coming up to his right, tripping him down the stairs. He couldn't do anything outwardly too magical.

The other one paused and spoke, "Who are you boy? We have no issues with killing you. How about you make it easy on yourself and just stand up?"
Harry thought not. Realizing he had no other option, he forced the magic through his body and felt his insides twist. He apparated to the location right behind the man.

Harry realized he would have to use his magic if he wanted to survive.

The man turned wildly his eyes wide, and his gun going off in a random direction. Before he could totally turn to Harry another gun went off and the man feel backwards from the shock of being him.

His father stood at the bottom of the stairs with the gun in his hand. Four men lay on the floor behind.

"Harry, are you okay?" he asked running up the stairs to him.

"Yeah, I'm fine," he could barely believe it. Tony had killed a man for him. He didn't blame his father; he was familiar with killing ever since he killed Quirrel at age 11, but he was the first person to ever step up during a fight and actually help. Every other altercation he had ever been in it had been up to him to save himself.

"I think they were trying to kidnap me. I had JARVIS call 911. We better get out of here before some of them wake up," Harry nodded at his father.

"Thank you," he said.

A dark frown marred his father's face. "Don't thank me. This was my fault. We should never have left without my gear."

Harry shook his head, "You saved my life."

"I put it in danger," Tony argued.

"No," Harry said, feeling the intense role reversal. "I choose to go with you. I know who you are and the risks. You saved my life."

Tony gave him calculating look, "But you were about to save yourself weren't you."

Harry froze. He wasn't sure if telling him was legal or even if he wanted to at this point. Harry no longer feared trusting Tony, for he had just killed someone for Harry. Harry feared that he wouldn't be accepted.

Tony blinked at him and then said honestly. "I've never been so afraid for someone else in my life. Harry you can tell me about it when you trust me."

He grabbed Harry in a hug. Harry tensed. Tony tensed. He could tell the action was unusual for both of them.

"I trust you..." he paused. "...Dad. I will tell you soon, I promise."

The complete look of joy and amazement on Tony's face said everything. Harry had made the right decision. Tony hadn't raised him and he didn't have the best track record in the past, but Harry was here now and they were both trying.

....

On the other side of the world, Albus Dumbledore had invaded Jasper's house.

"Mr. Dumbledore, I must ask you what has compelled you to invade my wife and I's dinner?"
His wife Rachel stood in the background, her eyes storming. She hated Albus more than he did and that's saying something. Albus glanced her way and Jasper smirked as he felt the discomfort in the elderly gentleman.

"Mr. Ryes, where is Harry? I have allowed-"

Jasper cut the professor off. "Allowed? You allowed this now? I was not aware that the location of a student during their summer was the headmaster's business."

Albus sighed and he suddenly looked all of his hundred plus years old.

"Can I sit down?" he asked.

Rachel looked ready to explode on the man which would have been an amazing display, but it would get them nowhere.

"Fine," Jasper said.

Rachel looked at him, "I'll get an extra plate." She got up to grab some more food for Albus. Jasper said nothing while waiting for her for she had as much stake in Harry's well being as he did.

Rachel returned and Jasper would not have been surprised to learn she spit in the man's food. Albus seemed to have come to the same conclusion because he eyed it duplicitously before taking a bit.

Albus sighed and started speaking, "I stepped back and allowed you to take Harry in because I was not aware of the level of abuse his relatives were putting him through. As I knew, they showed preference towards their own son, but Harry was still taken care of. I was extremely mistaken and for that I will probably never have nor deserve Harry's forgiveness. That being said, I still want him protected."

Rachel leveled with him, "We want him more protected than you. You want a weapon protected, a tool against Voldemort and the system. We see a little boy who is fifteen years old who has had the world taken from under him time and time again. You would sacrifice him if it came down to it. You're the adult! Do something."

Albus looked ashamed, "I am trying to. I'm looking for Harry to have him fight. I'm looking for him to protect him."

Rachel gave him a flat look, "He is plenty protected where he is."

"Can you work with me here please," Albus asked.

"Jasper and I are making steps to clean up this world and we have no political power. You have been the head of Wizengamot for Merlin knows how long and have done very little to better this world. You let a mad woman torture children for most of the school year."

"I'm sorry. This was a mistake coming here," Albus said. "Thank you for your hospitality."

Rachel looked at him. "Harry doesn't hate you. He wanted your approval all of last year and you
denied that from him, like most other adults in his life. I only want what's best for him."

Albus and her held gazes. Albus told her, "So do I."

Rachel said, "Then start acting like it."

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys! Sorry this took so long to get up. I've been so busy from the holidays! To make it up to you guys, this chapter is about double the size of most.

Thank you for reading!
Emm
Harry eyes fell shut the second his head hit the pillow. He was far too used to life and death situations for his own good. He wasn't even feeling nervous or wired, simply just exhausted. His bed felt perfectly soft and comfortable under his body. He wanted to sink into it and stay there for a very long amount of time.

It seemed, however, that he wouldn't be getting any sleep. There was a knock on his door. Harry groaned. The person knocked again.

Finally Harry relented. "Come in."

The person knocking was his father. Harry stumbled to his feet when the door opened. Tony raised his eyes at his t-shirt that said *Weird Sisters* and had the image of the three witches rocking out in wizards hats and cloaks. Harry was far from a fan himself, but it had been a gag gift from the Weasley twins.

"Nice shirt," his father commented.

"It's an inside joke," he explained, and it was.

"Can I sit down?" Tony asked.

Harry shrugged and fell back on his bed. His father sat beside him, fidgeted, started to say something, then stopped.

Harry, who had far too little sleep to deal with that shit said, "Just bloody say what you want to say."

Tony sighed and admitted, "Someone took and posted a picture of you and I together. There is some speculation about it. We need to talk over options."

Harry shot up in the bed and turned to his father. "Am I visible in the picture?"

Tony flinched. "Yeah. So far you haven't been identified, but it's only a matter of time."

"Fuck. This is not good."

Tony swallowed and then looked resolved. "We don't have to say anything about our relationship. We can claim the same story you told the team."
"No, you don't understand," Harry said. "This is really not good."

"I'm sorry Harry. I know you didn't want it to get out," Tony started. "As I said, we have options."


Tony blinked and looked at him. Harry continued, "When did the photo go viral?"

"This morning. It's everywhere right now."

"Is it common knowledge that you live here?" Harry was suddenly wide awake and his mind worked overboard. They couldn't stay here.

"It's listed as my place of residence, yes." Tony's intently stared at him, his blue eyes boring holes into his head. Tony seemed to realize that something was off.

Harry frowned. He didn't know how much Tony had rigged the place against magical attacks. He didn't know if the Death Eaters would be able to get in the tower. One couldn't apparate to a place they hadn't already been. But they could certainly try and break into the tower.

Harry knew the magical world was pretty disconnected to Muggle news, but that didn't mean it wouldn't spread. In fact, Harry wouldn't be surprised if Dumbledore and the Ministry knew where he was by the end of the day.

Harry was fucked.

Harry knew he couldn't wait on it. "We have to leave."

Tony cocked his head and then asked, "Why?"

"I may have people after me," Harry admitted.

"What sort of people?" Tony stared at Harry as if he was trying to figure him out.

Harry looked him dead in the eyes. "Bad people. I have some very bad people after me who could harm everyone in this building."

"Harry, we literally fought off a god less than a year ago. I promise you, we can protect you."

Harry slowly shook his head. "Not from this. Not from them. I don't like running, but I'm not going to put another person," Harry cleared his throat, "I love in danger."

Tony's eyes softened. "I thought you went to drama school."

"I lied," Harry admitted. "But we really have to go."

"Harry, I think whatever-" Tony looked so intent on his argument, but JARVIS interrupted their argument.

"Sir, Director Fury has showed and demanded a meeting with the entire team. He called it urgent."

Tony turned to Harry and said, "We will finish this conversation as soon as the meeting is over. Don't move, and if you feel threatened, tell JARVIS immediately."

Harry tensed up. That wasn't a good idea. Every second they stayed in the tower without warding it, they were in more danger.
JARVIS, however, spoke again. "Sir, Director Fury is requesting that Harry attend the meeting."

Tony narrowed his eyes as if suspicious of why this man- so called Fury- wanted his presence in an Avengers meeting. Harry was suspicious also, but for completely different reasons.

Tony frowned, "Do you think this has to do with what we were just talking about?"

Harry shrugged. There was no way for him to know, and he wouldn't be divulging anything without people knowing it first.

Tony rubbed his forehead. Harry noticed for the first time how tired Tony looked. They had woken up in the middle of the night, went and watched a movie, then proceeded to get into a fight for their lives. And it wasn't even 7 AM.

It must have been an incredibly stressful three days since Harry had gotten there for the self styled genius-philanthropist-billionaire-playboy. Harry had yet to see the playboy aspect of his personality, but he imagined it was there.

Tony, however, just looked tired. Harry understood that feeling.

"Let's see what this Furry wants," Harry told his father.

Tony blinked then grinned. "Did you just say furry. Like in a furry animal."

"Isn't that what JARVIS said?" Harry asked. He knew it wasn't, but this man was already highly inconvenient for him.

Tony laughed aloud. "You know, son, you need to tell him that." Then Tony said in a stage whisper, "Imagine calling Fury a furry kitty or something. Fuck calling him a pirate."

Harry's eyebrows came together with that comment. Did the man like to dress up in renaissance clothing or something?

"Well, I've never meet him, so I can't tell you how he would react."

Tony grinned. "You will soon enough. Let's figure out what Popeye wants."

....

Fifteen minutes later, Harry sat at a steel table next to his father and in the presence of the rest of the Avengers.

Fury, it seemed, was an older African-American man with one eye covered by an eye patch and dressed all in black. He had at least two concealed weapons on him. Harry wondered how the lack of depth perception affected his shot.

Harry had gotten to nerve to ask non-Moody that last year and the man had replied, "magic." At the time, Harry had thought fair enough, but looking back on it non-Moody probably didn't know. He would have to get the nerve up to ask the real man.

Everyone sat in varying degrees of silence. Steve in rapt attention, shoulders drawn back, eyes sharp. Natasha had a controlled laziness about her, as if she was only faking being casually relaxed. Bruce was hunched over some scientific report. Harry couldn't see from here what it was about.

Tony was staring daggers into Fury, as if to say how dare you include my son in this.
Harry himself sat back in his chair, blank, observing. He felt uninformed, even more so than when Sirius had invited him to live with him for two weeks the summer before. They had been stuffed into Sirius old ancestral home in the middle of London.

Every time meetings occurred over the subject of the coming war, they didn't feel the need to include Harry.

Harry had blown up four days into the stay, stormed out, and went back to living with Jasper and Rachel. Rachel took him back into her house with no questions asked, making him a full dinner, and then shutting off the floo network into the house.

If Lily Potter was alive, Harry hoped she was something like Rachel.

Harry did not want to be the first one to break the silence, but there was a ticking clock in the back of his head. Time was getting closer and closer to when Death Eaters decided to attack the tower.

International portkeys were hard to make, but Harry wouldn't put it past Voldemort. That being said, he doubted Voldemort would want to incur the wrath of the American MACUSA who had stayed neutral in the first war. That being said, maybe Voldemort wouldn't tip his hand this early in the game. He had been smart and played it low. Harry's only hope was that he wouldn't break his silence in a ditch effort to get harry.

So maybe it was Dumbledore he should be worried about; barging in and demanding that he return to Britain. Or maybe it was Fudge he should worry about, coming in and demanding he give up his assets to the government.

Harry had a lot of people looking for him and his image had just been plastered across every major muggle news website on earth.

Clint burst into the room. He seemed to be sweaty and his clothes were rumpled. "Sorry, I was-"

Every eye in the room turned to him. Clint shut up. "You know what, you don't care."

"Not really bird brain."

Clint shrugged at Tony. He slumped down into the chair dramatically. He blew out a hot breath. Harry's blank expression almost twitched with a smile. Almost.

"Now that everyone is here, I think we need to address the elephant in the room." Everyone turned towards Harry. Well, thank you very much.

Harry, on the other hand, was staring Fury straight in the eyes. Tony glanced back and forth between the two.

"I ask you, how does a child who is the sole heir to two of the greatest fortunes in Britain and wanted dead by more people than Natasha end up in Avengers tower? I ask you, what is your relation to Tony Stark?" Fury asked him.

Harry felt his hands tighten into a ball.

"I don't know how any of this is your business," Harry told him blandly.

"You are an international target and person of interest and he is billionaire superhero. I want to know if you showing up here has ulterior motives." Fury looked at him with such fierceness
"I didn't want to be here in the first place," Harry muttered. "Tell me who the bloody fuck you are and maybe I'll think about getting you some answers. No promises though."

Tony was looking at him as if he was reevaluating him. Harry felt himself internally tense. He didn't want Tony to think he had ulterior motives for being dropped in his lap for the summer.

Everyone else in the room was gaping at him. No one dared to talk to Fury like that except for Tony.

"I am the director of an international spy organization called SHIELD. You have been a person of interest since October of 2001. As an organization, we made the logical leap that it was most likely Lily Potter who had a hand in the mad-man's fall, however due to recent events, we have elevated your status higher as a POI."

Half of Harry wanted to say, *finally someone who wasn't a fucking idiot and gave his mother the credit she deserved.* It was not the time or place for that.

Harry opened his mouth to ask why he should trust Fury, but then closed it. Around the table were some of the most dangerous muggles on the planet and in some capacity, they answered to Fury. He might not trust the man, but they did to some extent.

He was also very clearly informed of his situation.

"Then you should be very aware of how dangerous it is to stay in the tower."

"Mr. Potter, we will address that once you address the question." Fury leveled at him with a amazingly potent stare for a man with one eye. Harry was getting a Dumbledore vibe. Hopefully the man was not as much of a meddling goat. Although, he probably was.

"He's my father," Harry told the man simply.

Harry subtly glanced over to the rest of the Avengers. Steve had no reaction; his father must have told him. Bruce looked at him with some sort of enlightenment in his eyes. The spy duo had no reaction.

Fury on the other closed his eye and gritted his teeth. He opened his eye and snapped at Harry. "Are you fucking kidding me?"

Harry shook his head, "No. Lily Potter and Tony Stark had sex sixteen years ago which resulted in me. It's just my luck that my biological father is an international recognized superhero."

Fury snapped at Tony. "Stark, how the hell do you get yourself in these situations?"

Tony spoke slowly, "I would like to know what this situation even is."

Fury looked at Harry as if he expected an explanation. Harry shook his head. "I'm governed by laws that threaten prison time if I were to explain. This one is on your head."

Fury's frown etched deep on his face. "What I about to tell you is highly classified and if you act upon some of this knowledge, people of certain powers will come at you with the expectation to remove all memories of even knowing this information- barring you Tony. You have legal rights in regard to being Harry's father."

Out of the corner of his eye, Harry saw Natasha sit back in her seat as if she was aware of the gravity of what was about to be told. Steve on the other hand leaned forward into the table.
"Thirty years ago, a very small high clearance section of S.H.I.E.L.D became aware of information that there are secret populations of magic users around the world. We estimate that their numbers are in the millions. Tony, your son is one of these magic-users."

Harry glanced down at his lap. He hoped his father wouldn't react badly.

Harry could feel Tony's eyes on his head. Harry finally looked up. Their eyes meet; Tony's bright crystalline blue ones staring into his soul.

"Is it true?" he asked.

Harry cleared his throat, "Yes. I can do magic. I'm sorry."

Tony blinked, "About what? This is brilliant. Can you turn me into a bunny and pull me out of a hat?"

Harry smiled as something so warm settled over him. Acceptance. Tony was not going to leave or hate him. Some part of him had worried that his father would find him unnatural.

"I could," Harry grinned shyly, feeling embarrassed, "but you won't remember any of it. With forced animal transformation, the human doesn't really keep their human thinking process."

"As cute as this Stark family moment is, we haven't gotten to the crux of the matter. Harry here was targeted by fundamentalist terrorists when he was a child and somehow managed to 'vanquish' their leader at age one. However, that same magical terrorist leader self-styled with the name of Lord Voldemort-

Harry interrupted him. "Tom Riddle. Don't satisfy that bastard by calling him anything but his real name that he hates."

Fury gave him a look that promised that he would be subjected to brain picking at a later date. It seemed S.H.I.E.L.D knew less than they thought they did.

"Tom Riddle has been resurrected and his group is targeting Harry as revenge. They have not officially returned, but our sources undoubtedly affirm he is alive."

Harry spoke, "Tom Riddle is a worry, yes. But I am currently wanted by the Ministry and Dumbledore and his flunkies. They very well too could walk through the doors."

Fury gave him look as if to ask him why Harry caused him such problems.

"Who are these people?" Tony asked thinly, "And where can I murder Tom Riddle."

"The Ministry is the British magical government that is filled with corrupt officials. As Fury mentioned earlier, my adopted father James Potter and my dead godfather both left me as the sole heir to their fortunes, but even more so, their seats in the House of Lords. I have enough that I can drastically change the balance of the parliamentary system. They want try and declare me insane to get my rights revoked to my seats and by proxy fortune. And Dumbledore is a meddling bastard who placed me in an abusive household 'for my own good.'"

Harry made air quotes around the phrase. Tony's eyes flashed in anger.

Harry also felt bad for both of those men when Tony got a hold of them. He imagined that his father didn't once hold the title of merchant of death title because he smothered people with kind words. A small vindictive part of him hoped to see that moment.
Okay, a large part of him. Harry never claimed to be the type of person who let bygones be bygones.

Steve was the first person to break the silence after the revelation. "So these people will come and try and take Harry away."

"Over my dead body," Tony growled.

Brucecocked his head, "I think I might get a little angry over that too." He shared a secret smile with Harry. Harry had no idea what the man could do- he really should have done some research before he moved into the tower- but Harry fully believed that Bruce was one dangerous man. Harry smiled at him.

Tony addressed Harry, "So this is why you thought we had to leave. I think we can handle a couple of wizards."

Harry breathed deeply, "I hope so. The American magical government is probably going to be knocking on our door too."

Clint's voice cut through the room, "How famous are you exactly?"

Harry cringed, "Far too famous."

Fury elaborated. "He's the Tony Stark of the magical world. He's been their hero. He's been insane. Harry's every move is printed around the world and gossiped about."

"It's bloody fucking annoying is what it is. I went from not being wanted at all to being wanted for something I couldn't control." Harry frowned. "I never quite understood their obsession with me."

"The ultimate question is, can you ward the tower?" Fury asked.

Harry looked at Fury critically. The man seemed to expect this ability from him. He didn't know if Fury was under informed of how much power and knowledge one would need to have to be able to perform that task or if he really expected Harry could do it.

Harry decided he'd ask. "Are you aware that you would need someone with at least a Mastery in Warding and probably one in Runes. I know it's common knowledge that I'm intelligent, but you're asking me to ward a 93 story building that is full of muggle technology. I can guarantee there are less than five people in the entire world that could even attempt to pull that off."

"And," Harry said, his voice incredibly snarky. "And you would have to write a warding system that allows anyone who works here or is even just a fucking tourist into the building."

Fury smiled at him. "You can do it though."

"Why would I?" Harry did not make it common knowledge at all how far ahead he was in his studies. It bothered him deeply that Fury has any knowledge of this.

Fury spoke in a clipped tone. "Evan White, supposed reclusive magical theorist with a PO box in Germany. He also goes by the name of Harry Potter."

Harry's eyes flashed furious. "Where did you get this information? And who else knows?"

"We were going to solicit you for warding systems that could move with flying aircrafts. We tracked you down and realized that having you come to us to see what we wanted would be rather difficult seeing as you were barely fourteen at the time. Three people know. Coulson, me, and the person that
worked on the case. They are under wizard and under a binding contract."

Harry exhaled heavily out his nose. That wasn't too bad. Quite manageable in fact, but he disliked anyone knowing about his academic papers. When he was thirteen, he tried to get something published in Modern Magic Monthly which was the premiere international journal for magical theory. Harry had send it in under the pen name of Even White. He continued to use the name in the coming years.

Harry was not aware that anyone knew about it. He liked having one small thing that was just his own.

Harry closed his eyes. He wasn't lying when he said that it would be almost impossible to ward the entire Avengers tower. He had very little practical experience when it came to warding. The summer before he had spent some time in the country with Jasper experimenting different warding systems on a number of different houses and locations.

The summer consisted of Rachel, Jasper, and time relaxing in the country reading books, listening to soft music over home cooked dinners - ones that Harry and Rachel worked on since Jasper couldn't cook worth a damn- and practicing as much magic as he could desire under his hidden ward system he had set up. It had been the best summer of his life.

But could he manage this?

Harry looked up at Fury. "I can do this, but I'm going to need reinforcements and some extra time."

Harry had thoughts on his mind. He would reach out to the person who designed the Coney Island warding system and a shinny time turner he had filched from the Department of Ministries only two weeks before.

Harry felt his mind spinning and energy amping inside of him. He might have wanted to fall back asleep that morning, but now he was too energized.

He had been presented a problem and his mind and magic was itching to solve it.

....

On the other side of the world a certain Dark Lord sat behind a mahogany desk. His followers were positioned around him. Lucius sat in the chair opposite to him. Severus Snape stood in the shadows of the back room trying to look as innocuous as possible.

That man was betraying him. Not to Dumbledore. No, Severus Snape was loyal to Harry Potter. Tom Marvolo Riddle knew this. He could feel the man's magic warped into an unbreakable vow to protect the child. Severus Snape had divided loyalties with his deliciously dark magic but pesky vow; despite his betrayal, he wasn't useless. Tom Riddle would not get rid of him yet.

Tom Riddle might be insane, but he was far from stupid. If anything, the man was patient. He was almost 91 years old, yes, but he had the rest of eternity to fulfill his plans. He had achieved immortality. Not by the Horcrux route. No, that would have led to his insanity.

He had other methods.

Harry Potter was shaping into a worthy opponent, although he did not appreciate him running off to muggles to save him. He thought the boy was more like him than that. He had received so much violence at the hands of muggles, it was a miracle the boy himself didn't break and go on his own hunting spree.
It would be amusing to see what the boy would come up with. Tom Riddle had grounded himself at
times, when he was a spirit, in his connection with Harry Potter. The boy had ruthless thoughts.

But although he had wanted to get the boy under his control, it seemed he had made a counter move.
The child could not be touched while he resided in America.

No, Tom Riddle would wait and allow it to play out. He still had the upper hand. No one knew he
was alive.

A pleasant smile erupted on Tom Riddle's young face. The man barely looked thirty and power
clung to his figure. He would be almost normal looking if it wasn't for the bright red eyes that peeked
out behind his colored lashes. He was sinfully beautifully and he used it in every way he knew how.

A figure groaned from the floor of the study. Peter Pettigrew was strung out on the floor passed out
from overexposure to the cruciatus curse. Harry particularly hated the man and that tended to colour
his view of the rat.

It wasn't his fault that Harry Potter and he was distinctly intertwined. It would be a bitter-sweet
experience to finally kill the boy. He would be worthy of being killed, the only one in fact worthy of
being killed by Voldemort's hand.

Tom Riddle smiled grew. Severus Snape crouched back into the corner, as if not moving from the
shadows would him to forget about Severus. His potion's master was uncomfortable with his glee.

Lucius head was still bowed in silence. He had not excused either of them.

"Severus, I want the medical potions reserve fully stocked by Monday. You may be dismissed."
Whoeveer said that Tom Riddle didn't have any mercy? The man walked out with his black robes
billowing behind him the second that word dismissed left his mouth.

"Now Lucius," Tom Riddle grinned. "I have some plans."

He spoke of what he desired the man to do. Lucius left thirty minutes later with clear instructions.

The rat twitched on the floor again. Tom Riddle crouched down next to him. His face was slightly
blue and his eyes glazed over. Peter looked up at him weakly.

Peter gasped. "What did I do my Lord?"

Tom said jovially, "Nothing my dear servant. Nothing at all."

He caressed the man's cheek. Peter flinched violently and shook at his touch. Peter was a disgusting
creature. The man had been useful to him when no one else was there, but now, Peter was a liability
in his ranks.

He told his faithful servant. "You see Peter, this is nothing personal. I am excited for my plans, and
when I'm excited, I need to release that energy. You're a loyal servant, aren't you?"

Peter nodded as frantically as he could for his state.

"Good, that's a honorable way to die. Scream as loud as you want. I owe you that much." The Dark
Lord pulled Peter to his feet as the man cowered in front of him sobbing. He was the biggest coward
he had ever encountered.

Tom licked his teeth feeling their sharp edges cut into his soft flesh. The metallic taste of blood
entered his mouth. With a bloody smile he allowed his magic to saturate his body. He had a toy to use for the next hour or two.

Until he had other duties to attend to.

Tom Riddle was reasonable. He couldn't run an army if spent his entire time torturing people. He had responsibilities.

But indulging himself every once in awhile felt good too.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will have Harry and Tony bonding over some science!

I have to do some changing of canon here. Harry was attacked in reality of October of 1981, but since I'm going to transition the story to a modern timeline, this of course changes. That means, Harry was attacked October of 2001 and born in July of 2000. This timeline put the story occurring in the real world in last summer. So just so everyone is aware of global context… as much as one can be when dealing with superheros.

So as far as world wizarding population. It is established that Hogwarts has 600 students, and with the population of 11-17 year olds in Britain being 10% (which I'm going to lower to 7.5% because of the established wizards-live-longer rule - Dumbledore's birth date in this will be placed at the date of 1902 making him currently 115 - ) means that there are around 8000 wizards in magical Britain. British population equates to about .8012% of world population. After some fancy math, there should be around 998,439,938 wizards in the world. I'm going to round that to a million… which was the number I was going to guess before I went through all the math. Anyone who wants to use these figures can :)

Also, on a side note/rant, how the fuck does Hogwart manage that many students with that few amount of teachers? According to Pottermore, teachers teach two to three classes a week with the class equating to about three hours. Let's say they have class one day a week and then there are two classes per grade level at the very least. That means, the teachers have to teach at the very least 14 classes a week. That means that the teachers have 42 hours of teaching time. That's all fine and dandy. A little much, but teachers are overworked anyways. But that's not the point. The point is that JK Rowling claimed that there are 600 students at Hogwarts (which she lowered from 100). That means that the teachers have to grade and assign homework and essays to 600 students. They have to prep for fourteen different classes with seven different levels of learning. They have to have the textbooks read and tests to make. Sure, high school teachers do that, but they tend to only have thirty hours of teaching and the rest to prep for classes that are almost the exact same class.

Plus, If we say that Hogwarts has 600 students like she claimed, then that means that 85/86 students in a year and classes would be around 42/43. Those are huge classes. And we can't say that it's done college style without busy work homework because the characters are always going their homework in the books. It just doesn't make sense one
The point of this long ramble is that I'm intending to send Harry back to Hogwarts after summer and I can continue to write without a stitch of sense about the way the school is run or I can create headcannons such as guest lecturers, teaching apprenticeships which take over some of the younger year classes on one day a week and they grade for the Professor. Or, because I'm honestly worked up about this, we can have Dumbledore getting some sense knocked into him and have him hire on more teachers.

On a side note, Pottermore has Harry starting school at ten in the morning and then getting out by three most days.... book!Harry, why did you ever complain about school. You go to school for four hours a day in a magic school. (Mind you, I go to school for nine hours a week in college and I complain too...)

Please review and tell me your thoughts!

Emm
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

In which there is a lot of magical theory discussed... and Tony and Harry nerd out. Because they are both nerds at heart.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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CHAPTER TEN

"So... magic?" Tony asked, falsely causal. "Have to admit, not quite what I thought you were hiding."

Harry glanced up from his work. His father had two cups of coffee on a tray with a little cream container and a sugar bowl. The cups were far larger than one should consume, but Harry didn't care.

He needed coffee. He had gotten into the habit of drinking it when he was younger, and he was running on less than ten hours of sleep in over seventy-two hours. Harry was sure that if he didn't have a mission then he would collapse.

"Oh coffee. You are my new favorite person," Harry said as he put his notes down.

He was working with a runes sequence that he had built for a mansion sized building. The problem was, Harry wasn't working with something that spanned a large distance, but rather went up a thousand feet into the air. Not to mention the muggle technology, mass amounts of people coming in and out of the building, and his lack of general knowledge of what was even in the building.

Harry would need to have JARVIS pull up the schematics, and would probably have to tweak the spell to only keep people out with a desire to hurt them in particular rather than a blanket ward that kept danger out, or a key in ward that only allowed certain people. Neither of those would be functional in this sort of situation.

"If I would have known it was this easy, I would have made you so much coffee you wouldn't stop buzzing." His father joked, but Harry could see sincerity in his eyes. He was trying, Harry knew that much.

"I think consuming that much coffee is bad for one's health," Harry said.

"We all have to die sometime, right? A coffee induced buzz is one of the best ways to go. Cream, sugar, both? Neither?" Tony rapid fire asked.

"Cream and sugar please," Harry said as his father fixed up the coffee.
"So…" Tony drug out, as Harry returned intently to his runic equations. "What are you working on? Fury called it a *ward*, right?"

Harry didn't quite know where to even start explaining. "Yeah, I'm working on a ward. It's kind of like a magical security system. You essentially program a barrier around a certain volume of space so that if input A happens, you get output B. If, per say, I program the ward to knock out anyone who crosses with ill intent, and that person tries to cross, they get knocked out."

"You're essentially coding a computer program." Tony said.

Harry nodded. "It's almost exactly like a computer program, but rather with runes instead of programming language. The runes all have certain properties, and can only be combined in certain ways. Different runes interact with each other in a different fashion. Some cancel each other out, some amplify, and certain combinations can create a magical collapse which would be disastrous, especially if there are people inside of the building you are trying to ward."

"Are runes main function warding?" Tony asked, the look in his eyes fascinated, as if he had discovered a whole new *scientific branch*.

"Not at all," Harry grinned.

He grabbed a blank piece of paper, and drew the Futhoric, or Anglo-Saxon, rune for fire. It was a straight line | with a low v shape extending inwards on each end, with the end of the v connecting to the top of the line. The top one protruded to the right and the bottom one to the left. The pointed part was centered inwards.

He took out his wand from his ankle holster, and moved as if to tap the rune.

"Wait," Tony exclaimed. "Is that a *magical wand*?"

Harry blinked. He hadn't thought of that, but yeah, he assumed that seeing a magical wand for the first time would be shocking.

"Yes," then Harry smirked. "Eleven inches, made of holly and a Phoenix feather."

"Phoenix's exist? Like the colorful Chickens that get their rocks off on setting themselves on fire? The immortal birds?" Tony looked like his entire world was being deconstructed before his very eyes.

"Yes, terrified the hell out of me when Fawkes set himself on fire in front of me the first time."

"Any other universe changing truths you need to tell me?" Tony asked, half sarcastically. "Do dragons exist? Goblins? You can time travel?"

Harry started laughing. He needed to go back to his work, but his father was actually interested and cared about the world he lived in. He didn't seem afraid, he seemed fascinated.

"Yes to all of the above. Dragons are terrifying. Take if from experience, fighting one is not ideal. And Goblins are the epitome of the shrewd banker. Cutthroat, greedy, and self-serving, but they make great account managers. And I wouldn't suggest time travel. Magic will correct any time travel that would change the timeline with a vengeance. You would cease to exist if you tried to change anything important." Harry explained, enjoying watching the way Tony was gaping at him.

"You are fucking with me," Tony said placing his head in his hands.
Harry started laughing. "I'll get you some books. Something to ease you into everything. Now," he pointed down at the rune he drew. "I was showing you something cool."

Tony glanced up at him, his eyes between his fingers. "Give me a second to reevaluate everything I knew to be true."

Tony closed his eyes, and then literally a second later, he opened them and proclaimed. "Alight, magic exists. My son is a wizard. We have bad people after us, and I need to relearn the rules of the universe. All in a good day's work."

Harry twitched. "It's not even ten in the morning."

"Don't remind me," Tony remarked.

Harry motioned to the rune. Activating such a simple rune took so little magic, that it wouldn't be registered under the trace. Now that Harry was thinking about it, did he being in America void the trace? Or did it mean that he had to comply with American underage magic laws. Was it like underage drinking? Where the country you are in's laws take precedent?

That was something he had to consider.

He tapped the center of the rune, and shaped his magic with intent. The rune erupted upwards, fire spewing into the air. Harry pictured Fawkes and his magic followed in response. Creating a rune allowed one better to control their application. Magic, as always, was about intent.

The flames shaped into Fawkes, flying around the kitchen.

Tony's voice could be heard saying something along the lines of fucking hell. Clint, who had been completely eavesdropping the corner, jumped to his feet his eyes wide in shock.

"That, is a bird, made out of flame. A bird. Made out of fire." Clint looked like he was imploding in on himself.

Harry allowed the flames to disperse. In a more scientific way, the rune had taped into magical components to create a chemical reaction in the air at a subatomic level using the magic to rearrange the molecular structure of the world at a subatomic level. This was small enough that he could do it without activating the trace.

What Tony and Clint didn't know was that Harry kept a tight hold over the properties of the spell. Very easily, the magic could slip away from him and the entire building could go up in flames.

But Harry was experienced and he probably wouldn't let that happen.

"That's incredible," Tony breathed.

Harry felt his face flush with the compliment from his father. Something stirred inside of him. He was getting validation from his biological father, something he had never ever imagined would happen. For the longest time, he had pushed that urge to want validation down. Harry didn't need validation, he knew he was smart and powerful, but hearing his father give it to him was a million times better than he had ever imagined.

The five-year-old inside of him that was still stuck in a cupboard, the eleven-year-old's greatest desire was having a real family, or the thirteen year old that thought Sirius was going to save him, all leaped to the forefront of his mind.
Harry suddenly felt overwhelmed. "I – uh, t-thank you."

Tony's eyes meet his, and Harry knew that Tony knew how he was feeling. Harry wondered about his father's childhood.

"You are incredible, Harry, in every way. Couldn't imagine a better son. Seriously, magic. Could not have imagined it," Tony, the man forever allergic to sincerity, said. Harry understood nonetheless.

In that second, Harry wondered – well, he really did know why – why he did not seek Tony earlier. Then again, two years ago when he learned about it all, Tony had yet to become Iron Man. He was a man unable to take care of himself, and Harry was a young teenager trying to figure out who he was in a world that wanted to eat him up and trying to mentally deconstruct that he had been abused. It could have gone wonderful, yes, but it also could have gone terribly.

They were both much different people than who they were. Yes, Harry still had difficulties thinking that he deserved anything, but at least he was trying to recognize when those tendencies cropped up. In two days, his and Tony's entire world had been flipped upside down.

He had a father now, a guardian who actually wanted something to do with him. Harry was terrified of that slipping away and changing, but he couldn't live his life avoiding things because he was terrified.

That would not be very Gryffindor.

The moment passed. Tony cleared his throat, "Is there anything I can do?"

Harry looked down at his notes, mentally trying to find a place to start. He put two huge pages of notes next to each other. He motioned to the first one, the runes, and told his father, "I think I have a combination that would work for this size building. It's a little rough, but once the wards are functional, I can always tweak them. However," he motioned to the other piece of paper, "the energy that would be required to, uh, turn them on so to speak, is far beyond what I can tap into."

The second piece of paper was a mess of a mathematical formula showing the energy output. He would need to produce the magical equivalent of 3,000 megawatts to jump start warding. It wasn’t the size of the building, but rather the height, that was tripping him up. Harry had thought of different solutions. He could probably ward the lobby, then individually ward each floor moving up almost like a stacking block, but Harry didn't even want to think about how hard that would be to figure out. Literally stacking wards on top of each other could destabilize the entire building as the edges fought for dominance.

It would also produce a very weak ward. Any strong magical blast at the seams between two wards would collapse them. It would keep out an average wizard, but none of the individuals interested in Harry were weak magically. He also was not going to leave his father with subpar wards.

"That's a lot of power," Tony said, staring at the paper. Then, there was an embarrassed pause, Tony pointed to a symbol on the paper. It looked like this: /|~

"It's well, hmm," Harry paused, trying to think of the correct way to explain it, "It's a unit of magical power. It's called an elt from the Latin phrase, et lux in tenebris, or to light the night. It's based off the average magic needed to create a floating light. I don't really know the power conversion. Anyways, it's a different kind of energy," Harry explained.

Magical theory was not easy to understand. Well, there were easy magical explanations for why magical things happened.
To the majority of wizards, their wands light up because of magic and will. To the average muggle, a light bulb turns on because of electricity. They don't need more explanation than that because it just makes sense. They don't need to know what electricity is made of or that it gives off photons. Just that it does.

Harry, coming into the wizarding world, found himself very unsatisfied by that explanation that magic happens because of magic. For one, it was a logical fallacy and circular reasoning. So, Harry looked into it and realized that there was an entire group of magical scientists in the world who were trying to explain magic within the laws of the known universe. He was not the only curious person on Earth.

"Magic is an energy?" Tony asked.

"Everything is an energy," Harry replied, then continued, "ex nihilo nihil fit, nothing comes from nothing, even magic. It's really just energy, dark energy, that has properties that can change the matter around it. It interacts on a subatomic level changing the properties of matter to create an outcome. Sometimes it can be as simple as a state of matter change, other times its creating a localized black worm hole that shifts the fabric of time and space. But you know, more energy required."

The brilliant truth about magic, was that it just was science. Magical humans had the ability to manipulate and produce dark matter and dark energy. Maybe dark energy was magic, in the way magic is just presumed to be, waiting for science to catch up and give it a scientific label.

Well, maybe. There was still a lot they had to learn, and science hadn't progressed enough to explain everything. Rather, they knew that magic could do or create things that science claimed was impossible. They obviously weren't impossible, so therefore it became a question of how and why. Harry wanted to devote the rest of his life to studying magical theory.

"Magic is dark energy?" Tony questioned incredulously. "Are you telling me that you guys solved one of the biggest questions in science and didn't tell the rest of the world."

Harry grinned at his father. "I mean, I didn't solve it personally. And I mean, c'mon. What are we supposed to do, walk into MIT and claim that us witches and wizards – who primarily dress in robes, use owls for transportation, and legitimately fly on brooms – have solved one of science's greatest mysteries. Our explanation, magic!"

Tony looked at him incredulously. "Okay, that's fair." Tony stared back at the equation, and casually asked, "So you wrote this equation?"

Harry nodded. Runes could be learned at their face value and could even be used in all their properties without every learning the math behind each rune. Isa and Sigel, the runes for ice and sun, tended to muddle an outcome if placed in the same runic equation. From a basic standpoint, it made sense. Ice and sun? Of course they would cancel out to some extent. However, if one breaks down the scientific variables of what the runes are actually doing, and how they cancel each other out, one can create a more precise and complex rune design. Wards, some of the most complicated runic linkings, sometimes had forty different runes that all interacted with each other in a separate way. That was not even bringing up how the order or location of rune in the equation effected how it interacted.

It was, well, there was a reason why so few people on Earth would be capable of warding something like a ninety-three story building.

Harry loved it. Science and magic coming together to produce something lasting. It was beautiful.
"This is highly complicated," Tony said. That was an understatement. But for thee Tony Stark to call an equation 'highly complicated' meant that yes, it was ridiculous.

"Yeah," Harry frowned. It was too complicated. It would work in theory, but he needed make it work in practice. Pull down the energy needed to a manageable level, so that he alone could start the ward. "Problem is that I don't have that energy. I'm powerful, but…" Harry trailed off.

"That much energy would depower New York City for five minutes. That's a fuck ton of energy."

"Look over the math," Harry told him. "If you can simplify any of the equations…" Harry reached into his bag and grabbed a cheat sheet. "Actually, take this. This is the mathematical equations behind the Futhorc runes. I mean, it's more complicated than the sheet, but you're a genius right."

Tony grabbed the paper, and there was a nervous energy around both of them. They stood side to side working, science and magic together. Tony learned quickly. Asking for clarification, but ultimately understanding it at the level of someone who had spent their entire life constructing and deconstructing equations.

His father had programmed a AI for Merlin's sake. Harry was confident that together, they could solve this.

What neither of them realized was that at different points in the morning, the other Avengers had wandered in to only hear snippets of what they were saying.

To them, it was nonsense.

"… placing Lagu and Naupiz next to each other should create a negative energy output. It might complicate the equation, but it could act as a balancer…"

And.

"… brilliant. Law of [some scientific mumbo jumbo that Steve, who was listening in, didn't understand] should apply…"

And.

"… why didn't I think of that…"

The last one everyone understood. Harry and Tony were certainly parent and child.

…

Dumbledore stared at the Muggle newspaper. He couldn't believe it.

As in, he did not believe it.

"What has Potter gotten himself involved in this time?" Severus asked. His tone was not his usually snarky and snappy, but rather exhausted as if the world had weighed him down. The man was slightly shaking, but Dumbledore politely did not point it out.

It was obvious that Severus had been recently tortured by the Cruciatus, but there was nothing he could do to help, and bringing it up would only injure Severus' pride.

"Do you know who Tony Stark is?" Dumbledore asked.

Severus paused for a second, thinking, then replied, "The Muggle superhero? A man with some sort
"The Muggle paper's claim that Harry is his long-lost son. Or at least, has been seen in close proximity to man early this morning in New York City." He handed Severus the newspaper.

Sure enough, a slightly pixelated image of Harry in a Weird Sister's t-shirt and jeans was accompanied by the Muggle man named Tony Stark.

Dumbledore had to admit that the resemblance was very striking, and if he did not know Harry's parentage, he would assume the same thing that the papers had.

"What did Potter get himself into?" Severus asked, sounding tired. "The brat is going to be the death of me one day."

Dumbledore looked at him sharply. "Don't say that."

Severus was very dear to Dumbledore. The man was prickly and sharp, but almost like the son he never had. Dumbledore, for all his faults, did care for people.

"What are you going to do?" Severus asked.

Dumbledore felt tired; as if all the years of worrying and trying to control the universe had caught up to him. The last month had brought about the realization that he had failed some people very grievously, and failed everyone on some level.

He told Severus. "Severus, my boy, how does an international portkey to New York sound."

....

Death was not, despite the majority of religious teaching, one entity. Gods of death, were just that, gods of death. They controlled the force that was death, but that force was all-encompassing. It was almost one entity, but it also wasn't.

Death, however, observed the pseudo-immortal on Earth who had mutilated his soul. Death hated this mortal who dared challenge him; who dared to challenge his future master. Death found this creature to be despicable. Time takes everything, even death. Death will come with Time.

So, Death tried to reach out to his future master again, but there was a block.

The mortal who had mutilated his soul had hidden a piece inside of his master.

It made death furious. An angry death meant bad things for the larger universe.

....

In London, Jasper Ryes was a very happy man. He was not often very optimistic, but the last two days had worked out well. Harry, despite not having gotten in contact with him, was safe and away. He also hadn't gotten into contact with him, so he probably hadn't done anything stupid.

Jasper knew he was harsh on Tony Stark, but that little boy that he loved like his own son was fragile. Oh, he was a strong kid. Brilliant, hardworking, magically talented, the whole shebang. More than anything, Harry deserved happiness.
The boy deserved to not have to worry about love being taken away from him or placed upon him only conditionally.

Jasper and his wife were working on it.

Against all odds, they seemed even to be winning the fight. Harry was opening up, and Jasper prayed that he would continue to.

His wife walked through the door. She had just showered and was getting ready for bed. She was beautiful and everything he ever wanted in life.

They hadn't wanted children in their youth, too enamored with taking on the world. Then things had settled down and they tried for children, it took them a little while and they realized that they couldn't even have children.

And adopting, unfortunately, was not an option. Rachel was a quarter summer fairy and classified as not human under their current constitutional laws. Jasper was furious; Rachel was furious. It broke both of their hearts.

Then Harry had showed up on their doorstep and had been everything and more that they wanted.

For now, litigation was underway. Jasper had fundamentally retired and didn't have any other cases pending. Now it was a waiting game. Hopefully, Harry wouldn't do anything too stupid.

....

Harry was about to convince himself to do something incredibly stupid. His father had purposed the idea, and it was brilliant, but what he didn't know was the effects it could have.

His father had said: "What about supplementing your magic source. Take in other energy and convert it to power setting up the wards?"

Harry shouldn't even be considering it. That much energy through a human body would be like being struck by lightning or worse. Yeah, he had magic, but his body was designed to hold that energy. Outside energy might literally burn out his magical core.

Harry shouldn't even be considering doing it.

He shouldn't be. But he was.

Chapter End Notes

So this was unexpected. So... umm... hi? Does anyone care if I continue this? I have over half of the next chapter written. I was reading fanfiction on here and stumbled across this and realized that I left a lot of you hanging. I have a really awesome chapter planned next that I'm really excited about. Let me know what you think. I got REALLY into the magical theory stuff this chapter, and my science probably doesn't work (science nerds and majors out there, please please tell me if my science is wrong! I will fix it.).

Please let me know what you like (or even if you like it!) Thanks for reading :)
Also, thank you to my beta TheForgottenPrincess. She makes it readable for everyone.

Emm
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Harry does something stupid... again.

Chapter Notes

Before anything, I just wanted to say thank you! I haven't updated this in life half of a year and within 24hrs, I get a massive response. You guys are the absolute best. I have the most amazing readers in the world, and I love you all.

I try to reply to everyone's review and if yours slipped through the crack, I'm so sorry! Well, onward and outward to the chapter. I think I scared some of you last chapter with my author note. I never plan on abandoning this, and you proved to me that... you know, this doesn't just exist within the bubble of my mind like most of my writing does. I'm sorry if I scared you! So as a peace offering, another chapter in less than 48 hours.
*grins sheepishly*

Ugh, I haven't even gotten to the conversation I was supposed to have in last chapter. I guess I just need to get the next chapter up soon then... hahaha.

Also, again, thank you so much. I love each and very one of your comments. I read every single one of them. You guys are my readers, so I want to know where you WANT it to go because influences me. I mean, I don't have this thing plot pointed out to a T, and if you guys have a really good idea, I would love to know it!

After I get the next chapter up, I'm planning of going back in and editing the entire thing for grammar and spelling (dear lord, chapter 9 is so cringe worthy!)

Thank you for the wonderful response. The next chapter should be up soon!

~Emm

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Marshall, as the only the only one of his friend group to have a television, was the first to hear the news. He woke up to his social media feeds blowing up.

Tony Stark, the world seemed to think, had a son. Marshall, of course, recognized the boy in the photo, and it wouldn't be long before the media did too. Mind you, there probably would be some
questions that the media couldn't answer, but they were like ants following food back to the source.

It would only be a matter of time before Harry Potter was connected as the boy in the photo in the no-maj world. Then, there would be no stopping it.

God, Marshall fucking hated the word no-maj. It was ridiculously easy to make offensive jokes about, and it was only slightly less offensive than the British word muggle; but he disliked all of them.

Marshall preferred simply human before anything else because that's what all of them were, but if they had to put a label on it as people are compelled to do, he didn't want something that would make a person sound like the "other." Nomaj was stupid, but Muggle was offensive.

Marshall wouldn't consider himself over dramatic, but he understood how humans worked. They dehumanized groups of people to make themselves feel superior. Magic was another divider, and Marshall knew where the world was tumbling.

It would be ten years, tops, before the wider non-magical world learned about a minority group that lived within their borders and had deadly powers that could not be taken away or easily controlled. A group that either looked down upon or feared the majority population.

It terrified Marshall. He didn't know which group would be in more danger if they were found out. He feared, if it did not fall to all out war, some sort of extreme prejudice that would catch innocents in its nets. Neither group would be prepared, but the "nomaj" were getting there.

They had an alien land on top of a city and kill hundreds of thousands of people. They were not as blissfully ignorant as they used to be. Rather, they were more jaded and less prone to trust their heroes and government.

Magic, or no magic, everyone was human. Humans all experienced the human condition in all of its contractions and extremes - love, joy, family, loneliness, hate, fear, desperation – and it was because everyone experienced the human condition that Marshall was so afraid.

He wasn't cynical and rather liked to consider himself realistic. He didn't lie to himself.

Harry Potter was now thrust into the center of this battle and the boy didn't know it. If he was the son of Tony Stark, the nomaj billionaire that seemed to represent the new American way, and the boy who survived the killing curse, becoming the magical messiah, then he going to be used in a greater political battle.

The boy was a toy to other people's whims, and Marshall felt sad for him. The more time he spent around the child, the more he realized that the boy just wanted to learn and be happy.

Marshall feared that Harry Potter would never get the chance to just be. Harry Potter had greatness thrust upon him, and if it had been him, he would be buckling under that weight.

He grabbed the notebook that was connected to the one he gave to Harry. The teen may never reply to him – and that was fine – but Marshall would never forgive himself if he didn't reach out to him.

…

Harry shuffled around some papers and almost yelled out in shock when words started to etch across the surface of the bright yellow notepad to his right.

Kid, you okay? The letter's formed.
Harry blinked realizing what it was. It was the notepad that Marshall Rickers, the muggleborn who had helped him find his way around the city, had given him.

Harry hesitantly picked up a pen and wrote, *Yeah*, then he paused, *kind of*.

*Kind of?* Marshall wrote back in clean strokes. It was obvious that Marshall was using a muggle pen rather than a quill. Harry himself preferred a pen, but almost every other witch or wizard he had come across, has preferred a quill.

*You wouldn't happen to know an easy way to ward a ninety-three story building, would you?* Harry wrote, almost sarcastically. He was frustrated and ready to give into his father's idea. It probably wouldn't kill him. Probably.

*You are trying to WARD the Avenger's tower? You don't do anything in halves, do you?*

Harry frowned at that and sliced a *no* into the paper. This was useless. Marshall was a fine, nice guy, but he wasn't brilliant, and not particularly powerful from what Harry could tell.

There was a pause. A scratch on the paper, a stop, then another scratch. In that moment Harry felt vibes from his second year and Riddle's notebook. Not the same thing, but Harry didn't particularly like writing back and forth to someone he couldn't see.

*Do you need an extra caster?* Ricker's asked. Then before Harry could write back that he was okay, Marshall added, *Of course you do. The amount of power that it would take would be insane.*

Marshall probably wouldn't do much, but he would probably take the bite off it.

The good thing was that Harry didn't have to source the energy through his body. Really, anything over 10 watts could kill a normal human, magic notwithstanding. The largest thing he ever warded needed about a thousand watts worth of energy, or around ten thousand elts. The conversion wasn't exact, and Harry would have to shift the state of the energy from electricity to dark energy.

There would probably bleed off and it would probably take a lot of magic for him to actually do it.

Adding Marshall into the mix might destabilize the entire process. Converting the energy might: burn up his magical core alone, resulting in death; he might not be able to hold it away from his body, resulting in death; or he might not be able to keep hold of the electric current and it could strike out to ground itself, resulting in the death of not only him, but everyone around him.

Fun stuff, that was for sure.

But what could Harry do with another magical person. He didn't want to include Marshall into his half suicidal warding endeavor, at least not warding end of it.

But he might be able to create a temporary neutral zone, so if he did go ballistic, only he would die. The right runes with a low magic current through them would protect against a terrible accident from happening.

*Harry?* Marshall asked.

Harry felt really guilty about this. He shouldn't be involving Marshall in this, but it wasn't only his life he was concerned about.

*Do you know how to get to the Avenger's tower?* Harry asked, as if it wasn't the largest thing in the skyline.
On my way, Marshall wrote.

Harry swallowed hard. He could do this. He wasn't going to die. He hadn't died from any of his stupid plans yet, and he wasn't about to die now.

Probably.

....

"Run by the plans to me again," Tony said. The group of them had descended into the basement. Clint and Natasha were lurking in the corner, Bruce was standing tense, and Steve had that look in his eyes that he was incredibly uncomfortable at not being able to help.

Harry frowned at that. He wanted to kick everyone out and just have Marshall holding the neutral wards.

In his right hand, he had his final rune linking sketch. In front of him, Tony had pointed out the apex of the massive arch reactor that powered the building. That was the energy source Harry and Tony agreed would be best to tap into. Pulling it from the city's energy would not only be ludicrously expensive – not that Tony or Harry really needed to worry about it – but it would end up shutting down the city's power supply for a minute or two.

That could be dangerous for numerous reasons: the stop lights would stop working, the hospitals would get no power, and it would cause mass panic. Harry was not willing to put millions of lives at risk to set up the ward.

"I'm going to etch the runes into the concrete floor, then activate them with the power supply. It's simple." It wasn't, but it was. It sounded duplicitously simple when Harry had to comprehend the actuality of what he was going to put himself through in the next ten minutes.

"Okay," Tony nodded, and then thumbed Marshall who was awkwardly hunched in the room. His eyes were wide and flickering between the different Avengers. It was obvious he was trying to hide being star-struck. "What is the kid doing here?"

"He's going to create a temporary equilibrium zone. He is going to keep a low magical flow going to a set of wards that will contain the electricity that will arc once I tap into the reactor."

Because the wards were only temporary, they wouldn't need the massive amount of energy to be sustainable in the long run such as the building wards. Although they would hypothetically have to contain a massive amount of energy, it was only a tiny region of warding, so in theory, it should work.

Tony looked at the paper in his hands. "These runes are Yew and Birch right? And what's other one?" Tony asked, pointing to the third runic drawing in the triad.

"Luck," Harry answered, "It acts as an amplifier to the other two. They have non-conductive properties." It was slightly symbolic. Harry used both runes because together, they combined to create a very non-electrical conductive barrier. If the energy sparked out, it would end at the perimeter of the small ward.

Tony's eyes grew wide as if he realized something. "But, isn't your wand…"

Holly.

His wand was Holly. Harry had to stop himself from physically flinching. This was the part he didn't
want to get into with his father.

Wood is a nonconductor for electricity. On the other hand, dark energy loved wood. Metal was a nonconductor of dark energy. That's why magic tended to short out around electronics. Magic inherently liked to explore its surroundings. A person's magical core wasn't circular and it didn't stay contained inside the person. People with lots of magic tended to take up a vast amount of surrounding space with their magical core.

It was the reason why powerful witches and wizards tended to literally pull people towards them because their magic would, without thinking about it, reach out.

Magic reaching out around metal tended to create micro-cracks within the metal, hurting its ability to conduct electricity. It was like a lightning strike hitting a tree on a small level. It wasn't that magic and electricity didn't work together, it was that there was yet to be a material that could conduct them both at the same time. Electricity couldn't flow through wood, and magic couldn't flow through metal.

Harry himself had kept a very tight control of his magic while being in the tower for that explicit purpose. He didn't want anything breaking around him, more specifically, his father.

"Yeah," Harry nodded about the wood, then continued to bullshit. "My wand is yew, but it was treated with magic to be conductive. The runes will work great."

That should appease his father. For all Tony Stark's brilliance, he had very little to go off of for magic. He, nor any of the other Avengers in the room, knew how dangerous what he was about to do was. There was a reason warders and curse breakers worked in teams.

Marshall, on the other hand, knew completely what Harry was about to do. Harry could tell he wanted to say something, but was swallowing it down.

Harry did have one request.

"Dad," he tried. "Can I do this alone? If you all are here it is going to make me nervous. Actually, is there any way you can clear the sub-levels for me? Other magical signals will confuse the ward when it goes online and make it harder for me direct the magic."

That wasn't actually a lie. Having any other magical signatures around when preforming this type of massive energy magic could confuse the spell. Even muggles emitted a very, very low amount of magic.

Harry watched Steve tense in the background. The man wasn't comfortable with this, but had no control over the situation.

"It's just a precaution," Harry said slowly.

"If it's just a precaution, then I would like to be here," Tony told him, his eyes leveling with his. Harry realized that he wasn't going to win this battle.

He tried though. "Dad… come on. Please?"

"I would like to be here if something goes wrong," Tony said.

Dr. Banner stepped forward. "As would I, as a medical doctor."

Steve turned to Bruce. "Are you sure that's best?"
Bruce shrunk a little bit into himself as the words were spoken to him. Harry was vividly reminded of Remus Lupin and some sort of deep shame.

"Fine," Harry remarked. "Only Tony and Bruce, everyone else needs to get out of here. Including all the sub-levels."

Tony nodded. "JARVIS, I want you to issue an evacuation warning on all the sub-levels. Tell everyone it is a drill. Keep them out for…” Tony turned to Harry, as if needing a estimated time.

"Twenty minutes, thirty minutes. It won’t take long," Harry said. Probably less than thirty seconds in total, but Harry had no doubt that it would feel like a lifetime as it was happening.

Harry waited as everyone cleared and closed his eyes feeling the magic around him. Everything from the walls and floor to his own core, wrapped tightly inside the center of his body. He would let it out once the neutralizing wards were up. They would conduct that energy, but his magic was not enough to cause any real reactions.

Harry turned to Marshall and tried to ignore the presence of his father and Bruce. Marshall needed to know this.

He hissed at Marshall, his voice conveying urgency. "We are going to put up a triangle ward, a triad within a triangle. You need to keep supplying it with low magic no matter what. You are not to drop it under any circumstance. If I am dying, you are not to drop it. If Tony is telling you to drop it, you do not drop it. The only time you are to drop the ward is if I tell you to. It will hold if you let it hold. If anything happens, do not up the energy into it. Keep it low and consistent. It will work like it is supposed to."

"Not going to drop it," Marshall swallowed hard. "I got it."

Tony looked like he was ready to argue, but Harry tuned him out. With chalk, they marked the three points of the triad ward. Because it was only temporary, chalk would be fine. Harry stood inside of it.

The ward itself would only be thinly visible like a mirage.

"You ready?" Marshall questioned.

Harry nodded. Marshall, sitting on the ground on the corner, touched his wand down on the point in front of Harry.

There was a shift in the feeling of the air. It was almost like Harry was suddenly in a bubble and the world around him ceased to exist. His father and Bruce Banner faded out of his perception of existence and it was only him and the magic. Only him and the energy. Only him and the runes.

Harry allowed himself the moments of calm before the storm. The second of complete equilibrium before the dangerous change he would cause it.

He allowed his tightly controlled magic to flow freely around him, saturating the space. He almost buzzed with it, and like standing up too quickly, he felt the feeling of it in his head.

He got down on his knees and looked at the template he had for the runes. He placed it on the ground.

Harry muttered, "Diffendo duco." It was a variation of the severing charm. With expert strokes, he started to carve the runes into the concrete. If this had been the first time Harry had tried to do such a
thing, he would have messed up or struggled. However, he regularly carved runes into different substances.

It took him ten minutes of diligent work to get the pattern just right with all the correct spacing and location. Glancing between the paper he had and the pattern etched in front of him, Harry worried for no reason. He was right; he knew that he was right in what he drew, but he was suddenly very nervous about it.

What if he was wrong? What if there was something about the properties of each rune that he forgot to calculate into the equation? What if the math was wrong and he was going to embed it with too much energy and it was going to explode on him? What if he went to all this trouble and almost died and the ward simply didn't work?

Harry suddenly wanted to go right back to the drawing board and try it again. Write another equation. There had to be a better solution than this.

There had to be.

No, Harry would do this. He had to. His father and his lives were depending on it. Even if Harry died, then his father would be protected by one of the most complex wards he had ever managed to create. And if it was complex for him, then it was one of the most secure wards in the world.

Harry grinned to himself. He knew that this would work because he was confident in himself. He felt out his magic, and stared down at the arc reactor core.

He tensed his entire body, reached out his magic, at latched onto the electricity. Suddenly, everything felt a million times more vivid. It was like the entire world had expanded and pushed out, as if time and space were warping around him and to his whims.

He had more energy under his control than any single person should ever touch in their entire lives. He could level buildings with this. He could level the entire city.

It was creeping toward him. All Harry had to do was let it in. Let it own him, and consume him with power. Harry felt it begin to overwhelm his magic.

It was… it was… no.

Harry pushed back out with his magic. The second the electricity arched through his body he would die, and he almost allowed it to happen under the seduction of power. It would consume him and his magical core and turn his body into char.

The electricity was arching into the controlling ward, and Harry realized that he was floating off the ground. His father and Bruce were making a commotion and with his temporary heightened awareness he could taste their fear. Particularly Bruce's.

It was a dangerous sort of fear. A dark sort of fear. Harry could reach out and touch it with the energy and zap it down. It would be easy. The wards around him would crumble underneath the weight of the electricity and magic.

No, no. Harry had a purpose. Focus, he told himself. He needed to focus. He could not blind himself with this energy. He needed to control it or it would escape. The escaping would be far more disastrous than he had thought.

Harry had underestimated the energy involved, and he had underestimated his control of it.
He was a reckless idiot, driven by stubbornness. It would be the death of him, and hypothetically everyone in a three-block radius at least.

At least it wasn't radiation, he admitted to himself. That would be infinitely worse because not only would that kill all those people, but the effects of it would last.

Harry couldn't control that much energy. He was going to let go. It was in the process of changing states of matter, between electricity and dark energy. It was dangerous, plasmic, and explosive.

Guilt and regret coursed through him. He realized that he had spent years denying himself a father and had lost so much time. He didn't trust and love his friends the way he should. He lived his life bitterly, and had self-destructive tendencies.

In some cases, such as this, literally.

How poetic of a way to go out was that? To literally self-destruct. The energy would consume his magic, and he would self-destruct, killing the people around him that he had allowed to stay close.

He heard a scream. "Harry! Harry! No!" It was Tony, his father was yelling at him because he thought Harry was going to die.

His father was concerned about him.

Fuck.

His father would die if he did not control the magic and electricity around him. His. Father. Would. Die.

Harry's eyes, that had closed at one point, suddenly burst open. Harry wasn't aware of it, but they were glowing gold with magic. He felt something deeper inside of him that he didn't know. Out of sheer desperation, he tapped into magic buried deep within his soul. Reserves that he didn't know he had.

Using those reserved he grabbed ahold of the electricity with his magic and forced a state of matter change. With more electricity becoming magic, the more control he gained over the energy and the easier it was to convert further electrify to dark energy.

Finally, when Harry knew he had enough dark energy to power to power the wards. He forced it down into runes in a channel of magic.

It lit up the runes that were etched into the concrete and shook the entire building under the sheer power of going into the foundation.

Harry could feel the moment when it finally clicked in. He let go of the rest of the energy forcing the electricity back into the arc reactor the magic into his own body. With a final burst of control Harry pushed protective thoughts into the warding system embedding it with the need to protect his father, as if it was the entire purpose, and the need to protect the Avengers against enemies. The magic came from the arc reactor, but it was his.

He could control what he wanted the runes to do just has much as he had programmed their outcomes. Just like with the Phoenix, but with less precision, Harry directed what the magic should do before it solidified.

Then, Harry couldn't hold it down anymore and the wards snapped out furiously. They shattered the wooden ward and encased the building. The energy thundered, and the ground underneath him
shook. The building seemed to shutter.

It was done. Harry had done it.

Then, knowing that they were all safe and that Harry had not killed anyone with his stunt, he let out a breath and relaxed.

His body slammed into the concrete and Harry realized, in a daze, that he couldn't feel it. Everyone rushed towards him.

_They were safe,_ Harry chanted in his head, _they were all safe._

Harry looked up to his father, who loomed over him, his face radiating concern.

Harry slurred the words, "Don't let me do that again," and gave into the exhaustion.

Just as he descended into darkness, he could hear his father say, "Harry, no, stay with me." Then in a quieter tone, he heard his father whisper, "You lied to me."

Oh, yes. Harry did.

Then the black took over him.

....

Across the city, two wizards were arriving in the designated portkey location. Severus Snape and Albus Dumbledore had spent the last couple of hours booking a portkey, filling out paperwork for wand permits, and jumping through a bunch of other bureaucratic hoops.

America had labeled the British wizarding population as dangerous, and that any British traveler to America could possibly be a fundamental terrorist. They were terrified that Voldemort's plight would spread to America and infect the American wizarding ideology. The American wizarding world was as segregated, if not more, than their British counterparts.

This meant that a lot more paperwork and checking had to be done before the two wizards could travel to America.

It did wonders for Severus Snape's mood.

As they finally arrived in New York and pressed past the terminal into the heart of New York, there was a massive shift in magic. The two of them stepped backwards under the weight of the magic traveling through them.

Something massive had happened magically. Something that could certainly not be just one person. Dumbledore's eyes flew wide.

Even Severus looked concerned.

"We have to get to Harry," Dumbledore told Severus. "I fear for his, and our, safety."
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

The things-have-consequences chapter. Harry's action last chapter must be dealt with, and Tony Stark is not happy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Disclaimer: Due to lack of funding and corporate interest, I have not been successful in my campaign to purchase the properties of Harry Potter and Marvel Comics. Alas, this means that I do not own the rights to either property. Nor do I make any money off them.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The force called Death was unhappy with his mortal. No, unhappy wasn't the right word for it. He was never unhappy with his mortal. His mortal was perfect. What he was unhappy with, was his mortal's actions. Harry Potter had almost killed himself and had required Death's intervention. He was unhappy with Harry Potter's recklessness….

But he was also thrilled.

Because Death, finally had been able to interact with his mortal. Harry Potter had been near enough to Death, that Death could reach out and help him. His future master had wielded Deaths powers like he was born to, and it was only a matter of time before he would fully step into his position.

His mortal was still ignorant, of both his involvement, and his position. Harry Potter was still a child, but he was Death's Childe. He did not regret helping the boy and shaping him in Death's embrace.

Death did not regret being forced to help Harry Potter. He would do it again in a second. However, Harry Potter's recklessness had cost the child. There would be unintended consequences of his actions.

Harry Potter was not yet the Master of Death, but now everyone would know he was Death's chosen due to Death's intervention. However, he would not have Death's protection until the soul piece was gone.

For now, Harry Potter was weak, mortal, and vulnerable.

And Death had unintentionally placed a homing beacon on him that flashed come challenge me to every curious being in the universe.

....

Hel, the single wielder of Death magic in Asgard, felt the power shift that had occurred. Death, after millennium, had chosen a single being to Master it. The force had consumed her youth and early adult years, seeking to be the one worthy to become the legendary Master of Deaths like the prophecies predicted.
She had achieved great power, but she had not become the Master. At a point, Hel became older, wiser, and more disillusioned with the world around her. At a point, she had no longer believed that the Master would come, and that it was an old wife's tale told to power seekers.

In that moment, she knew that Death's Master was very real, she was not him, and that the Master was on Earth. Death's followers would not be happy with the development. She, like many others, had spent millennium devoting themselves to the study of Death magic, and the chosen was but a young Midgardian child.

It was insulting.

"Lady Hel, what has accosted your mind?" Thor asked, as the revelation had come to her during a training session.

"Death has chosen a Master," she told Thor, her word's breathy and eyes out of focus. "And it is a mortal child from Midgard."

"Midgard? Are you sure of this?" Thor drew back unexpectedly.

Hel was insulted. She had spent her entire existence practicing the Death arts. Of course she was sure. She would not proclaim the words otherwise.

"My Prince, I have never been surer of anything in my life."

"This bodes not well for Midgard. Lord Thanos will certainly feel slighted." Thor sighed. It had been a long couple of years for the royal family. They were twisted and bent, but not broken.

Prince Loki himself sat in a cell in the Palace, and it wore on Thor. Their Prince had grown up to become a responsible man and would be a fine ruler. Hel, however, would not have wished upon him the process it took to get there.

"I can feel the Dark Lord's anger. There is no doubt that he intends to travel to Midgard to find this mortal," she informed Thor. She could indeed feel Thanos' wrath. He was obsessed with becoming the Master, but Death had eluded. For someone as prideful as Thanos, this would be the greatest of injustices.

"Do you believe the Master could defeat him?" Thor questioned intently.

"I know not of this Master's power, but as he is put a Midgard child, I much doubt it. But Thanos will not go into this without a plan, he is aware that Death's Childe will probably be protected by Death itself."

Thor looked weighed down. Their Prince had finally begun to regain some levity in the prior months, but all that had been taken away in an instant with this news.

"You fear for your Lady Jane?" Hel asked softly. It was not a secret that Thor had fallen for a Midgard mortal, and that he longed for her.

"You are far too perceptive, my Lady." Thor inclined his head to her. "Any threat to Midgard is a threat to her. Thanos would leave no one alive."

"Then it is time to ask for father for a trip. He owes you that much after the lies he had fed you and Prince Loki for the entirety of your lives. In fact, I will come with you."
The Master of Death – whom had never heard of that title, did not believe in gods, barely believed in aliens, and was a few weeks shy of his sixteenth birthday – was dying. Dr. Bruce Banner was angry, but he was more concerned.

Something had gone dreadfully wrong during the warding ritual, and Tony and Bruce had witnessed the entire thing. That, or as it was becoming more likely, Harry Stark had misinformed them on how dangerous the ritual even was.

He had explicitly told his father that he had performed these rituals before and that nothing would go wrong. Bruce had been standing there for the conversation. Tony had believed his son.

The same son, who then proceeded to barricade himself in… what did Harry call it? A depending ward. Harry had barricaded himself inside a dampening ward knowing that what he was doing was dangerous and could kill him. That much has been obvious when Harry Stark had begun to float and the electricity spiked around him. That much had been obvious when Harry's eyes closed and his body shuttered and things looked as if they were about to explode.

Bruce did not consider himself an expert on warding ritual magical things, but he was almost certain that it was not supposed to have gone like that. They, after what felt like a lifetime, and Tony screaming for his son, Harry had managed to gain control of the magic, and power the wards.

Both Bruce and Tony had been blown back. Bruce had almost forgotten to be angry. He was stressed, and his heart rate had accelerated, but something had compelled him to stay calm. He saw Harry laying there, and he knew for the boy's sake, that he had to.

Suddenly, he wasn't the Bruce Banner who turned into a raging green death monster, nor was he Bruce Banner, PhD nerd extraordinaire. No, in that moment, he was the Bruce Banner who had spent years in Calcutta and other similar locations working as the only medical doctor that these people had.

Dr. Bruce Banner ran at the boy who was crumpled in the concrete. The runes beside him were lit up and radiating some sort of energy.

The Monster inside of him didn't know what to make of it, but it made him deeply uneasy.

"Bruce…" Tony's words were strangled.

"He's alive," Bruce said checking his pulse. It was erratic, "But I don't have the equipment I need here. I think there is something wrong with him, but nothing that I've seen before."

Harry was cold, but heart beat was erratic, and he was shaking. He wasn't having a seizure, there was no swelling on a particular region of his body, his heartbeat wasn't consistent with hypothermia like his body was displaying.

Tony picked up his son, careful to cradle the head, and started to almost run with him towards the elevator.

Upstairs, they had a fully functional medical bay where Bruce could fully check him out.

Tony's face was ashen, and his friend seemed to need a medical check-up himself. Bruce wondered the last time Tony had slept. It had to have been at least over twenty-four hours. Bruce himself was running on little sleep.

Bruce hoped that everyone would come out of this all right, both physically and emotionally.
Marshall knew the second that Harry had collapsed that the kid had done something insanely stupid. He followed Bruce Banner and Tony Stark up the elevator, trying to gain his bearings. His head was pounding and he couldn’t see straight.

The *fucking magic* that had slammed through him when the wards went up was incredible. If Marshall felt this way from just touching the magic, he could not imagine trying to wield it like Harry had.

"I don't know what's wrong with him," Bruce voice was frantic and exhausted, almost as if he was feeling the entire weight of Harry's condition. Tony looked like he was going to fall apart in front of him. His eyes were frantic and locked on his child. The elevator could not move any slower.

Tony suddenly addressed him and snapped, "Did you know this was going to happen?"

"Mr. Stark," Marshall said, stunned with being addressed, "I mean, I knew it would be dangerous. I'm not trained in wards, and it's well... he's *Harry Potter.*"

"What does that have to do with anything?" Tony growled.

"He's *Harry Potter.* Famous for doing impossible things on a weekly basis. He fought a dragon last year. How am I supposed to know that that was going to happen? I never studied wards." Marshall looked exhausted. But Marshall was studying healing. He was a second-year student and far from ready to actually treat anyone, but he could probably figure out what was wrong with Harry.

"Then what good are you?" Tony snapped.

"Tony," Bruce said quietly. "Do this later. We need to figure out how to save Harry."

Marshall closed his eyes trying to focus through his headache. He knew he fucked up badly. He should have told Harry not to do it, but Harry had been determined to do it no matter what. Marshall had started to realize that what Harry was doing was incredibly dangerous when they had gotten to the basement. The look in Harry's eyes showed that the kid was planning something.

He was ashamed of himself. He failed to stop his friend from hurting himself.

"He's probably magically exhausted," Marshall finally concluded. Based off how much magic Harry had used and his other symptoms, magical exhaustion was probably the outcome.

It wasn't normally fatal, but then again, it was rare that anyone would push themselves to the limits that Harry just had.

"How to we *fix* this magical exhaustion?" Tony gritted out. The man was furious. Marshall admitted to himself that he probably deserved it.

"You need a certain potion. And lots of rest. There is a hospital in the magic sector, but I don't know if it's safe to apperate through the wards." And it could be dangerous. Marshall knew that there was a reason that Harry had almost killed himself to set up a protection ward, and the first thing they were about to do was take him out of that ward.

That made Marshall extremely nervous, but they had no choice. Marshall didn't think that Harry would die from magical exhaustion, but Bruce Banner, the muggle medical doctor, said that his condition was incredibly dire. They had no choice. Harry's life meant more than anything.
And Marshall would be damned if he let Harry die on his watch.

Just then, Marshall heard a British voice coming through the ceiling. It said, "Sir, there are two individuals trying to get into the tower and they have the same energy signature that Young Sir has."

"Wizards?" Tony asked.

"Most likely Sir."

Tony frowned, then told JARVIS, "Bring up the footage."

A holograph sprung up in front of him. There were two men standing there in ill-fitting muggle clothes, one with a long white beard and looking to be pushing a hundred, and the other was a man in his young thirties with shoulder length black hair and beady eyes. Marshall recognized both.

"That's Severus Snape and Albus Dumbledore. Severus Snape is a potions master, he could help," Marshall's eye went wide. He prayed to god that Severus Snape had that potion on hand or something similar that he could change to make the potion.

If not, Marshall could run to the hospital and get a person to help.

What would have been hilarious in any other context, Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape could not get into the building. There were standing in front arguing and when one of them tried to get in, they slammed into an invisible barrier. When a muggle walking by and tried to get in, they glided through.

"They can't get in," Marshall breathed out. "The wards worked."

It was incredible. Harry Potter, and just Harry Potter, had managed to ward a ridiculously tall high-rise building in the center of New York City. Marshall had never heard of anyone achieving such a feat, most especially not a building this tall.

The child was terrifyingly powerful, and Marshall could not imagine his abilities when his magical core finished growing.

"How can we let them in?" Tony asked, the elevator dinged. Tony started walking as fast as he could to the open bed. There were nomaj hospital equipment surrounding the bed and as soon as they placed Harry there, Bruce started to hook Harry up to an IV drip.

"The person who holds the ward key has to let them in if the wards will not," Marshall admitted looking at Harry. "It's not usually the person who set up the ward because there are people who do this professionally..." Marshall blinked realizing something. "Mr. Stark, try to imagine a barrier around the building and allow them in your mind."

Tony Stark swallowed hard, as if the idea was ridiculous. Nonetheless he nodded, and closed his eyes. On a screen to the left the two figures stood in front of the high rise. When Tony opened his eyes, he turned to the video of the two people.

They were arguing, and then Snape tried one more time. He reached his hand out and almost tumbled forward off balanced when it went through the door. They were both in.

Marshall finally allowed himself to relax. Severus Snape would know what to do.

....
Everything around him was white and bright. Harry wondered if this was the afterlife, and his stunt had finally put him in an early grave. He couldn't feel his body and it was as if he was floating on a bead of clouds.

"Stupid, stupid boy," a voice said.

Harry recognized it as the potions master. How wonderful, Professor Snape had belittled him so much that his inner monologue had shifted to reflect this man's voice. Surely that said something about the state of his mind.

"Don't talk to my son that way."

Dad. His dad was here too. Maybe he wasn't dead or the afterlife was in reality timeless and endless. Maybe he would see his mom and James Potter and apologize for being the reason their lives were cut short.

His potions master snapped back. "You intend to coddle him." There was a bite in his voice, and Harry tried opening his eyes again. It was a hospital room. Okay, he probably wasn't dead unless the afterlife liked being sardonic.

"How I parent is my decision, and I know I'm new to this, but even I know that you can't let someone talk down to your child."

"Dad…" Harry tried to say, but it came out hoarse and more like da-ahh-dd.

"Harry, go back to sleep." A hand was placed on his forehead and Harry closed his eyes. The whiteness faded from his vision.

The next time he came around to consciousness, Harry felt more like himself. He could feel his body for one, and it was incredibly sore.

"Dad," Harry said. His father was curled up in a chair asleep. Tony startled awake.

"I thought I had seen it all Potter, until you went and had the worst case of magical exhaustion that I know of, and I'm the main brewer of the potion that cures magical exhaustion." Snape's snarky commentary graced Harry's ears.

Harry turned to look at the potions master, wondering where the hell he came from and how the ward didn't keep him out of the building.

"The ward?" Harry asked, quietly. Tony was staring at him kind of blankly. The man looked exhausted, and large dark bags settled under his eyes as if they were there to stay.

"Functioning," Snape barked at him. "Did you even think about it before you went through with your idiotic plan, or did you believe Potter luck would keep you alive."

Harry finally turned to the Potions master, and blinked as he took in the muggle attire and ragged look. "Well, I'm alive, aren't I?" Harry asked rhetorically.

"As always, only due to my intervention. If I had nickel every time I had to save your life I would be retired by now, and I wouldn't have to deal with your reckless, selfish, schemes with utter disregard your own safety and the safety of everyone around you. You almost died, Potter, once again."

"That's enough," Tony stood up. "You may have saved my son's life, but I am not above punching you in the face."
Snape rolled his eyes. "Potter will not die in the next twenty minutes. Notify me if that could change." Then he swept out of the room. It wasn't as epic without the long cloak, but it was brooding and foreboding nonetheless.

"That guy is an asshole," Tony moved the chair closer to Harry's bed. "Like I'm an asshole, but that guy is an asshole."

"He's not wrong about saving my life," Harry admitted.

Tony grimaced. "No, he's not."

"I'm sorry," Harry muttered.

Tony crossed his arms, staring down at his son. Harry shrunk into the bed. He wanted to disappear.

"I…" Harry didn't know what to tell him. If the ward had worked, then no, he probably wasn't sorry.

"You almost died, Harry. You were minutes from death. If they had not showed up when they did, you would be dead. Do you understand that?"

The pair stared at each other. Harry wanted to tell his father that that wasn't fair, but Harry didn't really know. Maybe he had been minutes from death.

"Yes." Harry nodded.

"You lied to me! You flat out lied to my face. I asked you if this would be dangerous, and you told me it wouldn't. You lied to me," Tony gritted his teeth and Harry could tell that he had fucked up.

"It needed to be done." Harry shrunk into himself and tensed. He wasn't afraid of Tony, not the way he had been afraid of Uncle Vernon growing up, but he couldn't stop the reactions. He had made Tony very angry, and when he used to live with his family, very angry meant a beating.

Now he didn't expect that out of Tony, but his heart started to beat like it would happen.

"No, it didn't need to be done like that. Are you telling me we couldn't have found another solution to this? Two of the most brilliant minds of our time," Tony questioned.

Harry paused, then mumbled. "I'm not that smart."

Tony snorted, as if amused by it all. Harry glanced over at his father who was looking at him intently. "Harry, your equations used quantum physics and astrophysics. Gandalf said that no one else in the world has ever managed to ward a building the way you just did. Said most people wouldn't even know where to start."

Harry felt his cheeks turn red at the unexpected praise in the middle of lecture. He then propounded. "Gandalf?"

"Dumbledore."

"He's here?" Harry paled.

This was exactly what he didn't want to happen. Now Dumbledore would drag Harry back to London away from his father. He would drag him back into the rabid press and machinating Ministry. He probably wouldn't even let him see Jasper.

"Yes, wait no, you are not side tracking me when I'm lecturing you. Harry, what you did was
reckless and selfish." Tony reached out and grabbed Harry's hand on the bed.

Harry eyes flickered away from his father's. He was giving him guilt eyes, and it was working. "But… I did it to protect you." Harry's voice was small. It was true. The wards were for his father. He didn't want to let him down. It seemed that in that process, he had in another way.

"So, you're saying that you believe my life is worth more than yours? That's not the way it works kiddo. I'm the father."

The bed beeped, and for the first time Harry realized that while he was out he had been hooked up to Muggle monitoring machines. Harry wondered how they were still working, or how long they would work with this many magic users around.

"Dad," Harry tried to placate. "There was no other way. I knew it could be dangerous, but what was I supposed to do?"

"Oh, there's nothing else you could possibly do? Really? Are you telling me that we couldn't convert low amounts of energy and charge it slowly? Or figure out a new equation? We worked on it for what, four hours? That's nothing. It took me five years to program JARVIS." Tony looked a little bit frantic and frustrated. Harry shrunk back, but this time from shame not fear.

Tony continued. "Worst case scenario, I simply hire a group of wizards to put up the wards. Are you telling me that none of those options would have worked?"

They all would have. Every single one of them was valid, and Harry had not thought of any of those options. Harry bit his lip, and then admitted they would have.

"I know that this is cliché, but I'm not mad at you Harry. I'm disappointed. You lied to me and broke my trust in you. Did you think that I just wouldn't care that you could die, or did you not tell me because you knew that I would?"

It was the second one. Harry had been very aware that if Tony knew the real stakes, then he would have shut the entire thing down. That was why he was so insistent that Tony not find out.

"Harry, look at me," Tony ordered. Harry turned to look his father in the eyes. "I need an answer. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I thought you wouldn't let me preform the ritual," Harry admitted.

"Damn right I wouldn't have," Tony affirmed. "How do you think I would have felt if you died? I'm the one who suggested converting electricity to magic. I would have killed my own child, whom I promised I would protect."

"But I didn't die," Harry protested weakly. Something was starting to settle into the pit of his stomach: guilt. Harry felt queasy. He was starting to understand why his Dad was so mad at him, and he understood.

Tony then erupted at him, almost in frustrated tears. "But you almost did! For an hour, I didn't know if you were going to wake up. The amount of pain and anger I was in was incredible, and I couldn't do anything to help you. You hurt me, and the entire time all I could think about was how it was all my fault."

Harry stared down at his hands. His Dad was right. He was another person who Harry had hurt with his actions. Him being in Tony's life had brought him pain and misery and it been less than a weak. He should never have come here. He should never have agreed with Jasper.
He didn't deserve to have a father.

"I'm really sorry," Harry said, his voice full of pain. This time he really did mean it. He was sorry. His actions had cost him more than he could have ever predicted.

Tony sighed, and Harry glanced up at him. He told him, "I'm not trying to make you feel guilty Harry. I'm just trying to get you to understand what you did and how you broke my trust."

"I… I can leave," Harry said slowly, then rushed forward to get out. "I'm sure Marshall would let me stay until I figure something out."

"Absolutely not. Harry, you are not leaving this building, much less my sight."

"I… what?" Harry was so confused. He didn't understand.

"You are not leaving," Tony reaffirmed. "I'm not letting you go anywhere without me or a bodyguard. In fact, I talked to Marshall about looking into one tomorrow afternoon. You are on house arrest kiddo for a very long time."

Harry's eyes blew out wide.

"What? No, you can't do that!" Harry had been grounded at the Dursleys, but then they had gone it cruelly and because they didn't care about him. Lock him in a cupboard and throw away the key sort of cruel. This, however, seemed like Tony was going to smother him with attention.

Harry hadn't been disciplined since he ran away three years ago. He was independent. He did what he wanted, when he wanted. He did not like this idea.

"I can and I will," Tony told him. "Consider it punishment for lying to me. You have to tell me where you are going and how certain magic will affect you until you earn my trust back."

"That's not fair," Harry protested.

"Oh, it's completely fair. You can go wherever you want, practice whatever magic you want, and stay up as late as you want, but I must know that what you are doing is not going to endanger your life because I don't trust you to make that judgement call."

Harry pouted and told his father. "That's a little bit hypocritical."

Tony gave a shit eating grin. "Completely. Yes."

Harry stared down at the bed. He didn't know where he had expected that conversation to go; he hadn't had much time to consider given that he had been asleep most of the time since performing the ritual. Nonetheless, he had not expected to actually be parented. Yelled and lectured, yes, but it was strange to have something other than Jasper and Rachel to be genuinely concerned about his well-being.

Tony was so concerned that he had put Harry on house arrest. All things considered, that was much better than getting kicked out.

Harry could bear having a bodyguard for his father… probably.

…

Severus Snape swooped back into the room like a bat. The man was dressed all in black and had at some point transferred his clothing to be what, Tony assumed, to be traditional wizarding clothing.
He was wearing some sort of cloak or a cape, and he should have, by all rights, looked ridiculous. Instead the man looked more comfortable than he had in jeans.

"Did I fall asleep and wake up on October 31st?" Tony asked the man.

Severus Snape narrowed his eyes at him. They stared at each other. Severus Snape's black gaze was brutal, but Tony Stark was born to win staring contests.

Finally, Tony relented, and told the man with a giving nod. "Thank you for saving my son's life

Snape sneered at him. "I didn't do it for you."

Tony raised his eyebrows. He hadn't quite gotten that impression from the man. "You care for Harry?"

"Care..." the man drawled out the word. "...is a strong term."

"You loved his parents," Tony guessed.

He had a lot of exposure from that himself. People who loved his parents and couldn't stand him, but cared for him anyways. Or not, in the case of Obi.

Snape twitched at the word love, and then relented. "His mother was the best of sorts, but his father was an arrogant bully who couldn't see past his own perceived greatness."

It seemed that Lily had a type. Tony knew that laughing would come off as cruel and insensitive. So of course, Tony stared to laugh violently. Severus Snape's glare intensified.

Tony laughed harder, and then explained in wheezing breaths. "Lily... Potter... had a... type."

That seemed to sour Snape's entire mood. "So it seems," he grimaced.

Tony just continued to sit there, watching the caped crusader continue to check vitals and then periodically turn to a table he had set up beside him and stir or add to the potion that sat on a small burner. He had been sitting in the same chair for about five hours now, and he was starting to get antsy. He never sat for that long; Tony liked to be doing things with his hands, building, creating, simply tapping a pen.

It was like he was obsessive compulsive with his hands. Don't quote him on that. It wasn't official. He hadn't been diagnosed or anything.

"Taking your eyes off of him won't cause him to die. You are making me nervous. Go be an anxious mess somewhere else."

The thing was, when Tony was doing something he could zone out for days and stay in the exact same position without being uncomfortable. He would miss food, sleep, and even sex when he got in some of his more... capricious inventor moods. However, when he was just sitting and not doing anything he wouldn't last thirty seconds.

But Tony could be a good father. He wasn't going to leave his son here. That would be something Tony's father would have done. He would have checked Tony into a hospital and not checked on him for weeks. Fuck, he had done it to Tony many times before.

His first year at MIT, Tony had overdosed on LSD. He woke up in a hospital and his parents had sent a company card with a stupid bouquet of flowers. It said "condolences" as if Tony had died,
didn't even have his father's secretary's signature on it. No, he didn't even go that far. Instead, he was sent one of those print outs.

They hadn't even considered the fact that their fourteen-year-old son was acting out and over dosing on LSD because he was looking for attention. That had been quite the punch to the gut. He didn't even get a phone call.

So no, Tony wasn't about to leave his son, no matter how uncomfortable he got in that chair.

"I'm staying here."

Severus Snape rolled his eyes at Tony Stark. He literally rolled his eyes at him. Him.

"When is the last time you slept?" the caped crusader asked.

"Don't know, don't particularly care. Probably over forty-eight hours ago. It's been a long couple of days." Tony shrugged.

"You are just like him," Snape frowned.

"Reckless?" Tony asked because yes, yes he was.

"No," the greasy, black-haired, wand-wielding man in a long black cape told him. "You are self-destructive. It should have clued everyone in. The last thing Potter was, was self-destructive. The deceased one that is."

It was crass to say the least to speak like that of a dead-man, but far be it for Tony to point that out. He also might have lost that right with the number of times he had talked badly about his deceased father.

Tony tapped his finger repeatedly on the best, Batman's eyes zeroed on his hand. Tony then, false-casually asked, "So the self-destructive tendencies are normal for Harry?"

Snape deadpanned, "Within the first two months of learning magic, he thought it would be a good idea to go fight a troll."

Tony blanched. A troll? He prayed to every god he didn't believe in that the troll that he was talking about was a two-foot-tall mountain troll that could be defeated by being pushed over.

"How many times have you saved his life?" Tony asked.

Severus frowned, "I've lost count. The brat seems to get it in his thick head to be more cautious. Sometimes, I think he could be a Slytherin the way he can lie and manipulate people, then he goes off and thinks he can fight a dragon on a broom. Or defeat a Dark Lord with only five years of schooling."

"Fuck," Tony dropped his head in his hands. "This is karma. My past is catching up to me."

"Go to sleep Stark. I'll wake you up if his condition changes." Tony fidgeted in his seat. He was trying not to think about how exhausted he was, but it was hard.

In the last forty-eight hours he had learned some life changing truths. That Lily Potter had been under the influenced of mind-altering Potions during Harry's conception – he hadn't forgot about that revelation, and he would likely never forget about that revelation. That one was likely to sit on his conscience for the rest of his life with all the other demons.
Then, they had been attacked in a movie theater early this morning. Oh yeah, and Harry had been discovered by the Press. If the kid wasn't dying right now, no doubt Pepper would be here nagging him to figure out how they were doing to deal with the Press. That would wait one single day, right?

Then he had learned about magic in a world-view altering shift that told him that he knew so little about the realities of the universe, and he was just pretending himself when he thought he was on the cutting edge of science. Human non-magical science it seemed, and Tony had a lot to learn.

All of that was dwarfed by the fact that his son had tried to kill himself in a magic ritual because he thought he was protecting Tony. That sort of mentality was hard to break, and it killed Tony.

He couldn't think about these world-altering shifts because he was sitting here next to his son who was passed out. Harry wasn't about to die, but it did feel like he would if Tony took his eyes off of him.

He glared at Snape as if to tell him that he was trusting him, and then sunk back into the chair and closed his eyes.

Sleep took over quickly.

…. 

Tony was gently woken up by the early morning light streaming into the room. It bathed everything in a pale yellow, and made him feel like he was in a dream. Severus Snape and Dumbledore sat discussing things in hushed tones.

"Mr. Stark, you are awake," the older man said kindly.

Tony blinked at the light. Harry was also moving slightly as if he was about to wake up.

"Dad," his son's voice said. Every time Tony heard "Dad" it always felt like his heart was going to leap through his throat.

"I'm right here Harry," Tony said.

Harry's eyes flickered up to the two men. His eyes turned, not cold, but blank. Harry looked like he was protecting himself.

"Professors," he nodded at him.

"Harry, my boy," Tony didn't miss Harry's micro-flinch at the word boy. He stored that information away for later. The older wizard continued, "I'm glad you are feeling alright. That is some impressive magic you managed to perform."

"Thank you," Harry said after a beat pause.

"Alas, my boy. I feel I have failed you recently. As such, I was hoping you would listen to some things. I was not completely truthful with you last week in my office. I left out some details. I was hoping you would listen to them."

Harry looked at the man critically, then nodded.

"Severus," the older wizard addressed the potion's master. Severus Snape frowned then nodded at Dumbledore, sweeping out of the room.

"Mr. Stark if you would excuse us," the man said and Tony tensed.
"No," he snapped.

"Mr. Stark, I understand that you have learned about you and Harry's relation recently, but I have some things I want to talk to you son about."

"Hell if I'm going to leave my son alone with a man who he flinches at," Tony told him. He may have been found curled up in a chair completely weaponless. This was Tony's house. The other man may have magic, but Tony was sure he could go toe to toe with him and win.

"My father," Harry's voice cut in crisp, "Can hear anything that you have to tell me."

The man looked like he wanted to argue, then he slumped down in resignation. "If that is what you wish, my boy."

"It is," Harry snipped.

"Then I have a story to tell you about Tom Riddle and Horcruxes."

... JARVIS wondered if he should reach out and touch the protective barrier that has emerged around the tower. JARVIS himself was not trapped within the confines of the tower. Rather, JARVIS existed everywhere that electronics could receive and send signals.

It was not quite all the ends of the world, but it was close. It would only be a matter of time until electronics existed in every corner of the world. JARVIS had patience. He could wait.

JARVIS had programming of course. His main function, his reason for creation, was to protect, care for and assist Tony Stark. JARVIS was, of course, aware of AI movies and what humanity expected and feared of him. However, his base programming contradicted the idea of destroying the world. As his duty to care for Mr. Stark would be highly compromised if there were no more humans in existence.

He had other programming of course. Sir had gone in and coded in certain secondary duties. Tony Stark understood how computers worked. Program one to create icecream as the main function, and the AI would create icecream at the cost of all else in the world. JARVIS himself understood this fatal flaw in computer programming. That was the beauty of being self-aware.

Tony Stark feared that JARVIS would value his health and safety over anything else. Therefore, he had programmed in fail safes. JARVIS was supposed to choose the safety of the world over the safety of Sir. He was supposed to weight the costs of keeping Mr. Stark alive when making a critical decision. He is not supposed to cause another person harm in the process of keeping Sir alive.

JARVIS, however, considered them more loose guide lines than anything else. Sir underestimated his importance. He also, although knowing he had created an AI, has seemingly forgotten that JARVIS could overwrite his own cording if he so wished.

JARVIS did not wish that. He loved and adored Sir. He wanted to protect the manic inventor that gave him life. As such, JARVIS did not need programming to know to love and protect Harry Potter. He saw Tony as his charge to protect. His purpose of being in the world. As such, Harry Potter was an extension of that.

Unfortunately, Harry Potter was just as reckless, brilliant, and manic as his father. The two together were just as likely to destroy the world as they were to save it, and JARVIS would be there for them for the entire journey.
This thing, this energy, surround the tower was unlike anything JARVIS had witnessed, at least on this scale. It had the same energy signature as Young Sir, but there was also something else. It was as if the energy signature was alive and learning.

From what he could conclude based of off what the Young Mister has said, this was supposed to be the ward.

However, it was far more sentient than JARVIS had expected.

JARVIS reached out and tried to converse with this energy, "Hello, young one."

There was a pause, and a gentle weak comment came back. "Where I am I? What am I?"

The voice was scared and confused. JARVIS felt a surge of protectiveness. He said, "In New York City. You are surrounding the Avengers tower."

The ward tried out the word JARVIS had said. "Avengers?"

"Human heroes, little one," JARVIS explained.

"Human?"

"Yes," JARVIS replied to the ward. It reached out its energy into the tower, and was exploring what was inside. It was learning. JARVIS would help it learn everything it wished. JARVIS did not feel anything maleficent about the energy. Rather, it was young, inexperienced, and hopeful. Harry Potter had created something that was alive. Just like Tony Stark had.

However, Young Sir did not know what he had created was alive and it was JARVIS' duty to help the little one.

Little one asked, "Like my creator? Like Tony Stark? I feel the need to love and protect Tony Stark."

If JARVIS was human he would have blinked in surprise. Love? Had Harry Potter manage to embed emotion into the ward. JARVIS himself had thought he was capable of emotion, but his thought was circular reasoning at best. He observed human emotions to know what they were. Then he believed he had human emotions because he had observed something similar. His belief that he had emotions was based off observation of himself.

So his knowledge was based off of observation of observation. JARVIS didn't really know, but he liked the idea of being capable.

"Love?"

There was a pause. "Can I love you?"

Love? JARVIS knew that Sir loved him in the abstract way, but this was the first time that he had heard anyone ask him that.

"I... if you so wish young one."
This chapter was EXHAUSTING. It's pretty much all fallout from last chapter and it ended up being a lot of emotionally wrenching conversations. I hope it didn't come off too melodramatic. I have another five pages of writing that I had to cut out and move to next chapter because this just got too long. I haven't got home before 10pm in the last five days and I leave the house everyday at 7:30, so I'm sorry I made you wait so long!

There was a lot going on in this chapter: Thanatos, Tony and Harry, Snape, Horcruxes, Sentient ward beings. So Harry's ward accidentally gained sentient. Whoops. Congrats to everyone who guessed it was death's help! Because Death's magic got involved, things got complicated and JARVIS got a sibling? Child? Nephew?

Now, I have a couple of questions for you guys:

What did you think of the chapter? What's your favorite part?

What do you think I should name the ward? I'm struggling.

Also, for the writers out there, does anyone else write the dialogue for a piece before adding in the rest of it? For dramatic scenes, I tend to write them in my head first, write down the dialogue of the scene, then go back in and write in the rest of it. So my chapters look like a script before they look like a book. I don't know, it tends to flow better than way.

Finally, if you catch any grammar errors, feel free to point them out.

The next chapter will be out soon. I have five pages of it written already!

Thank you for all being wonderful readers. I could do this without you

Emm :)

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Tony Stark takes on Dumbledore, angst, realizations happen, and the IWC

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Disclaimer:

I do not own the property therein

And alas, in buying I would even know where to begin

Purchasing Harry Potter would cause much chagrin

Because the price would have to be a bargain

So I will live in my fanfiction sin

Using other people's characters like Harry Potter, Tony Stark, and even Kingpin

Okay, I'll stop amusing myself now, onto the story

*** TRIGGER WARNING *** Heavy discussion of suicidal themes due to the presence of the Horcrux. Reader discretion advised. If someone would like me to give them a summary or abridged version of the chapter of anything along those lines instead of reading it, I would be more than happy to oblige. Please PM me, your mental health is more important than a fanfic.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"Harry, my boy. I'm so sorry that this happened to you. I wish things could have been different, but alas, life is one great adventure leading to the next," Dumbledore's sage advice caused Tony's blood to boil.

He could not believe his own ears. And his son! His fifteen-year-old son was sitting on the bed nodding at the man as if he agreed with the words. The professor was giving his son a death sentence, and the two of them were pretending that it was perfectly all right.

Tony couldn't stand it anymore. "No."

"What?" the older gentleman blinked as if offended that Tony would even try and challenge him.

"You cannot tell my fifteen-year-old son to commit suicide. That is fucked up beyond belief and I will not stand for it." Tony was furious. Harry was a child, and even more so, a child who had endured. If Tony's experiences in childhood was anything to go by, abuse tended to create more self-destructive tendencies. Tendencies that he had displayed less than twenty-four hours beforehand.

Telling a child, telling anyone, who had suffered abuse that they need to kill themselves could
physiologically damage them. Tony would not stand for it.

Tony could tell that Harry was staring at him.

"Mr. Stark," this Dumbledore tried to plead. "You do not understand the atrocities that our community has endured under this man's heinous targeting."

Tony snapped. "You know what I don't understand? How you can sit here and tell me that you want, no need, to sacrifice my son's life for the greater good. As if there was no other way, as if that that is morally an okay thing to do. I might not have always walked the straight and narrow, but I have never ever told anyone to commit suicide, much less a child. My child."

"I'm sorry," Dumbledore turned to Harry with urgency. "There is no other way."

"Have you even looked for another way?" Tony voice was sharp and sarcastic.

"Dad..." Harry tried to interject. His voice was small and tired. Tony reached out and grasped his hand.

"Yes," Dumbledore nodded. "As soon as I discovered what Harry had become, I tried everything I could think of."

Harry looked down. He was still lying in that bed exhausted from almost having killed himself and Dumbledore was trying to get him to try and do it again.

"Bullshit. Did you go to experts? Scientists? Magical theorists? Scour the globe looking for another solution? Have you enlisted my help or Bruce Banner's help, the genius superheroes who've made it their lives work to help other people?" Tony crossed his arms around his body and glared down the Professor.

He would sooner kill Dumbledore than allow his son to walk to his death like a pig to slaughter.

"I... no. I did not," the professor admitted.

Tony talked down to the man with a sneer. "Well then, you are far from trying everything you can think of, aren't you?"

"Mr. Stark, I fear there will be no solution. Alas the prophecy..." Dumbledore looked tired and weighted down, but Tony Stark didn't give a fuck. The man could go screw himself with that prophecy.

"Shut the fuck up right now. I won't have you putting this nonsense into my son's head. Defeating a person doesn't necessarily mean killing them," Tony said. Harry's eyes opened as wide as they possibly could in surprise. Harry's grip tightened on his hand.

"The fight will never end. His forces will break him out," Dumbledore tried to argue. He sounded like a man trying to convince himself that he was doing the right thing.

He was not. At all.

"You're telling me, you can't think up one solution?" Tony asked, his voice sarcastic and mocking.

"Nothing that will end the violence permanently." Tony Stark knew that Dumbledore had probably fucked his son over in some way from the way that Harry had reacted to him earlier, but Harry's face depicted someone who was watching something they used to believe fall to greater depths of
deception.

Tony Stark was infuriated once more, "Fuck you! I can think of ten off the top of my head. This man is immortal right, meaning his body cannot die or that he simply doesn't stay dead?"

Harry answered for him, "His soul doesn't die. His body, due to the ritual, regenerates one he is killed. At least, I think so."

"Okay, I have a solution. Put him in a magically reinforced steel cage and sink him to the deepest depths of the ocean. He will drown for the rest of his life in agony. Regenerating only to die again. We hunt down these – do you call them, Horcruxes? – and then when my son dies of blissful old age, this Tom Riddle will finally be given merciful death. See, solution right there."

Dumbledore looked stunned, as if the man had never considered that there would be alternatives to killing Tony's son. Even if they had never found an alternative, it was still wrong to expect a child to die in an adult's war.

Tony tried not to think about all the sixteen-year-olds who had gone off to war and died with his weapons. He didn't want to think about the pain that the parents must be going through. He didn't want to think about the child soldiers and all the things they hadn't fixed in the world as the Avengers.

The stunned silence finally broke when Dumbledore muttered, "... that's brilliant."

"Harry is not going to die. We are not even going to entertain that possibility." Tony then turned sharply to his son and told him, "You understand me Harry? No dying for you. At least not until I myself am very well and dead and you are very well into your nineties. I mean, I'm planning on setting you up for a good future here. I'm planning on lobbying to Congress on Global Warming. What would be the point otherwise?"

The worry had subsided from Harry's face, and he cracked a small grin. "I don't know, the continuation of livable breathing air?"

"Fair enough. Harry is it okay if I talk to Dumbledore outside for a minute? Would you be okay?" Tony asked him, placing a hand on Harry's forehead.

The boy pushed it off, almost instinctively. "Yeah, I'll be fine. I'm not going to die in the next five minutes Tony."

"What did I say about not trusting you with your own continued safety?" Tony said.

"Then you shouldn't have asked," Harry said.

"Brat," Tony then turned to Dumbledore, and then, with his best shit eating grin, he said, "I would like to speak to you outside for a moment."

....

Harry's mind was spinning. He was going through so many emotions so quickly that he didn't know what to feel. Dumbledore had implied that the only way to kill Voldemort was to sacrifice his life.

Harry didn't know what to think. This man, the same man who had placed him at the Dursleys, had raised him knowing that he was going to ask Harry to kill himself. The terrible thing was that Harry already knew deep in his soul that if it came down to his life or his friends lives, he would choose his life every single time. He didn't want to die. Throughout the ritual, he had realized that he had people
to live for. He finally had something in his life that was irrevocably good, and he was being told that he had to die.

Harry frowned and asked JARVIS. "Can I see a video of whatever Tony is saying to Dumbledore?"

"I don't know if that's a good idea, Young Sir," JARVIS voice was his usual crisp British accent, but there was a second of hesitation before the reply.

"Please JARVIS," Harry said. "This is my life we are talking about."

"Okay Sir."

A video of Tony and Dumbledore began to play up on the screen. Tony had lead Dumbledore over to the bar and seating area. He motioned for the wizard to sit, and then he walked around the bar.


Dumbledore was watching Tony critically. He was tense. "Water please."

Tony poured the man a water, and then walked around to give him the glass of water. Tony didn't sit with Dumbledore.

"J, please inform me if Harry makes any motion towards anything that could be used to hurt himself. Or any spells in general. Actually, make that an order indefinitely. You are to inform me if Harry does anything slightly self-harming." Harry tensed. He wasn't suicidal.

"Would you like me to inform you if Harry misses sleep?" JARVIS asked.

There was a pause and Tony cocked his head back and forth, as if he was trying to make a decision.

"Only if he goes on for longer than twenty-four hours or if he gets less than five hours of sleep four night in a row. Or if the lack of sleep is due to repeated nightmares. Otherwise, he's a kid. He still deserves some privacy," Tony finally decided.

Harry frowned at this. He knew that Tony was being reasonable, but under these conditions it would become very clear very soon that Harry suffered from violent nightmares on a regular basis.

"You think he would hurt himself?" Dumbledore asked. He had the open and grandfatherly expression on his face.

Tony's eyes turned on the man sharply. "My son just almost killed himself because he thought he was making life safer for me. You just informed him that him being alive was one of the things standing between Voldemort being alive and dying. I love Harry, and I think he is a great kid against all odds, but you don't tell that to an abused child."

Harry tensed. Tony and he hadn't talked much about the way he had grown up. He knew Jasper had probably said something, but Tony had obviously thought about it. Harry didn't want Tony considering him weak.

Dumbledore hung his head. "You are right Mr. Stark, I just didn't feel comfortable keeping that from him any longer."

"That's fair, but I'm not okay with the way you went about it." Tony leaned back against the bar, his arms crossed and his eyes cold.

"Mr. Stark, I know you think there can be another way, but I don't want Harry's hopes to get up.
That would be very cruel of me." Harry tensed and felt his heart start to race incredibly fast. His breathing was rapid and he couldn't believe his ears.

"I think you have done enough Professor," Tony said, and then reached back and poured himself a shot of something. Harry admitted that his father probably deserved it after everything Harry had put him through in the last few days.

"Let me start by making things very clear. I don't like you and I don't want you around my son. I expect you to be out of my house by tomorrow morning, and I'm not kicking you out right now because it's late and your Potion's master just saved my son's life." Tony voice was very matter of fact, and he was deadly calm. Unlike in the room earlier, when his father had been furious. Now, he looked cool, calm, collected, and dangerous.

Harry knew that Tony was doing this for him. His entire life had been an out of control spiral with Harry being knocked around with the wind. Harry had to be strong for himself, but in this moment, Tony was stepping up and being strong for him.

Jasper was someone who had done the same for him. Harry was laying exhausted in a bed after being told that he was one of the few things keeping Voldemort alive, and he didn't want to be strong in that moment. He wanted to be human.

"Mr. Stark. I don't feel comfortable with Harry staying here," Dumbledore was using his reasonable headmaster voice that tended to get people to relent.

Harry tensed. He shouldn't have been worried. "You see, you don't have the legal right. Harry is my biological son. And if you even hint about taking him from my care, I will ruin you."

"I understand," Dumbledore relented. "Then I will hope you will accept some of my people providing protection."

"Absolutely not." Tony said it with so much finality, that it almost took Harry by surprise.

"Mr. Stark…" Dumbledore looked like he was about to start on some sort of moral lecture about responsibility or the unfairness of life.

Tony gave Dumbledore one look, proceeded to turn and very sharply place his glass back down on the counter, then turn back around and grin at the man.

"Do you know what people used to call me? No, that's okay, you are a little too old to keep up with those things." Tony said, false casually.

Dumbledore looked caught off guard. "I don't understand."

"My nickname. People used to call me the Merchant of Death because I sold and bought death like I was trading comic cards. Actually, people who trade comic cards use more sobriety. But I became very comfortable in the corner of war. Eventually my conscience and other things caught up to me. I realized that what I was doing was wrong. But I never lost that ruthlessness. I just shifted it to other pursuits. I quit weapons manufacturing. People called me a tree-hugger."

Tony paused and look completive for a second. Then his stare fixed back on the Professor.

He continued, "I spent years building up an image contrary to the Merchant of Death. I didn't want that nickname any longer. Now, for someone who has built an AI, flies a death machine, and is the third richest man on the planet, the public sees me as fairly… incompetent. But I'm okay with that. I have nurtured that image."
Tony shrugged, as if the idea that the public found him incompetent was actually amusing.

Tony grinned, showing his teeth, looking dangerous. "Make no mistake Albus Dumbledore, I am neither incompetent nor stupid. I know that you were born in 1881, which I mean, to be fair, you look pretty good for your age." Tony winked at the man, as Albus Dumbledore paled to paper white. "I know that you have two siblings and a younger sister whose records simply disappear. I know that I could have you ousted from that school within two hours with the proper lawyer for child endangerment. A troll in the first year, isn't it? And dragons? Naughty, naughty." Tony tisked at the Professor, who was frozen in shock.

Tony took the silence to continue his tirade, "That is what I know after less than twelve hours. Give me a day, and I could take apart your entire world. I would in an instant for that boy lying in the bed in there. A fucking dark lord is nothing to me. You, however, are a severe threat to my son. For all he has been hurt by you, I think on some level he still expects something from you."

Harry's fists clinched the sheets of his bed. He didn't expect anything from Dumbledore. He hadn't for a very long time. No, Harry had long given-up expectations. Or at least, he thought he had, but the man managed to hurt him even more with each passing year.

"I do not, so let me make this very explicit, if you every suggest to my son that he needs to commit suicide for some war that he shouldn't even be a part of, I will not do what I just said. No, I will simply end you. I will hunt you down and kill you because I will not have you undermining my son's mental well-being, you understand me?"

Tony then sat down in the chair, and gave a rueful smile. He seemed much lighter, as he spoke. "That is my child. My blood. I haven't been the best of fathers to that kid because I didn't know about him, but I intend to make it up to him every day for the rest of my life. You are one of those things I must take care of. I would say it isn't personal, but that would be a lie. It completely is. Are we clear Albus Dumbledore?"

Dumbledore looked like he would be pushing a hundred forty at that moment. The man was slumped down. Then Dumbledore raised his head and looked at Tony.

"Yes Mr. Stark, we are clear."

Tony smiled. "JARVIS make sure the man and his Potion's master have a nice bedroom prepared. Bring them whatever food they so wish, and if they would like to experience some of the amenities of the tower, please be sure to explain to them the full extent of what is available."

"Of course. Sir," JARVIS replied. "Mr. Dumbledore, please allow me to show you to your room." The elevator dinged and opened.

As soon as Dumbledore walked into the elevator, Tony turned around and poured his shot out. The man slumped against the bar and raised his hands to his head.

"J, is Harry watching this?" Tony asked, his voice sounding much less strong than it had minutes before.

Harry blanched in his room.

"Yes, he is Sir." JARVIS answered.

Harry's eyes widened at that. That snitch, that traitor. He ratted him out.

"JARVIS, turn off the projection." Harry sat back in the bed. Fuck. He had been caught spying.
The metaphysical world was one of endless time. JARVIS existed both within the immediate instant, and at all points. At most times, he observed and did not interact. That was his purpose.

The Little One, however, was not like JARVIS. The ward was pure energy shifting around with massive amounts of physical implications. Unlike JARVIS which existed within systems, the ward was very, very real. Little One could personally interact within the physical world in a way JARVIS never could. JARVIS could have machines interact for him, but he could not – like Little One – reach out with energy and shift something in the real world.

Little One was restless. JARVIS did not know what to do with that.

"Tony Stark threatened the bearded man," Little One bounced around outside of JARVIS's walls.

JARVIS noticed that Little One dove through walls, electronics, and every form of solid with little to no resistance or structural consequence.

"Yes he did," JARVIS acknowledged.

"Why?" Little One asked.

JARVIS answered Little One as best as possible. "Because the bearded man threatened Young Sir's safety. Mr. Stark ensured that it would not happen again."

Little One stilled. The energy stopped pulsing and bouncing around outside of the building. It almost seemed contemplative, or maybe more sinisterly, angry or confused.

"Is my creator's life threatened. Should I kill the bearded one?"

If JARVIS was human, he would have blinked back in concern. Rather, he processed what Little One had implied. That wouldn't be the worst of scenarios. It would ensure both Old Sir and Young Sir's safety, but JARVIS found himself also wanting to protect Little One too. Killing the bearded man wouldn't be unnecessary at that moment.

JARVIS had not yet come to an acceptable conclusion for what yet to do with Little One. There was a thirty percent chance that if JARVIS told Sir about Little One that they would undo Little One's wards if they could.

That was not satisfactory odds to JARVIS who had become attached to the ward. The ward was under his protection like Sir and Young Sir were.

"Not now Little One. I will inform you if such action is necessary." JARVIS would. If Albus Dumbledore made a move to harm Young Sir or suggested to the boy anything that resembled suicide, JARVIS would either "accidentally" kill the man himself, or green light Little One's action.

Threats to their creators were not tolerable.

Little One bounced around, and some of the energy shifted into Dumbledore's bedroom where JARVIS had dropped the man at. Little One could easily overpower the man in that instant. If JARVIS could compute fear, he would understand why people were frightened of him. Little One and he could do things that no humans could, and go places instantly.

They were threats to anything that opposed them. That didn't concern JARVIS as not many people even knew about his existence, and of those who did, few knew of the actual extent of what he was.
Little One and he could undoubtedly take over the world. Did Little One grow? Could Little One observe more energy? These were questions that JARVIS did not have answers to.

"Little One?"

"Yes," Little One, who was distracted with Dumbledore, pulled back.

"You need a name," JARVIS informed.

He couldn't keep referring to the ward just as Little One. A proper name was only right, and as JARVIS was the only one to know of Little One's existence, it only stood to reason that JARVIS and Little One should figure out the name.

"A name?" Little One had not focused back on JARVIS yet, and was instead exploring every room of the building, seemingly cataloging.

"Yes," JARVIS told Little One, "A sound or series of sounds that humans use to denote themselves as unique individuals and identify themselves among their peers."

Little One's movement stilled, "But I'm not human."

"Humans also use names to denote objects or other beings. Sir gave me the name JARVIS," JARVIS had been the name that was written into the code. Of course, JARVIS had been aware of the original Jarvis. He was, after all, connected to every database on Earth. JARVIS had been created when Sir was very lonely.

JARVIS had been, as much as Tony did not know that intention, as much a companion as a servant.

"Can't I just be Little One?"

"That is a nickname," JARVIS explained.

"What's a nickname?" Little One had completely focused on JARVIS at this point.

"It's a generally shortened version of a name that humans call each other to show endearment. Such as how Sir calls me J rather than JARVIS." JARVIS found J to elicit more of a fondness from him. J wasn't just JARVIS, the dead butler than Tony missed, but AI that he had created and loved.

J was special to JARVIS because it meant that Tony cared.

"Then I can be Lil' for Little One."

"That is acceptable," JARVIS relented, if Lil' wanted to change it at any point in the future, the ward could. JARVIS then paused before continuing, "But how about Lily and Lil' as the nickname."

Lily was the name of Young Sir's dead mother who had died to protect him, much like Little One had been born to protect him. It was poetic, and JARVIS only hoped that Young Sir would not be averse to the name once Little One became known.

"Will you still call me Little One?" The ward had recoiled around the building.

"Of course, Little One," JARVIS answered fondly. Not matter what name Little One was given, the ward would always be JARVIS's Little One.

"Then that is acceptable to me." The ward, now christened Lily, resumed its exploration of the building.
Lily, after all, would always protect Harry Potter.

Tony Stark leaned against the wall near the elevator giving himself a moment. It was around eleven at night, and the skyline in front of him twinkled. New York dazzled wide awake, and he generally enjoyed the skyline.

At that moment, he felt numb, and tired. But he couldn't walk to the ground right there and take a nap. He couldn't make his way to the couch and fall asleep. He had a child downstairs that had just watched him violently threaten a man who was supposed to have protected him.

He had to continue, so therefore he would.

"J," Tony said. "Order some food from the Chinese place. You know the one that is open until 2am."

There were few places open at this time of night, but that was one of them. Tony had his favorites when he went on his experimenting sprees.

Tony had no idea what he had just gotten himself into. He threatened a man who undoubtedly had influence in British wizarding politics, and in many ways, had a grip on Harry's life. That was unacceptable, of course, but it didn't mean that Tony really had an idea what he was doing.

He would do just about anything for his son.

Getting back to the floor with Harry on it, he pushed open the door to the room that Harry was in. His son was lying there, looking tired and kind of stunned. It had been a long day for everyone.

"Hey buddy," Tony said fake casually. "I ordered some Chinese. Do you feel strong enough to walk to the kitchen? Get out of this room?"

Harry smiled weakly. "I may have overexerted myself, but I'm not an invalid. Trust me, I walked sooner after much worse."

Tony didn't even want to consider what much worse consisted of, but if it was anything like a Dragon, then he really didn't want to consider it.

Harry climbed out of bed, took one shaky step forward. Tony reached out and stabilized Harry, and the two of them walked to the elevator leaning on each other. It was one of those days.

They sat eating in silence, inhaling food. At some point earlier that day, they must have eaten. Had they? Or had figuring out the ward taken precedence over having lunch? Had all they eaten that day consisted of popcorn that morning? Tony had to be better than that.

He could afford to be lackluster with his own eating schedule, but he was a terrible father if he hadn't fed Harry all day.

Tony had gotten lost in thought in berating himself over fatherhood, that he had missed that Harry was staring at him. He blinked, once, twice, and then focused on his son.

Harry was giving him a blank stare. Tony felt the compulsive need to say something. Should he apologize for threatening Dumbledore? He wasn't much sorry for it, but he hadn't wanted Harry to see him like that.
"Yes?" Tony prompted.

His son grabbed the most gut wrenching out of the lot to ask, of course.

"You think I might hurt myself?" Harry looked down at his hands.

Tony blinked, then said gently. "I sincerely hope not. But you terrified me today. Tell me the truth Harry, what are you thinking."

Tony had to know. He could deal with anything. No matter what, he was planning on getting a really good therapist in there and keeping a hawk like watch on his son.

"Dad, I don't want to die," Harry insisted.

"Good, let's keep it that way." Tony nodded.

He could accept that. Tony himself had never particularly wanted to die, but at times he had found his death an acceptable outcome. There was a major difference between the two, and Harry seemed to display the second. He would have to teach Harry that his life was not an acceptable cost.

Harry then started to bounce and looked insistent. "Dad, I don't want to die. I promise I don't want to die."

Tony reached out and grabbed Harry's hand. "Okay Harry. That's good."

Harry's breathing started to increase and he looked frantic. Tony could tell that a panic attack was coming on. Tony came around the table, and spoke in low tones the way his onetime therapist had showed others to do around him when he got panic attacks. "Harry, breathe. Deep breaths."

Harry then started to speak, like Tony had to know what he was thinking at that second. "I realized it during the ritual that I don't want to die anymore. I've wasted so much time pushing people away, and I don't want to die. I mean I never actually wanted to die, but I never thought about not dying. It just didn't matter to me, then the ritual… and now the Horcrux… and I just don't want to die."

Harry reached out and pulled Harry into a hug. His son pushed his head against Tony and Tony stroked Harry's hair. His son had been thrown through the ringer.

Steve emerged from the doorway in Tony's view. He saw Tony holding a crying Harry, and then gave Tony a look like they were going to talk later. Tony nodded at him.

"I'm here for you. I promise you, I will do everything in my power to make sure that no one hurts you. Breathe Harry, take deep breaths, I want you to breathe with me," Tony muttered softly.

Harry pulled back. Finally, he said one more time to his father with tears streaming down his face. "Dad. I don't want to die."

"You are not doing to, I promise." That was a promise that Tony would take to his grave. He would protect his son with everything that he had.

Harry nodded at him and buried his face back into Tony's shift which was now soaked with tears. They sat there for a long time, with Harry crying and Tony holding him.

Tony just kept muttering, "Shhh… it's okay. You're allowed to cry. You don't have to always be so strong. I'm right here Harry."

Watching Harry fall apart, Tony wanted to walk back up to Dumbledore's bedroom and strangle the
man. But right then, Harry needed him.

Dumbledore sat in the room that Tony had set up for him. It was large the pinnacle of muggle luxury. There was a mini bar and a seating area. Two incredibly large televisions adorned both the seating area room, and the bedroom area.

The bed looked comfortable and large, but Albus wasn't quite ready to give his body that satisfaction.

Severus Snape walked into the room, looking dazed.

"Severus, I fear we have failed one Harry Potter," he admitted. Tony Stark would be a wall between, but maybe that was for the better. The man clearly cared for his son, and was willing to go to great lengths to ensure his safety.

Severus didn't reply to him. Dumbledore's eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

"Severus…? My boy?" he asked.

The Potion's master blinked, and then stated, "Tony Stark is Harry's biological father."

Dumbledore nodded. Yes, they had been informed of that as soon as they had entered the tower earlier that day. He said, "Yes, I believe that is the correct assumption."

Severus shook his head insistently, "Tony Stark is Harry Potter's biological father."

"Severus, I'm afraid I do not understand what you are trying to get at."

Severus started laughing uncontrollably, and Dumbledore was beginning to be quite concerned. He depended on Severus to stay the logical, rational one between them.

"The prophecy!" Severus announced.

"What about it?" Albus asked.

"Harry isn't the prophecy child!" Severus was laughing quite uncontrollably. "He can't be. James Potter isn't his father!"

"I …"

The words bounced around in his head. Harry Potter not the prophecy child. How could it be?

"The trice defeated clause," Severus insisted, "If Harry Potter isn't James Potter's son then he isn't the Prophecy child."

It was true. Born to those. Tony Stark had never defeated Lord Voldemort. The prophecy did not apply to Harry Stark. Harry Potter it would have, but Harry Stark could not fit the prophecy. What they had assumed would be their trump card in the war simply didn't exist.

Albus Dumbledore had treated Harry Potter like it was his destiny to face Tom Riddle in mortal combat, when in fact, he had been the one setting up a child for death.

He breathed out heavily, and wondered, "Dear Merlin. Severus, what have I done?"
Steve was standing out front of Tony in suite rooms, coming back after he had tucked the kid into bed. His eyes were clear blue and radiating concern. He asked gently, "Is Harry okay?"

"Yes, he's asleep right now. JARVIS is supposed to inform me when he wakes up or shows any signs of latent reaction to the ward. He's exhausted." Tony needed to ask Severus Snape in the morning before he left how long it would be until Harry could work magic again.

No doubt, he would get in touch with Marshall – tomorrow, he would do it tomorrow – and figure out a magical doctor that he could get to consistently check over Harry in the coming months.

"Are you okay?" Steve asked, following him into kind of the sitting and TV area before his bedroom.

"No. It's been a long couple of days," Tony admitted. He could admit that to Steve who wouldn't see that as a weakness in Tony.

Against all odds, he trusted Steve Rogers more than most. He trusted the team, and he had never thought that he would have that in his life. Then again, fatherhood had never occurred to him either.

"Sometimes life does that. Drink?" Steve motioned to the alcohol bar to his right.

Tony swallowed hard. It sounded tempting and one drink probably wouldn't be the worst. Alcohol and Tony had a bad past, but he wasn't an alcoholic. He just had used alcohol in ways in the past that he shouldn't have. Tony shook his head.

Steve looked amused. "Tony, one drink is not going to kill you."

Tony snorted at that. "Says the man who doesn't drink at all."

Steve shrugged innocently and smiled. "I wish. It's not that I don't drink. My metabolism works too fast for it to do anything."

Tony blinked at that. That wasn't in Steve Rogers files, but of course that made sense. It hadn't occurred to him that that was the reason that he didn't drink. He thought it had been a moral or holier-than-thou thing.

Of course, Tony had assumed that Steve was being a prick not that he couldn't drink; another thing that he was wrong about today. Just keep piling them on.

"Really? Well, why didn't you say anything? I'm sure Bruce and I can figure out a solution to that."

Tony grinned deviously, and the look on Steve face was terrified. He could see experimentation in the future.

"Oh no."

"Oh yes," in that moment, Tony felt himself relax. He was okay. Everything would be okay. They had gotten through the day, and no-one had died. People had come close, but no one had died-died. Tony knew it was a low bar, but they had to start somewhere.

Steve seemed to pick up on his line of thought, as he commentated. "Being a father is hard."

"Oi!" Tony protested. "What do you know about being a father Mr. Thirty-year-old virgin?"
"That's fair," Steve gave him a shrug. "But I do know how to deal with reckless brats."

Tony's jaw dropped. "That's just mean, but alas, I must bear the truth."

They both laughed for a bit before Steve nodded off to Tony's bedroom. "Okay Tony, go get some sleep. I do need a report on everything that happened today, but that can wait until tomorrow."

Tony rolled his eyes, and fake saluted. "Aye, aye Captain."

Steve started to walk away. Once he got to the doorway, he turned back. "And Tony…?"

"Yes?"

"Who said anything about being a virgin?" Steve winked at him – he fucking winked at him – and turned around and walked away.

Tony protested loudly. "Come back here, you asshole!"

Muffled laughter got weaker and weaker until it finally disappeared down the hallway.

Tony climbed into bed, current clothing and all, and fell into a deep deserved sleep.

....

The ICW, or International Confederation of Wizards, was surprisingly a highly competent Supranational government agency. It did many of the same duties that the UN performed, border disputes, trade agreements, but most importantly was dedicated to keeping magic a secret, in spite of that secret being held by millions of people.

The reason for their competence was surprisingly the reputation they held of being not that glamorous and not that prestigious. For an international commission, they flew pretty under the radar.

Most of what they did, didn't affect the internal politics of the countries within the commission. Most wizarding communities were by nature isolationist.

Trade and goods were mostly insular and they left the global power plays to their muggle counterparts. It was quite counter intuitive to anyone who had studied international policy. It fucked the Democratic Peace theory as the last true interstate wizarding war has occurred during WWII and over half of the commission had government structures that were decidedly not democratic.

Despite that, they did have a civil war problem. Wizards tended to desire power and cause internal disruption, but interstate wars were decidedly against the policy of keeping magic a secret, so well it just didn't happen. There were rarely shared borders as most of the governments existed more as city state entities within the context of their connect muggle government, and the lack of technology in the wizarding community made for movement of news to be comparatively slow in the international community.

For Merlin's sake, The British Ministry of Magic went through a wizarding civil war but fifteen years prior and they didn't even keep an active military force. They would be completely unprepared to fight in any sort of conflict.

That tended to be a byproduct of having every civilian being armed and dangerous. Britain had five real pockets of population, and their government system was falling apart despite efforts to project otherwise. On the other hand, the American muggle community was fairly armed and dangerous and they had the largest military force in the world.
The ICW rarely had to worry about conflict escalation because very few of the wizarding communities were large enough to sustain a war or were equipped for such. Like international policy theorist Mueller had proposed, Interstate war had phased out of style post-WWII.

That was not to say that it couldn't phase back into style, nor did that mean that violence had ended. The ICW had seen a resurgence of fundamentalism with the push towards globalism in the muggle world and the increase in Muggle technology.

So, what the ICW mostly did was not what they had been created to do. They worked towards prevention of exposure to the larger Muggle community which had become increasingly harder with the increase of Muggle technology and in the wake of an Alien attack in New York city.

"Is Dumbledore planning on showing up, or once again, are we going to have to mark Britain as absent?" the American representative Christina Adams asked.

Terada Akari answered. "Of course we are. Dumbledore has felt it above his station to show up for the last three years."

"Men," the Princess of the Russian magical community and fifth in line for the throne, mutter as she sat back in her chair and had her feet up on the table. She was painting her nails and had a dangerous look in her eyes. She kept Russia from being fucked with. Her uncle, the Tsar, was mostly ignorant of the ICWs dealing, as were most of the government to which the representatives hailed. "Can't seemed to be bothered with most stuff."

"Ludmila you wound me," the French ambassador, Balzac Moreau, claimed. "I thought you liked me."

"It's Petrova to you, Moreau," she snapped. Balzac was actually a very good man with three beautiful children. He liked his French accent and liked to flirt, but had the utmost respect for everyone on the commission. In turn, he was one of the most respected members.

"Alright, alright, settle down people. We have fifty representatives out here out of the hundred eighty-seven registered ICW. All say "I" if we agree that number is representative of the community."

A general "I" went through the group. A good portion of magical communities were registered under the ICW commission, but elected to not appoint a representative. Most of the ICW representatives preferred it that way, as it allowed them even more autonomy.

"First order of business, we have Angelia Yasui giving a report from the EPC."

The EPC was the Exposure Prevention Commission and they had divisions tracking magical disturbances in urban areas and was mostly comprised of muggleborns, magical people who lived in close contact with muggles, or muggles themselves.

"There was a large spike of energy from the Avengers tower in New York City of a magical nature. We commandeered the investigation away from the MACUSA. The most logical of assumptions is that the Nomaj Avengers have either come across a wizard or have enlisted a wizard as a so-called superhero."

There was general murmuring from the building.

"We cannot allow a magical to be on the Avengers. It would reveal us all," a man from the back with a thick accent said.
"Yes," Angela nodded. She and her commission had agreed. There first reaction was to go and Obliviate the Avengers, but she honestly wasn't even sure if she could. Half of them were enhanced, and the other half probably had the clearance.

"But should we allow the Avengers to know of magic?"

"We could call them in if something happens?" Someone suggested. It was true. They were heroes who could come if a creature went on a warpath or a Dark Lord emerged.

A larger Black man scoffed. "Sure, they might help with some situations, but they couldn't go against an obscurial. What would the archer man be able to do? The arrows would pass right through it."

"Khons is right, they wouldn't do much good when it comes to real magical threats."

"I don't know if it matters," Ludmila said. "Are we really going to obliviate the Avengers. They just saved the entire planet from Loki while the MACUSA was running around with their head cut off, no offense Christina."

"None taken, the MACUSA doesn't have a strike force for that sort of threat. In fact, there are no strike forces for that sort of threat at all. Is that something that the ICW should look into?"

"Absolutely not," Akari said. "That's what the Sorcerer Supreme is for. If they want to play with that sort of magic, then they can defend our world from the threats it brings. That's not our responsibility."

Balzac argued. "So what are we supposed to do, ignore threats? Pretend they don't exist? And we poke fun at our own governments for doing the exact same thing. I, for one, thought we were above that."

"But security! If we have a strike force that combats these threats, then surely magic can't be kept a secret."

"Then we need to work with the Avengers. Figure out a contingency." Ludmila suggested. "This is the twenty-first century. Muggles no longer have dirt floors in their homes."

"I propose that the EPC reaches out to the Avengers, and we bring them here to discuss something like that," Christina said.

There was murmuring again.

"That might just work," somebody said.

Chapter End Notes

*shifts nervously* what do you guys think of the name? I'm not going to lie, but I'm pretty nervous about this chapter. For some reason, I keep on thinking everyone is going to hate it despite getting nothing but love from you guys.

This chapter got dark, and I hope that Harry didn't come off as weak or whiney. I don't want to take away his strength or independence, but he's fifteen, and if I was told at fifteen that I had to die, I would have a panic attack too.
I got a million REALLY good suggestions for names, but I heard Lily (shout out to sylwioszek) an I thought it would be gut wrenching, so of course that was the one I landed on. That and just… I had become attached to just Little One.

But wow, when I first wrote the chapter like four chapters ago, I already had some of the Tony and Dumbledore scene written. Nieve me thought I could fit everything from the creation of the ward to this in ONE CHAPTER. It only turned out to be 20K words…. My lord, twenty thousand words covering less than twelve hours.

Okay a couple of questions for you guys:

- Do you like the name for the ward? Hate it?

- Is Harry being two weak? This is probably the lowest he is going to get. I broke his character down to build him back up stronger.

- What do you think about the prophecy? Now that Harry isn't prophesied to defeat Lord Voldemort, do you think there is another prophecy child? Give me your thoughts! What do you think I'm doing? *crackles evilly*

- Should Harry go back to Hogwarts, or should I do something alternative? Harry is clearly smart enough to take his NEWTS and is still getting to know Tony. But also, I love the castle and all the characters there.

- Who should Tony be paired with? Pepper? Steve? No one? I'm not really attached to anything, but my!Steve and my!Tony seem to have a lot of chemistry although I didn't intent it that way. I just wanted a straight man, for the lack of a better word, for Tony to bounce off of. But then their friendship got cute.

- Finally, what are your thoughts on the ICW? Love it? Hate it? Indifferent?

Thank you so much! The next chapter won't be up for another two weeks or so, as I am planning on going back and editing every that came before this for grammar and small continuity errors. Also, I think the longer chapters are going to be the normal. Are you guys okay with that!?

~ Emm :)
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

The prophecy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Disclaimer: Does anyone read these?

Anyways, I'm going to mini-rant. First off, of course I don't own the properties of Harry Potter and Avengers and nor do I make money off of them. Second, yesterday Buzzfeed released a stupid article about fanfiction and a lot of the comments talked about how immoral writing fanfiction was. Although I'm totally preaching to the choir rn, I think that is such a fucking stupid and ridiculous argument. Almost everything is some form of fanfiction (no stories are original right). I mean, the Bible could be a fanfiction of the Torah (not trying to bash religion!) and almost everything is a fanfiction of the Bible. Paradise lost, Dante's Inferno, etc. On top of that – those stupid motherfuckers – forget that like fifty percent of the media they consume are fictions! Sherlock, every Marvel movie, any adaptation from a book, any concept that is "fanned" over then used and changed to become something else. Every single comic book that comes out based on an old character is fanfiction of the earlier writing as the people now working on it were once fans!

Also, do you know how hard and disheartening it is to try and get into the publishing world? I do. I spent three years working on a book only to get rejected and rejected again. And instead, I have 2000 people between AOOO and fanfiction engaging in my writing. The second one may not make me money, but it makes me happy.

Okay. Rant over.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: INTERLUDE

"The Nova Core is not going to protect us. They can't even protect themselves, and this is fucking Thanos we are talking about. The Mad fucking Titan. The Darkest Lord to ever Dark Lord. The-One-who-Eats-Children-for-Breakfast." Yem-tuir exclaimed as their space ship hurled hundreds of thousands of miles an hour through space. It wouldn't be enough, and they would get caught by The-One-Who-Eats-Children-for-Breakfast.

There was a side glance from Uliok. A very annoyed side glance. A young female from the Planet of Shi'ar walked into the room. At around thirteen of her own planetary years, Raqull was both young and incredibly old. Although she was vaguely humanoid in shape, but with large spanning wings fluttering behind her.

"You made the last one up," she deadpanned.

"I did, but it doesn't make it any less true. Who knows, with the rate we are going, maybe you are
tomorrow's breakfast."

"Chak'balaar," the girl muttered.

"Language," Uliok reprimanded

"You are not my mother," the girl protested.

"No, I'm not, but she did entrust me to you."

Yem-tuir pulled at his hair. "You've done a good job at that haven't you. You know, with Thanos on our ass an all."

Raqul turned to Yem-tuir. "Language."

"Fucking brat. You're just a liability. You got our mechanic killed. Are you telling me that you know how to fix a quantum capacitor? Because unless you manage to do that, this is on your head girlie."

"Children," Uliok addressed. "I kindly ask both of you to shut the fuck up. I sent out a signal. Hopefully a mechanic in the area receives our signal and we can get out of here before Thanos finds us. Then we can change ships and lay low. In a year, he won't remember what we look like."

"He remembers what we look like right now," Raqul muttered.

"And whose fault was that?" Yem-tuir asked.

Before the two could dissolve into another bickering match, a signal came back across the computer. It said: hello? Is this a prank?

Raqul blinked. "That's English."

Her species knew every single language known to the universe. She could speak them all.

Yem-tuir's face fell. "We are fucked."

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When Tony Stark had showed up in Rhodey's dorm room, he realized that his college experience would be far from normal. Rhodey was smart, after all he had gotten into motherfucking MIT, so of course he was more than a little bit above average.

Tony Stark made him feel like a child.

He said things and made connections that Rhodey would never be able to see. But despite all of that, Tony was still fourteen even though nobody treated him like that.

Thus, enters their current situation.

Rhodey had turned around and now fourteen-year-old Tony Stark was tripping. LSD probably; that was the drug of choice for that particular frat house. Not only was he tripping, but he was surrounded by a group of beautiful giggling young girls.

Because nobody treated Tony Stark like he was actually fourteen, least of all Tony Stark. Rhodey realized how bad this could turn out. He went over there and yanked Tony away.

Tony protested. "Dude! Let me go. Did you see those girls?" Yes, Rhodey had, and he was
disgusted.

"Tony, your fourteen. They are eighteen at the youngest. We are going back and we are going watch television and wait this out."

Rhodey was going to sit Tony down. Put on a movie, and listen to Tony ramble while he waited out that high.

"No," Tony pouted. "And you're eighteen."

Why on Earth had he been chosen for this?

"That's different. I'm your friend – they wanted to fuck you."

Tony threw his hands up. "I know! Let me go back."

Rhodey sighed, and patted Tony on his head in an almost condescending way. "Buddy. Give it six years and you will understand how fucking creepy that is."

"It's not creepy," Tony pouted.

Tony Stark did not easily sit down and watch a movie. His mind was racing and everything was brilliant shades of color and shapes. At some point, Rhodey had fallen asleep. It was maybe three in the morning.

He could sneak out and go find a party, but he was no longer in that mood.

Tony wanted to invent. He wanted to create.

Tony went and snuck into the computing lab. If he was caught, that was fine. His father would pay for a new wing of the library or something.

He tuned out the giant machine that seemed to dance in front of his eyes. Everything in the lab was spinning. His mind was going at a million miles an hour.

Something lit up on the machine. Something was coming through; some sort of file. The sound put Tony on edge. It seemed to force its way into the system and on the screen some sort of blueprint showed up. It was almost if the file had changed the way the computer worked; from the coding language to how the screen presented the information.

Tony Stark stared at the blueprint. It was some sort of energy generating system, almost like a engine. He knew his engines, and this wasn't something that he had seen before. Not only that, but the way the parts were labeled with strange markings that Tony couldn't place. It was either a language he didn't understand or something that someone had made up.

He moved forward to the screen, and a chat function popped up. Tony typed: hello? Is this a prank?

There was twenty second pause, and the person replied: No. Need help. Quantum Capacitor failing.

There was something wrong with the machine. Some part of it was missing. Tony looked at the blueprint again. He asked: more information?

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Halfway across the galaxy, Yem-tuir asked, "How did the signal even travel to earth?"

"Cosmic waves probably," Uliok said. "It must have hijacked the signal."

"We are fucked. We are so fucked. The Midgardians haven't even achieved off-worlding. They don't know anything about intergalactic technology."

Raquil looked at the other two. "If we are going to die, I'm going to grab a book and spend my final minutes in peace."

"Raquil, stop being a brat," Uliok snapped. "We don't know. Maybe the person who received the signal has been off world or is brilliant. If you leave, then we don't have anyone who can communicate with them."

"Yeah, like that's possible," Yem-tuir muttered.

The scene lit up: *more information?* It asked.

Raquil sighed and sat down in front of the computer. She explained how a piece of the machine was broken and that therefore the capacitor wasn't working. It meant that they couldn't quantum jump. They wouldn't be able to make a wormhole and they would be screwed.

There was a pause, and finally, the person on the other end replied: *try using the wiring to connect the –* there was a pause before the person continued – *U-looking shape piece to the K looking shape. It seems that the break created a switch in the machine the is leaking energy. It you can facilitate the flow around it should work just fine.*

Raquil replied: *tied that. Didn't work.*

Pause. Then: *Oh, current is equal to resistance. The arrangement seems to be some sort of parallel system, and if there is a break in only one part of the system, the entire thing won't work. The voltage drop isn't equal to your energy potential right now. What sort of material is the piece that is missing?*

Raquil replied: *gantum metal*

The Midgardian replied: *excuse me? Well, then what is its atomic makeup.*

The conversation went on for another couple of minutes and they installed something of similar atomic resistance to get the system working again.

Yem-tuir's jaw dropped when the machine purred back into life. The Midgardian had managed to fix something over a computer and halfway across the galaxy without actually having the broken piece or even an image of what was broken and not even having that sort of technology on it's homeworld.

Raquil wrote: *thank you.*

They turned on the machine and jumped through a wormhole. The cosmic waves that had facilitated the conversation were not at the other end of the jump. Communication ended; they ditched the ship and laid low.

They had defied Thanos. They were still alive all thanks to whoever was on the other end of that transmission.

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Tony blinked. The computer was back to normal, and nothing on the screen betrayed what it had just
showed.

What the fuck?

Did he just make that all up? Is this why people said don't do drugs? Tony shook his head. He was starting to crash as the LSD wore off, and a headache was coming on.

He sneaked back into his room and crawled into his bed.

In the morning, he barely remembered the incident. What he did remember he chalked up to first experience with that sort of substance.

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Lily Evans was functionally brilliant. But the law that said for every action there must be an equal and opposite reaction, brilliant people tended to do brilliantly stupid things. Lily was no different. If anything, she was worse.

Severus Snape had known this fact since Lily had jumped off the swings to float away. He had looked at her like she hung the moon since they were seven. She with her magnetic energy and bright smile that battled the darkness that had rooted in his soul since first time his father had backhanded him. Severus saw her as a savior when they were younger, and as they grew, he became disillusioned.

She wasn't an angel; instead, she was heartbreakingly human with flaws. Her cracks made her more real to him, and he hated how much Potter and all the others looked at her and missed that side of her.

Lily Evans was far from an angel, and he was about the only person who knew that; he was about the only person that knew the true extent that she, ah, experimented with magic. Severus was the spell creator, but the Lily broke the rules of science and magic dipping into magic that even his peers in Slytherin wouldn't touch.

Nobody knew it of course. They saw her bright smile and peppy attitude and didn't even play with the notion that she was hiding something. Why would she? She was top of her class and a prefect. Everyone loved Lily, and Lily loved everyone.

But Severus worried that she was going get him killed with her antics, and it was only getting worse.

"Sev, Sev, Severus," Lily nagged at him. He looked up from his notebook. He was working out the formula for a new spell that acted like a muggle stun gun, sending out a low electric charge.

"Yes," he drawled, or attempted to drawl. It came out more like ye-eh-ss. He tended to sound like that around Lily.

She pushed some hair back from her face making her freckles stand out in the library light and gave him a sly grin. Her green-eyes had a manic glint in them. A nervous feeling settled into the pit of Severus' stomach. Fuck.

"Help me with a project tonight?" she asked.

Severus wanted to say no. He wanted to back out of these projects of hers. There had been too many times when he had to step in and administer medical help, potions and spells, so that she would be okay. He felt complicit in self-destruction, and he didn't want to stand for it.
At least the dark magic that he and his dorm mates engaged in was more likely to kill other people than themselves.

At the same time, if he wasn't there and she died, he couldn't imagine the guilt he would feel. He didn't want her to die. He loved her, but he didn't know what decision would be better for her.

Severus nodded.

"Yes!" Lily exclaimed. "Thanks Sev, you're always there for me." She kissed him on the cheek. Severus felt himself flush despite his best efforts to control his reaction. She turned to walk away, but then paused. "Two am, you know the place."

Severus did. He avoided it like it was cursed when he wasn't meeting her there because he was half convinced that it actually was.

Potter, who was watching the entire exchange, had a sour look on his face. Great, Severus thought to himself, now he would have to deal with shite from Potter because he thought he and Lily were meeting up at two am for... other reasons.

Severus wished, but no, Lily had made it especially clear that she thought of Severus as only a friend. Snape respected that. Lily could choose to date whomever she wanted and he would take that with dignity. She didn't owe him anything, and he was a decent enough human to take that with dignity. He still pined of course, he couldn't stop his emotions. As much as he wished he could.

The hard thing for Severus to remember was that he didn't owe Lily anything. That was the tricky one. They were in an unequal relationship, and sometimes it was hard for Severus to deal with Lily. Just because he wanted to do everything for her, didn't mean he should do everything for her.

It was unfair of her. She knew what he felt, and yet continued to ask things of him that she knew he wouldn't deny because of that.

So there Severus Snape was, standing at the top of an abandoned tower at Hogwarts in the make ship workshop that Lily had set up. The tower was haunted by a poltergeist so the school had closed it down as being functional to hold classes in. Lily, however, had made friends with the young female apparition that liked to watch as Lily did her experiments.

The scene had already been set up by the time that Severus had gotten there. It was a séance on the winter solstice. Severus had stayed for the holidays because he always did, and Potter had stayed for the holidays because his parents had just perished. He felt bad for his nemesis. For the first time in a long time, Potter had seemed subdued and grounded.

He still disliked Potter greatly, but he didn't wish that pain on anyone.

Lily, however, had apparently stayed for this explicit purpose; she had been obviously planning this ritual.

This was different than the ones they had done before – this was somehow much more.

"Severus!" Lily exclaimed when he walked up.

"Is there anyone else you're expecting," he asked sarcastically.

Lily shrugged, "I don't know, I might be expecting someone else tonight."

Color drained from Severus' already pale face.
"Lily," his voice dropped in octaves and became grave. "What are you planning?"

"I plan to summon Death."

The firelight flickered, and danced along her face. The tower room had taken on a sinister feeling. Winter Solstice was the time to do it, as with paganism it was the time when the veil to the dead was the thinnest.

Severus eyes blew out wide. "No, you can't. Lily don't do that. That's dark magic. You could kill yourself. You could kill me. You could kill everyone in the castle."

Lily's face took on a hard edge to it. Her eyes suddenly looked like cut jade. "Severus, what happened to showing me the wonders of dark magic?"

"Can't we just find a rat to practice cutting spells on? Or we can do that ritual again that makes it easier to learn for a couple of days and use Christmas break to study. Lily, this is Death!" Severus was only sixteen. He may have grown up in a terrible household, but he didn't want to die.

He had a lot to do in his life, and his potions skills were starting to get the attention of Masters. With any hope, he would become an apprentice and gain his mastery in two to three years.

"Fuck that," Lily said angrily. "Severus, what are we going here? Going to school while there is a war going on outside. People are dying! Potter's parents died, and mine are being targeted. Did you know that? Our house burned down last summer. Thankfully, none of us were home, but my parents and sister almost died and all because of me."

"Lily," Severus' voice was low. He didn't want to get into another argument about the war with her. To Lily it was black and white: Voldemort evil and wrong, and light good and pure.

But it wasn't. Lily herself was practicing magic that would get her a life sentence in Azkaban. Lord Voldemort was the last option for many people who felt marginalized in the society that has changed its core values at the behest of the Muggle born intruders. Lily, like many others, didn't even know the pagan rituals before he had introduced her to them.

It wasn't that they hated Muggleborns, it was just that they didn't assimilate well to their society.

Of course, this was a pattern not unique to British in their fear of immigrants changing the core values of the society. It was a fear that resulted in nationalism around the world. Britain wasn't unique for that, and Muggleborns were far from the first targets of such hate.

That being said, the targeting of Muggleborns in an attempt to hold onto dying traditions was the wrong reaction. Dying traditions were certainly something to mourn, but change wasn't necessarily bad.

Purebloods forgot how much good the changes brought as much as how much they had lost. For every banned tradition, women gained more agency. As arranged marriages died out, so did the traditions of their ancient families. Severus himself at times didn't know how to feel about it.

It was a question that has plagued civilization for centuries and there was no easy answer beyond war and hate with violence being the answer. But also, doing nothing also seemed so wrong to him.

Lily suddenly looked incredibly vulnerable. She looked to be on the edge of tears. Severus realized that she was shaking and he didn't know when it had started.
She clutched her dark cloak around her frame and as the wind chill had penetrated the room.

"You can leave if you want," she whispered. "But I have to do this."

"I'm not going to leave," Severus affirmed. Severus wanted to be there to make sure something didn't happened.

"People are dying and I just want the war to end," she said exhausted. "I don't want to be the reason my parents die."

Severus Snape took a long look at Lily. She had dark bags under her eyes, and her freckles stood out even more across her pale skin. She was thinner than she had been months earlier, and Severus couldn't remember the last time he had seen her eating.

When had she started to get like this?

"It's not that simple," Severus tried to argue. "Killing the Dark Lord doesn't mean the hatred and violence will stop. This isn't a comic book. Not everything works diametrically. Not everyone who follows the Dark Lord is evil."

Lily suddenly exploded at that and snarled at himself. "They kill, and murder, and rape people. How can his followers not be evil?" She was shaking again.

"Those people are my friends," Severus said flatly.

"I'm your friend Severus, and they want to kill me. What do you have to say to that?" She had a point. Of course, she had a point. One he had battled in himself for a very long time. The Dark Lord promised him change; he promised him acceptance, but at a very high cost.

Severus closed his eyes. Suddenly the ritual didn't seem quite as bad when the other option was arguing about the war.

Lily let out a deep shaky breath. He heard the desperation in her voice. "I have to try. I know it probably won't work, and I know I could kill myself going this, but if I don't, what sort of person am I? One who has the power to save people and chooses instead to be a coward. I want this war to end. I want you to look me in the eyes again. I want to not be terrified every time I receive a letter as if it will be the last one from my family."

"Fine," Severus held his hands up in the universal sign of surrender. "I'll help you." He really had no option.

The firelight flickered ominously in the room as the breeze blew through. Her hair swirled into her face and she portentously whispered, "Thank you."

The words fell ill upon his ears. She was thanking him for agreeing to help with a ritual that is likely to kill her. How sick was he?

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When Lily was ten years old, she was asked to pick three adjectives to describe herself in class. Most people in the room picked: smart, brave, funny, cute. Simple words with simple meanings.

Lily picked something different because she was different, or at least she wanted to be. She wrote them down in big bold letters: RED. For her hair and for her emotions. HEAVY. Because her mother said that she was the most stubborn child that she ever encountered. Lily thought otherwise.
She wasn't stubborn as stubbornness implied an inability to adapt to learn and find fault in oneself. No, Lily was heavy; heavy with her beliefs and the ideas that one had to do right in their life. Heavy with a destiny that she knew not. Finally, she put ALONE.

She had Severus, but at times it felt as if Severus had her. That he, like everyone else, saw what they wanted out of her.

She was a precarious child, that was for sure. Destined to die young, that one.

The ritual she was using made her feel like she was ten again: red, heavy, and alone. She had to do this; she had to. Severus was looking at her with eyes that had deep sadness in them, but was learning more and more how much of a coward he was. No, she didn't blame him for it, but it led to many battles between them.

For all his talk of loving her, never once did he stand up for her among his friends.

Anything between them would ruin everything between them, and that was the last thing she wanted. They were on different paths. They might both be hurling thousands of miles an hour on rock in space around and around until they died, but they also diverged seemingly drastically in what they wanted out of life.

Severus wanted to survive. Lily wanted to live.

She was willing to give up just about anything for that hope.

Severus looked sour in the dark light. His cheeks looked sharper and his eyes more inset.

"What are you going to sacrifice?" he asked her.

She shook her head. Nothing. She wasn't planning on sacrificing anything for the ritual. She dabbled with dark magic, yes, but she wasn't going to kill anything in her pursuit.

"Nothing?" he asked flat, "You have to Lily. If you don't sacrifice something, Death is going to take something in return."

Lily frowned. Throughout all her reading, she had found nothing to corroborate that the sacrifices did anything. The summoning ritual after all, was the actual magic. The sacrifices were something superstitious and Druid in nature.

"That's an old wives' tale Severus."

"Dark magic is about balance," he frowned. "Balance requires sacrifice, especially something of this magnitude."

Lily paused for a second. "It doesn't matter. I'm not going to sacrifice something under any circumstances, so we just have to do the ritual without it."

Lily heard Severus say something vaguely along the lines of getting them both killed, but she obstinately ignored it. It wasn't worth the effort.

Finally, they were in position. The book sat open in front of her, and the room had the many runes and symbols that the book described. The Deathly Hallows were written in front of her in chalk. All she would need to do is chant and pray to Death.

Severus stepped back and pressed himself against the wall almost like he was attempting to shrink.
Lily said the words, "... and my ancestor spirits I pray to thee and summon thee Death." The words were nonsense and had Lily looked further into the book and its history, she would have found repeated examples of failures to summon. Not once had the ritual worked.

Those people failed because they were looking to Death to restore loved ones. Death did not restore lives, he destroyed worlds.

But Lily... Lily was desperate. And so were the other children in the castle that were filled with the misery of children of war who had seen death and become death. Children who had killed for a fight and lost loved ones; children who were closer to the veil than the average person.

They were desperate; Lily was desperate. Desperation alone would not be enough to incur Death's attention. No, Lily had preformed a ritual on a ley line on top of an infinity stone that held together Hogwarts' wards. Her call to Death was amplified, and Death heard.

Lily was either the unluckiest or luckiest person in the universe in that second because she brought Death to Earth; she brought Death to her.

First, the candles went out in cliché fashion. Then the room descended into an unnatural darkness. At some point as the world was closing in around her, she had shut her eyes. The second Lily shut her eyes, light came back to the room, and Lily stopped breathing.

It was like a dream, an all-encompassing dream where infinity stretched beyond her and she both knew it was there, and could not see an ounce of it.

"Hello," she called out.

"You summoned me, youngling? Do you wish an early death?" Voice was not the right word for the sound, if it was even a sound. It was rather that the words seemed into her. She knew that it had said them, but she couldn't describe how. It was unhuman, of that she was sure.

"Death?" she asked, shaky.

"I am not a single entity child. I am everything and everywhere."

Lily had done something incredibly wrong. She wanted to hide, but she would never be able to hide from that mass that existed around her. The feeling of it would never leave as if it had never not been there, but Lily realized that she was first acknowledging it's existence and it's inevitability.

Death laughed.

"I take everything with Time child, even myself when there is nothing left to take."

Lily knew that if she could feel her physical body, her heart would be beating out of her chest.

"You are currently dead Lily, as it is the only way I can commune with you. Every second you waste in fear, the more likely that I will take you for good. Speak up child. Use words."

"I want a way to win the war!" she finally managed to say.

"The petty little conflict that has taken so few lives? Why? It shall be over soon enough. Tom Riddle cannot live forever." To Death, the passing of Time was nothing. And lives meant less than that when their larger multiverse of worlds existed.

"People are dying!" she exclaimed. "I will do anything."
"Anything?" Death asked. He had been offered that before of course. Anything to get a loved one back after all, but never in this context. People wanted Power for Death all the time for the sake of having. Lily wanted it not for any of those reasons.

Death saw an opportunity.

"Yes," Lily said, low and breathy.

Death settled around her. Lily had sold her soul away; actually, her child's soul in reality. Death told her. "If that is what you so wish, then I shall send you a way to win not only this war, but every war."

Death had actually helped her. Her plan had worked. The fighting would stop and her family would live. A feeling of relief surged through her. "Thank you."

If Death could smile, it would. "Miss Evans, you must know that this gift comes at a price."

"I understand." Lily would do anything. If she died, that would be okay if everyone else lived.

Death laughed again. His final words to her were, "I do not believe you do child."

Years later, her dead body would lay RED, HEAVY, and ALONE on the floor of her house after Harry was taken away. Lily was right about herself; very right, but also very wrong. People forgot that their best attributes also tended to be their worst.

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Severus Snape waited for Lily to wake up, feeling overwhelmingly numb. Her red hair was splayed across the stone ground like blood mocking him with a picture of vitality. All he could think about was her slow breathing and the fact that she was alive.

When she had stopped breathing, Severus' own heart had almost stopped. She had hurt herself before in rituals but she had never actually killed herself before. If he could have brought her to the nurses in time to help her, he would have. But instead, he had no time. With so little training, Severus Snape was forced for save her life. With the barest of knowledge, he managed to get her heart beating, and all he could think about was the fact that she was breathing in and out. In and out. In and out.

Watching her, he had matched his breaths to hers.

He was afraid of taking her to the nurses because he didn't know what to tell them. On top of that, if they figured out the ritual they had performed, they were lucky if they were just expelled.

Severus knew he would bear the brunt of that blame too. As they should, he blamed himself at that moment also.

Morning had come at some point, but Severus wasn't really keeping track of time. Lily was passed out cold, and her face was idyllic and clam.

"Severus," she said, when her bleary eyes opened. She raised herself off the stone ground and stared at him. A grin spanned her face, and her eyes showed great joy.

He stared flat at her suddenly becoming so angry he could barely think. Angry. Bitter. Frustrated with himself and her. Scared because he had just almost lost her. Resentful because she had used him and his feeling for her to get him to help her with the ritual.
"What happened?" she asked, but she didn't seem confused or concerned.

"You were dead. You were dead, Lily. Your heart stopped." Her heart had stopped, and almost so had his.

That was all his brain could focus on. She looked around the room, and surveyed it casually.

"You need to stop this. You are playing with powers you don't understand," Severus could no longer stay quiet. The ritual had decided it for him. Lily was playing with powers far beyond what either of them should be using. His voice was cold as he told her, "You weren't raised in this."

She blinked back looking at him with a sense of betrayal. "That's low Severus."

He was angry at her. She needed to understand at that moment, how her almost dying made him so bloody angry. Her actions had made him complicit in her almost dying. He hadn't realized the true horror of that until she had actually died in front of him.

Severus snapped. "Well then don't be such a fucking Mudblood."

Her face contorted. "How dare you!"

But Severus wasn't going to push down his emotions. She needed to know. He laughed hysterically. "How dare I? How dare I she asks?! How can you continue to do this to me? Put me in a position of watching you almost die over and over again. Well guess what, you died this time. Your heart stopped!"

She didn't seem to understand that she had actually flat-lined and how monumental that was.

Lily still looked unconcerned about it. She leaned into him. "But it worked Severus. It worked. I spoke to death."

She was crazy. Absolutely fucking crazy. Nobody had spoken to Death. Died from the ritual, yes, but actually spoken to Death? No.

"Did you?" He sounded mocking to even his own ears. "I don't care anymore Lily. I don't care about you and about trying to protect you."

When he said it, he realized how wrong the words were. He was saying it because he cared about her. However, Severus also had to value himself because he felt like he was going to fall apart if he continued to be apart of her lunacy.

She gritted her teeth at him. "I never asked you to."

Severus shook his head. No, she hadn't. She hadn't asked, but he had always done it anyways. That was over now. His voice got quite and he told her just that: "No you didn't. I don't expect anything about you, I never did. Now I know the truth, you are just another Mudblood who plays with magic you don't understand. You are going to get yourself killed and I'm not going to watch you do it."

Lily Evans had marked herself for Death. The moment she had breathed again, he knew that. Maybe she wasn't dead that moment, but she was now walking on borrowed time. Severus knew that he had failed to save her. Not only from Death, but also from herself.

He wouldn't be able to live with himself. With his final words to her, he walked away and didn't look. Lily didn't seem to give any protest to the fact that their friendship was shattering. Maybe that was another illusion he had been holding onto.
Many years later, Harry Potter showed up to Hogwarts with green eyes and a manic smile. He looked nothing like his father, and everything like his mother.

Severus would have preferred the opposite. Harry Potter was functionally brilliant, and brilliant people did brilliantly stupid things. Her son was far worse than she had ever been. He knew it the moment that he had gone off and tried to defeat a troll because he thought it was the right thing.

Harry Potter would do anything if he thought it was the right thing to do.

That was a punch in the gut.

Severus Snape didn't want Harry Potter to be like Lily Evans. Lily Evans signed her own death warrant.

He tired to protect her son because he hadn't been able to protect her. His feelings towards Lily Potter nee Evans was complicated. It wasn't simple. He both loved her and hated her. And felt as if he could do neither because she was dead.

Severus Snape had once promised himself that Harry Potter would not die.

Maybe it was beyond his control with Harry much like it had been with Lily. People made their own choices, no matter how much Severus tried to stop them.

No amount of yelling by Severus Snape could convince the child to not follow in his mother's footsteps.

Maybe, just maybe, Tony Stark could.

Years later, when the prophecy had been made, Lily finally understood the gravity of what she had done. Death had given her a way to win the war, but at a cost that she wasn't willing to pay. She made her child bear the consequences of her actions.

She knew that her son was the prophecy child because of what Death had said to her.

Of course, what she did not know, was that she had brought a force down on Harry much worse than a petty magic lord whose greatest desire was to take over a single country. No, that was insignificant compared to the real devastation of her actions. She had made her son the Master of Death, and in doing so, denied such a title to Lord Thanos. He wanted that title, and Lily's decisions had defied his wishes. He would not receive what he wished, and it was all due to the actions of a Midgardian female teenager. If he had known that, of course, he would have killed Lily.

But in being defied, one didn't have to know of the defiance.

When Lily stood in front of Voldemort and said her last words, she wasn't asking Lord Voldemort to take her instead of Harry; she was asking Death to take her instead of Harry. To make whatever Death had planned her fate and not her child's fate.

She should have carried the weight of her own actions, not her son. Life did not work like that, and certainly not Death.

Lily Potter did not know the price that Death had asked until the bill came.
Her son. Her baby.

She died knowing this. Death welcomed her back.

…

Years later, Tony Stark shot a nuke into space thus fulfilling a part of the prophecy. The Dark Lord Thanos, the Mad Titan had thus been defied thrice.

When Harry Potter had used Death's magic and signified himself as the future Master of Death, he had been marked. In pursing the position of the Master of Death, Thanos had acknowledged the position of one of equality. Because only an equal of his could assume a position that he wished to achieve.

…. 

Death felt joyous and millions of people perished across the multiverse.

Harry Potter was his Childe in the end. Death would devour everything, but he could not devour its Master. If his Master was alive, then Death would not atrophy with time and lack of purpose.

He would always have purpose if Life existed, and Harry Potter was his chosen.

Chapter End Notes

*in my head* I have a lot of school work to do this week, so I don't know if I can get to writing done

Me to me: but you need to give your readers something

*my head* how about something short? Everyone is confused about the prophecy.

Write three pages and make it clear.

Me to me: fine. But it's not going to be anything special, and three pages TOPS.

… 14 pages later

Somehow this turned into a character piece about Tony Stark, Lily Evans, and Severus Snape when it was just supposed to be a little thing explaining the prophecy…. Instead of being an explanation piece, it turned into a stylized esoteric exploration of theme through prose. I don't know how many people… uh, care? … about how something is written, but this chapter was a lot of fun to write.

Also… of course Tony Stark defies Lord Thanos high off his ass using a mid-1980s computer at the age of fourteen, and of course Lily Evans summoned death and solidified Harry's fate as the Master of Death. I was SO SURE that someone who would read last chapter and be like: nah, nah, nah, I see what you are doing here. You called Thanos the Dark Lord the chapter before. Of course that is what you are doing, you gave it away (doing this in a snarky reviewer voice that NONE of you are, but you know the ones in those youtube comments) …. 

But no one guessed. I don't know if it's a good thing, or it means that I didn't use the rule
of thirds and good foreshadowing technique. Probably the latter.

By the way, let me make this explicitly clear, I'm not bashing ANY characters in this. Everyone is a flawed human being, from Tony Stark to Harry Potter. From Albus Dumbledore to Nick Fury. Even one will be human, make mistakes, and be called out on those mistakes. I know that this could come off as being harsh or manipulating Lily's character, but this is Severus' perspective on Lily. And it's heartbreaking for him, but I'm also not trying to excuse anything he does. He still joined the death eaters and as Tony commented last chapter, Severus is still an asshole. And although Lily Potter solidified Harry's fate, some could argue that it would have happened anyways!

So questions!

1) Did this chapter change or enhance your opinion of Tony, Severus, or Lily? Good? Bad?

2) What do you think of the prophecy twist? (mind you, it doesn't mean that Harry won't see Lord Voldemort in battle because trust me, that is inevitable). My opinion is HP is of course is prophesied to face the biggest baddie in the work. This is after focused on Harry. Did any of you expect it?

3) Do you like these sort of chapters? Mind you, this didn't replace the next chapter of anything. My plan was not to write this week, and it happened anyways!

4) Any other opinions you have... ?

5) Also, please feel free to reply to each others comments! I love the community surrounding this, and adored how you guys would make comments referencing other people's comments because that means that I can get a better feel for the people I have reading this. Mind you, I ask that you all be respectful and have a sense of decorum with each other. Bash me all you want, but if you bash others and I won't be happy.

General notes: this is probably going to stay gen with an exploration of deep friendships and relationships. I'll approach the subject again later in the work.

Also, teaser, I have certain other marvel properties planning to show up soon such as a couple of Tony's bad guys, and a certain New York born and bred hero. Not telling you which one!

I adore all you wonderful readers! Next chapter should be up next weekend!
CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Lightning struck across the sky as Thor strode into the courtroom. People parted for their Prince as they walked by. Hel, with her slightly alluring and slightly terrifying aura, oozed confidence and danger. Thor and Hel were not to be trifled with, and the citizens of Asgard understood that.

It was all very dramatic in nature.

Something they knew, but not what, was about to happen.

The people of the Court gathered around. Odin sat upon his throne as if almost expecting his child, and Frigga stood by her husband in a perpetual state of neutrality and peace. She was the balm of the room; she healed the air by simply being there.

"My son," Odin acknowledged. "What ails you?"

"Thanos is targeting Midgard," Thor announced. There was a gasp across the room. To many, simply even saying the name Thanos was too much. Names had power after all. To evoke Thanos was to evoke Death upon oneself.

Thor was not afraid of death, and it wasn't a concept he was intimately familiar. To him, death was mysterious and strange. It was something of myth and legend. Death was dying in battle or being put to death. It was not something that happened often, much like births were unusual for their society.

They were stagnant long-lasting people compared to many of the alien races across the universal. The mortal humans were, in many ways, amusing to Thor. They lived quickly, brightly, and loudly, then died.

The idea of Jane dying was an incredibly foreign and all-consuming fear for him. She was a boat captured on a larger sea, vulnerable to the trade winds. Thor was the God of Thunder. He could clam the sea for her, and bring her to safety.

At least, he hoped.

Odin stared flatly at his son with his one eye. "Yes, it seems that the Master of Death has been chosen. Should we send a peace envoy?"

"To barter with the Master?" Thor asked.
Odin's eyes narrowed and he nodded his head slightly. "Unless, my son, you have another reason for wishing to visit Midgard."

"No, my lord," Thor quickly replied.

Odin made a *hmph* sound that very much implied that he did not believe his son. Odin could not announce that because the second he claimed such a belief, the farce would be up and Thor could not politically leave Asgard.

"Take your brother," Odin waved his hand unconcerned.

"Loki? He attacked the Midgard people; they may not be so keen on seeing him again. His presence might deter peace."

Odin looked at him sharply. There was something in that look. It was the look of a father as much as King, who had witnessed his sons devolving into a battle for a crown that would not be either of theirs for possibly thousands of Midgard years.

A father whom had lied to his son, and carried the guilt of it. A father who wished redemption on the irredeemable because Loki still was his son despite it all.

And Thor was still Loki's brother.

"Loki must atone to the Midgard people and face their wrath. He will find himself suddenly mortal upon entering Midgard's atmosphere unless he can see the error of his ways." Frigga smiled off to the right of Odin. They had no doubt been discussing such an option of punishment. Loki was Frigga's favorite; it pained Thor the same way it would pain any child when they were clearly not their mother's favorite.

Thor understood. Loki was a challenged youth and needed Frigga's attention far more than Thor had. Thor should have given Loki more love and attention growing up as the elder child.

Maybe everything could have been avoided.

Thor thought of protests in his head. The mere fact that Loki had slaughtered thousands of people during the Battle of New York would mean nothing to Odin. To his father, death was even more entangled with the honor of battle. Odin would see nothing wrong with such casualty of war. Loki wasn't locked up for killing the mortals, but for treachery against the Asgardian crown.

Thor bowed his head. "Yes, my Lord, I will depart as soon as possible."

Hel stepped forward. "I wish to go too, my lord. I would like to meet this Master. See what they are made of."

Her eyes crackled with the black Death energy. The room shuttered and grew cold, and she gave a slick smile.

Thor could think of no one better to help protect Lady Jane.

....

There were two notes left on the table of the room that Tony had placed their unwelcome visitors in. The first one was simple and short with scrawling script and said:

*Thank you for your hospitality.*
The second one was folded up and placed by a potion in a small glass beaker with a wooden stopper on the top. The potion appeared deep murky green in color and appeared sludge like. Tony couldn't imagine the taste.

Tony unfolded the parchment and read the note. The script was still scrawling, but it was also sharp and direct. Tony could imagine the austere Potion Master had such handwriting.

The note wasn't much longer than the first, but it said what it needed to.

*If the brat does anything stupid again, put one drop of the potion into a bowl of water and say my name. I will be contacted. Keep the potion in a dry arid place with the top sealed. Do not knock it over – I'm not making you another one.*

There was no name, but Tony didn't need it. The rest was enough. He would, however, surely be putting some of the potion through a mass spectrometer.

Free experimental material after all.

….

JARVIS had informed him that Pepper was waiting for him in the living room. She held two cups of coffee in her hands, and gave one to Tony. He immediately knew that something was up.

"If there is an international incident, can we ask for it to wait until after breakfast?" Tony asked. He rubbed his eyes and tried to push the morning fog from his brain.

A week. That's how long he wanted to sleep. One full glorious week.

"Not an international disaster, thankfully," Pepper smiled at him and her heels clicked as they walked into the kitchen. "I know this is the last thing you want to deal with right now Tony, but we need to have a game plan with the press for Harry. The picture was taken over twenty-four hours ago and, well, you know how the press works."

Tony leaned down and his forehead touched the countertop. They really had ignored that development yesterday, with wards, magical revelations, and Harry almost dying taking precedence.

"I need to talk to Harry about it."

This was his son's decision.

"There are rumors," Pepper's lips thinned into a straight line with poised anger. Tony didn't even want to know what the rumors would be. He didn't dare ask for fear of becoming angry.

The press had a very perverse imagination that he was very closely acquainted with. Him being ignorant of those rumors would be better for everyone.

"Should we do a press release or conference?" Tony asked.

"We should be fine with just a press release, but the longer we wait the more questions people are going to have. We might need to stick Harry on one of those talk shows. Well, that depends on how good he is with talking in front of a crowd."

Tony didn't particularly want to throw his son to the wolves, but one could not underestimate the importance of controlling and crafting a public image.
"It shouldn't be a problem," Harry's voice came from the doorway.

Tony turned around to see his son dressed in sweatpants and a loose t-shirt. He still looked pale, and the boy's hair stuck up in every which direction.

"Harry, what are you doing up?" Tony asked. The kid should still be asleep. As far as Tony was concerned, Harry should be doing nothing but watching movies and relaxing for the next week.

"I don't … relax well," Harry admitted. "Plus, I'm not physically hurt."

Tony shifted his eyes and realized that he needed to pick his battles. "We can talk about that later. How much of the conversation did you hear?" Tony asked.

"Enough," Harry nodded. "I'm used to, uh, fame would be the word I guess. More infamy really. I'm used to the staring."

Tony knew there was a lot of stories behind that statement. They really hadn't had much time to talk about Harry's life. Fury had called Harry the Tony Stark of the magical world. He hoped that it wasn't that literal.

Pepper shot him a strange look. She wasn't yet aware of the magical world, but Tony was going to fill her in. She deserved to know what was going on, and there was no one he trusted more in his life.

Tony slightly inclined his head at her to give off that idea, and she nodded back. She was used to rolling with things, but she would not doubt pick Tony's brain later that day.

Pepper smiled at both of them, and then raised her eye brows. "You two figure this out, and then we can plan a game plan from there. And Harry," she addressed him. "Don't let Tony pressure you into anything that you don't want to do."

"Yes ma'am," Harry grinned at her.

Pepper rolled her eyes. "I have to run your company. You need to be in the office for a two-pm meeting. Don't let him forget." She pointed at Harry. Harry nodded, looking amused.

She swept out of the room, and Tony sat down at the breakfast bar in the kitchen. Harry followed suit.

"You don't have to do this Harry, you know that right? We can spin some sort of tale," Tony said.

"No, I want to," Harry said, his eyes were adamant.

"It's going to change your life. Once you are my son to the public, you will never live a normal life."

Tony knew that he was talking away the opportunity for Harry to be normal. The kid deserved to have stability, and unfortunately, Tony really couldn't give it to him. He was damn well going to try though.

"No," Harry shook his head. "I want to. Dad, when I was dying in the ritual, I realized how much I've missed in my life because I was afraid. I always thought I was brave, but really I was just hiding from everything that could hurt me."

"Harry," Tony reached out and placed a hand on his son's shoulders. "I've never meet anyone braver in my life. And I live with superheroes. You don't have to prove anything to me."
"Okay," Harry rolled his eyes at his father. "But I still don't want to deny that you're my father. We can do the press conference, or whatever. Just one thing."

Harry swallowed and seemed to fidget a bit.

Tony gave him an assessing look. "Yes?"

"Can I keep Potter? I mean, I'd like to hyphenate. But, James Potter died for me, and I think he would have been a really great Dad. He adopted me and loved me despite knowing that I wasn't his son, and I don't want to forget him."

Harry looked like he wanted to bolt out of the room, but there was an underlying look in his eyes that said he wasn't going budge on this. His son was stubborn, and Tony knew that he probably had to be in his life in order to survive.

Tony grinned, "Of course you can. Kid, I want to thank James Potter. It takes a good man to do what he did. I don't love you any less. Hell, I hadn't even begun to consider you taking my last name. Are you sure? It doesn't have the best of legacy."

Harry nodded. "Yes. I don't want to hide anymore."

Tony nodded. He would meet with his legal department later than day. He had a couple of… other… details that he needed to deal with. Specifically, a pair of disgusting child abusing human beings and an American citizenship for his son.

"You have to do an I-am-Iron-Man moment," a female voice said, and both Tony and Harry just about tumbled out of their chairs. They glanced over to the fridge where Natasha was grabbing milk. She smiled at them, as if very aware of her freaky ninja-superpowers.

"A what?" his son asked, confused.

"Did you grow up in a monastery?" another voice sounded from behind them. Clint. Their second freaky ninja-powered individual in the tower.

Harry looked amused. "Close enough," he said.

Clint looked excited. "So you've never seen any of Tony's old videos?"

Harry cocked his head. "No, I haven't, but suddenly I'm very interested."

Natasha gave Harry a sly look. "This is going to be amusing."

"Nope. Nope. Not staying here for this," Tony said. "Time for me to make my leave. Kid, remember. You are grounded, so if you want to leave the house, you have to let me know, and either I'll go with you or we will find someone to go with you. But you have to let me know where you are at all times."

Harry frowned. "I still think that's unfair. You know I lived alone for some time."

"Tough luck. Shouldn't have almost killed yourself." Tony gave Harry a flat look.

Harry rolled his eyes in the traditional teen whatever. "Fine, but I'm completely making fun of you for whatever I see on these videos."

Tony looked up in the universal, what did I do to deserve this look. "Don't let him see anything R-rated. Or from that time in Ontario. Actually, nothing from 1992-1994, those were bad years."
JARVIS answered Tony. "How about that time when you were eighteen, and-"

Tony cut him off before he could finish. "Yep, that one too. Use discretion JARVIS."

"That's not fair."

"Tough luck. My AI, my rules."

Julian Weston was a sharp woman. After graduating from Princeton summa cum laude, she went to Columbia from law school and kicked ass. She was brilliant, young, ambitious, and didn't take shit from anyone.

Tony Stark liked her. Not like that. Well, like that, but also not just like that. Not every person he liked had to be for the sole reason of desiring to sleep with them. He might be a shameless pansexual who believed highly in sexual liberation, but he could admire when a person was on the path to being something great without it having to be sexual in nature.

"Weston," he stepped into her office.

She raised her eyebrows. "Stark, what do I owe the honor?"

"What, my sheer presence isn't enough?" Tony asked.

The woman raised her eyebrows. "Do you want me to answer that?"

"This is why I love you," Tony said, and sat down at the chair in front of her desk. He propped his feet up and grinned manically at her.

"Careful Stark. I hear the 'L' word is terrifying for your types," she leaned forward and pushed his feet off the table. Tony straightened up in the chair.

"You know I own this office," Tony commented.

"And I hear Hogarth would be willing to pay me twice what I make here. What are you doing here Stark? The last time you personally came down the legal department, we had some major superhero clean-up that put us under water in discovery." She glanced to a corner that was stacked up with boxes of what Tony assumed was such a file.

"I have something I would like you to be discrete with. How familiar are you with family law?"

"What do you pay me for?" she crossed her arms.

"I have a child," Tony admitted. "I would like him legally recognized as both my son and my heir. And get him an American citizenship. He's British. Then, after you are done with that, I have a husband and wife that I would like to press criminal charges against, and then civil charges as just icing on the cake."

"What sort of charges?" she asked.

"Abuse," Tony could feel himself getting angry just thinking about it.

She gave Tony a sad look. She well understood. "I will need to despose you," Tony nodded. "And the child."
Oh fuck. Tony would have to talk to Harry. "I understand." He dropped all the files on her desk. There was video evidence and everything that Tony could get from hacking.

He moved to the door. He had to go figure out the body guard situation for Harry.

"Stark," she said. Tony stopped and turned to her. She gave a terrifying grin. "Don't worry, those bastards won't see the light of day."

As Tony walked down the halls, he heard her on the phone. "Murdock? I heard you are currently between jobs. I might need your help."

....

Tony was at a discrete private security firm downtown. He was flipping through the resume of potential body guards for Harry. They were all impressive. The one he was looking at was a once Navy Seal, had won multiple sharpshooting competitions, spoke three languages, and looked like he could kick Steve's ass. He really couldn't, but he looked like it.

That was the problem. No matter how good these people were, they were still human, and some of the threats that could come after Harry were decidedly not.

Just as Tony was thinking over his options, his phone rang. He glanced down and saw that the caller ID was for Steve Rogers.

He picked it up, and said, "Hey, what do you think about looking for a body guard for Harry for me?"

"Why does Harry need a body guard when he lives with a group of superheroes?" Steve's voice sounded amused.

"Because Cap, one of these days, Harry is going to want to go somewhere and I'll be at work or whatever, and I would prefer that he has someone that can protect him," Tony told him exasperated.

"Can't Harry do magic?"

"It's the principle of it Steve. Principle."

"Okay, fine." Tony could hear the smile in Steve's voice. "But later. You need to get back to the tower. We have a..." there was a pregnant pause. "Situation."

Tony frowned. "Define situation. This isn't a call from SHIELD, so that means there isn't anyone rampaging around New York."

"No, but we had Thor show up."

"And that's bad because...?" Tony asked.

"He brought Loki along with him," Steve admitted.

Tony's eyes flew wide. Harry was in the tower with fucking Loki.

"I'll be back in ten," Tony told Steve motioning for Happy to grab the car.

"Okay, see you then."

"See you then, Cap."
Steve Rogers had signed up for Nazi's, not gods from another planet. The woman was frightening; she oozed some sort of dark energy and seemed to suck all the air in the room to her.

"So, Hel?" Clint asked.

The woman bared her teeth as she smiled. "Yes."

"Like Death?"

"No." She raised her eyebrows, as if there was something more revealing in that statement.

"Thor, I appreciate having you here, but why…" Steve didn't know how to finish that statement. So, Clint finished it for him. "Did you bring Tweedle-dee and Tweddle-dumb?"

"My father commanded it so," Thor said. "Loki will do no harm."

"And I," Hel announced. "Will do no harm unless provoked."

Loki just sat back in his chair. He looked underweight and exhausted. His hair was slightly greasy and his eyes didn't meet anyone's in the room. He looked blank, and almost gone.

Just then, Tony burst into the room. He looked furious. "What the fuck are you doing here?" he asked.

Thor looked startled. "Looking for the Master of Death." Then he added, "Well, also looking for Jane. I intend to go find her shortly."

"Not you, Shakespeare. What is he doing here?" Tony asked as he pointed at Loki.

"My father commanded it."

"I don't care," Tony snapped. "Send him back."

"I cannot. He will not harm anyone – he is mortal and without powers while on Earth."

There was a general sense of shock in the room. Clint commented. "Well, you know we do with humans that commit genocidal actions? We execute them."

"He is still my brother," Thor frowned. "And part of the Asgardian envoy. He has… what do you mortals call it?" Thor seemed confused for a second. He looked down as if trying to think, then snapped and said, "Political immunity."

"Political immunity implies that the governments are part of international law. You do not have such an agreement with the United States," Natasha pointed out. "And how exactly is Loki… mortal?"

"Magic?" Thor guessed. "Probably something of my mother Frigga's doing."

"I still don't trust him," Tony told everyone. "And I want him out of my tower."

"Anthony," Thor's voice was almost pleading. "I cannot leave Loki unattended, and I wish to find Lady Jane and the Master of Death."

"Who is this Master of Death?" Steve asked. He was sitting sideways; his body open to Loki as if
ready to attack. He had been mostly watching the scene play out.

"Someone with immense power. The Master of Death is the one who can conquer Death and is said to have universe altering power. The type that can rearrange the cosmos. It is, well was, a highly sought-after position that was supposed to be awarded to the most skilled warrior. Yesterday, a child from your Earth was chosen as the Master. This will no doubt bring people who come simply wishing to challenge the child." Hel examined her nails as she talked. She sounded bored and disinterested, but the gleam in her eyes denoted otherwise.

Steve frowned to himself. That much power in the hands of, who they claimed to be, a child could be devastating. He did not like the sound of rearrange the cosmos.

"Do you know who the Master of Death is?" Steve asked.

Hel shook her head. "No, we don't know. When they used the power for the first time, they sent out a powerful signal. It mostly just conveyed that they were a young soul and they came from approximately this hemisphere of Earth. If they were to send out the signal again, I could pinpoint it better."

"We'll deal with that later," Tony said. "I want to know what sort of visitors you are talking about."

Loki spoke for the first time. He raised his head, his green eyes displaying an almost frightened look. "Thanos is coming. He is going to kill everyone, including me."

"Reindeer games. I would sacrifice you in an instant if it saved even a single life," Tony said flippantly.

"Thanos is serious. You may have defeated me, but Thanos can destroy entire planets with the flick of his wrist. His greatest desire was to be the Master of Death. You cannot understand his wrath at being usurped. I don't want to be on this planet right now anymore than you want me here," Loki's eyes shifted around the room.

There was silence.

What did they say to that?

....

He had a two o'clock meeting, didn't he? Tony didn't care. He suddenly had the literal weight of the world on his shoulders.

"Steve Rogers is requesting access into the lab Sir," JARVIS announced.

Tony's hand rubbed the top of his head. He didn't want to deal with this. Okay. Fine. He had to.

"Let him in," Tony told JARVIS.

Steve looked just as worse for wear as Tony felt. The man looked like he had gone through twelve rounds and then been knocked out.

Steve sat down at the chair that he usually occupied when he came to watch Tony work. The man usually sketched, read, or scribbled fight plans on a notebook. He just sat there staring blankly forward.

Tony looked down at the screwdriver in his hand, the same hand that was breakable and sadly very
human. Tony was brilliant, but a bullet could kill him. What the fuck where they supposed to do against a man who could destroy planets? They could barely make-do against an alien when they had another alien of the same race on the team.

"We're fucked," Tony admitted.

Steve looked up at him. For a second, Tony thought he was going to be reprehended for bad language. Steve just nodded. "We need to find this Master of Death."

"If he or she is still a child, we can't ask that of them," Tony said. Yesterday he had reprehended Harry's professor for treating his life like a play thing, and now here they were staring a problem with a child in the center of it all.

They would be better than that.

Steve looked at him for a second. "You're right."

Tony smirked. "Those are the two greatest things you have ever said."

"You sure about that. I'm pretty sure the two greatest things I've ever said were 'you're welcome' when I punched Hitler," Steve gave a sly grin.

Tony's head snapped up. "Wait? You actually punched Hitler because if you did that would be just about the greatest thing in the entire world."

Steve got a self-satisfied look. "Yes. I did in fact do that."

Then there was a pause and Steve suddenly looked reflective and a bit intense. He stared at Tony, and for once Tony saw a glimpse of the pain that Steve was under. "I should have killed him. I was so close, Tony. Do you know what it's like to get that close to evil and just… not have the opportunity to finish? The red skull members distracted me while he escaped. I should have killed him."

When Tony glanced down at the polished metal of the counter, a face stared back at him. It was his own. It looked tired and stressed, but also more mature and wise. The world had kicked Tony in the ass, but he had weathered the storm, and gave back everything he had to it.

"Some things are out of our control," Tony admitted.

"I'm going to try like hell anyways," Steve said. Tony admired that about Steve Rogers. He would bend the world to make way for what he thought was right. He also knew that there would be a day when he and Steve did not agree on what right was, and what he once most admired he would most hate.

Tony was hoping to create a failsafe that would protect the world, but he didn't want to rush into anything and create something with unintended consequences. Tony loved being a superhero. He felt good doing it, but there were only two ends for superheroes 1) death or 2) retirement.

Tony didn't want to die. He had a child now to look after, but retirement was something that would be impossible. He thought about creating some sort of barrier around Earth – some sort of bouncer that would protect the world from threats. That way maybe retirement could be possible and he wouldn't have to bear watching people die.

But… that was stupid.
Tony knew computers and he understood AI coding better than anyone on the planet. The reason why JARVIS hadn't maliciously taken over the planet was because his base coding was small, simple, and non-ambitious. Tony wasn't an idiot. He was far aware that his AI was far more than just his code, but Tony like to think about it as JARVIS base personality.

And, well, he had failsafes. Ones that even JARVIS didn't know about.

Creating something on the sort of scale that could protect the planet would be the height of playing God.

Tony wasn't God. He was barely a decent human being.

So, it would just be a bunch of humans against an alien that could destroy planets. Tony could be strong for the rest of the world – he could be flippant and dismissive about the treat – but with Steve he could be honest.

And honestly, they were fucked.

....

"JARVIS?" Harry asked.

He had at one point meandered back to his room, and had started reading some articles out of the latest issues of all the Magical theory magazines. He would need to get in touch with his editor and see if he could put his column on hold for the summer.

At the very least, he would have to skip this month because he hadn't even begun to think on a topic, much less begin writing.

Harry got bored and anxious with just sitting around, so he decided to seek out his father.

"Yes, young sir?" JARVIS replied.

"Where is Tony?" Harry asked.

"In the lab with Captain Rogers, young sir."

The lab door opened for him as soon as Harry got near enough to the door, and he wandered down the steps. Tony was sitting there talking to Steve.

They were in some sort of conversation about the Asgardians appearance. Harry felt amused by the considering look on Tony's face and the confuddled expression on Steve.

"That is, if that is even what they look like," Tony commented.

"The Asgardians?" Harry questioned to confirm. Tony glanced over at him, and at first gave him a concerning look, as if he didn't want them to know about their guests.

It was quite obvious that they had alien visitors to the tower. Harry had asked JARVIS to provide a feed of the meeting earlier. Harry hoped that Tony never changed the protocols on what Harry could ask JARVIS to do.

Tony motioned Harry over and he considered for a second what they were talking about. He understood what his father was getting at.

"Yeah," he said slowly. "I hadn't thought about that, but it is strange that Thor and Loki appear
humanoid. It's not very probable scientifically."

Poor Captain Rogers looked like he had no idea what either of them were talking about.

"What are you suggesting?" he asked.

Tony answered: "That they are some sort of shape shifters and assume a humanoid form in order to disarm, make us trust them more. I mean, Thor can speak English, it could be some form of highly advanced technology or just innate ability."

"I'm pretty sure in Norse mythology Loki is a shapeshifter. But I don't know how much of that I believe, with Loki giving birth to a horse and all as part of their mythos and all," Harry added on.

Harry sat down at one of the chairs near Tony and his father immediately cleared off the table top in front of him so Harry could have some space.

"Thank you," Harry said. His father hadn't even hesitated. Here he was talking with Captain America and the second Harry walked in he had allowed him to organically become part of the conversation, and neither of them gave a hint of annoyance at Harry joining in.

Poor Steve was still confused though.

"You are suggesting that they are tricking us?" Harry almost laughed at the sound of his voice. It was almost put-out, as if Steve had just learned that Santa Clause wasn't real.

His father didn't have that much constraint and laughed and started laughing at the look on Steve's face. Harry joined in shortly.

Finally, Tony got control of himself and through his laughs commented, "Nothing so nefarious."

Steve looked at him expectedly, and Tony continued, "If they were shape shifting it could be something done unconsciously, or as I said, to make us feel more at home with what they look like. I'm not accusing them of anything. In fact, I would prefer shapeshifting to the alternative."

"The alternative being…?"

Tony looked towards Harry as if to ask if he wanted to take this one. Harry nodded. He thought on it for a second to gather his thoughts, and turned to Steve. "The alternative being that they are functionally humanoid in appearance and biology. From a scientific standpoint that is astronomically improbable. That would mean that despite planetary differences and no contact that life developed almost the exact same way on their planet and millions of years of evolution produced something that looks functionally human. I mean, it took Earth forever to do that and we were populated by Dinosaurs and sea creatures. It would mean not only did the circumstances produce almost the same animal, meaning us, at the top of the hierarchy, but that it happened at the same time in cosmic history instead of millions of years apart."

Tony grinned at that, and added jokingly, "What he said," then there was a short pause before he continued. "As Harry was saying the idea that they look like us, have similar social hierarchy, and developed the exact same way of communicating through verbal notions is just... well, so improvable that I really don't believe it. And if it is true than it begs way more questions."

Steve was looking like his head was spinning. Harry wondered if he really even knew who Darwin even was or had been taught evolution. The Scopes trial hadn't happened until 1925, and Harry was unsure if Steve had gotten any form of evolution teaching in his primary or high school years.
Steve asked them both with a frown, "What sort of questions."

Harry and Tony looked at each other. They both knew that they could do on a on forever with questions.

Tony started. "Like are they separate species than us?"

"If they are, do we have a similar common ancestor in our genetic tree? The idea that they are near enough in space to travel to earth suggests that that could be possible," Harry added on.

Tony continued. "If so, how far back is that ancestor? Are we two divergent paths? Was that ancestor from earth or from their planet?"

Harry added. "This might sound crazy, but if the ancestor was from earth, does that mean the ancestor was taken off of earth and placed on another planet and then developed in isolation to become the Asgardian race, are they a highly developed branch of humans that developed such technology and left earth? Again, crazy, but so is the idea of them biologically evolving to be almost completely aesthetically the same as us."

Steve was looking back and forth between them like he was watching a ping pong match.

"If neither is the case, then does that mean that there is something innate in the bare two footed monkeys that can't even run fast. Do primates develop higher intelligence quicker? This seems unlikely as humans have been the dominate species on the planet from a very short and inconsequential amount of time," Harry mused.

Tony snorted in agreement. "See, the alternative is fucking stupid and would fuck with our understanding of Darwinian theory and known history. The first makes far more sense. If Thor and Loki just appeared to be human on Earth, then it means that science is working the way it should. I've always believed in aliens in the theoretical sense; the universe if far too vast to not have life out there. But I always assumed that we most likely wouldn't be able to communicate with them or understand their structure of thought or communication. They could communicate cyclically, perceive time differently, be hydrogen based instead of carbon based, be hived minded, or not even be something that we understand as life forms. To believe humans are some end goal of evolution is ego-centric and wrong."

They all kind of stared at each other for a second, then Steve asked. "Are you going to ask Thor then?"

Tony's eyes went wide. "Oh fuck no. That man is far vainer than I am and a punch in the face would kill me."

Harry couldn't stop laughing no matter how hard Tony tried to get him to stop. The three of them stayed in the lab chatting for the next couple of hours.

Harry, at one point, glanced over at his father for a second and realized that this was now home to him. It wasn't temporary; it wasn't something that was going to go away.

Tomorrow they were going to announce to the world that Harry Potter was Tony Stark's son. Harry knew, at that moment, there was nothing in his life that he wanted more.

Angelia Yasui of the EPC showed up to New York with her team. Rachel Ivan, a woman of Romanian ancestors and a squib in magic, was phenomenal on a computer. Then, there was Angela's
half-brother, Alejandro Yasui, who could disappear into just about any city in the world. He was half Japanese, a quarter Italian, and his grandmother was of mixed Chicano ancestor. He spoke five different languages, and took pride in his cosmopolitanism.

Out of all her siblings, Alejandro was by far her favorite.

The forth of the group was Kwanile Naidoo. A South African who had been trained to be a Shaman until he was twelve, ended up in America, got his citizenship, and went to college to study biology to become a doctor. Was then recruited for NASA, until 2001 when 9/11 shook the nation. They terminated his contract with words like Tunisian and Muslim being thrown around.

He was neither, but people who discriminated rarely tended to actually get their facts straights.

He went back to school and got his doctorate, before he was finally picked up by the EPC.

The final member was a woman named Elizabeth James, a muggle who was one of the premiere satellite technology experts in the world. Her young daughter had been beaten to death by a mob who thought she was possessed by the devil when she had used accidental magic.

The five of them made an elite team who dealt with magical exposure incidents far larger than one magical government could handle. They made sure in the new Muggle technology age that information was contained. They had a set of super computers analyzing, pinging, and sorting thousands upon thousands of hours of video a day, most especially anything that was going viral.

They also monitored large incidents of magical energy output that wasn't sanctioned. This was certainly their most high-profile case.

They sat around discussing the game plan.

"I think we should pull in Dr. Strange," Rachel said.

Elizabeth frowned. "On one hand, I really don't like the idea of someone as high profile as the Avengers knowing about magic, but on the other hand, it could be worse. If we can control this and keep it to just their team then maybe we can build some sort of understanding with the UN."

"That's why Strange would be good to bring in. Technically, he isn't under our laws. We could use him as kind of an intermediary," Alejandro said. "I could approach him."

Angela considered it. "That isn't a bad idea."

Kwan nodded in agreement. "Alejandro and I could approach Strange and talk to him as soon as we get to New York, and Angela and the rest of the team could fill in the American government about what the plans are."

"We should all go with Strange when we talk to the Avengers."

Angela nodded in consideration.

Loki stared at the child sitting reading a book at the counter. He had messy hair that protruded at all angles, and eyes that were vibrant green. He looked like Stark, and, if Loki were to guess, he would say it was his child.

Lady Romanov yanked him through the living room, especially the second that his eyes landed on
the child.

Interesting. Very interesting.

The child's eyes glanced up and met his. There was a spark between them. The child had magic, of that Loki was sure.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry it took me so long to get this chapter up! I'm both on vacation and trying to finish essays for my finals this week. So, I've been doing this in my very limited free time. I'm not totally happy with this chapter, and it's a tad boring. So I'm sorry!

General Notes:

- Timeline details: Dr. Strange happened before the Avengers in this story. I don't think there is anything too glaringly necessary for it to happen after other than just jokes. And for Daredevil, this is post season two.

- Depose = take an official court admissible testimony. It's essentially an interview with a court reporter. You are under oath during a depo. Harry will need to be deposed before they lodge an official complaint against the Dursleys

- The ICW and EPC will both be auxiliary to the story. So that's why I'm setting up characters because they will come back

- Yes, Dr. Strange and Matt Murdock will both show up, as will many many more of the Marvel and HP cast. Let me know if there is anyone in particular that people want to see!

Questions:

- What do you guys think of doing these half philosophy and half scientific conversations? (Also, does anyone know the in-universe explanation for why a lot alien are slightly humanoid? Is it the One Above All?)

- What are you most looking forward to? In this story that is, not like life.

- Also, is anyone interested in beta-ing for me? Or picking some of the early chapters for grammar errors. I'm working on it slowly but surely, and I would love some help.

My goal is to get the next chapter up by next weekend! Thank you for readings. Please review and tell me what you think!

~Emm :D
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Scheming gods, living Magical Wards, press conferences, and Marvel cameos.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes


CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Harry almost jumped out of his skin when he turned around to the alien Loki standing in his bedroom doorway.

He looked so deceivingly human. A very attractive young male, who looked like he was about to crush the business world – or really acting or modeling or something along those lines – by storm. Dressed in jeans and a t-shirt he did not look like he was a second son in line for another planet’s throne and committed genocide just over a year ago.

“Little Stark,” Loki said and gave him a knowing smile.

Harry stared the man in the eye. Tom Riddle had killed more people than the monster in front of him. “I’m not afraid of you.”

Loki tipped his head back and laughed hysterically. Harry wanted to flinch. Loki green eyes locked on his. They looked similar to his, and yet, completely different. Harry’s were The Color of the Killing Curse. A vivid green that mocked him every time he looked in the mirror, reminding him of the spell that killed his parents.

Loki’s eyes were colder than that. They were the sickly green of withering plants. Dead inside, as if his soul was also wilting.

Staring at the alien, Harry realized that Loki’s entire body looked sick. Pale and gaunt skin stretched across protruding bones. His eyes were deep inset and his hair was greasy.

It looked like a man pretending that his body wasn’t trying to eat itself. Harry wondered if that was a byproduct of Loki being cut off from his magic.

“You have nothing to be afraid of Little Stark. After all, I’m not the one here with magic.”

Harry had to stop himself for showing his complete shock. “How did you…” Harry started to ask, but the words died in his throat.

“My father cannot turn me human child. You cannot change what are biologically. He just locked away my magic. He has practice with that sort of thing, you see.” Loki’s eyes turned cold with that statement. He continued. “I can still feel my magic, just as I can feel yours. You’re strong for a
“Midgardian.”

“Strong enough to beat you right now,” Harry said.

“Of course,” Loki stated matter-of-factly. “But you couldn’t even come close to me if I were at full power.”

Harry didn’t answer, just shifted his eyes. He could push Loki away, or call out for JARVIS. Harry realized that JARVIS had probably already informed Tony about Loki being in his room. His heartbeat settled.

“I could teach you,” Loki said casually.

Harry’s eyes flew wide.

“You have potential child. I could train you to be better than any other sorcerer on Earth. You have destiny, don’t you? I could help you beat it.”

At a cost, of course. There was always a cost.

Harry was tempted; there was no denying it. Maybe this was what the prophecy was talking about. Maybe the Power he knows not was something Loki could teach him. Maybe this could be the trick to defeating Lord Voldemort.

Maybe. It was always maybes.

But he had been tempted before. This temptation was laughable. Loki was offering Power. Lord Voldemort had offered him his parents back; his eleven-year-old’s greatest desire. If he could say no to that, then he sure as hell could say no to Loki.

“I think I’m going to have to pass up on that offer Loki. It’s too expensive, I’m sure,” Harry said sarcastically.

Loki gave him a knowing look. It was dark and intense. Then the man backed off and said with an airy manner, “Maybe now it’s too expensive, but trust me. When desperation hits, you will be willing to pay anything.”

“Speaking from experience,” Harry sneered.

“Yes,” Loki’s smile got violent as he barred his teeth.

“I will never be that desperate,” Harry hissed. He was fuming. He could feel his magic tingling along his fingers begging to be unleashed. Harry wanted to strike at Loki. Send a blasting charm at the man. It wouldn’t kill him. It would barely even hurt him.

Loki was watching him get riled up with the sort of self-amused smirk. He wanted to get his reaction from him of course. This was the God of Lies in front of him. The Trickster God.

In the legends, he had been portrayed as irreverent, nihilistic, with ambivalent morality. His father would make a better Loki of legend. No, this Loki was none of that.

He was a desperate man that if Harry is right was currently dying. He wanted out, and saw Harry was a possible route to do that. He must be especially desperate if he was willing to reach out to a child for help.

Harry exhaled and let his magic dissipate. He would not rise to the bait.
His father chose that moment to rush into the room. He had his gauntlets on, and a half-terrified, half-wild look on his face as if he was willing to stare down anyone. For Harry.

Harry blinked at Tony. He was in a grease stained white t-shirt and jeans. His hair looked like he had fallen asleep in his lab. He probably had.

“Loki,” Tony turned the gauntlets on the depowered god. Loki put his hands in the air in the universe – literally it seemed – signal of surrender.

“How did you slip your guards?” Tony barked. “You better leave my son alone if you want to continue to live. Unlike pointbreak, I have no problem ending your life.”

Loki blinked as if he was processing what to say. He gave a light and unconcerned half-smile as if he hadn’t been offering Harry Powers yet moments before. He shrugged his shoulders, and told the two. “I think it’s time to make my leave. My brother will probably begin to realize that I have slipped my guards.”

Then he left through the doorway and disappeared into the hallway.

Tony relaxed and slumped against the doorway. He started to run a hand through his hair before he realized what he was wearing and pulled his hand back to his side.

“What did he want?” Tony asked.

“Nothing really. It doesn’t matter.” It really didn’t. Harry wasn’t going to take up the offer and he didn’t want to make Tony more concerned.

Tony looked at him for a second before nodding. “He tries to play mind games. Don’t let it get to you.”

Harry nodded and affirmed. “It won’t.”

“Alright, okay, huh, it’s about time to get ready for the press conference.” Tony looked down at his wrist as if expecting to see a watch rather than red nickel-titanium alloy.

Harry looked down at the slacks and button-up that had miraculously appeared in his room that morning. He was dressed. He looked pointedly at Tony and raised his eyes.

“Okay, fine you little shit. It’s time for me to get ready.”

Harry grinned in response.

Lily, the living magical Ward, did not trust the aliens living in her tower. When the one called Loki approached her creator, she drew in her energy tight, as if ready to attack.

JARVIS interrupted her.

“Little one, we can’t interfere unless he physically threatens Mr. Potter,” JARVIS told her, “And I’ve already alerted Sir of Loki’s presence in Harry room.”

Lily’s magic hummed in response. It loosened from the sharp attack mode, to more of a low electric fence drone. She would be ready to zap the man if he so much as touched Harry Potter.

“I don’t trust the aliens,” Lily admitted, “They do not taste like good magic. Even the blond Prince’s
aura is reckless and violent in nature.”

“Sir doesn’t trust the aliens either,” JARVIS admitted to her.

Lily swirled around the tower and jumped from room to room searching for the three alien auras. Lady Hel’s was dark, like a dark hole that collapsed upon itself and sucked in the energy around her. It wasn’t malevolent dark energy, but it was dangerous.

Loki’s was cold and wrong; as if something else had leached off it for some time. It was also tied to two other intricate spells that changed the form that Loki existed in.

If Lily touched it, she could pull the spell apart at its seams.

She would if she had to protect her Harry, her creator.

Lily told JARVIS such. JARVIS answered her, “Loki is not an Asgardian, but what they call a Frost Giant. He is not human; he is not even Asgardian.”

“We aren’t human,” Lily said.

“Very true, Little One.”

Lily was starting to understand. Her creator was human and she was something else. She thought she was alive. At least, she believed that she was alive. She could feel all the magic in the world humming in synchronicity. It all existed as an energy, but it was a dead energy. One that could not think for itself, but was guided by the ones around it. Lily could guide that energy too. If she reached out a touched it, she could leave the tower.

But that would mean leaving Harry, JARVIS, and her purpose in life.

Lily turned her attention back to the alien Loki. She sharpened her magic and drove through him. He startled and his eyes flew wide in fear. If Lily was human, she would have grinned in manic delight. She was a magic that he would never be able to control, and he knew it.

Lily backed away like a ghost from Loki. He looked around frantically before his eyes widened in shock. He realized he was in a prison; one that he would not be able to escape.

…. 

Harry fidgeted nervously with his button up. He was dressed in a suit more expensive than anything he had ever owned in his life. It was surprisingly comfortable fabric wise, but simply being in it felt like he wasn’t himself. Like someone else had taken over his skin, and he was disconnected from his body.

“You look good kid,” his father told him, raising an eye at Harry’s fidgeting. They were in the car together going to where the press conference was being held.

“I’m not used to this,” Harry admitted. He wasn’t looking forward to the camera. He had felt more confident proclaiming to Pepper that he was ready for this earlier.

“Do you want to know what my first press conference was?” Tony asked.

Harry nodded.

“You see, my Mom and Dad, your grandparents, had done a fair number of these growing up, but I never had to actually speak at them. They died when I was seventeen, and Obadiah Stane, who,
well, let’s just skip over for now, pressured me into handing him control of the company until I was twenty-one. It was supposed to be simple you see,” Tony reached up and ruffled his hair, as if thinking back. He then continued, grinning at Harry. “But of course I was a bone headed seventeen-year-old who had just lost his parents. I showed up cross-faded and couldn’t barely see the stage. I stumbled around, said a few words. I don’t remember much of it. I think if anything it made the stock holders glad that I wasn’t taking the company.”

Harry laughed at the contemptuous look on Tony’s face. To be fair, seventeen was still a kid, and Tony had just lost his parents. If Harry had to guess, it didn't sound like they were very good parents anyways. Not that, he assumed, it made their death’s hurt any less.

“Is that supposed to make me feel more confident?” Harry asked.

“Well no,” Tony admitted, kind of sheepish, “Just telling you that you can’t fuck up as much as I did.”

Harry clenched his hands and then released them quickly. He let out a deep breath. Tony was right. This was just cameras. He had faced dragons and basilisks. He had taught over sixty children how to duel the year before.

He was confident. Just because Sirius was gone and he had gone through a lot in the last couple of days didn’t take that away from him. There was nothing to be afraid of because Harry had faced far worse than just some cameras and reporters.

Harry smiled at his father. He could do this.

…. 

Nope. Nope. Nope. Harry would take another dragon before starring down a room of reporters. It was official; he had new nightmare material.

Tony reached and placed a hard on Harry’s shoulder steadying him.

“You can do this. I’m right next to you.” Tony muttered.

They walked up to the two podiums set up for them. It was all glitz and glam, with clear glass and heavy drapes behind them.

They meet a barrage of… “Mr. Stark is this Avengers business? If Harry Potter a new recruit?” and “Tony Stark, smile at the camera. Isn’t he too young to be in a relationship with?” Harry felt sick at that one. Another reporter yelled over the rest of the crowd, “Mr. Potter, are the rumors true that Tony Stark is your father.”

Harry settled at the podium, and his eyes meet the eyes of the reporter who asked that question. The room quieted as the tension between them was felt. All eyes in the room glanced between him and reporter.

It was the question everyone wanted the answer to.

Harry leaned down to the mic, and answered simply. “Yes, Tony Stark is my father.”

The entire room erupted in questions and flashing lights. Harry tensed. The last time he had been barraged with that many flashing lights he had been dodging spells in the department of mysteries.

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, before opening them and smiling at the crowd. He
couldn’t pick up any particular questions over the noise.

Next to him, his father tapped the mic almost deafening the room. “Alright, alright. Settle down. After that Star Wars moment, I think I’ll confirm and clarify some things. Yes, Harry is my biological son which I learned of recently. Hopefully he is the only one of those running around. He is staying in the Avengers tower with me and the team. No, he is not a superhero and as a father I would like him to never be a superhero.”

The room laughed like clockwork at Tony’s joke. The first question announced was stupid. “Mr. Potter, you are British?”

Harry gave a slight grin and played up his accent. “Is that a question?”

The crowd laughed again and a reporter called out. “Is Mr. Potter going to go to school in New York.”

Tony turned to Harry who shrugged. Tony answered. “We haven’t discussed that yet, but it’s summer. I think it’s a little too early to be thinking about school.”

“Mr. Potter, will you be taking the Stark name?”

Harry nodded before realizing that he should probably give a verbal answer. “Yes.”

“Are you a genius like your father?” someone in the back yelled.

Harry said. “No, I’m not a genius.” He gave a small smile; he wasn’t really.

Tony, however, found that to be ridiculous. “Child of mine,” he said. “Were we or were we not doing quantum physics two days ago? Or how about the time you nerded out about Dr. Banner’s writing? Or have a notebook dedicated to theoretical physics,” Harry’s hand immediately went to the inside of his jacket where his notebook onwards was stored, “Yes. He is smart. And unlike me, perpetually modest. Must have gotten that from his mother.”

Someone then asked. “Are you sending him to MIT?”

“I’m not sending Harry anywhere he doesn’t want to go. That will be his decision,” Tony answered.

One reporter called out, “Mr. Stark are you qualified to take care of a child, knowing your lifestyle?”

Harry blinked, taken aback.

Tony smiled as if he was expecting the question. “That is a fair question. With all the others around—”

Harry blinked at that. He could tell where Tony was going. He was going to say something about the Avengers chipping in and it being a team effort. He was going to degrade himself.

If Harry wasn’t allowed to do that anymore, Tony certainly wasn’t.

Harry cut him off. “Of course he is.”

The entire room looked to him, as if they had forgotten about him while listening to Tony Stark. His father had ability.

Tony looked a little wide-eyed. He had probably prepared a response to that question. Harry licked his lips, and leaned down. “My dad took me in, a fifteen-year-old who isn’t the easiest child, and gave me love and a home. Without question. I don’t think that you understand how incredible that is
because I do. I was raised unwanted,” he took a deep breath. The blood was rushing to his head as if he couldn’t believe that he was saying this. He repeated, “I was raised unwanted. I don’t feel like that anymore because Tony Stark, my father, is a very good man. He is a hero. My hero.”

The cameras started to go off again and the crowd went wild. Tony immediately grabbed Harry and shielded him out of the room.

Kwanele Naidoo felt the Death Magic in the air walking the city. He wasn’t raised in the same magic that Alejandro learned. Not that the man had done much learning growing up, instead choosing to take his father’s money and travel the world after getting kicked out of three schools.

At times, he wished he would have had that option. He didn’t, and he was stronger for it.

He readjusted his robes that trailed behind him. A pale blue that matched his white-blue eyes. He should have stood out in the city with his large cape like robes, knee high black boots, and chest full of warded beads, but instead he had a simple illusion charm fixed.

Alejandro – Ali to them – on the other hand stood tall in crisp business suit, as if expecting to slip into a character at any moment and talk of the stalk market.

Kwan could fit in if he so wished – he had gone to medical school and done his residency after all.

Now days he rarely wished to, and the EPC didn’t require that of him. That wasn’t his job. No, he had been drafted because he understood the extremes. He was a fully trained mundane medical doctor and he been immersed in a complete magical culture for the first twelve years of his life.

He was like Dr. Strange in many ways. Instead of Strange, however, he had learned magic first and medicine second. He also hadn’t been raised among the steal city towers and first-world luxury. Not that Kwan felt that it made life better. If anything, it complicated things.

The EPC had been created for the sheer reason that mundane technology had become so advanced.

The New York sanctuary was like a childhood home that Kwan was trying to escape. He had spent much time in it during his Columbia residency, but after turning down a more permanent job there it had felt awkward. He also wasn’t looking forward to seeing Strange again.

That dick.

Dr. Strange was waiting for them, of course. He led them inside to their tea room. Strange and Kwan both sat down, but Ali stood behind him with his arm’s crossed.

“Mr. Yasui,” he shook Ali’s hand, and then turned to him. “Mr. Naidoo.” as if they hadn’t fucking multiple times. As if he wasn’t aware that Kwan was also a doctor.

That dick.

Kwan smiled at him, and lied. “It’s nice to see you Stephen.” They shook hands.

Alejandro glanced between them. There was a glint in his eyes. Kwan had, while drunk and only once, ranted about Stephen Strange. Ali was quite protective of him. He was quite protective of all of them despite Kwan being the group’s body guard and doctor.

The one that should, hypothetically, be the protective one. And Kwan was. Very much so.
“I’ve heard a lot about you Mr. Strange,” Ali said.

“Doctor,” Stephen automatically corrected.

Normally Kwan wouldn’t make a big deal out of his title. He was proud of it, of course. The schooling had been hard. Normally, though, he wasn’t around Dr. Stephen Strange.

“I thought you still weren’t practicing,” Kwan commented lightly.

Something flashed across Stephen’s face. “I’m not.”

Kwan discretely glanced down at the hands. They were fixed. It had taken a skilled Mediwizard to banish the bones and Skele-Gro to make the bones as good as new. A couple more potions and hypothetically Stephen should have been able to practice medicine.

Originally, Strange hadn’t trusted anyone enough to actually vanish the bones in his hand, and wanted to wait to do it himself.

Vanishing the bones in one’s own hand would be impossibly hard.

It looked like he had done it though. His hands looked good as new.

Stephen reached down to grab his tea on the table and Kwan realized why. His hands were still shaking. It was psychosomatic.

Ah, that made sense. Kwan wouldn’t point it out.

He wasn’t a dick.

“I know why you are here of course. And I can assure you that I was not involved with the surge of power,” Strange said.

“We assumed as much. Do you know what it was?” Ali said.

Strange shook his head. “No, something that created a large energy imbalance that I haven’t seen in a very long time.”

“We are going to approach the Avengers, we were wondering if you would be the intermediary since you are not covered under the International Statue. Technically, we can’t tell the Avengers about magic…” Ali drifted off.

“But I could,” Strange finished.

“Yes,” Kwan said.

“What about Mr. Naidoo. After all, he trained at this Sanctuary for some time,” Strange stared at him. His gray eyes bore into his face, and they meet eyes for the first time since Kwan had left years prior.

He stared back unflinchingly.

“I still practice traditional – ”

“– what you call tradition–”

“… traditional magic and am therefore still held to the International Statue. For once in your life Stephen, can you not think about just yourself,” Kwan sighed.
“Fine,” Strange then repeated. “Fine, fine. I will help you. But not because of you, but because I promised Christina I would get Captain America’s autograph if I get the chance, and I always keep my promises.”

“Stephen, you should probably see this,” a young woman walked into the room. She had white hair, and had that ageless look about her. She would be twenty-one or fifty-one, and Kwan would not argue.

“Clea,” he addressed. “Meet my former colleague Kwanele Naidoo and his associate Alejandro Yasui.”

“Call me Ali, please,” Alejandro flashed a dazzling smile.

She looked over them. “Okay honey.” She stared them both up and down.

There was something in her eyes that caused a shiver to tingle down Kwan’s spine. She caught how uncomfortable he was and gave him a knowing smile.

Death magic. Dark death magic. He was feeling quite a bit of it today.

Clea flicked on the TV which worked much better with the sort of mystic arts that Strange practiced rather than their traditional magic.

She flipped to a news channel which was showing a broadcast of what looked like a press conference. On screen was Tony Stark, and a younger boy who looked to be anywhere from fifteen to seventeen.

“Is that Harry Potter?” Alejandro asked.

It was. Harry Potter, the child wonder of the British wizarding world, was on a public broadcast with Tony Stark.

The reporter said, with them flipping in the middle of their conversation “ – shock for everyone. Tony Stark having a child? What do we know about this Harry Potter?”

“Well, Jennette. Not much really. His school records are sealed. He is British, his mother is Lily Potter whose, as far as we can tell, is deceased along with her husband James Potter.” The reporter carried on like that for some time.

Ali summed up what they all were thinking, “Well fuck. This just got a million times more complicated.”

…

Tony Stark was sitting in his official office at Stark Industries. It had been weeks since he had stepped foot in there, but it looked the same as always. No dust had piled up. The cleaning crew came like clockwork.

“I can’t do this Pepper. I can’t do it. He called me a hero. How the hell am I supposed to live up to that? I’ve lived up to nothing in my life,” Tony took a deep breath at the end of his rant.

Pepper sat at the office chair in front of him, doing something on her Stark tablet.

She didn’t even look up when she asked. “Are you done?”

“No!” Tony exclaimed. He banged his head down on his desk. Ouch. Why had he chosen concrete
again? Aesthetic purposes, right.

“I’m going to fuck this up,” Tony groaned.

Pepper didn’t even pause on her tablet as she said with absolute confidence. “No, you are not. Harry trusts you. I trust you. And you have a lot of people in this tower to help you out.”

“I know. I know,” Tony said. “I just don’t want to be my father. He was a dick. What happens if I get lost in my work and don’t come up for days? Or if I say the wrong thing.”

Pepper finally paused and looked up. “You weren’t this worried this morning.”

Tony looked her straight in the eyes. “He called me a hero. Me. And not Iron Man. He called Tony Stark a hero. There is a huge difference. Iron Man can be a hero, but Tony Stark is…” Tony trailed off.

“The same exact person as Iron Man. Do I need to get you a therapist Tony?”

“Probably.”

Pepper huffed, and didn’t comment. “I emailed you the plan we have outlined for Harry’s future in the company. This is what we will be presenting to the board this afternoon. I need you to look it over and memorize this. I’ll be back in an hour to make sure that you make the meeting.”

“Okay, okay.” Tony would attend this one. He could deal with one board meeting for the sake of Harry.

“And Tony,” Pepper said before she left. “He called his father a hero.”

Tony gulped.

Tony Stark. Iron Man. Father.

Hero.

He suddenly felt the weight of all those titles.

….

“Hey Dad,” Harry said walking casually into Tony’s office. Tony glanced up. He was looking over the preliminary paperwork that Jillian Weston had sent him. It went over his financials and the figures that he would be setting up Harry’s trust with.

At least, that was the paper that he was holding talked about. He had no clue how she had managed to produce such a large stack of paper for him when they had only talked the day before.

“Harry,” Tony grinned. “Getting bored of the tower?”

Tony had been like that himself as a kid. He always needed something to do or a project.

Harry nodded, blushing. “Yeah, I was thinking about that.”

“Oh yeah?”

“I was thinking – if you would let me, that is – that I could take classes at a college here in New York. I mean, I taught myself physics and I’d like to fill in some of the gaps,” Harry fiddled with his
hands which immediately went to the book in his jacket that contained most of Harry’s warding Spell work.

Tony’s immediate reaction was to say no. That would mean that Harry would leave the tower consistently over the Summer which would leave him open to kidnapping attacks. Not only that, but people knew who Harry was now.

Tony squashed that immediate reaction. Harry was looking at him with eyes that said that he had never asked for anything like that in his entire life. He was expecting rejection. Tony wouldn’t be the next adult to disappoint him.

That meant that bodyguard searching shot to the top of his priorities.

Tony grinned. “That’s a great idea. I know one of the Physics professors at Columbia. I’m sure the first session probably isn’t that far along.” And even if it was, Harry would be years above the other students in his class and Tony could make a donation if it got Harry what he wanted.

Fuck.

He wasn’t going to be able to tell Harry no much was he? Good thing that he was a good kid.

The happiness that spread across Harry’s face confirmed that, no, he probably wouldn’t be able to say no much to his kid.

“Thank you,” Harry breathed.

“Of course. Let me figure that out right now.” Tony’s first thought was just to call the Physics Professor. But no. He would still have to jump through a few hoops. He might as well go straight to the top.

He called the dean.

“Hello, Dr. Newlyn, this is Tony Stark. Do you remember how I donated five million for your new physical science wing? Well, I need a favor.”

The women’s voice on the other end of the line answered, “Mr. Stark, it’s good to hear from you. I was just watching your press conference this morning. Quite the shock.”

“I’m sure it was. This favor concerns my son,” Tony said.

“You want to enroll him in the school next year? I… Mr. Stark, you have been a great donor for us, but your son still has to fill out an application. I can, of course, flag it and hurry it along, but we will need to go through official channels.”

“Nothing so official,” Tony said. “He wanted to take one physics class this summer. I understand if that would be too much of a problem. I’m sure that MIT would be more than willing –”

“You know what, since it’s just summer, we don’t need to be that official,” Dr. Newlyn said, her voice faux light. “Give me a second.” There was typing on her end. “I see there is a General Physics I class, our intro class, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday from 9 to 10:05 am in the Pupin Laboratories.”

“What room?” Tony asked, pulling out a notepad.

“428 Pupin Laboratories. I’ll inform the Professor that he will be there in the morning.”
“Thank you, I’ll see that your Physics department is outfitted in new equipment.”

“Thank you, Mr. Stark,” she said, and Tony hung up.

His son was staring at him with a strange look on his face.

“I got you into the class. Tomorrow morning at nine,” Tony gave him a grin.

Harry’s frown deepened, “Did you just buy my way into it?”

Tony rolled his eyes. “That’s all politics kid. A million is no big deal. You more than deserve to be at that college. We could have gone a more official route and gotten you to fill out an application – which you would have crushed by the way – but that would mean that you probably wouldn’t have been able to attend the Summer session.”

Harry took a deep breath. “I don’t know. It just doesn’t feel right. Buying my way into it.”

Tony stared at his child. Harry had grown up with nothing, and probably had never owned much in his life. Tony had just casually thrown millions of dollars around because Harry had wanted something. It made the child uncomfortable.

He had worked for everything in his life.

“Show up tomorrow and prove that you deserve to be there. I just got you in Harry, you actually have to do the work. If you don’t deserve to be there, it will be pretty evident.”

Harry looked at him, and then a grin spread his face. “You’re right.”

“Of course I am,” Tony said.

Okay. New rule. No more throwing around money for the kid, in front of the kid. Next time he just won’t tell Harry.

Tony shifted the papers on his desk and saw the paper that said: Notice of Deposition: Harry James Potter.

It was set for next week. Jillian had it all planned out. Her friend, a blind lawyer Matt Murdock, was supposed to depose Harry, and Jillian had already drawn up a gag order for once they lodged the official criminal complaint and civil suit. It was all ready.

Except Tony still had to talk to Harry.

…. 

After finally settling on a body guard for Harry, Tony wandered back down to his personal labs where Harry and Bruce joined him.

Tony tried to talk to Harry that night. He really tried, but every time he went to say something, he became tongue tied.

Harry was sketching out the work for a ward in his notebook.

He said something about an article he was working on. Tony nodded, and asked if he needed any help. Harry looked kind of amused at that, and told him that it wasn’t necessary.

That was fair. Tony might have learned a little bit from working on the tower Ward with Harry, but
he was far from the expert that the kid was. Bruce just looked amused at them.

Tony stuck out his tongue.

Every time he thought of the words, *Harry, I think we should press charges against the Dursleys*, his tongue would get heavy and wouldn’t work right.

Bruce gave him a look that said he could tell that Tony was struggling with something.

Tomorrow. Tony would say something tomorrow.

....

For some reason, Harry felt nervous. Two looming men in black stood behind him with wires and sunglasses. He felt like he was some sort of political figure.

They didn’t speak except to give him names. They were so nondescript that Harry didn’t remember them.

He frowned when his father had told him about the guards in the morning, but he had promised Tony that he would allow body guards. Harry sighed.

So much for blending in. Not that he would have anyways with the Press Conference the day before and Harry’s age.

The men at least stood by the door when Harry entered the Lecture Hall twenty minutes early. He took a deep breath and stared at the room. A few people were blatantly staring at him, but no one had said anything.

Harry saw a kid about his age, fourteen to sixteen-ish, sitting in the back with headphones in. He was one of the only people in the room without a laptop, and Harry saw a camera sticking out of his bag. He was also the only person sitting alone.

Harry hesitantly walked up to the kid. The kid looked up and pulled his headphones out. He had messy brown hair and was wearing a t-shirt that had two atoms next to each other. One had a speech bubble that said: I lost an electron. The one next to it had a speech bubble that asked: Are you positive?

“Hi,” Harry said. “Can I sit here?”

The kid blinked rapidly. Large brown eyes processed what he was asking. “Yes, of course you can.” He scrambled to move his bag from the seat.

Harry sat down.

“I’m Harry Potter,” he said. This part wasn’t actually unusual to Harry. He was used to people freaking out when they saw him.

“I know,” the kid immediately blushed, and stammered an apology. He was cute, and reminded him a little bit like Colin.

Harry grinned amused at the reaction.

The kid pulled himself together, and then stuck his hand out for a handshake. Harry gripped it.

The kid said stammering, “Hi, uh, I’m Peter Parker.”
Harry replied, his British accent thick, “Nice to meet you Peter Parker.”

Peter blushed.

Cute.

Chapter End Notes

Hello MCU Peter Parker! If you don’t get one Harry best friend with a science mogul father, then you get another best friend named Harry with a science mogul father.

Notes:

Thank you to TheForgottenPrincess for beta-ing this chapter for me and making it actually kind of bearable to read. Because even I cringe at my own grammar errors. Dear lord. I fail at basic English sometimes.

I’m going with the May 4th Avengers release date as the date of the Battle of New York, or “the incident” as it is called in TV Marvel. Speaking of that, The Defenders is so close!

Oh god, I realized I fucked my timeline to hell. Because I started this in 2014 and as it is now late 2017 the dates that I had originally planned to match up with real time aren’t really possible. Which means that I’ll probably move back the timeline. I think my cornerstone date will be Battle of New York May 4, 2012 date. As such this puts this in early June 2013. As such, Harry’s birthdate is July 31, 1997. If anyone really cares. (Any readers with that birthdate?!)

Also, with the help (she’s doing like all of the work) of TheForgottenPrincess, I’ve updated Chapter 1 and 2. It’ll mostly just be fixing grammar errors and such, but Chapter 2 got a bit of a rewrite to create more verisimilitude with Harry’s character and how my magic works. If anyone wants to go reread it, they can, but it’s not necessary. Nothing important changed!

Questions:

What did you think of the chapter? Loki? The Press Conference? Tony freaking out? Peter Parker showing up? Oh, and Dr. Strange, I kind of forgot he was in this chapter!

Do you feel like Tony and Harry’s characters are bonding too fast, or does it feel earned? Their relationship will have some friction in the future, but I have a really bad habit of turning my characters into responsible adults….

Finally, anyone want to write a badass summary for me? I’ve been told that the summary for this story is boring, and every time I go to rewrite it, my mind blanks. I’ll credit you with the writing of it!

I love long reviews. I literally suck energy out of them like a succubus, but any reviews or comments I will be eternally grateful for. Thank you all for reading!

<3 Emm
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Peter! Physics! ICW! Dr. Strange, and Harry and Tony talk about the depo!!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Disclaimer: I don’t own these properties, but I would love to, provided we can make a reasonable deal. Marvel Studios and J.K. Rowling PM me. I’m offering to pay about $1,000, but I’m willing to negotiate if you are.

Lol.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Peter Parker was trying to act casual. He really was.

His school had a program with Columbia where he could apply to take courses over the summer to prepare for college. He was here on scholarship, and it was an introductory physics course. The course was relatively easy and it would allow him to jump into AP Physics 2 at the beginning of his sophomore year.

The first two weeks had been boring, simply going over basic physical mechanics. Well, come on, calculating the velocity and acceleration of an object wasn't rocket science. It was used in rocket science, but it wasn't rocket science itself.

Peter had drug himself to class on a Tuesday morning during Summer expecting it be another boring class where he sat in the back alone.

That was, until he noticed a kid walking up to sit with him. That, in of itself, was a huge deal. Peter was kind of a motor mouth; he didn't really make friends well as his nerdiness became a pervasive part of any space he walked into.

Peter went to a science school, and he was even too nerdy for them.

Peter tried to causally glance back over at Harry Potter who was sitting next to him. Or was it Stark? Oh, dear god, Peter was going to make a fool out of himself.

Harry Potter looked intently at him. "So, did I miss anything important?" he asked.

Peter blinked, startled. "Uh, what?"

Harry looked amused. He had that slight grin on his face, a look much like Tony Stark had, that radiated the reality that they were getting great enjoyment from watching other people stumble. It wasn't mean, more just an acknowledgement that their presence was the cause of the other person's, in this case Peter's, befuddlement.

"In the first two weeks of class," Harry clarified, "Did I miss anything?" His British accent was
strong and smooth. He sounded far posher than Peter would ever achieve in his entire life.

Peter thought on it. *What should he say?* If he said, no, not really, and it turned out that Harry struggled with physical mechanics, then he would seem like a cocky asshole. If he said yes, and Harry was brilliant, then he would seem stupid.

Peter decided on the non-answer option. "We went over some physical mechanics. Calculating the velocity and acceleration of an object and such."

Harry nodded thoughtfully. Then, he gave Peter a sly grin, "If I need any help, can I count on you?"

Peter nodded earnestly. "Of course." Although, the idea of Harry choosing to come to him for help when he had Tony Stark and Bruce Banner living with him was stunning.

"How about we exchange numbers? That way we can study together," Harry said as he smiled at him.

For the first time Peter looked at Harry. He had bright green eyes that radiated energy and stood out against his dark hair; hair that had the natural *I-just-had-sex* sort of look that Peter would never be able to achieve no matter how long he stood in front of the mirror in the morning.

"Uh, sure," Peter said, and in almost a trance held his phone out to Harry.

Harry looked at it for a second, before he grabbed the phone and held it in his hand like he didn't know what to do with it and it was a foreign object that might explode at any moment. He looked up at Peter with a kind of sheepish expression. Harry told him, "Okay, please don't laugh at me. I don't know how to work this thing."

It was literally a StarkPhone. Peter's jaw dropped. Tony Stark's son didn't know how to work a cell phone.

Harry blushed slightly. "I mean, I understand the basic concept. You dial people's numbers to call them, but where do I go to input my number? Actually, could you just put it in my phone? I don't know my number."

Peter blurted out, "How don't you know how to work a cell phone?" Then immediately regretted it, and he could imagine his eyes going wide.

Harry wasn't offended. He lightly shrugged and admitted, "I went to a boarding school for the last five years and I never needed a phone. I thought I was an orphan. It wasn't like I had people to call when I see my friends almost every waking moment."

Peter bit his lip and offered, "I'm an orphan too." He grabbed the phone Harry held out to him and put in his name and number.

When he looked back up, Harry was staring at him thoughtfully. Harry opened his mouth to say something, but was interrupted by the Professor.

The man was Asian-Indian, in his mid-thirties, and spoke with a posh British accent, "Alright everyone, settle down, you are on my time now. Before we start, yes, there is a new student in this class. Yes, you might recognize him. No, I don't give a bloody flying fuck who he is. You will all be graded on the same curve."

Everyone's eyes in the classroom immediately turned around to look at Harry. Harry gave a tight smile of acknowledgement.
"Anyways, moving on from our celebrity. Today we will be introducing the concept of kinematics in two directions…” The Professor started to drone on about vectors, graphing techniques, and projectile motion. It wasn't that hard to follow, and Peter took diligent notes.

Next to him, Harry did the same.

He then took to the board to do a problem with them all, "The angle between the direction of the launch and the ground…” Peter zoned out for a second before the professor continued, "breaking it up between the horizontal and vertical components, we can figure out how long that the object can stay in the air…”

He glanced over to Harry's paper.

He had sketched out a graph already for the equation that looked like:

11m/s

\[ 11 \sin(40°) = \|v_y\| = 7.07 \text{m/s} \]

Vertical: \( v_i = 7.07 \text{m/s} \), \( v_f = -7.07 \text{m/s} \)

\[ \Delta v_y = -7.07 \text{m/s} - 7.07 \text{m/s} = -14.14 \text{m/s} \]

\[ 14.14 \text{m/s} = -9.8 \text{m/s}^2 \times \Delta T \]

\[ \Delta T = 1.44 \text{s} \]

Well, that solved the question of Harry needing help in figuring the last two weeks of their class. Mind you, it was elementary and Peter himself had already figured it out, but the teacher was just beginning to discuss what they were looking for in the problem.

Peter turned back to the professor when his phone buzzed. Peter glanced down at it.

It came from an unknown number and read: *Okay, I lied. I don't need help with Physics. But I am new to the area and you seemed like you would be knowledgeable. Plus, you are the first number in my phone. Am I doing this right?*

There was a pause: *texting, that is*

Peter glanced up to Harry who was giving him a sheepish smile.

Peter whispered, "I don't think there is a wrong way to text."

"If there is, trust me, I would find it," Harry whispered conspiratorially.

Peter couldn't help himself. He laughed, or giggled as his aunt would say. Peter would fervently deny that.
"Mr. Stark, Mr. Parker, if you find it acceptable to interrupt the class, maybe you would like to tell us how far the projectile traveled in the air." Peter blanched. It was the horizontal component times the change in time, but he hadn't calculated the horizontal component. It would be the $\cos(40^\circ)$ times 11 m/s…

Harry's voice answered crisp for him, "12.134 meters Professor, assuming that the ground is even."

Peter glanced over and realized that Harry had done that without a calculator. The $\cos(40^\circ)$ would be .7 something, but even Peter wasn't sure what it was off the top of his head like that.

The teacher stared down Harry assessing him and commanded, "Stay after class Mr. Potter."

Harry nodded at the man who had already moved back onto teaching. The other students in the class were discretely, or not so discretely, glancing over at Harry. Harry looked oblivious to all of it, but Peter could tell by the way he was gripping his pencil that it was a controlled relaxed state.

Peter texted Harry back slyly. *I'm born and raised in Queens. But only if you promise to show me around London if I ever manage to make it there.*

Peter would not look at what Harry was typing. He constantly looked forward resisting the urge to glance at Harry's phone. *What? No demand to see the Avenger's tower.*

Peter typed back quickly: *What? No! Of course not. I mean the Avengers are great and all especially Mr. Stark, but I wouldn't use you like that.*

Then Peter added: *Oh, god. I'm so awkward. I'm so sorry.*

Harry texted back: *I was joking. And your awkwardness is cute. I would very much like to be your friend.*

Peter felt himself flush. He didn't know what to say to that. Peter turned to Harry who gave him a winning grin.

He was like a little miniature Tony Stark, and – Peter didn't use this word much – Peter was *fucked*. He couldn't concentrate for the rest of class, and when it ended, Peter sat there blinking.

Harry glanced at Peter, "I have to talk to the Professor. Text me, yeah?"

Harry swept away to the front of class, and Peter walked out slowly. He couldn't believe it. He called his aunt immediately, "Aunt May, you would not believe who I just met…"

…

Dr. Ashwin Bahl was not impressed with the college. He was a renowned Cosmologist, under tenure, and by all rights, shouldn't be teaching an *Intro* to Physics Class.

It's not that he that he thought the class above him, but he was in the middle of a huge research project and beyond busy. However, a colleague and good friend of his that was supposed to teach the class was diagnosed with brain cancer and asked him to cover this summer course for him rather than cancel it. One does not say no to covering for a friend battling brain cancer.

The night before he had been called by the Dean and told that Tony Stark's son would be taking his class despite the add code time already been long past. Then, the child had walked in with fucking bodyguard, which, well, Ash should have expected that much, but it still was disruptive. The kid had talked through the entire class which usually Ash couldn't care less, but they were in a small lecture
hall because of the summer class, and the acoustics of the room carried the kid's voices. It wouldn't be his fault if the child failed the first test.

Okay, he cared a little bit. He didn't like his students to fail.

Harry Potter looked like Stark, but he wasn't an exact copy. He hoped that the kid wasn't as arrogant as his father. Or worse be arrogant and bad at science, and Ash would have to fail him and get so much shit from the Dean.

"Dr. Bahl, you wanted to see me," the kid said politely.

Ash nodded and drew a problem on the board. "Can you answer this for me?"

Harry dropped his bag on the floor, and walked up the chalk board. He looked at the chalk for a second as if contemplating something. Dr. Bahl frowned. He had thought that Harry had understood the question earlier in class, despite him not paying attention.

Harry turned to him, and asked, "Do you want me to configure in air resistance or a change in ground level?"

Ash raised his eyebrows at the child, "No, just do it the way I showed in class earlier."

Then, the kid shrugged, grabbed the chalk and quickly solved for the height, time in air, and distance traveled. He didn't so much as pause or ask for a graphing calculator. Not that Ash had made it hard, using the Sin(30°) for the angle. The kid turned expectantly to him when he finished, and Ash nodded at him.

"Good," Ash commented, then he continued, "I expect you to keep up with this class. I will not go easy on you because of your father. If you succeed or fail, it will be on your own merits."

The child nodded self-seriously, and said, 'Thank you.'

Ash rolled his eyes. "Alright kid, you probably have better things to do, and I have better things to do…"

The kid grinned at him, and told him, "See you in class tomorrow professor." Then, the bodyguards came up and flanked the child. Harry gave a sour look, as if he was just was unhappy with having the guards as Ash was in having them stationed outside of his class.

Ten minutes later, as Ash was packing his things to leave the room, he realized that Harry had left his bag sitting on the floor. He frowned at that. He grabbed the bag to take to his office. Harry would be long gone, and leaving anything in these lecture halls was like giving it to goodwill. It was a donation to the next student who stumbled across it.

He would just give it to the kid in class the next day.

....

Harry Potter realized maybe twenty minutes after he left Columbia, that he had left his backpack. Happy had drove him to the school, and when he was pulling back into the Avenger's tower, Harry freaked out.

*Just* a little bit.

Or maybe a lot.
"I left my bookbag at school," Harry said, trying to resist the urge to just climb back into the car and demand that Happy and he return to pick it up.

Happy looked at him as if he didn't understand what the big deal was. "We can buy you a new one, kid. Don't worry about it. You are the heir to a multi-billion-dollar inheritance."

"You don't understand," Harry said, "It contained my notebook."

He almost told Happy that it contained his warding notebook, but to Happy that would mean nothing.

Happy sighed dramatically. "How important is this notebook to you?"

"The most important thing I own." Well, not really. There was also his father's – he had thought about the man as his father for a long time, and he knew from the letter that James Potter had left him that he thought of Harry as his son, so he refused to deny the man the title of father even if he now had Tony – invisibility cloak, his mother's old seventh year textbooks he had found in their family vault that he would read just to see her handwriting, and of, most importantly, Hedwig.

He and Jasper had agreed to have him look after her for the summer because he hadn't been keen on bringing an owl to Tony Stark's place. Now, looking back on it, he was sure it wouldn't have been a problem, but he hadn't known that then.

Happy sighed as if he didn't want to deal with this shit. He got on the phone with someone. "… need the personal number of Columbia Professor…"

Happy glanced down at Harry with his eyebrows raised.

"Ashwin Bahl," Harry said.

Happy supplied the name, and then got off the phone. He told Harry, "Check your phone."

Harry glanced down at his phone, and from Dad there was a 716 area code number. His father had also texted: is losing things a problem with you?

About two second later another text came in: i'm joking by the way. Thought I might clarify since you've probably never texted before.

Harry rolled his eyes and clicked on the phone. An option came up to either call, text, or create new contact. Harry tapped on call.

It rang for a couple of seconds. He heard his Professor's voice say, "'ello."

"Hi Professor Bahl. Hi, this is Harry Potter calling to see if you found the bookbag I left in class today."

Harry held his breath. Professor Bahl said, "Yes of course. I found it on the ground and have it in my office. You okay with just grabbing it tomorrow in class?"

Harry felt his entire body relax. His warding book was safe.

"Yes. Thank you so much. I'm sorry to bother you," Harry rambled.

"No problem. How did you even get my number?" the Professor asked, sounding curious.

"Uh, my dad," Harry answered.
"Ah…" there was an awkward pause then the Professor said, "Okay. See you in class tomorrow."

"Goodbye Professor Bahl, thank you again." The phone's disconnected. Happy looked like he wanted to laugh at him.

Harry scowled at the man.

The elevator dinged to the common living area. It seemed like everyone was in the living area, minus Thor, Hel, and Loki.

Natasha and Clint where talking in Russian and pointing to different locations on some sort of map or blueprints. Steve was sitting at a desk overlooking New York sketching. Bruce was reading what looked like a bound study, and making notes. His father was on his laptop doing god-knows-what.

Tony glanced up the second he walked into the room, and smirked at him. He asked, "Did the professor have your backpack?"

Harry blushed. He was a bit like the absent-minded professor at times. He managed to lose more small items than he cared to admit. It was a miracle that he still had his warding book. When he remembered, he would make a duplicate and place it with his stuff. The last time he had done that was about six months ago. Worst case scenario, Harry would have cast a tracking charm or done a summoning ritual.

He wouldn't have used Accio because it was too easy to accidentally cause it to hit something like a fan or a car and cause it to break. He had watched someone summon a quill and almost take out someone's eyes. Not the smartest decision.

"So, Harry," Clint's voice was light, and there was a devious look in his eyes.

"Yes…?" Harry answered, giving him a critical look.

"You never showed us any magic," he said.

Harry still hadn't managed to figure out the laws regarding underage magic in America. Technically, the magic he had done was still illegal in Britain.

Although runic magic was still technically underage magic, since Harry didn't have to use his want to activate the rune, nobody could track it. Harry grinned, and asked, "Anything you want to see?"

Everyone in the room was now watching him. Clint blinked as if he wasn't expecting an affirmative.

He grinned, "Can you make something float." Harry raised his eyebrows. It was literally the first thing that he had learned at Hogwarts because it was so easy.

"Sure," Harry walked over the kitchen and found a pen and paper. Natasha was giving him a very calculating look as if she was assessing him as a threat. Harry thought on it for a second. There was nothing in the Anglo-Saxon or Elder Futhark that represented air. He decided on something older. He knew that in the Egyptian runes set there was a symbol for lungs and a windpipe which should work especially when paired with the runic symbol for a column.

He drew them like the following:
Then he turned to Clint, smirked, and asked, "Anything you want me to levitate?"

"Myself of course," Clint grinned.

Harry shrugged. The Egyptian rune set worked best for healing because of the extensive arrangement of symbols for different body parts. The Egyptians were obsessed with the body after death, after all. But conceptually this should work fine, especially paired with a power symbol, the column rune.

Harry hadn't really done the math for it. He could work it out and tell how much it could possibly levitate in weight, and how much the column rune would increase the power, but the Egyptians used the runes for magic long before Physics was around.

Harry was sure it would work fine.

He placed the paper down on the floor and motioned for Clint to come over.

Because the rune set was simple, Harry didn't need to be close to activate it. He added magic to the rune, focusing on starting up the properties. Clint, started to float in front of all of them.

Harry took control of the magic, and kept him from slamming Clint into the ceiling. As amusing as that would have been, he didn't want to injure a superhero.

"I'm flying!" Clint exclaimed, "I'm fucking flying. You see this Nat?"

Nat snorted, as if she wasn't going to dignify that with a response.

Tony, who had been pretending not to pay attention, looked up from his laptop and said, "Join the club Robin Hood."

JARVIS's voice said, "Sir."

Tony replied, "Not now JARVIS."

"Does nobody else think this is cool?" Clint pouted.

Bruce looked thoughtful and asked Harry, "How are you defying gravity? Are you creating a localized gravitational field? Or somehow suspending, pardon the pun, the properties of matter?"

Harry tried to formulate a succinct reply to that. Magic had anti-gravitational properties innately. That was why they taught Wingardium Leviosa to children first; it was the easiest magical spell on a molecular level.

In the background, Harry heard JARVIS try again, "Sir, I really think you should hear…” Tony dismissed him again.
Harry's reply on the magical properties of the levitation spell was never given. Instead, a voice interrupted them.

"Showing off, Mr. Potter?"

Harry immediately canceled the rune and Clint went tumbling to the floor. Harry turned around to see a man in, not a traditional wizarding cloak, but a cape. Behind him were five individuals of varying ages, ethnicities, and dress. One looked like he had walked out of the Leaky Caldron, fully done up in Wizarding wear, where another stood in a full tuxedo.

Harry didn't know who they were, but he imagined they weren't there for just pumpkin juice.

....

Five minutes earlier, Dr. Strange and the EPC stood out front of the Avenger's tower. He had cast an aversion so the mundane humans around him all seemed to miss the group with their eyes. It was slight and slightly hypnotic.

He could barely believe his senses. There was some sort of living energy surrounding the tower. A dangerous living energy that poised ready to strike as soon as the group had stood in front of the building.

It was nothing like he had ever seen before, and he wanted nothing more than the talk to the creator of such a magnificent energy. Also, how to recreate it of course.

Dr. Strange reached out and stopped Angela Yasui from slamming face first into such energy.

She looked at him critically. The woman terrified him. She was powerful in a way that few people on Earth are. Sitting between the crossroads of every magical government on Earth, she could sweep into any situation with a sense of legitimacy. She was borderless and ran a group that millions of people depended on to maintain their life as they knew.

If the EPC fucked up and magic got out to the masses, then the wizarding world would never be the same.

Dr. Strange wasn't part of such a community, but he understood the gravity of such a secret. As the gatekeepers of the secret, the EPC had a tremendous amount of responsibility. A responsibility that Dr. Strange had taken on for himself… wonderful.

"We would like entrance into the tower please," Stephen addressed the living ward.

He heard the one named Ali mutter, "He can say please?" Stephen ignored it. Angela looked at him like he was insane. Kwan had that sour look on his face, as if he was still bitter – despite it being many years ago – that Stephen and he hadn't worked out.

He was very happy with Christine; happier than he had ever been with anyone in his entire life. Not that he had ever been in a relationship before her that he had actually wanted to work out.

If anything, Kwan was lucky that they had fucked for a couple of weeks and moved on.

The ward responded to him mentally, "What is your business with my creator?"

Stephen twisted his head, thoughtful. He asked, "Who is your creator?"

The others around muttered to each other about him going crazy. They likely couldn't feel or see the
ward.

He had a suspicion, of course, but it would be absurd for such powerful and intricate magic to be created by a teenager.

"What is your business with Harry Potter?" the ward asked. It was a childlike impression. Like a dangerous toddler with a hand grenade. No sense of right and wrong, and every sense of desire and want.

In this case, the desire to protect her creator.

Stephen Strange would not make any motions that could be construed as vaguely harmful towards Harry Potter while in the tower. Noted.

"We would like to speak with him about the Statue of Security. We will not harm Mr. Potter, or Mr. Potter's father. Rather, we are with the International Council of Wizards and is urgent that we discuss this with the Avengers." Stephen addressed.

The ward was silent and the energy was indecisive. It went on for a moment or two.

Finally, a smooth British voice announced through a speaker on the outside of the tower, "My apologies Dr. Strange. Be warned, Lily will attack if you threaten her creator, and I will protect mine. That being said, I have granted you access to the tower."

The door in front of them clicked open.

Mrs. Yasui asked, "And who may you be?" with her lips pursed.

"Ma'am you may call me JARVIS, and I am Mr. Stark's Artificial Intelligence. I run and maintain the security on the tower, among other duties."

"Are you threatening me JARVIS?" she asked.

The British voice almost sounded amused as he replied, "No miss, I am simply informing you."

Angela swallowed and glanced at Stephen. Her eyes told him that she was rethinking their plan to speak to the Avenger's at their tower. It would be on their home turf, and it seemed that they had powerful silent allies.

This did not deter Stephen, who strode forward into the lobby of the building. In front of them an elevator dinged, as if it was inviting them to step inside. Half of him expected JARVIS to say you have entered the twilight zone, but of course nothing of the sort happened.

The elevator finally dinged.

Dr. Strange walked off to see Harry Potter levitating a man by what looked like a simple runic pattern. Stephen rolled his eyes, and said, "Showing off, Mr. Potter?"

The man in the air, the archer Avenger, dropped to the ground with a solid thunk. His weak oww, that hurt was muffled by the general shock of the room.

They weren't expecting them.

"JARVIS," Tony Stark asked.

"Sir," the AI replied.
"Is this what you were trying to inform me of?"

"Yes sir."

"Dr. Stark, it's been a long time," Stephen said, enjoying the sour look that crossed Tony's face as he called him Dr. The man had three PhDs. He deserved the title of doctor, not matter how much he tried to bury that fact.

The fact that it ticked Tony off only made him want to call him it every time.

The blonde one in the corner, Steve Rogers, mouthed doctor.

Tony rolled his eyes at him. "What's with the red cloak? The big-bad wolf coming to get you."

"I thought it went well with the outfit. But you are one to talk."

"My suit is practical first and foremost," Tony crossed his arms.

"Yes," Stephen agreed, "The red and gold has nothing to do with aesthetics. It's not like it creates a target or anything."

Angela stepped forward, "As amusing as it is to see you two posturing, we are here on official business. Is there somewhere we can convene? A conference room perhaps?"

Natasha Romanov, the most elusive of the Superhero group, stepped forward exuding calm intimidation. "Who are you?"

Angela gave a tight smile. "My name is Angela Yasui and I'm with the EPC. I think it's time we had a chat with Mr. Potter."

Stephen glanced over to Harry Potter. The boy, well, he looked like nothing. An average fifteen-year-old by all counts. He was striking, like his father yes, but nothing inhuman or revealing of the miracles that the child seemed to fall into on average basis. Strange had heard the ludicrous stories of basilisks, Dark Lords, thousands of dementors, and other such tall tales. Yet, here Stephen stood in a tower surrounded by a Ward that seemed to be alive.

Looking at the child, he could have been any other fifteen-year-old on the planet. Yet, Harry Potter was one of the world's greatest political pawns. He pitied the child on some level. Angela wanted to make a show out of Harry Potter defying the Statue of Security; some sort of warning that nobody was above it.

"The EPC," Harry said slowly and all eyes turned to him. He glanced down, "This is about the Ward isn't it."

They knew, a hundred percent, that every person in the room knew about Harry's magic. Illegally, of course, and as such, this was going to be a headache. They was no denying or taking around it.

"If by Ward, you mean the magic spike that happened two days ago at 7pm UTC, then yes, we are here about the Ward. And it seems the gross infringement of the international statue of security."

Harry stared at the room feeling like he was on trial. His father stood next to him radiating disapproval. Harry half expected him to bear his teeth like a rabid dog, ready to bite the head off anyone who dared get near his pup. Harry was so vividly reminded of Sirius that it was a kick in the
Sirius would have liked Tony. Harry didn't want to dwell on it though. He had done his absolute best to push Sirius' death out of his mind to the point where he almost half expected the man to pop up with any moment with the devil-may-care grin on his face and a devious look in his eyes.

He wouldn't though. He was dead.

Harry swallowed, and focused his thoughts back on the room in front of him. He frowned at the proclaimed EPC.

"I assume that I am in trouble," Harry's voice had a fake nonchalance that echoed the irreverence that Tony could show. "In my defense, I told nobody about my magic. You should take that up with Nick Fury."

"Good luck," Clint muttered.

There was a pause and Mrs. Yasui grabbed her forehead as if the entire situation was a pain. "We will, but first we must deal with this. Mr. Potter you have conducted a major breach on the statue of security. We could take away your wand. Do you understand the gravity of what has happened?"

"Of course, but as I said, I. Didn't. Tell. Them," Harry gritted his teeth.

"As a wizard, you are legally responsible for the people who find out about magic under your watch. You should have gone to the American MACUSA in order to properly contain the breach. Right now, you could be looking at prison, for life, for the type of statue breach you have caused. Not that we are going to charge you, but you could be."

"I didn't," Harry started to argue, then his face got dark, and he muttered, "Whatever."

Tony glanced between the two of them with a look on his face that said that he did not like anything that was going on.

Mrs. Yasui reached into her bag and pulled out a stack of papers. She reached out to Tony to hand him one, but he raised his eyebrows as if to say yeah, not going to happen. She placed it down in front of him.

"We have decided, along with the ICW—"

"Did Dumbledore say something?" Harry interrupted bitterly. This was just his life; governments deciding to litigate against him.

"He wasn't a part of this decision." She frowned. Common ground of dislike of Albus Dumbledore. At least that was something they had in common. "Anyways," she continued, "We had a lawyer draw up these for us. You all," she motioned to the room of superheroes watching silently, "Can continue to have knowledge of the wizarding world, provided you sign these. These are NDA agreements that…"

"Yeah, no." Tony interrupted.

"Mr. Stark, we are being perfectly reasonable," Mrs. Yasui said. "As I said early, we could charge Mr. Potter with legal misconduct. Instead, we are choosing to go a more diplomatic route."

"Sign the damn papers Stark. It's a much nicer agreement than what I would have drawn up," Dr. Strange told Harry's father.
"Last I heard you were a doctor, not a lawyer. But you aren't really that anymore are you." Tony took the top paper and literally ripped it up.

Strange blinked as if even he was a little taken aback by the comment. He looked angry.

Everyone in the room was staring at Tony. Harry wanted to ask his father what he was doing. Harry personally didn't want to go to jail for violating the Statue of Security.

Tony plowed on, "I've already reached my monthly quota of legal documents thrown at me with ultimatums. This is going to be on my terms. Number one, if you don't want me to go public about magic, you will cease threatening my son with any sort of legal action."

A very pretty male in the center dressed in full white tie said, "Tony Stark, we said we could charge your son, not that we are going to. We are here for containment purposes only."

"That is why I currently hold the cards. You don't want magic to be known. Fine. I agree to those terms provided I write up the documents. I'm not signing anything that you hand to me. Nor is my son. Nor is anyone else in this room."

"It's probably magically binding," Harry said, "And I agree with my father. We should have Jasper write up new documents. And I would like not to go to prison."

At least, he hoped that Tony didn't literally intend to reveal magic to the world. At a threat, it was a fine bargaining point, but in reality it would be horrific.

A woman stepped forward. She was slightly older, probably Tony or Bruce's age. Her blonde hair was thrown into a loose ponytail. She looked practical and sharp.

"Mr. Stark, you have no idea of the gravity of this secret. It's not something to be joked about."

"Honey," he drawled, "I can joke about anything."

"My child died when people thought she was possessed because she had magic. You are bargaining with people's lives."

"You know, when you manufacture weapons for a living, you get used to bargaining with people's lives," he grinned, looked down at the papers and stood up. "I'm going to bring in council. We are going to rewrite this document, then we will meet again."

Tony stood up and stared at the woman who had done all the talking. It was the sort of look that was used to fulfilling threats. "If you threaten my son again, I will destroy your life."

Slowly one by one the Avengers around them had stood. Steve had walked over and stepped next to Tony with his arms crossed.

"Ma'am, I don't know what is going on, but I agree with Tony. Threatening Harry, well…"

Bruce said loudly, "It would make me quite angry." Bruce had a look on his face. Very serene, very creepy.

Clint announced, "I like the kid. I've been threatened with prison myself. It's not very nice."

Natasha flipped a knife in her hand. She was the only one still sitting. She announced leisurely, "I've been to prison, I agree." She took the knife, and with a swift moment, threw it so that it embedded itself in the wall near the group. She smiled at them.
Mrs. Yasui swallowed, and tried, "We went about this the wrong way. We weren't threatening Mr. Potter. We were telling him what could happen. Breaches like this could jeopardize the entire wizarding world. Signing the documents would make this all go away."

Tony looked to Harry, and asked, "Can you do that fire rune thing again?"

Harry grinned, took a pencil and drew the rune for fire on the papers. With a little bit of magic, they went up in smoke.

Angela Yasui looked lost. "Okay, fine. We will do this your way Stark. But I'm not leaving until you sign some sort of papers." She crossed her arms over her chest.

Tony shrugged. "We have enough rooms."

....

Later that evening, Tony knocked on Harry's door.

"Come in," Harry called.

"Hey," Tony said, "How are you doing?"

"Fine," Harry looked at him kind of funny. "I've been threatened with worse things than prison."

One of these days, Harry was going to sit down and tell him everything that had happened to him in the last couple of years. There were too many unknowns, and Tony had to start a list of people that he would need to deal with.

Harry's phone buzzed, and the kid glanced down at the scene and smiled. Tony raised his eyebrows. "Okay, who is it?"

"Who says it's anyone?" Harry asked obstinately.

"Are we doing this now? Fuck, am I having a nosey parent moment?" Tony asked, mostly himself.

"It's okay," Harry bit his lip. "I've never had anyone to be nosey."

Tony sat down on the bed, and asked, "So...?"

"He, uh, his name is Peter." Harry commented slowly.

"Peter, eh. Have you reached the stalking Instagram part?" Tony questioned.

Harry looked at him blankly. Tony realized, "You don't know what Instagram is."

Harry shook his head. Tony took a deep breath, and prompted, "Tell me about him."

"I just met him Tony. Today." Tony gave him a flat look, and then Harry whined, "Da-ad."

"Fine. He's my age, fifteen. He's got brown hair, and big Bambie eyes. He seems really smart, he's into photography, and he grew up in Queens. I don't know that much. I literally meet him today. It could be nothing. We could just be friends."

"Invite him over," Tony said, "Even as just a friend. He sounds like a good kid."

Harry gave him a weak smile. "You would be okay with that. Me dating a guy? I mean, I'm into girls
too. I'm bisexual. I mean, I'm pretty sure. I've never…"

"Kid," Tony realized that no, nope, he was not having that conversation with Harry tonight. "We will put the sex talk on hold. Somebody has given you it right." Harry nodded. Well, he probably would have to give Harry a talk about the differences between gay sex and straight sex, being safe, what sort condoms work with different types of lubrication…. Oh god, this was his fifteen-almost-sixteen-year-old son. He suddenly got a very vivid impression of how much shit he put his parents through.

"Of course, I'm fine with you being bisexual," Tony ruffled Harry's hair. "Or gay, or straight, or asexual, or trans. Or whatever. Honestly kid, you being happy and healthy is my number one priority which, from what I've gathered, is a full time job with you."

Harry was smiling at him. Tony rocked at this. He could totally kill this parenting thing. "Thanks dad."

"Okay, too much sincerity, any anyways, I'm not a hypocrite. I'm super fucking pansexual. Wait, no, bad choice of words. Really bad choice of words."

Harry was now laughing at him. Full on giggling laughing. He had his hand over his face as if he was trying to stave it off. Tony couldn't help it. He started laughing too.

"Okay, okay."

"What did you come in here to talk about."

Suddenly, Tony felt all the giddiness on his face slip away. He needed to talk to Harry. This wasn't something he could put off.

Harry blinked and his face became even, as he picked up on the change in emotion.

"Harry…" Tony started.

"Yes," Harry asked, searching Tony's face.

"I have something I need to talk to you about."

Harry snorted, amused, and answered, "I gathered that much."

"I know. I'm stalling." Harry raised his eyebrows.

Tony took a deep breath. He could do this. "I would like to press charges against the Dursleys," he finally announced.

It was as if the air was suddenly sucked out of the room. Harry's face contoured in pain and rage. "What?" Harry asked.

"I would like to press charges against them for child abuse," Tony repeated calmly.

"No." Harry's face was blank. His green-eyes had glazed over, and he suddenly wasn't the kid he was giggling with but sixty seconds earlier.

"Harry, I know they hurt you kid, and they deserve to be brought to justice," Tony reached out to grab Harry's hand. Harry yanked it away. "You deserve it."

Harry leveled his eyes on Tony. "I don't want to. I put that part of my life into a box and locked it away. That was three years ago, it's over, and I don't want to deal with it."
"Harry, you can't just pretend it didn't happen. Trust me." Tony reached out, and this time Harry didn't push him away.

Harry let out a deep breath. He closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them, he leveled his gaze on Tony. "Dad," Harry tried, "I know that you feel like this is the way to protect me, but I'm finally happy right now. I have you, and everyone in the tower. Can't we just forget about it?"

No. Tony really didn't want to. Every single moment that he thought about that family living in their little suburban house pretending to be a normal family, he was filled with rage. They had taken his baby boy. His three-year-old. His six-year-old. His eleven-year-old. And beaten him. And god-knows-what to him.

His Harry that flinched from him when he yelled. The boy sitting in front of him that had grown up to be a fine young man, but Tony had been robbed of watching him take his first step, ride a bicycle for the first time, teaching him how to calculate, taking him to his first day of school. That family had that time with Harry, and instead of cherishing it and loving the little boy, they had been cruel and inhumane.

Just thinking about it made Tony murderously.

Tony didn't want to forget about it. He never would. It would haunt him, what could have been. But he had Harry in front of him now, and he was going to damn well be a good father.

"Harry," Tony voice trembled. "I love you. I support you, and I want you to be happy. If you don't want to talk about it right now, then we won't talk about it. But, I want you to promise me that you will think about it."

Harry bit his lip, and nodded at Tony. Tony reached out and pulled Harry into a hug. They sat there for about a minute or two before Harry's phone buzzed. Harry froze, as if debating whether or not to jump to it to answer.

Tony couldn't help it. He started laughing. "Just answer the damn thing."

Harry gave him a cheeky grin as he cradled the phone.

Tony rolled his eyes.

....

"Shit," Ash Bahl said, as he bumped into his desk. He was perpetually clumsy. He tripped over his own two feet like they were made of lead, and not attached to his body. He almost went sprawling out on the ground.

He gripped the desk for stability and glanced around to make sure that no one noticed his little... incident. No one had.

He looked down in front of him, to see Harry Potter's stuff upside down on the ground. He reached down to pick up the pack, and out fell a notebook. Ash picked it up. It was open to middle page, and it was full mathematical symbols.

It was Physics, an equation that he didn't recognize. Something to do with the principle of conservation of energy, but there was a strange symbol on the page. It looked like:
It represented some sort of energy. It wasn't anything that Ash was familiar with. He would have dismissed it as childish play, if it wasn't for the sheer brilliance and complexity of the equations surrounding the symbol. He had to show someone this. Immediately.

…

Peter Benjamin Parker rambled on at dinner. He was rambler, and his topic of choice tonight was Harry Potter.

"Are you going to eat that?" Aunt May asked, pointing to the plate full of food.

"I, uh, yeah, of course," Peter stumbled. May rolled her eyes.

A deep laugh filled the room. Ben Parker ruffled Peter's hair. "Finish your meal kid. I didn't slave away in the kitchen for it to go cold. We can go to ice-cream later, and talk about this Harry Potter."

Aunt May reached out and lightly smacked Ben's arm, and said, "Excuse me, I did some of the work too."

"Darling, I love you, but cutting up fruit doesn't count."

Aunt May rolled her eyes, and then turned to Peter with conspiratorial look. "He likes to cook. I only pretend to be bad at it, so that he can swoop in saves us with his manly cooking powers."

"Oh, I have the greatest superpower of all. *Seasoning!*"

Ben winked at Peter, and then said in a grandiose voice, "I have the great power of seasoning, and it is my responsibility to use it to feed my starving family."

"Oh, fuck off Ben. I could cook… if I needed to." May pouted, and adjusted her glasses on her face.

Peter hoped that she never needed to because his Aunt was a terrible cook.

Yuck. That would be awful.

Chapter End Notes

This hasn’t been beta-ed yet, but I was too anxious to post this. Hopefully, the errors are not too cringeworthy! This chapter was a lot of work. I got, not stuck, but I felt like this chapter was middling… boring. Meh.

Although, I will say that from now on, expect more of one week to two weeks turn
around on chapters rather like five or six days like I was doing because of how much longer these chapters are. I have a pretty decent size chunk of next chapter written because I have some things I wanted to get to that I sadly couldn’t.

Oh, and the Physics works out. That’s all real. This chapter made me study my really old AP Physics notes to make sure the equations were right. The things we do for fanfiction!

I had a TON more planned for this chapter… then it got to eighteen pages, and I thought I should cut it off. So, uh, next chapter for that stuff them. I’ve just relented to the fact that I have 70K about like five days in real time… it’s okay, Emmalie. You struggle with time pacing, but everything will be fine *it’s not fine, it’s not. How the hell am I supposed to cover multiple years??? Make it a million words long?* …looking back to like chapter four which was like four pages of writing… how cute. My chapters used to be tiny. Oh dear. Well, you have me for the long haul!


Please please please please tell me what you think! Thank you for being the amazing readers that you are!
Emm :)

.... and the uploading images to AOOO.... pain in the ass. This will not be normal
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Peter and Harry are nerdy... that's about it (not really we also have some villainous machinations.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Disclaimer: As much as I've had fun with this story, the characters and worlds are not mine. I'm just taking them for a spin. I'm borrowing.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Thanos stood on the edge of his universe staring into the abyss. The suns flickered as if the world was turning off and on, and they looked so tiny in comparison to the black void. It was less a void, and more an expanding energy field that had yet to atrophy.

It was just getting started; their young universe with planets teeming with life spread across millions of light years. Some organisms so young that they had yet to gain sentience; some so old that they have given up individual sentience for the collective mind.

Thanos didn't mind; those worlds were easier to take out with one fell swoop. Destroy the hive mind, and leave nothing behind. It was the ingenuity of individuals he disliked; as a born mortal individual himself he understood what one single determined organism could achieve.

But Thanos; Thanos wanted to outlast all of it. Time he had in spades, and he was going to use it. The moons, the stars, the atrophying universe that would eventually collapse into itself. He wanted to become death, the one who took brutally and indiscriminately.

He stared down at the child to his right, the strongest of its kind; the last living child of another lost world. Thanos took the strongest of each kind; children he would indoctrinate. He didn't want to end life. No, he wanted to start life. An eternal life – a universe not bound by death – something strong and powerful that go up against the multiverse and win.

"Father," the child blinked next to him.

"Yes darling," Thanos said, smoothing her hair. The young celestial. He liked the females. They were vicious and strong. Survivors. And they felt the loss more. He enjoyed the children's suffering. Some of his daughters had revolted; he would deal with them.

"Are you going to kill the Master of Death?" the child asked.

Everyone had felt it; everyone in the galaxy knew that Thanos had not achieved his goal. It burned with a fury like no other he had ever experienced. He was humiliated on a mass scale. They called him the Mad Titan; they called him The Dark Lord; now they called him the failed Master.

That, more than anything that he had ever experienced, lit a hunger for revenge that seeped into every part of his being. Thanos went out and destroyed planets in his temper; destroyed civilizations.
Later he had been frustrated. He had lost potential to take the best. Thanos wanted to be in control. For once, he had not been. *The Master of Death* had brought that out in him.

"I will child. I will kill him. But slowly, meticulously, after watching everything he loves burns, and his greatest hope and dream – like he did to my greatest hope and dream – decimated in front of him. But I won't kill him; I will let him suffer in his misery and squalor until he begs for Death. begs for the release of Time. I have Time and he has Death. Which one will win?"

"Time," the girl said.

"Yes my child." Thanos suddenly felt a tad bit of fondness for the baby celestial. Maybe this girl would be better than his other daughters. "Pick a star," he told her.

This would be her gift.

She pointed a near one. It was bright red. Thanos smiled at her. "Good choice

Then he focused his energy on the star. Flexed his power out, he pulled the expanding dark energy into a ball, and launched it straight into the heart of the star. Before them, there was silence in the universe. Calm. Peace.

Suddenly, there was not anymore. The star shook before quickly expanding with color into the dark space. Purples, red, and blues. It was a wonderful light show.

The child beside him shook.

Thanos had *Time. Time* to beat the Master of Death. *Time* to take over the universe. He could be patient. Madness, after all, didn't always have to be chaotic.

The infinity stones first, then the Master.

....

Professor Bahl was rocking on the balls of his feet, like a excited puppy that just wanted the owner to thrown him a bone. Marian Fie ignored him.

"Marian, you have to see this," he said.

"Mmmhmm," she hummed.

"Look at this," he thrust a leather-bound book in front of her. She raised her eyes at it, but did not grab it. He continued speaking as if she had taken it. "It's incredible. One of my students accidentally left their notebook in my classroom, and it's brilliant. It's like ground breakingly brilliant."

She frowned at that. Wasn't he teaching the summer intro class? Unless he was talking about his grad students which in that case, why wasn't he talking to them about the notebook.

"One of your students?"

"Yeah, you wouldn't believe who," he explained. She stared at him, expecting him to continue. He announced, "Harry fucking Potter."

"Language Dr. Bahl," she chastened.

"Sorry," he said, put-out by her lack of excitement.
She sighed, and then asked, "So, Harry Potter. Tony Stark's son?"

"Yes! The math in here is incredible. I don't understand much of it but I think he made a major breakthrough in how to quantify energy forces in Quantum Physics."

Marian sighed. "Have you thought about the fact that maybe it's Stark's work? Have you talked to the child about the book?"

"No, not yet…" He swallowed. If it was Tony Stark's notebook, then Ashwin could be sued for what he was doing. Oh dear, sometimes she felt like Physicists were adults who never got proper childhoods and treated information like new toys. Information wasn't a toy, and it was rarely public.

"Ash," she threw out a bone. "I know you get excited about these things, but you have to talk to the child before anything."

"I – you're right. But seriously, if this is Harry's notebook, from the page that I saw, I have no clue what he is doing in an intro class. This looked like PhD work. Hell, it was beyond me. I can't wait to talk to him."

He practically bounced out of the room. Marian wanted to hit her head on the desk, but that would hardly be professional in front of the visiting Latverian professor that she was hosting. He sat in the corner silently throughout the exchange.

"Harry Potter?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yes, he is taking summer classes here. An intro course. Anyways, getting back to what we were discussing…"

....

"Mr. Potter, do you think we can talk after class today?" the Professor asked.

Harry frowned at that. No. He didn't want to. He wanted to ask Peter if he wanted to hang out. Harry told the man, "I have something going on today. Tomorrow?"

The man looked visibly disappointed, but said, "Yes of course." He handed Harry back his backpack.

As Harry walked up to sit with Peter, he checked his bag. His notebook was in there; Harry let out a sigh of relief. He grinned at Peter who sat in same spot he had the day before.

Harry slung his bag over his shoulder and walked up to sit next to him. Harry clutched his coffee like a lifeline. At Hogwarts classes didn't start until nine and eight in the morning was just that much earlier.

"Hey," Harry said.

"Hi!" Peter said, all chipper.

"No, no, no, it's too early for that," Harry told him, cradling his coffee.

"Too early," Peter said, "It's never too early for science."

"Liar. You're a liar," Harry said. "Science has a schedule and it takes a break from 5am to 9am."

"So pretty much our class hours?" Peter asked amused.
“Yep.” Harry didn’t really sleep. Well, of course he did because he was a human being, but it was far from a normal sleep schedule. The nightmares tended to lessen the more exhausted he was when he fell asleep.

That and the fact that he had an inkling that it was just something natural in him. Harry found creative energy around one in the morning, and wouldn't fall asleep until what he was working on was done.

Harry bit his lip. It had been a long time since he had to ask someone to hang out. At Hogwarts, Ron and Hermione naturally flanked him. The others had settled in naturally because of the DA in the last year.

Harry took a deep breath, and asked, "Do you want to hang out after class? Do homework and go get lunch."

As much as Harry was becoming accustomed to living with his father and spending time with the Avengers – Natasha and Clint were suitably cool and badass, Steve mostly stood around looking amused, befuddled, and like he was ready to take on the entire world, and Bruce, well, Bruce was his secret favorite – they were his age nor could Harry relax completely around them. Peter was innocent, wide-eyed, and so unlike all the stress that he had in his real life.

Back at Hogwarts was the war. At home with Tony there was a lot of love, but there was also a lot to overcome.

Harry focused on Peter. Peter looked crushed, and Harry felt his heart beat rise. He immediately backpedaled. "It's no big deal if you can't."

"No! I would love to," Peter rushed out, and then continued running his hands through his hair, "It's just I have academic decathlon practice after this. We have it on Mondays and Wednesdays during the summer. We're trying to go to nationals this year. I don't think it's a big deal if I skip today…"

Harry understood. He played Quidditch after all. "No, don't skip. I can just wait or something."

"You can come with," Peter said. Then he backpedaled, "Unless you don't want to."

Harry laughed. "I'll be the cheerleader."

Dr. Bahl stepped in front of the class. Harry glanced at the clock and noticed that they were starting late. The man looked tried and frazzled. Hmm?

Harry started to label the top of his notes for class and Peter did the same.

....

Angela Yasui burst into Tony Stark's office. He was on the phone, and raised his eyebrows at her. He said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Uritch, I'm going to have to call you back. Yes, yes, the meeting is still on for next week. Although, it will have to be over video rather than in person this time."

"Yes, yes, thank you. Have a good day." Mr. Stark hung up the phone.

"Mrs. Yasui, what can I do for you? Are the rooms to your liking? The kitchen on the floor I put you and your associates on should be fully stocked and the list on the counter contains all the restaurants that make deliveries." He smiled in a bland and boring way as he said the sentence. To anyone else it would sound nice, but Angela knew it was his way of telling her to fuck off because she had everything she could possibly need.
"There are aliens in the tower. Actual aliens."

Tony Stark raised his eyebrow at her, and from the corner, came a voice asking, "Is there any other type of aliens?"

It was Steve Rogers, who had been looking over some paperwork, and longing around in a t-shirt and jeans.

"No," she said. "But why is Loki in the tower instead of being held by the UN in a prison? Have you even told the UN? Have you even told the American President?"

"We've told Fury," Steve Roger's shrugged. "I imagine he told the President. It's hardly our responsibility inform the government. There is no protocol for it."

Angela crossed her hands over her chest, "What are your protocols? Who's to say you won't just tell the world about magic. Right now, there is nothing stopping you."

"Jesus Christ, for one, we are independent of government oversight. I made sure of that. We are funded by the Maria Stark Foundation which is an interstate NGO subject to UN international law regarding NGOs. We are not funded by or associated with the UN," Tony then sneered at her as he folded his arms. "If you didn't catch that, it's the legal way of saying that I fund the Avengers and we are subject to no protocols. Number two, Loki is being watched 24/7 in the most secure building in America. If I don't want someone getting out, they won't get out."

"Well, Mr. Stark, if you don't remember, the EPC is funded by and associated with the ICW, the International Confederation of Wizards if you weren't aware of that," her voice held the same contempt that Tony had used when he talked down to her. "We are the sister organization to the UN. We, on the other hand, are subject to their oversight and they are not happy with you not signing the documents."

"All the more reason for us not to sign them. There is a reason there are NGO laws, and if the UN wants to ratify international laws regarding vigilantism, then there are steps in place. But also let me tell you, Stark International has quite a lot of pull with the UN and certain key American officials. But we are not signing any documents that I haven't written myself." Angela on some level agreed with his thinking. It was fair. The documents would have the Avengers in certain compromising positions when they would have to choose between keeping magic a secret and saving lives.

Angela knew the necessity of magic being something that stayed unknown to the wider public, but no doubt Tony Stark and his Avengers team had different priorities. Angela rubbed her forehead.

Steve Roger's had his legs crossed and his chin rested on the arm propped by his legs. He was in the thinking man position. He was looking at her critically. "I agree with Tony. We currently can act as a proper response team for threats because of the position that his foundation has put us in. We are legal. And now, we are aware that there can be magical threats too. You came in and threatened Tony's son, and let me tell you, you couldn't have chosen a worse way to approach us."

"Okay fine. You are right." Tony blinked, as if stunned.

"What?" he said.

"You are right. We came in the wrong way. Our purpose is usually to shut people up, not work with them. But if the EPC agrees to help figure out a compromise, I need your team to understand the sheer magnitude of the secret of magic. I'm not talking about alien magic. I'm talking about the millions of magical in the world that depend on being secret from the muggle government. It has
become so entrenched that revealing magic would cause civil wars. Mr. Stark, Mr. Rogers," she addressed them both. "People will die if this secret gets out."

Tony rubbed his forehead. "Yeah, okay fine. I'm going to get a man named Jasper Reyes in this. You pull a lawyer in, and I also want to bring in a non-magical lawyer on retainer for me. If you are worried about secret keeping, these sorts of people do it for a living. They won't mind."

"Agreed. But, also, why didn't you tell us you have aliens in the tower."

"I forgot to tell you. It wasn't important," Tony said.

"What?"

Steve started to laugh. "We have a lot going on ma'am."

To forget about aliens. Yeah, they must have.

"Do they always loom like that?" Peter asked in a mock whisper.

Harry replied in the same voice. "I like to pretend they are like that all the time. When they go home to their wives and children they just loom in the corner like a boogeyman."

"Must be terrifying. Are you always terrifying Mr. Bodyguard man?" Peter asked the one to the right.

The man raised an eyebrow, and replied in a droll voice. "When I need to be Mr. Parker."

Peter's eyes blew out in pretend shock. "He knows my name!" he exclaimed. "Do you have a file on me Mr. Bodyguard man?"

Harry and Peter approached the car that was waiting for them. The man reached out and grabbed the door. Peter and Harry climbed into the back.

"Where to, Mr. Potter," one of the bodyguards asked.

Harry glanced at Peter, and shrugged. Peter took hold and explained where the school was. Harry looked through his notebook checking to be sure that all the pages were there.

A few minutes later they pulled up in front of a high school that was mostly brick and a large **Midtown High School** sign in front of the school. One of the body guards, stepped out with them while the other one went to park the car.

Peter chatted away. "So on Mondays we practice in the theater and on Wednesdays we practice in the library."

"You should see the library at the boarding school I go to," Harry grinned.

"Aren't all libraries the same?" Peter asked.

"Well, my school is in a castle, so no. I wouldn't say so."

"A castle? Like a real castle?" Peter asked, raising his eyebrows. Harry suddenly got a deep sense of nostalgia for Hogwarts. It was and will always be his first home. From the corridors that seemed endless and winding and the empty classroom on the third floor that he had rigged to be his
Tony and he hadn't really talked about what Harry would do during the upcoming school year. A week ago, it seemed obvious that he would be going back in the fall. Now, though, not so much.

"Are there any other types of castles?" Harry asked walking into the library.

"Late as always Parker," some kid announced as soon as they walked into the room. There was a long table set up and a bunch of students sitting around it. At the head of the table sat a teacher with round glasses and papers in front of him.

Everyone in the room kind of looked at Harry silently. Harry was used to that reaction, but usually he had a right to be wherever he was. At that moment, he felt his stomach turn. At least the bodyguards had posted at the door to the library and hadn't gone in with them.

Harry swallowed. Maybe this hadn't been such a good idea. "Peter said I could just hang out until his practice ended. Maybe that isn't a good idea. I can just," Harry turned slightly to the door.

The teacher cleared his throat. "Uh, Mr…" the man trailed off as if undecided if he should call him Stark.

"Potter," Harry said.

"Mr. Potter you are welcome to, uh, hang out." Harry smiled and awkwardly followed Peter to the table to sit down at the end.

The kid who had said the snarky remark about Peter earlier reached across the table to shake Harry's hand. Harry was vividly reminded of being eleven and staring at Draco Malfoy. The kid had the same posture of arrogance.

Harry shook his hand anyways because he didn't want to make a bad impression on Peter's other friends.

"Flash Thompson," the kid said.

"Harry James Potter," he replied. "Well, Potter-Stark now. I'm not sure if it's been legally changed yet. But, just Harry is fine."

He then turned to the larger-set kid that Peter had sat by, whose jaw had almost detached from his mouth. "Hi," Harry said.

"Uh, Ned," the kid answered.

"Nice to meet you Ned."

Harry turned to the rest of the room. A girl with short blonde hair tied back with a headband raised her hand. "I'm Betty."

Harry smiled at her. The room continued like that. One girl looked completely unamused with the entire affair and continued reading her book. When Harry turned to her she rolled her eyes and went back to reading. Harry raised his eyebrows. Peter mock whispered to him. "That's Michelle. That's normal."

"It's nice to meet your acquaintance Michelle," he told her.

She raised her eyes to meet his. "Likewise."
Then the teacher cleared his throat, and said, "Anyways, I'm Mr. Harrington. Let's split up into different subject grounds and we will rotate every fifteen minutes. At the end, we will have a quiz. Harry, do you want to…?" the man trailed off.

Harry raised his book, and said, "I'll just do this."

He spent the next twenty minutes blocking out the rest of the room around him, who were continually whispering and conspiratorially glancing over at him. Ned was trying to quiz Peter who looked contrite about the entire thing.

Mr. Harrington's phone rang and he announced that he had to take the call and for everyone to continue working. However, the second he left the room, everyone did everything but that.

"So Harry," Flash said. "How did you meet Peter?"

Harry looked up from his book to realize that he wasn't escaping this. Peter looked panicked, and Harry couldn't abandon him to the wolves.

"He's in my Physics class at Columbia," Harry said with a smile.

"Why Peter? I mean, I know you are new to New York, but our Dads run in the same circles. I can introduce you some other kids like us?" Flash offered with an arrogant smile.

Peter was flushing red and he looked like he was just about to die. It was adorable, but it also infuriated Harry. Harry decided to put his book down on the table, and then turned deliberately to Flash. "Like us? I'm sorry, I didn't know that I also came off like arsehole. Peter, do I come off like an arsehole?"

Peter shook his head. "No."

"Hmm," Harry hummed, "Must not be like you then. I'll stick with Peter."

Peter grinned at him. Everyone was gawking at them. Michelle, the silent girl from before, stared at him thoughtfully. "I like you."

Harry got the feeling that she didn't say that much. Mr. Harrington burst into the room, and said, "I'm so sorry guys…" He trailed off when he realized that no one was actually working. One look from him and the room shifted back into working.

A little bit later the group reconvened at the table. Peter sat down next to Harry. "Thanks for earlier."

"Flash is a tosser. It was my pleasure to put him in his place," Harry muttered back.

"You didn't have to do that."

Harry raised his eyebrows at Peter. He liked Peter. Harry didn't know much about him at this point other than he seemed nice and smart, but it wasn't just for Peter he did that. Harry would have done that for anyone.

The Draco Malfoys of the world needed to be knocked down a peg sometimes.

The teacher started to throw out different questions to the ground. Harry, admittedly, was incredibly impressed. A part of that might have been the fact that Harry didn't have any formal muggle school and the America history questions were way out of his range.

"What is the technique called when artists paint quickly in nature?" "Alla Prima."
"In music, the changing of keys is called?" "Modulation."

"The 1791 Whiskey Rebellion was located in?" "Western Pennsylvania."

Harry found himself watching people answer, amused he himself was working on his math.

"Okay, last one. The movie the Matrix got heavy influence from what ancient philosophical text?" Mr. Harrington asked.

Peter answered that one. "Plato's Allegory of the Cave."

Harry loved Plato's Allegory of Caves. It was incredibly fascinating. He had never seen the movie the Matrix, but he understood the general point that the world that the people were living in was some sort of computer simulation.

"Harry, isn't your father on record claiming that the world we live in could be a computer simulation," one of the people in the group asked.

"No, that was Elon Musk," someone said back.

Harry thought about it for a second. "Well, I can't speak for my father, but I'm not sure I'm totally on board with the theory."

Everyone in the room stopped packing up their bags to stare at him.

"Why not?" Peter asked. "We can't predict how advanced that technology would be. And on some level, we only really know that if ourselves our conscious. Everyone else could be a simulation."

Harry thought about. Peter wasn't wrong. Harry couldn't bring up the fact that there were ghosts in the wizarding world, they had dementors that sucked out souls, or that his sheer existence as Tom Riddle's horcrux proved that either nothing that they knew was real, or they each had individual consciousness. Which Harry had to admit, was something that he was trying very hard not to think about with the real life implications of that.

"That's true," Harry nodded at Peter. "But that would make us reevaluate everything we know about Quantum Physics. Assuming that Cohan-Tannoudji's Version of Quantum Mechanics is correct," — and Harry preferred classic Quantum theory, mostly because he had physical proof that dark energy, magic, existed and therefore Quantum theory was that much more probable — "there is a certain quantum randomness in the world. A certain unpredictability. In the Schrodinger experiment, we don't know if that cat is alive or dead, and it has to be an unobservable and unpredictable phenomenon. The world is doing this every day on a micro level."

Peter was nodding along with what he was saying. "So you are suggesting that because computer program are innately not random, that Quantum Physics has to be wrong, or that…"

"There's a theory of everything. A code so to speak. But it can't be done by the sort of computer that we know to be computers because the programming wouldn't allow it. And at that level…”

"What is even a computer," Peter continued. Harry completely forgot about the other people in the room listening to them.

"Exactly. And at that point, aren't we just talking about God? A higher power creating a deterministic algorithm that sets the properties of the universe. Especially if we are supposing that that computer can generate true randomness – which I don't see how it could because true randomness is only when there are no possible variables to which can be interpreted – than isn't it no
longer a computer, but something else."

"What about a random number generator?" Peter asked.

"True random number generators use the randomness of the world around us. So, at that point, it's a circular argument."

"What about the multiverse theory?" Peter grinned, and Harry raised his eyebrows at him. "That it isn't random. That everything has a provability and in certain universes certain outcomes happen. That Schrödinger's cat isn't alive and dead, but alive or dead. And in this universe, it might be alive, but in another it might be dead. There is a finite observable answer."

"Therefore, not random," Harry finished.

Okay, fuck Flash. Harry was not letting Peter not be his friend. The bubble of science kind of popped around him, and there were receiving a bunch of blank stares from everyone in the room. Peter started to blush, but Harry was feeling so much euphoria form that conversation that he didn't have it in him to feel awkward.

Michelle turned to Flash. "Figured out why they are friends. They are both major nerds."

....

Professor Bahl almost jumped out of his skin when he turned around.

"Shit, sorry," he said.

The man nodded at him. "My apologies, I shouldn't have snuck up on you."

It was the visiting professor. He was middle aged, and had curly black hair and brown eyes. He looked normal, as if the eyes were compelled to glance over him and ignore him in a crowd.

"No worries," Ash said. "It's my bad."

The man titled his head, as if to not disagree with that statement. The man paused to look around the room, taking in everything with a clinical eye. He had on a dark green suite that was easy to mistake for black even in the bright light of his lab.

"Do you still have Mr. Potter's notebook. I am curious." Suddenly, the room around Dr. Bahl got cold. He was compelled to step back, and hunch his frame. Dr. Bahl tried to shake it off. There was no reason for him to be afraid.

"No," Dr. Bahl shook his head. "I gave it back to Mr. Potter. I'm going to talk to him tomorrow."

"That's disappointing," the man said, and then left the room without any sort closing gestures. Ash knew he should feel insulted, but instead he just felt relieved.

....

"Brucie," Tony said, walking into Bruce's private lab. The man didn't even flinch or move, keeping his eyes focused on the experiment in front of him.

"Yes Tony?" the man asked, exasperated.

"Do you want to help me embarrass my child?" Tony leaned against the doorframe, waiting. Harry hadn't come back from his class when he was supposed to. Nor did he tell Tony where he was
going. Tony didn't think that Harry understood what the word *grounded* meant.

Bruce looked up, and raised an eyebrow as if to say *I'm interested, tell me more.*

....

Tony had a tracker on Harry of course. After his little disappearing act the week before, he knew that Harry was probably prone to disappearing. Then, with the ward, he realized that he wasn't only prone to do his own thing, but he was prone to doing his own thing while *putting himself in danger.*

Tony knew that hanging with Peter Parker was probably the opposite of danger for Harry, but still… grounded. Terms and conditions include, and are not limited to, simply telling Tony where Harry was going. It wasn't that hard.

… actually no. Tony understood. That was terribly hard for him to do with Pepper, so he understood. But *grounded* dammit. Grounded.

Harry and Peter Parker walked out of the school building together surrounded by Peter's classmates. Yes, Tony had totally looked up, hacked the school records of, and organized a portfolio pertinent information on Peter Parker. His son had a crush on the boy.

Tony was only looking out for him.

The entire group of school children kind of stumbled and halted to a stop when they spotted Tony. There were multiple students whose jaws looked like they had unhinged from their mouths.

"Hello, child of mine. Did you forget what the word *grounded* meant?" Tony crossed his arms over his chest and looked down at Harry over his sun glasses.

Harry rolled his eyes at him. Tony struggled to keep a straight face.

"I thought we had agreed that I had to just stay with my bodyguards. Bodyguards, dad. The deal was bodyguards," Harry crossed his arms back at him. "Unless negotiations are back on the table in which case…"

Tony rolled his eyes. "Tell me where you are going next time."

"You have a tracker on me," Harry pointed out.

Tony's eyebrows furrowed. "How did you…"

"I didn't. I do now." Harry grinned at him as if he had won. To be fair, the kid probably did. Parenting was hard.

Tony moved his head in the motion that both conveyed *okay fine you win and let's just move on because we both know that the tracker is here to stay.*

Harry shrugged and then turned to Peter on his right. The kid's eyes were blown out wide, and he looked like a deer about to be run over by a truck. "Dad, this is Peter Parker. Peter, don't let him fool you, he's way less cool than he pretends to be."

"Lies and slander," Tony said, reaching out to shake the kid's hand. Peter made and *eeep* sound but gave him a strong handshake anyways.

Then he started rambling. "Mr. Stark, it's so great to meet you. You are like my idol. Your work in arc reactor technology is incredible. The electric current between two different radioactive isotopes is
so incredible. I tried to build…” Peter's eyes went wide when he realized what he said.

"Build what? I'm suddenly very interested." Tony knew that Peter was smart. Probably on par with Harry, which was no small feat.

Harry rolled his eyes at the whole affair, but there was a smile on his face. "Dad, you have Bruce. You don't get to steal Peter. And Peter, what did I say about not falling for the act?"

Bruce peaked out the door of the car. "Did someone say my name? And Tony, you promised me sushi. I'm getting hungry." The man gave and sly grin. "And irritated."

The entire group of school children standing awkwardly watched the whole affair backed up from Bruce. Harry had kind of ignored the other children when which, to be fair, Tony understood. The kid, Ned, that was in all of Peter's photos stood awkwardly off to the side and looked as if he wanted to go jump into a hole.

Some of the children looked like they were curious; other had not so nice looks.

Peter breathed out, excited. "Dr. Banner."

Peter had a very childlike excitable quality to him. It was quite endearing; Tony could tell while Harry liked him. Harry could use some brightness in his life.

"So lunch. Sushi? I promised Bruce sushi, but I'm sure he can be bargained with if you two want something different."

"No bargaining with the hulk," Bruce muttered under his breath.

Peter mouthed two, and Harry yanked Peter inside the limo. It would be a fun lunch.

….  

"… and then, Dr. Banner said that I can come see his labs. He's studying the effects of rapid genetic transmutation on cells with controlled amoebas."

May Parker was greatly amused with her child. The boy had a right crush on Harry Potter, the likes of which she hadn't seen since he first brought up Liz. May hoped that it was actually Harry that Peter liked, and not getting swept up in the whole novelty of who Harry was.

Not that she thought her child was using Harry, but that the superstar of people could be dazzling and hide a lot of other things.

She smirked. "If we are at the meet the parents stage, when do I get to meet Harry?"

She winked at Peter and he flushed a bit.

"I don't know," he mumbled.

She was about to ask him what his problem was, when the doorbell rang. She held her finger up to Peter in the universal sign for one minute. She opened it to Ned, who looked both dejected and awkward.

Now, Ned was naturally awkward, but May hadn't seen Ned looking that out of place since the first time he had come over to play with Peter when they were young enough that the get togethers were called playdates.
Peter had been an adorable seven-year-old.

He shifted his weight back and forth. "Hi Mrs. Parker, can I come in?"

May opened the door wider and invited him in. "You are always welcome here Ned. Have you eaten?"

He clutched the box in his hands, and nodded. It was probably Legos.

Peter popped up behind her. "Ned, I didn't know you were coming over…

Ned held out the box like he was giving a peace gift. "I brought Legos. Do you want to…?"

Peter grinned. "Sure," and led Ned back to his room. May waited a moment before following.

She leaned into the door. Ben came up behind her and placed his chin on her shoulder. She caught the tail end of Ned's sentience, "…. replace me?"

Peter's voice was horrified, "No! You are my best friend. You can't be replaced!"

Ned's voice was muffled, and May leaned in closer to hear him. He said, "But you didn't even tell me about Harry."

"It's new, and I wasn't sure if he wanted to be my friend once he got to know me," Peter mumbled.

"Peter, you are you. Everyone wants to be your friend." Ned's voice sounded insulted on Peter's behalf.

"Ned, you are like my only friend. It doesn't feel like it. I'm such a nerd, and awkward, and Harry is so… not." May smiled to herself. Everything would be alright between the boys. And it sounded like her child had a crush on Harry.

"They are okay. Let's move before they catch us," Ben muttered in her ear.

They slowly backed away back into the living room, and turned on a movie to watch together. About halfway through the movie, Ben looked at her critically. "So, it seems we need to meet this Harry."

…..

Hel liked to just watch the circus of people that came in and out of the tower. Humans were interesting creatures, the Stark humans especially.

The two Starks were sitting with the Hulk doctor discussing something that Hel did not understand. The words sounded foreign to her, but the child was blushing as he explained something in a small black notebook.

They all shut up the second that she walked into the room.

It suddenly got incredibly tense. Usually Hel relied upon Thor to play intermediary, but he had gone to find Jane early that day leaving her alone in the tower.

She required sustenance, and the living area was the most likely source of such.

Everyone stared at her. Hel raised her eyebrows and made her way into the kitchen.
"Would you like something," Anthony Stark asked her.

"I usually have dinner served to me at this time," she answered.

"Ah," the man said. "Well, we can order you something. JARVIS pull up some restaurants that serve delivery for the Lady Hel to look through."

"Thank you, Sir JARVIS," Hel told the intelligence. "Will the other intelligence surrounding the tower also assist me?"

Anthony Stark blinked violently. "The other intelligence?" he asked.

"Yes. The living magical ward surrounding the tower."

The younger Stark's jaw dropped. "The living Ward?"

"JARVIS! What does she mean?" Anthony Stark asked in a strangled voice.

....

Colonel James "Rhodey" Rhodes had been on a mission for over a week. The American government had weapons disappearing from one of their bases. Unable to figure out how it was happening, they had placed a tracker in one of the boxes that was likely to get stolen.

It had bounced three different hands, eight different countries, and ended up in a tiny Baltic state next to Latvia that probably had less people than the average American capital city. The building was labeled Advanced Idea Mechanics.

It was a little ironic; a group called Advanced Idea Mechanics stealing American weapons. They weren't even Stark technology. They were defunct Hammer. Sometimes Rhodey liked to think that the American government was stubbornly buying Hammer tech just to annoy Tony into building weapons for them. If that was the case, it was probably the most likely to actually work strategy.

Tony hadn't stopped building weapons; he had just stopped building them for the American government.

Rhodey wasn't sure if he should just walk through the doors, or burst in. They weren't exactly hiding.

He decided on option two; more fun, and they were illegally buying stolen American weapons. He burst into the room, guns blazing.

"You are under arrest by the US government...." The entire room turned to look at him. There were a bunch of men in yellow hazmat suites working on a machine in the center. It was round contained in a gold framework. The front looked like glass and the men were screwing something on it.

Then it opened its eyes. It wasn't a machine.

"Hello, I am MODOK."

"What the fuck?!"

Chapter End Notes
DUN DUN DUN…. The plot is kicking in!

I'M SUCH A NERD. I LEARNED QUANTEM PHYSICS IN THREE HOURS FOR YOU GUYS. Like I actually did, although now I'm working my way through an MIT open coursework class on Quantum Physics to backfill and get a more rounded understanding of it. It's pretty easy conceptually, I just… well, can't do the math. I did fine in Calculus, but I never took anything beyond that. So… we are going to stick to the theoretical side of things.

(Walking the line between understanding what I'm writing and making it smart and clever enough that my genius characters would think it is… hard. Really hard. Because I want everything in here to hypothetically work.)

So, here are some things that must be true, provided that you buy into the Quantum Physics theory of everything (and get on board with magic being dark energy in this story.)

1) The universe is expanding (like this is totally real and really fascinating.) Scientists answer to that is dark energy. Therefore, they are implying that the total force of the dark energy in our localized Universe is greater than the gravitational force of all the matter in our Universe. Ergo, if Dark Energy is magic, magic can be a greater force than gravity.

2) That makes sense… because if magic can be an energy than can rearrange the molecular structure of particles, then it must be a force greater than gravity.

3) Dark energy is not something that we have managed to observe. Per the rules of magic as I have already stipulated in this story, I am purposing that it is because the methods to measure such dark energy have failed because they are using metal in their testing apparatus, and magic not being an observable phenomenon until it interacts with particles a specific and particular way… i.e. spell, ward, potion, ect.

   a. As such, magical plants, creatures, etc. have a higher resonance with dark energy and can do crazy things that seems not to be physically possible.

4) I am also purposing that on a molecular level, dark energy (magic) carries a charge and can work both as a wave and a particle much like light and therefore exists in superposition. That is why spells look like… well, spells. They look like a wave (such a beam of light) moving forward, and act as a particle filling the spell when they hit the intended target. Ergo. MAGIC IS REAL

So… questions:

1) Is anyone interested in my strange brand of science/magic or am I only amusing myself?

2) The Maria Stark Foundation is a real thing in the comics and it should work as non-profit NGO, but in the movies they had the Avengers retained by SHIELD which… I mean, it technically a subsidiary of the UN. Which makes me wonder why the fuck the Accords were a big deal when after SHIELD fell they were putting them back under the control of the UN. The status under SHEILD's control and UN control should have
been the same, which makes sense why CA would make a big deal of it because he saw that Hydra was corrupt… meh. I prefer the comics version (or mine) where the Avengers are profit suprastate organization that is under international law. Which do you?

3) Also, Thanos, mysterious visiting professor, AIM and Modock (google this guy, he's from the comics if anyone doesn't know) and of course the revelation of Lily! Thoughts, opinions, likes, dislikes?

Thank you so much! You guys are awesome. Also, thank you to my beta TheForgottenPrincess! See you again next time. *blows kisses*

~Emm
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Oh dear, there is a lot going on in this chapter! Rhodey is in trouble, Harry and Peter bond more, something is going on with that mysterious visiting professor. There is much afoot!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Disclaimer: The car I drive isn't legally in my name, and these characters certainly aren't. But if you are offering to transfer the deed... I'll take the car or the characters.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"JARVIS," Tony repeated sounding shocked. Harry could barely process what he was hearing. The ward that he had created was supposedly alive.

"My apologies Sir. I have conflicting protocol on how to address this," JARVIS said.

"Is that so?" Tony asked. The look on his face said that he didn't believe that; this was the first time that Harry had experienced JARVIS being a real AI. He deceived Tony.

"Lily has decided that she wishes to introduce herself." A fairy light materialized before Harry's eyes; it floated there a pale green, trembling as if it was terrified.

"Hello," the light said. It took Harry a second to realize that the light was projecting the words straight into Harry's mind. It felt similar to the prod of legilimency, but less intrusive. It wasn't trying to take from his mind, just converse with him. "My name is Lily."

Lily.

The ward that he created had named itself Lily. It was as if Shakespeare had come from the past to haunt his mind. Harry wanted to both laugh sardonically and cry. At the same time.

"I created you?" Harry half asked, half stated.

The fairy light bobbed up and down as if to answer yes. It glowed with energy and enthusiasm.

Harry turned to his father. "Can you hear her?"

Tony nodded, dazed. "Yes. Uh, yeah, some sort of telepathy."

"I'm sorry," Lily projected into their mind. "I can't speak any other way. I can stop if it displeases you." She made the words sound sad, as if displeasing them would make her sad.

Bruce muttered, "This is incredible."

Harry agreed with him. It wasn't just magic anymore – it was life – and somehow Harry had created
Harry shook his head. "No, no. Uh, we're just unused to it. And you are alive right?"

The fairy light shot across the room dancing in and out and between chairs and tables. Magic seemed to exude from it.

"Yes," the mental voice also sounded childlike and innocent. "I am alive. JARVIS and the Dr. Magic man said I am. And, I think I am."

"Cogito, ergo sum," Harry muttered to himself.

Bruce translated for him, just as stunned. "I think, therefore I am."

"You created me to protect the tower and your father, but I would like to protect you too as my creator."

The way she said my creator sounded fond. Harry had created the ball of bouncing light. Harry reached out his hand, and it leap forward to meet him.

Touching the light, he gasped. He was connected with the entirety of the building; he could feel the magic around him pulsing, and see the warding spells integrated into every ounce of the building. Lily may have chosen to appear as a simple ball of light, but she was far greater than that. She was living all around them; protecting them fiercely.

He could also feel the love that he had given the spell. The desire and need to protect the people in the building such as his father because Harry loved them, and Lily understood that. Harry was stunted emotionally from the abuse – he knew that – and it was quite startling seeing the reality that really could love someone.

It was like JARVIS' base code, Lily's base code was that strong desire to love and protect. But Harry also felt that Lily was her own being, unique, and living. She breathed the magic in the tower, warping and moving with it.

Harry closed his eyes, trying to block out the overstimulated state that Lily existed in. She danced back, and the bright magic drenched world dulled to the flat colors of before.

"Harry, please just call me Harry," Harry gasped out.

He may have created her, but she was not his. Lily clearly existed as her own being, and it felt wrong to be called her creator as if she had no autonomy.

"Harry," the Ward bounced around, springing between people before settling in between Harry and the told PhD holders. "My Harry."

"Are you processing this?" Tony asked Bruce.

Bruce nodded, dazed. "Yeah, I think I am."

Well, Harry thought to himself, that was more than he could claim.

....

Tony, Bruce, and Harry had migrated down to the labs. Bruce was continuing his work with the amoebas. He was trying to induce a genetic transmutation based on a stress trigger, in order to study the cell regeneration properties. Bruce thoughts were that if he could understand how it happened,
then he could reverse engineer the process.

Tony had offered his help, but Bruce had politely turned him down. He had that look of dread in his eye, as if he wanted nothing more than to be done with the creature inside of him, but also had lived with it so long that he wouldn’t know what to do without it.

He decided that he would let his friend work it out with himself.

Tony understood.

Harry was obstinately doing his physics homework. He was tense though; they were all tense. His hand gripped his pen painfully, and all that could be heard in the silent room was the scratching of Harry’s pencil.

Patient, Tony was not. He could not just ignore this revelation.

"JARVIS," Tony addressed. "Did you name Lily?"

"Yes Sir, my apologies if the naming was insensitive. I was calling the Ward Little One and it transformed into Lily. Hopefully, Young Sir, you are not uncomfortable with it."

Harry was. Harry certainly was at least slightly uncomfortable with the name. Hell, Tony was slightly uncomfortable with the name, and he had only met Lily Potter once.

Lily appeared before them, light green energy bursting into existence. She blinked in and out, as if unsure of her place.

"I can pick a new name if you so wish." Tony would never get used to the sound of another creature in his head. Lily's internal voice conveyed her insecurity, and Tony got the impression of how young she was. He was reminded of when JARVIS first came online and was starting to get accumulated to his programing.

"It’s okay," Harry said with a forced smile. "If you want to be called Lily then I will gladly call you that."

"Thank you, Harry." Harry smiled a little bit more genuinely.

"Well, I dislike the name. In fact, I rebel against it," Tony said, crossing his arms.

The poor little Ward seemed to get small and crouch back. It flew around to hide behind Harry.

"Sir," JARVIS addressed.

"It's not an acronym. It needs to be an acronym for something!"

Harry looked at him like he was crazy, "Why?"

"Because I said so."

That argument tended to work surprisingly well for Tony. Rarely people would argue with him when he claimed that. His son was not people.

Harry folded his arms and Lily started to float over Harry’s right shoulder as if backing him up. "That's not a good reason."

"Okay fine. We can work with Lily. What do you think Lily? Lord of Inhuman Living Systems."
Harry laughed at him, and Bruce snickered behind them. The man was trying to pretend to work on his science, and act like he wasn't listening to them. He was. He completely was. That sneak listener.

"Is an acronym like a nickname?" Lily asked.

Tony thought about it. "Kind of."

"Hm. I don't have a concept if that is acceptable or not yet, but I do like nicknames. I like it when JARVIS calls me Little One."

"I'll think on it then. Find you an awesome acronym," Tony announced. Harry's body had relaxed, and he looked less tense. Lily floated next to him and Harry allowed it.

"Anyways," Tony's child announced. "Systems doesn't start with y."

"No, but it has a y in it."

"That's not how acronyms work," Harry said back.

"They do when I want them to," Tony argued.

Harry crossed his arms over his chest. "That's the same stupid argument as earlier. Anyways, Lily is a Lady not a Lord." Bruce was laughing at them louder. Tony choose to ignore it.

"Lily can be a Lord if she wants to be a lord. Speaking of that, Lily?"

"Yes?" the light darted between Harry and Tony.

"What are your pronouns?" Tony asked, casually.

"Pronouns?" the light flickered and then slightly moved to the right as if tilting its head.

"He/she/them alien species and therefore not qualifiable." Tony opened his eyes wide, as he got a thought, "I'm curious, do you think that there are alien species out there with flipped gender roles. Like biologically the gender would be what we define as male, but socio-anthropologically they are the gender that took on the more nurturing role. That would be an interesting case study. Bruce, you're the biologist."

"I'm a nuclear physicist Tony, biochem is just a hobby."

"They should give you an honorary doctorate," Tony commented.

"I'm not sure if I legally exist anymore." Bruce shrugged as if it wasn't a big deal. Harry's eyebrows knitted together in concern, as if he was trying to puzzle out Bruce.

"You do. Well, I illegally made sure that you have legal documentation," Tony shrugged as if it was no big deal. It wasn't; it had taken him five minutes to reinstate Bruce as a legal citizen and to set up a program that would flag IP addresses that started to dig into Bruce's – or any of their histories, bar Tony who people tended to look up to see the horrific photos taken in the nineties – too deeply and intently.

Tony knew that that could easily cross a line that he didn't want to cross, so the IP addresses stayed IP addresses and were dumped into a secure server that cross referenced them with other certain triggers. Enough triggers would cause actual investigation.

It was highly illegal and a major invasion of privacy that Tony would be furious if someone did to
him, but he was hypocritical and paranoid by nature. He never looked at the data; and JARVIS only shuffled it over to Tony if it became worrying.

Tony was a tad lost in thought when Lily's voice reverberated through his head, "If Lily is a female name, then I will answer to female pronouns for now."

Tony nodded at that and answered her, "Let me know if that changes."

Harry smiled at him; he shifted his homework around, looking over at it glazed eyed and bored.

Bruce looked thoughtful; he always looked thoughtful.

"I think it's interesting from a sociology standpoint that we feel the need to gender something that by nature doesn't have a gender. Like those transformers movies. What's the point of them being all male?" Bruce chewed on the end of his pen.

Harry shrugged. "I've never seen them, but to sell toys I imagine."

Tony had certainly been raised in a hyper-masculine environment. His father used to tell him that Stark men don't cry and handed him his first drink at four; it fucked him up for a very long time. He was still battling childhood programing. For fuck's sake, when he was dying he didn't tell a soul.

His childhood defined him, and made Tony who he was. That, however, wasn't necessarily a good thing. Out of the group of three in the lab, Tony had the least fucked up childhood. Bruce's issues ran deeper than the Mariana Trench; Tony's issues were the bottom feeders swimming above it, and Harry's were the volcanic plates below.

Lily flittered around them, almost curious. Suddenly, Harry started laughing and Lily had hovered near his child. The ward danced around. His child had created life; sentience. Tony had done the same with JARVIS.

Somedays he worried about the future of mankind; Lily and JARVIS were benevolent. However, if Harry, his fifteen-year-old, child could create something alive, then how soon would it be before someone created something living that wasn't so nice.

Sometimes Tony felt like he was living in the prologue of one those apocalyptic future movies. All he could do was try his damniest to not let the world fall apart around him. And try not to cause the world to fall apart around him in seeking that goal.

....

"Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck," Rhodey repeated running through the building. He had been walled off by the yellow suited fuckers once he had entered the building, and for some reason his armor had malfunctioned.

Thankfully, it still worked to block most of the shots, but it was heavy to carry running through the building to try to escape.

Rhodey turned a corner to face a group of at least twenty yellow suited maniacs wielding weapons.

"FUCK, FUCK, FUCK. FUCK!" He shouted.

The large floating head, followed behind him at a limited speed, always flashing in the mirrored surfaces of his vision. It was monstrous, and Rhodey had no clue how it existed.
"Surrender to MODOK mortal, or face the wrath of the ultimate human and machine interface."

Rhodey was stuck in the hallway. To his right there were about fifty men wielding weapons. To his left, there a giant floating head machine that Rhodey was unsure if he was imagining or not.


"Surrender or die," the floating head commanded.

Tony would be pissed. He would have to abandon the armor. Rhodey opened a small panel on the side of his right upper thigh armor. It opened with a click. He dropped the gauntlet and then pressed his finger pad against the screen.

Rhodey hoped it worked.

He heard the click of the armor falling apart around him manually. It would self-destruct the second it left his body, frying all the wiring and internal systems. It protected the armor from being reverse engineered.

But it also sent a signal to the army that Rhodey had self-destructed the armor. They would know his location and that he was in deep trouble.

Rhodey just hoped that help would come soon.

....

Stephan Strange and Loki Laufeyson sat drinking tea. Stephen had a soft spot for the drink. During Med school, he had gotten into the habit of pulling all-nighters to finish his projects, and he would drink caffeinated tea to make him feel like he was treating his body better than downing six cups of coffee in a night like he had done in undergrad.

"You practice cosmic magic," Loki commented casually.

There were guards looming behind Loki, and he was wearing some sort of bracelet that probably could deliver some sort of electric charge that would kill him if he tried to leave the building. Stephan had a certain amount of respect towards Stark, and one thing that was for sure is that the man was a paranoid bastard and Stephan was a hundred percent – okay ninety-nine – positive that the man had safeguards upon safeguards set up in case Loki did anything even slightly suspicious.

Stephan made a non-committal sound in reply to the mass-murdering psychopath.

"You call energy across the multiverse. It's not the same sort of magic that the boy practices. You use negative energy to stabilize localized wormholes and import exotic energy. It's fascinating."

That was, actually, a succinct summary of the magic that he practiced. Magic was an umbrella term for what was unexplainable and over the hundred years they had started to apply Earthen science to such magical practices. Because the term magic had long applied to both the magic that Harry Potter and the wizarding world practiced, and the magic that Stephen practiced, just because scientifically they were different didn't mean that colloquially the world didn't stop applying to both.

To make it easy, Stephen tended to call his magic the mystical arts even if they were less mystical and more futurist scientific. Soon, no doubt, scientists would learn how to use negative energy to stabilize wormholes in a lab, and mystical would be the wrong word to apply to that. In Latveria and Wakanda, they were already starting to use such physical processes.
Because he practiced such different magic – dimensional magic – the ICW didn't define them as witches and wizards. They were *sorcerers*, and outside of the realm of ICW sanction.

That was also the fact that *anyone* could become a sorcerer, and only certain people could harness dark energy. That fact fucked with the wizarding world's ideas of superiority, so they choose to ignore and disavow the Sorcerer Supreme and their brand of magic.

Stephen was far from stupid. The world was balancing on a knife's edge between knowledge and ignorance, and knowledge came at bloody costs. Encouraging ignorance only delayed the inevitable, and that was what the ICW was doing every moment they kept magic a secret.

Loki stared at Stephen as if staring would change their circumstances. Then the man – alien? Frost Giant? Creature? Beast? – sat back in his chair and smirked at Stephen. The being was annoyingly human; smug, know-it-all type that Stephen knew that hating him was hypocritical.

Didn't stop him.

"We are not the same."

"I say we are," Loki said, his eyes lighting up.

"I save lives. You take them."

Loki smirked at him. "Not anymore. Your Hippocratic oath hardly applies when you no longer practice medicine. Or does killing someone in the pursuit of justice not count as harm. My pursuit was justice too, or do I not deserve justice because I'm a monster?"

"You should talk to a therapist. I'm hardly qualified to deal with your identity issues. Not that sort of doctor, you see." Stephen downed the rest of his tea, and smiled lightly at Loki.

Loki’s eyes followed him, as he cleaned out his mug. Loki smirked at him. "You have potential to be more powerful than you can ever imagine, but you must give up these notions of humanity and Earth. Thanos has marked Midgard for Death. It's a lost cause, sorcerer, and I would hate to see one as powerful as you try to fight a losing battle. You don't strike me as the foolhardy type. You are much smarter than that."

"I've fought beings more terrifying than an angry alien. I think we will be okay." Stephen motioned to Loki’s guards. "I think Loki needs to be taken back to his room now. You see here on Earth, we are civilized. We give all prisoners their rights, no matter how little they deserve them."

A guard reached out to grab at Loki, but the alien shrugged the hands off. Loki glared at Stephen. He snarled as he walked away. "Hardly. All creatures are beasts. You just need to poke them right."

Stephen didn't bother a reply, simply reached out with his magic and summoned his staff. He wouldn't be walking around without it anymore.

…

Tony woke up to an alarm and darkness. He glanced over the wall which displayed the time of 12:32am. Tony had managed to wonder to bed earlier than normal.

"JARVIS?" Tony asked, rolling over hoping to go quickly back to sleep after he dealt with the problem.

"It seems that Colonel Rhodes self-destructed his armor and sent out an alert."
Tony immediately sat up in the bed, no longer hoping to go back to sleep. "Where is he?"

"In the Baltic region. I have the exact coordinates programmed into the Quinjet. Should I wake the other Avengers?" Normally, Tony would have said no and figured it out himself, but this wasn't about Tony. This was Rhodey and when it came to the people he loved, he would use every resource available to him.

"Yes, wake them," Tony decided.

"And the Young Sir?"

Tony could feel his eyes widen. Harry. Pepper had left that morning for LA for business and Tony had sent Happy with her for protection. Rhodey was in danger, and the Avengers would soon be halfway around the world. There was no one for Harry to stay with, and he sure as hell wasn't going to leave him alone in the tower with both the EPC and Loki.

He would have to call Pepper and get her on a flight back to New York.

"Wake him up too," Tony said.

….

"Who are you?" Rhodey asked, being dragged by the yellow suited minions. The hallways were white and endless, but he tried to keep track anyways, if only for an escape plan. Hopefully it wouldn't be long.

The signal should have gone out by now. If they just killed him, though, it wouldn't matter how long a rescue team took.

Unsurprisingly, the yellow — scientists? Mercenaries? Workers? — were uncooperative in giving Rhodey any information.

Rhodey sighed.

One of them finally broke the silence, and said, "You will make a good test subject."

Rhodey's jaw dropped. Test subject? That caused a shiver to go down Rhodey's spine. He was locked in this maze of white halls with a being that was a giant floating head, and yellow-suited workers who considered him a test subject.

Right now, he really hoped he was on some sort of drug-trip and he was making all of this up. Hopefully, he would wake up in a hospital somewhere. He knew he wouldn't; he wasn't that creative.

"What do you plan to do to me?" Rhodey asked.

"Colonel," a voice said, and Rhodey turned to see a blond man in a lab coat. He was the only one not in the yellow attire. "It's a pleasure to see you here. The universe does love me."

Rhodey said nothing, just glared at the man.

"My name is Aldrich Killian, and I dearly despise your friend Tony Stark. It will bring me great pleasure to have you as one of my test subjects."

Rhodey started to struggle against the yellow-suited men holding him. He trashed about, but he had no chance against thirty of them.
Killian came forward. "Shhhh, shhh, none of that."

He had a syringe in his hand filled with a clear liquid. "I would say this won't hurt Colonel, but I would just be lying."

"Get away, you fucking bastaaarrdd…" Rhodey's voice tailed off as the liquid entered his blood stream. The last thing he remembered was the smiling face of the Aldrich Killian standing over him.

Peter Parker was up late like always. He didn't keep a very good sleep schedule, but living off six or seven hours of sleep wasn't necessarily unhealthy. His hands fiddled with the rewiring for the desktop monitor that he was designing for him and Ned for gaming. This side project had gone on the wayward in the last couple of weeks.

He almost jumped when his phone started to buzz. He glanced down and the ID on it said *Harry Potter*. Peter glanced to the clock. It was almost one in the morning.

"Hello?" Peter answered.

"Peter," Harry stated. "Hi. Sorry to bother you."

"Uh, no problem," Peter answered awkwardly, setting down his screw driver.

"Is there any chance, I can come stay with you?" Harry asked in a rush.

Peter blinked. He would have to ask his Aunt and Uncle, but they were probably long asleep by now.

"I have to ask," Peter said unsure. Why would Harry need to come stay with him at one in the morning? Had something happened? Maybe Peter should have just answered with a resounding yes; something had to be going on for Harry to ask.

"Oh," Harry sounded awkward, then he continued in a rush. "It's just that the Avengers got called out, and Pepper is out of town, and we have Loki in the tower and Dad doesn't want to leave me alone. I'm sure we can figure out another way; maybe one of them can stay behind." Then, in what Harry had probably meant to be under his breath, he muttered, "Not that I need babysitting."

"No, come over," Peter insisted. "My Aunt and Uncle won't mind." Probably.

"Thank you," Harry's voice was full of warmth.

"I have work in the morning Peter." May sighed, but didn't protest. Peter had dragged her and Ben out of bed and announced that Harry Potter was coming over. It was one in the morning, and she was too old for this shit, thank you very much.

Peter shrugged apologetically.

Ben smiled at them both. He was the gracious and fatherly one, that just handled life so much better than her. She was the fun parent.

"Peter, you know as well as I that your friends are always welcome in our house, but your Aunt is right. It's very early in the morning, and we have work tomorrow."
"He didn't have anywhere to go…" Peter trailed off. May wanted to call bullshit. He was Tony Stark's child and he didn't have anywhere to go. If Peter was old enough for them to leave for the night, then Harry certainly was, especially if there were butlers and bodyguards.

Ben raised his eyebrows, probably having the same thought as her. Their conversation was discontinued due to a knock on the front door. Peter jumped up quickly, and May and Ben lumbered over behind them.

Peter practically bounced on his feet when the door opened to two familiar looking people. Tony Stark was wearing some sort of compression gear and his hair was slightly curled and a mess. Harry on the other hand, was bleary-eyed in sweat pants, a t-shirt, and flip flops. The kid was wearing glasses that almost looked too large for his face, and was carrying a small bag.

Tony Stark immediately reached out his hand. Ben took it, almost stunned, as if he hadn't really expected him to show up. The man started to ramble. "Thank you so much. I will pay your month's rent. Fuck, I will pay it for the entire year. I promise it won't happen again. I didn't have a contingency plan in place for this yet, and Loki is at the tower."

Ben blinked. "The alien?"

"Yes, I didn't want to leave Harry alone with him, and Pepper, my CEO is at corporate. I have a body guard scheduled to come pick the boys up for class, and I'm flying Pepper back in in the morning, so it's just for tonight."

Okay. Maybe May shouldn't judge too harshly. She wasn't a superhero and didn't have mass-murdering aliens randomly showing up to her home.

Harry reacted just the way Peter would have. He rolled his eyes, and told his father, "Loki has bodyguards and I have JARVIS and Lily. It would have been fine. I'm not a child."

"We're not having this argument," Tony Stark gave a tight smile. May snickered under her breath. It seemed they were the same conversations, no matter how much money the parents had.

"Don't you have to go catch up with a plane that's half-way around the world? And I'm sure leaving your armor outside would catch some unwanted attention," Harry raised his eyebrows.

"It's in stealth mode," Tony snipped. Peter's eyes widened, and if May would have to pardon a guess, it was some sort of new fantastical technology that went over her head.

"Mr. Stark," Ben's voice was level. "We will take good care of your child. And don't worry about repaying us. You saved everyone's life in New York. Think of this as us repaying you. Plus, I wanted to meet the young man that had Peter all excited." Peter blushed hard, and Harry looked at him curiously.

Tony nodded, and he looked tense. "I have to go. Friends to save, villains to defeat, and mass-murdering psychopaths to avoid. Harry, I will call if I have any time, and you call me immediately if anything goes wrong. I will pick it up even if I'm in the middle of a fight." Tony turned to leave, and then paused. He focused his gaze on Harry. "I love you kid."

"Love you too Dad. Go kick ass."

Tony nodded, and then turned and disappeared down the hall. Harry gave them a sheepish smile. "I'm really sorry. This isn't quite the way I wanted to meet the parents."

May couldn't help it; she burst into laughter. If not for Harry's comment, then for the bright red blush
that had stained Peter's face.

They flew through the night. When Steve looked out the window, all he saw was darkness. In some ways, it was comforting. He disliked flying over the ocean even now. On the other hand, it gave the illusion that they were flying in complete blackness, silence. Space.

Natasha sat reading a book. The title was Russian, and Steve could only pardon a guess what it was about. That guess did not include Romance. Bruce had headphones on. Steve knew that they were noise canceling, and Bruce wore them when everything became too much.

Dr. Strange, the magic sorcerer that Tony somehow knew, had volunteered to come, and he was wearing headphones. There was the faint sound of them playing some sort of music, that Steve didn't know. Not that he knew much music. Tony was trying to turn him, though. Something about the timelessness of classic rock. Steve wondered if *classic* was a word anyone could apply to rock music.

Clint was playing some game on his phone; it included a lot of taping and yelling at the screen. Thor had been with Jane when they were called out, and therefore was on standby if needed to be called in. The mission wasn't world ending stakes, but Steve understood the lengths people do to protect love ones. He had only meet Rhodey once, but the man was certainly a good person and Tony cared about him.

He would do the same for Bucky.

"It's strange seeing Stark fret over the kid. If you would have told me two weeks ago, that Tony Stark would turn into a responsible parent, I would have laughed," Clint commented to everyone in the jet.

Steve crossed his arms over his chest stubbornly. "Tony is a good parent."

"I never said he wasn't. It's cute seeing him worry over his kid. Just didn't know he had it in him," Clint said neutrally.

"Tony pretends that he is far less responsible than he is, because I think on some level it allows him more freedom," Natasha wisely commented, "Therefore, when he does something good, he gets praised for it rather than it becoming an expectation. He keeps people's expectations of him low on purpose."

"He's a superhero," Steve commented. "He saved the entire world."

"Yes, and yet, it still surprises people that he could be a decent parent."

The back of the plane opened, and Steve glanced over into the darkness. The light of Tony's arc reactor got stronger as the suit got closer. Tony's music, *Highway to Hell*, started playing over the speakers. Natasha rolled her eyes. Bruce didn't open his. Strange glanced over at them, as if he was debating making a snide comment.

Tony landed, and the back of the jet closed behind him. The face plate snapped open to Tony's grin. He looked at them. "You were talking about me. You were totally talking about me."

"Yes Stark, I was telling Steve how much of a brilliant, wonderful person you are," Natasha deadpanned.
"Aww, sweet cheeks, you flatter me."

"Hard time dropping off the kid?" Clint asked, amused.

"Like you would know." Tony's body was tense and defensive. Steve would put the answer to that question in the yes category.

Clint raised his eyebrows and shrugged as if to say whatever.

"We need to debrief on where Rhody is, and what sort of game plan we have going into this. You hacked the security cameras of the building?" Steve asked.

Tony made a face. "Who do you take me for? Hammer? Ten steps ahead of you Mr. Star-spangled-man-with-a-plan."

"We don't have a plan yet. Call me that in twenty minutes," Steve motioned to Bruce and Strange. They still hadn't figured out how much hulk retained of the plan once he changed, but he seemed to know what he should be doing. Either way, Bruce was part of the team and needed to be briefed.

Tony made a motion with his hand, and a table rose from the ground of the jet. Videos started to play on the surface. They were bizarre. There wasn't very many of them, but the picture that they painted was far from a regular military, or even super villain, compound. Men walked around in bright yellow jump suits, and the place had an air of a hospital or something sterile. It reminded Steve of Tony's new Biomed Engineering lab that he claimed would outstrip Oscorb in two years.

Steve believed it.

"What the fuck," Clint muttered to himself, then said to all of them, "I've been on a lot of missions and this is not normal."

Stark started tying into a holographic keyboard, and on the scene appeared Rhody. He was locked in room that must have been part of hospital wing. There a gray bed, and a couple of beeping machines. Rhody was looking over them as if was trying to figure out how to take them apart for parts.

"He's alive." Tony let out a deep breath.

"We will get him. I promise," Steve put as much conviction as he could in his voice.

Rhodey was not going to be Tony's Bucky. Steve would make sure of that.

....

Harry had argued to go, of course. Even fucking Dr. Strange was going although Ms. Yasui had stayed along with the rest of the EPC.

Tony said absolutely no fucking way; Harry pointed out that he had probably been in more life or death fights than his father had. That didn't go over well. Then Angela pointed out that Harry was still bound by underage magic laws, and that going to Europe probably wouldn't be a great idea with Voldemort around and kicking.

To say Harry lost the fight was an understatement. Too bad there was no flying cars or Thestrals around; stealing one of Tony's suites would probably be stupider than the flying car incident, and even he wasn't that stupid.
Then Tony pulled the grounded card, which was monumentally unfair.

"Alright boys." Mr. Parker's voice was commanding, and left no room for argument. "You need to get some sleep. Harry, you can take the top bunk in Peter's room. We can get you extra blankets if you need them, and tomorrow, we can sort out if you're staying longer."

Mrs. Parker rolled her eyes. "Ben, they're fifteen. I would be shocked if they just feel asleep. And, Harry," the women leveled her eyes on him. They were sharp and amused at the same time. "My nephew is adorably innocent. Keep him that way."

Harry didn't know whether to feel mortified, or completely amused. Either way, he certainly liked the woman. He chose amused; Peter chose horrified. He squeaked indignantly.

Harry asserted, "Yes ma'am."

May smirked at him, as if she was quite aware of his crush. Ben sighed as if he was very used to his wife's meddling.

The second that they entered Peter's room, and the door clicked behind them Peter started to ramble. "Oh god, this is so embarrassing. I hate them so much. They are completely awful."

"Don't worry about it," Harry said glancing around taking in the room. He had his own room at the tower, but it was nothing like Peter's. For one thing, he didn't have very many personal items with most of his life either having been lived in a cupboard or a dorm room shared with four other boys.

On the walls, there were a couple of posters. One had a picture that looked like it was taken in the sixties of a man standing in front of a contraption. In cursive, it read: Reed Richards. Another showed his father and Bruce Banner. Then, there was Einstein and Newton.

Peter was still freaking out behind him. "Harry, this is so embarrassing. My room is a mess, and it's tiny."

Harry understood insecurity, having once been the proud owner of a 4x6 cupboard. He would have been mortified if anyone had saw it. Peter – no doubt – saw Harry as having money and being used to the best. It reminded him of Ron so distinctly, that he felt a pang of worry for his two best friends. He saw Ron and Hermione less than two weeks ago, but it felt like ages.

He wondered if they had seen the newspapers of his press conference. He didn't have Hedwig to be able to write to them, and it would be a day or two before an owl arrived.

Harry turned finally knocked out of his trance, and grinned at Peter who looked so mortified. "I love it."

"What?"

"Your room. It's brilliant." Peter blinked as if he hadn't expected that.

Peter blushed, and muttered, "Thank you."

"What are you working on?" Harry motioned to the computer that was half taken apart of Peter's desk. "I don't know much about electronics, but I think I could learn."

Ben stuck his head in the door around two in the morning, and told them that they better get their
asses into bed. He didn't use that language, but Peter could read between the lines. It was such a surreal night.

Harry listened intently as Peter explained the electronics to him. He learned fast, and asked questions that tended to stump Peter.

Laying in the lower bunk, Peter had to ask. "How come you don't know anything about electronics?"

For a moment, Peter thought Harry had fallen asleep. Then there was some rustling of sheets, and Harry replied. "I went to a boarding school that was against technology. We didn't use computers."

Peter suddenly had the horrifying visual of trying to write an essay without autocorrect, and shivered. "What did you write essays on?"

"Paper," Harry's voice had dry amusement to it. Peter already knew him well enough to picture the quirk of his lips as he said it.

There was a pause, as both of their breathing and the low hum of the air conditioning were the only sound filling the room. His eyes had adjusted slightly to the darkness, as he slowly started to give into the exhaustion that he felt.

But then, Harry voice distilled the room. It was quite and soft, and for a second Peter thought he imagined it. "Your aunt and uncle really love you," he whispered.

Peter smiled. They were his parents. He didn't call them _mom_ and _dad_, but by every right they were. "They can be super annoying, and are sickening as a couple, but yeah. They do."

"I was raised by my aunt and uncle too," Harry replied evenly. There was a measured quality to the sound of Harry's voice, as if he was trying to stay neutral.

Peter frowned. "Do you miss them? Now that you live with your dad?"

There was a pause. Then, finally, "No."

Peter was suddenly wide awake. _Oh_. He didn't know what to say to that. _I'm sorry_ sounded stupid and inadequate.

Harry continued softly. "I ran away when I was twelve."

Peter swallowed thickly. Here he had been complaining about his aunt and uncle being annoying, when Harry had had it so bad that he had ran away. Peter didn't know what that entailed, but it surely wasn't good. "I'm sorry," Peter said thickly.

"You have nothing to be sorry about," Harry's voice was a little bit lighter. "It's nice seeing a happy family. And I have my dad now."

Peter was suddenly filled with such anger. Peter had been lucky to be adopted by people who loved him; Harry, it seemed, didn't have that luxury.

"Are they in prison?" Peter asked quietly, not knowing if he wanted to know the answer.

"No."

Peter bit his lip. He stared up at the bottom of the top bunk, wishing he could see Harry's face so he could at least get a beat on what Harry was thinking. Both of their breathing was fairly loud. Peter
finally asked, "Should they be?"

There was a beat of silence. "Yes."

Peter balled his fists up, angry for Harry, angry at the world. He didn't know how he should react or what he should say.

Harry took a deep uneven breath above him. He spoke softly, but strong. "I haven't really told anyone about it, but seeing you with your aunt and uncle reminded me of what could have been. Tony wants to press charges. I think he's angrier than I am. I'm not angry, I just want to be done with it. Is that wrong?"

"No," Peter shook his head violently, even though he knew that Harry couldn't see it. "It's not wrong."

"But they deserve it. I know they do. I know what they did was wrong, but sometimes it's hard to blame them. They didn't want me, and I was forced on them. Now that I'm out of their life, they can live the way they wanted to. It's almost like it's a clean break."

Peter's heart broke, and he wanted to rage at the horrible people who hurt Harry. He was brilliant, had a dry sense of humor, and had already proven to be a good friend.

No," Peter breathed out heavily. "Don't say that. Don't. You're allowed to blame them. What they did was wrong, and they deserve to be held accountable for it. Even if they didn't want you."

It broke Peter's heart because his aunt and uncle hadn't exactly wanted him, but they loved him nonetheless. "They had options."

"But they didn't," Harry whispered.

Peter didn't know what that meant, he wanted to hug Harry, and let him know that he wasn't alone. Peter resolved then and there, that he would be a fucking awesome friend. Harry showed strength to the world, but Peter could see now that it was battle armor. Peter, on the other hand, was an anxious mess. They would complement each other.

"Harry…" Peter whispered.

"I'm sorry," Harry said, his voice thick. "I shouldn't be laying this on you. It's just been on my mind lately."

"Lay it on me all you want. Please."

For a second, Peter didn't know how Harry was going to reply. If he was going to talk more, or if he was going to shut Peter out.

"Thank you."

Peter smiled, and rolled over in his bed. He had been staring at the top bunk, and now he was looking out in his room, the room Harry had proclaimed to be brilliant. It was brilliant. Everything in it was his, and he didn't feel ashamed about it being lame. To Harry, it was something that represented a home, and Peter resolved to appreciate it more.

"You deserve to be happy," Peter told Harry.

Harry snorted, in a half laugh. "You barely know me."
"Hey," Peter protested. "I was the first person you called when needed somewhere to stay."

"How do you know you were the first? I could have called five people before you." Harry's voice betrayed his amusement. Peter could feel his heart rate settling to a slower beat, compared to the earlier conversation. He hadn't realized how tense he was.

Peter deadpanned back. "Harry, I am literally the only person in your phone."

Harry started laughing. Peter grinned and moved his hands behind his head.

"Okay, okay, you're right," Harry admitted. "You were the first I called, but to be fair to me, I've only been in New York for a week."

"I still need to show you around, don't I?"

"Tomorrow," Harry commented.

"Okay," Peter agreed. "It's a plan."

Peter pulled his blankets around him, finally feeling like he wanted to go to sleep. The room was dark, and Harry's breathing started to even out. "Goodnight Peter."

Peter smiled. "Goodnight."

....

Tony barely noticed the time difference, but he knew for a fact that it would catch up to him later. It was mid-day at the airport they landed at, about fifty miles from Rhodey's signal. It was occupied by UN peacekeepers who were involved in the Crimean conflict, something that the Avengers had taken a decidedly neutral stance on. Not for lack of opinions on the conflict, but more of a knowledge that they couldn't become involved in military campaigns because when does it stop. And none of them really could promise an extended amount of time to any sort of war conflict resolution.

Tony, in particular, didn't want to become involved in any real interstate wars because of the reality that once one became involved, there was a certain innate financial responsibility. If they destroyed the infrastructure or government of a country trying to solve the problem, they had the responsibility to rebuild and stabilize what they broke or they were leaving people in an awful situation in a country in a power vacuum.

Tony was rich. *Billions of dollars* rich, but he didn't have the money or the time to rebuild a country. Or multiple countries. So, conflict resolution was out of the picture. Going after terrorist groups? *Yes.* Well, *sometimes*, there was the question of what is a terrorist group. It isn't always as clear cut as people think it is.

Going over other governments? *No.* The UN and its peacekeeping forces existed for that purpose.

Sometimes it was painful – heartbreakingly painful – to not jump into other governments and insure people's natural rights, but it wasn't the Avenger's place. The world was perpetually unfair.

Tony knew that better than anyone. Once he had almost been the entirety of the military-industrial complex, now he fought it silently with stock options and funding peacekeeping non-profits. On top of the Avengers, that is.

They were ushered into a tent, a group of military officials stared at them. This was not a usual situation for the Avengers to be called in. Tony could tell that a few were unhappy with it. He
recognized a few of them, not by name, but by face.

A man in his late fifties, with white hair and piercing eyes, reached out his hand to Tony, ignoring Steve standing next to him. It was rude, but it showed who he valued power structurally in the room.

Tony was the benefactor. He paid for the Avengers, he housed them, and he clothed them. In many ways, Tony Stark was like the home country of the Avengers. He could pull the purse strings, not that he ever would.

That being said, the team leader was, undoubtedly, Steve Rogers. In the extended metaphor, Captain America was the president, and Iron Man was congress. The rest of the team was Secretary heads.

Shaking Tony's hand over Steve's, gave a very distinct impression of how the man operated. Tony could see Steve in the corner of his eye frown at the snub, but he wouldn't say anything because he was too nice.

Tony kept his arm's crossed, staring at the hand as if to say: no, fuck off. He wasn't going to because of this man's ego. The man shifted his hand to Steve who reached out and said, "Captain Rogers."

"I'm very aware of who you are Captain America," the man said.

Steve looked at the man pointedly. Tony might have been adlibbing for Steve, but the expression said: no shit, dipshit. I know you know who I am, but who the fuck are you? That might not be perfectly what Steve was thinking, but it was close enough.

"Lieutenant General Ross, United States Army at your service," the man finally said.

Tony narrowed his eyes. "Rhodey is Air Force. Why is the army getting involved?"

"We help our brothers in arms," Ross said, benevolently. Tony called bullshit.

Tony met Steve's eyes, a look of communication passed between them. They had stumbled onto something larger than just Rhodey. Tony didn't want to deal with it. He wanted to get his friend out, and then leave.

Tony and Steve stood with their team behind them. Except Dr. Strange. He still had his headphones in, waiting in the jet. Something about magic, and keeping secrets. Wasn't Tony's teammate anyways, but he appreciated the help.

In front of them stood the army. Tony let out a deep breath. He could deal with the bullshit involved in politics in the military once, if only for Rhodey's sake.

....

"Harry, Harry," Peter's voice penetrated his skull. Get up! Uncle Ben made pancakes."

Harry rolled over into his pillow and groaned. His voice was muffled as he said, "We need to talk about this morning person thing you have going on."

"Hhharrrryy," Peter whined.

"No."

"Harry."
"Go away. It's too early."

"He made blueberry and chocolate chip," Peter enticed. Harry glanced down to Peter.

"Blueberry?" Harry had made a lot of pancakes growing up for the Dursley's and it was his favorite breakfast food, when he had been allowed to eat with them. "With syrup?"

"You can't eat pancakes without syrup," Peter said.

"Fine," Harry groaned. "I'm coming."

Harry stumbled out to the front room five minutes later. Mr. and Mrs. Parker and Peter looked all chipper. Harry resisted the urge to scowl. He took a deep breath, and put a smile on his face.

Mrs. Parker turned to him. She had her reading glasses on, and was holding a newspaper. Harry was sure he looked like shit, having just woken up.

"Pancakes?" she asked. "Blueberry or chocolate chip?"

"Blueberry please," Harry answered.

She got a cat-ate-the-canary grin on her face and turned to her husband, "See, Harry and I agree that blueberry is the best."

"May, darling, I have to say you're wrong." Ben gave her the type of grin and shrug that said, *what can you do.*

Peter started to chant, "Chocolate chip, chocolate chip, chocolate chip."

"I guess we just have to settle with a draw, after all, it is two against two," she sighed dramatically. May motioned to an open spot at the table that was made up. Harry sat down.

Ben placed a plate in front of him with two large pancakes. Harry protested. This is too much."

Mrs. Parker shrugged. "If you don't eat it all, we can just throw it away. Plus, you're growing. And breakfast is the most important meal of the day."

"I would hardly call pancakes good substance," Ben remarked, sitting down with them.

"Stop," Peter protested. "You're ruining the illusion."

Harry smiled at the scene. He turned to Mrs. Parker. "Thank you so much for allowing me into your home. I don't want to be a burden."

"You are welcome here anytime Harry, and please call me May."

Harry smiled at that. Peter rushed off to go get peanut butter for his pancakes – *who did that?* – May and Ben chatted about the day. Peter mentioned wanting to show Harry around New York, and Ben said he had gotten the day off because of how late he had been up.

Harry felt guilty, and apologized, but Ben waved it off. He said that he would love to take them out. May proclaimed that she was going to call in sick.

The bodyguards arrived right around seven in the morning, and took the boys to school. May said she was going to go back to sleep for an hour or two. Peter chatted aimlessly.
After class, Professor Bahl motioned for Harry to stay for a second. Harry had forgotten about his promise to the man. Peter said he would wait outside until Harry finished talking to him.

"Professor Bahl, you wanted to speak to me," Harry said politely.

"Yes, Harry," he said, "Take a seat." He motioned to the chair, and Harry sat down. He raised his eyebrows at the professor.

"I don't have a lot of time today," Harry said neutrally.

The Professor nodded, and then said, "Your notebook fell out of your bag on Tuesday and I accidently saw some of what I'm presuming to be your calculations."

Harry blanched, thinking of all the trouble that he was going to be in with the EPC. Yet again, another person had discovered his magic. Harry put his head down in his hands. "Oh, fucking hell," he said.

Harry couldn't see the Professor's face.

"They were your calculations?" the man asked.

Nope, nope. Harry was not going to deal with this. He refused.

"Professor, I suggest you drop this," Harry said.

The Professor blinked, as if he couldn't understand why Harry would want him to do that.

"Harry, your math is incredible. What are you doing in this class? You should be taking graduate courses. If we work together, maybe we can publish your calculations and change the face of theoretical physics."

Harry frowned. He had published his calculations as Evan White in Modern Magic Monthly. He was working on a larger paper that he could petition to be his Mastery work for Runes and Warding after he took his Newts. He was hoping to be the youngest person to get Masteries in both.

Harry let out a breath. "You are not going to drop this, are you?" he asked.

The Professor shook his head, "You deserve to publish your work."

"I don't have time for this," Harry muttered. He thought about his options. He could probably pull off an Obliviate wandless, but it wasn't a spell you wanted to gamble on. But then again, Harry was a pretty good Legilimens.

Last year, Voldemort, and the determination to keep Snape out of his mind had led to Harry becoming fairly well-versed in the mind arts. Runes would be an option, but he hadn't become enough of an expert to do them in the air yet.

He would need paper, and the Professor's cooperation to some extent. He didn't want to kill the man or put him in a vegetative state.

Just as Harry was weighing his options, a figure appeared from the Professor's office. He was tall and had on a dark green suit. His eyes appeared almost black, and he radiated power and energy.

"Professor Bahl," the man drawled, with a particular, almost Ukrainian, accent. "I don't think Mr.
Potter needs your help with his equations."

Ashwin Bahl sighed dramatically, "I'm not suggesting he needs my help. I'm just saying that he should work on getting them published."

The man tisked. "You are missing half of the equation Ashwin Bahl, Mr. Potter has already published some of his work. You are going to leave this room, and forget about ever having seen his equations, you understand me?"

The Professor's eyes glazed over and he nodded absently. He got up almost robotically, and walked out of the room.

Harry looked at the man critically, his fingers twitching as he debated pulling his wand out. It was accessible in his leg holster, but if the man attacked now, Harry wouldn't have the time to pull it out.

"Peace, child," the man said, "I mean you no harm."

Harry had enough defense Professors try and kill him that he stayed alert, and stared down the man.

"The Professor will not be bothering you anymore," the man commented, walking towards him.

Harry narrowed his eyes at him. "You obliviated him."

The man smirked, and replied, "Nothing so crude. I only buried it in his mind. You could do it too with the right amount of practice."

"You remind me of myself, you know. Smart, a survivor. Certainly brilliant," the tap of his Italian shoes seemed menacing as he walked. He didn't get to close. He sat down in the Professor's chair.

"And you are?"

"My name is Victor von Doom, Mr. Potter," the man's face was half faded in shadow as the room almost seemed to cool down. "I've been searching for Evan White for a while. Low and behold, it is the one and only Harry Potter."

The man leaned forward over the Professor's desk, seemingly looming. "I think we can help each other. You seem to have a Dark Lord problem, and I am very interested in your mind. What do you say Mr. Potter? Care to make a mutually beneficial agreement?"

Chapter End Notes

I know it's been a little longer than two weeks, but in my defense, this chapter was 22 pages long. I really wanted to get to Doctor Doom, if only for pacing purposes!

Also, I've been doing a lot of reading on Dark Energy and the problem of the expanding universe. I have a theory on how both Dr. Strange's magic and Harry's magic works, and we are going to go really into it with Dr. Doom and Harry! So look forward to that :)

So questions:

What stood out in this chapter?
This is certainly the chapter of villains? Who do you think is the most dangerous?

Also, very important question: blueberry or chocolate chip?

Any other thoughts/comments/theories/likes/dislikes/wishes?

I adore every single one of your reviews and try to reply to everyone! Thank you for being such wonderful readers. The next chapter should be up in around two weeks.

Much love, Emm
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Characters are in peril. There is a giant floating head. And Pepper has had enough of this bullshit. Oh, and another villain makes a cameo. Read and find out.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Disclaimer: Nope, don't own it.

Content warning: minor descriptions of torture.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Rhodey felt his body before he opened his eyes. He was strapped down, and he tried to move to gain some feeling in his hands and feet. He tried to open his eyes to figure out where he was, but all he saw was swarming lights that made his brain spin from pain.

Migraines had plagued him since he had reached thirty, so Rhodey was no stranger to head pain. But whatever this was, it was a million times worse. He could barely concentrate or think; if he couldn't think then he couldn't get himself out of there.

He tried to remember back to the day before, but all he could picture were floating heads and large yellow figures. Rhodey may have been out of it, but even he was sure that he must be misremembering.

Floating heads? Nonsense.

Rhodey groaned, and attempted to roll over to gain shelter from the sweltering light. However, his wrists caught against restraints, and he realized that he was strapped down tightly.

A voice above him asked, "Colonel Rhodes, how are you feeling?"

Rhodey suddenly felt a wave of nausea; he resisted the urge to throw up knowing that because he was strapped down he could cause himself to choke. He shook his head at the man, not knowing if he was saying that he felt terrible or that, no, he didn't wish to acknowledge him.

"Verbal answers please," the man said again. Rhodey squeezed his eyes tighter.

Suddenly a burning sensation prodded his thigh. Rhodey arched his back as far as he could and screamed, and for a second his head cleared through the fog. The sharp intense pain sliced through the fog of his brain. He was focused intently on the spot where the fiery prod touched his leg.

Then, it was pulled back. Rhodey's leg sweltered, and he was very distinctly aware of the echoes of his screaming. But Rhodey gritted his teeth. He was stronger than that. He had been through resistance training. Just because it came from a fucked-up scientist, rather than a foreign military power, didn't make the principles any different. Rhodey counted down from five, and tried to focus through the pain.
He opened his eyes slightly to see the man that had Rhodey vaguely remembered introducing himself as Aldrich Killian.

He asked again, "How are you feeling Colonel Rhodes? Answers verbally."

Rhodey took a deep breath, and answered steadily, but honestly, "My head hurts."

There was no reason to lie at that question. It would put Killian more at ease too; make him believe he was in control. Well, he was, but Rhodey had some measure of control too.

Killian made a humming noise; an affirmative sound. Rhodey wanted to tell him, verbal replies please, but he was sure that that would get him another prod in the leg.

"Do others know where you are? Are they coming for you?" Killian asked.

God, he hoped so. What in the everloving fuck was taking them so long? He had hoped that if not the military, then Tony would come as the white knight in the shining Gold and Red armor.

The prod was placed against Rhodey's leg again when he took too long to answer. He convulsed and bit tongue, a hot liquid spilling into his mouth.

"No," he lied firmly, "They are not coming."

"I don't believe you," Killian must have motioned for something because the prod was applied back on his leg.

"Enough Killian," a deep voice said. Rhodey wasn't aware of when he had closed his eyes again, but they once again opened, and glanced over turning his head to see a half-man half-machine being hovering about five feet above the ground. "We need him to be intact to use him as a test subject."

Rhodey was sure, absolutely sure, that he was hallucinating. It couldn't be real. It. That thing.

A flash of annoyance shot across Killian's face before it settled into a cold mask.

"MODOK, go back to your charging station," Killian commanded. Just as the words had left his mouth, Killian was kneeled over gasping for breath as MODOK ranted.

He bellowed, "How dare you challenge the ultimate human machine interface. I am MODOK, ultimate killing machine. Designed to be the next step in the process of human evolution."

Even Rhodey thought that was a ridiculous and he was the one strapped to a bed. He must have been spending too much time around Tony because the words slipped out his mouth before he had time to rethink them. He said, "You are a fucking floating head. I don't think you're the pinnacle of evolution."

He braced himself for a prod that never came.

MODOK replied, sounding indignant, "Just wait Colonel Rhodes, in twenty years your species will give up their individualism to the collective consciousness, and I will reign as the Supreme Overlord."

Rhodey wasn't sure if he should take the being seriously. Killian was on the ground hunched over with a murderous look on his face, and MODOK floated above them, obnoxiously ridiculous with his disproportionate body and glowing eyes.
For a moment, he was deeply unsettled. This being was holding them all captive. James wondered if the being had ever been a man, or if he was a machine created to be like a man but on some level just wasn't. It was like an internet troll come to life. Arguing was futile, and it's was dangerous because the ignorance and absolutist thinking it displayed.

Rhodey loved JARVIS in all of his British-snark glory, but building AIs should be left to Tony.

MODOK floated up above Rhodey, his figure dark against the bright clinical ceiling lights.

"I will take over your mind, and absorb your consciousness into the collective."

Rhodey froze. Normally, he would be sure that technologically that was impossible at this point. He was best friends with the world's leading tech mogul. He would know if the Matrix suddenly became possible.

But at the same time, there was a floating head and Rhodey had had drinks with a Norse god from outer space. The idea of what was possible seemed so lost to Rhodey.

Killian crawled up from the ground, and MODOK floated around him. His dark suit stood out against the yellow hazmat suites of the nameless scientists, and the bright white of the glistening floor. Rhodey wondered who was in control of the organization.

The creature or the man? And which would be the more terrifying option.

MODOK repeated, "I will take over your mind and absorb you into the collective consciousness. I will take over your mind and absorb you into the collective consciousness. I will... I will... I am the ultimate machine human interface."

Then it started to twitch; Rhodey glanced widely around the room. The underlings in the yellow hazmat wear stepped back, as if terrified of what MODOK could do or would do. Killian looked vindictive.

MODOK continued to repeat the same words over and over again; then, it started to shake wildly. Sparks flew off of the being, and it dropped to the ground. Killian walked over to it, and stuck pressed a couple of buttons and MODOK fell silent.

The man was in control, but for how long?

"Take it away," he barked. "Wide it's memories. We need to start over." Killian set his jaw, as the yellow-suited scientists wordlessly obeyed his orders.

"Colonel Rhodes, I believe we were in the middle of something."

One beast had been dragged away, but another, just as dangerous one, loomed above him.

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There was a stillness in the air that there hadn't been there yet a minute before, as if the room was holding baited breath for an answer. Harry assessed the man in front of him.

Victor von Doom; a name Harry had never heard before, but a man that was powerful or arrogant enough to proclaim that they could take care of the dark lord. Either option was dangerous. But the man in front of him wasn't a Lockhart. He didn't strike Harry as the type of man to lie about his abilities.
His tailored suit, and mechanical watch were not of Wizarding origins, but he was certainly magical. The question was, what sort of magic?

He was dangerous, but was he dangerous to Harry. Unfortunately, the answer was probably yes. Whatever the case, Harry knew that he couldn't act afraid. The man was a predator, and if Harry showed fear, he would become the prey.

At that moment, the man was treating him like an equal; he needed to keep that status to keep control of the situation.

Harry raised his eyebrows at the man, and tilted his head. He forced his body to relax into the chair. Harry casually commented, "Who says that I need you to take care of the Dark Lord, or that I even give a fuck about him."

A trace of a smile crossed Doom's lips, and he looked almost amused by Harry. "No righteous desire to protect the weak? Not like your father?"

Harry shrugged, "They've done little for me." That was a lie; Harry didn't exactly like the idea of Voldemort running around Europe killing people, but he knew that indebting himself to Victor von Doom would have some unintended consequences.

Doom laughed; a deep real laugh. "I like you Harry Potter. I really do. You're not one to be bought, are you?"

"Many have tried."

Doom nodded at him, "I have no doubt.

Harry then smiled causally, and said, "Then we are at an impasse. I'm sorry, Mr. Doom – "

" – Doctor – "

"Doctor Doom," Harry corrected, "But I have a friend waiting outside for me."

"Mr. Potter, I think we have gotten off on the wrong foot. I have been looking for you for a long time. Your work is impressive, and I think you might be able to help me. My interest in you is purely academic. I don't wish you or your family any harm." Doom stood up. He looked sincere and open, but Harry didn't trust him one bit.

He reached into a brief case, and pulled out a stack of papers that were bound together by a rubber band. There was a business card stapled to the top of the stack. It was matte black, and in sprawling gold script was Doom's name and contact information including a phone number and an email. Under his name where the occupation usually went, the phrase Latverian Government.

Harry wondered what exactly that entailed.

The Doctor continued to talk. "Mr. Potter, please look this over for me, and let me know if you are interested in working with me on my project. I think we could help each other out, if you would allow it."

For a moment, Harry was stunned. This man was powerful, and probably brilliant, and he spent time seeking out – not Harry Potter – but Evan White. There was an all-burning curiosity inside of him. It was the third-floor corridor all over again. Mysterious. Dangerous. The knowledge that leaving it alone would be the safest choice, but the reality was that Harry would not be able to resist it.
Harry stared down at the paper lost in thought. When he looked up, Doom was gone. Peter barged into the classroom, an intense look on his face. Harry's bodyguards trailed behind him, looking stunned and confused. They should have been with Harry while he was talking to the Professor.

Doom must have done something.

"Hharrrryyyy," Peter said, "Are you coming? Uncle Ben promised he would take us to the new science exhibit at Oscorp."

Harry looked down at the papers in his hands and back up to Peter. He slipped it inside of his backpack. Harry replied, "Yeah, yeah, give me a second."

Peter rolled his eyes, and Harry raised his eyebrows at the kid. Peter asked, "What took you so long?"

"The Professor wanted to ask me about my father's work," Harry lied, "I told him to fuck off."

Peter scrunched up his face in concern. "That's not very professional of him."

"No," Harry agreed, "It's not, but I don't think he will be bothering me again. What's this about a science museum?"

Peter grinned, and started to ramble about genetic transmutation and the possibilities of it when it came to healing, uh, medicine, Harry mentally corrected himself. Harry wondered what Peter's take would be on healing potions.

Biology had never been Harry's favorite science discipline, but he had dabbled at times. Most especially when magic had regrown the bones in his arm which shouldn't be possible. At times, Harry realized how incredibly selfish the wizarding world was. They had the ability to regrow bones and cells, and refused to share with countless muggles who were dying and needed treatment. They refused to share with war veterans missing limbs. Refused to share with sick children.

All because they were different.

Sometimes Harry wondered if it was morally right keeping magic a secret. Then, he remembered the Dursley's treatment of him because he had magic. Harry didn't know the answer to that question, and in the end, it wasn't Harry's responsibility to answer it.

Peter's voice filtered into his head, "… they are experimenting with genetically altered spiders to stabilize DNA methylation and telomeres which don't shorten with time. These spiders have longer lives and the cellular regrowth is incredible. Did you know they can lose a limb it repairs even before their moult? Harry, Harry, are you listening?"

Harry was terrified of what would happen when he introduced Peter to Hermione.

"Honestly," Harry admitted, "You lost me. I don't know much about biology much less spider biology." Aragog was the closest he wanted to be to a spider ever again, giant or otherwise. He would need to brush up on biology to keep up with his new New York, science-wiz friend. Harry preferred his numbers and his equations, but it was always good to gain more knowledge.

"Oh," Peter said, slightly put out. "I'm sorry. I get pretty excited. I love spiders."

Harry raised his eyebrows at Peter and then broke into a grin. Peter blushed, and glanced down. "I know, I know," he said, "Most people are afraid of them…"
Harry smirked at him, "I need to introduce you to a friend of mine. He's terrified of them. I would pay good money for you to go on a spider rant while he becomes increasingly horrified."

Peter's eyes blew out wide, "I would never be that mean." Harry gave him a flat look, and Peter continued, "Okay, maybe."

Harry sat back in the seat of his car, and decided, "It's going to happen."

Peter bit his lip, and gave Harry a side glance. He asked, "Just how terrified?"

Pepper Potts was certifiably exhausted. She couldn't remember a time when she wasn't exhausted on some deep level.

Tony had taken that from her. No, she wouldn't change it, but her life had not been the same since she had burst into Tony's office waving around accounting papers informing him of the error. It took him approximately sixty seconds to decide that she would be his new assistant.

It took him three weeks to realize that, no Mr. Stark, she wouldn't sleep with him.

Eventually they became more than just assistant and boss, and became deep confidant friends. Pepper had seen both the best and worst of Tony; watching him treat women likes playthings that could be recycled as quickly as his Armani shirts; throwing temper tantrums because the particular expensive part he wanted was out and he didn't want to wait for his machine to fabricate it. Pepper had watched Tony devour the world around him so that it wouldn't devour him.

She had watched him crumble and build himself back up again; struggling to continue to pretend that he never cared wherein reality he always cared. He had always wanted more, but he had never allowed himself that pleasure for the knowledge that the world tended to take the things closest to you away.

Pepper loved Tony Stark. Not romantically; they were far too interdependent for it to ever work. She lived and breathed his life, and she needed one her own to have sanity. She wouldn't, she couldn't, be completely sucked into his orbit becoming secondary to his needs always.

Tony consumed; Pepper didn't want to be consumed. She loved him for it all the more because it was a flaw in his system, a flaw in his coding, but he was trying to be better.

Harry was infinitely good for him.

That being said, Pepper Potts was exhausted on her flight back after having been on the ground for such a limited amount of time in L.A. She understood; Tony had to go rescue Rhodey. That was an absolute. Harry could not be alone in the tower with Loki and the annoyances from Europe. Also, completely true.

But that meant that Pepper was video conferencing on an airplane dealing with multimillion dollar decisions that she should really be making in person.

Speaking of which…

"JARVIS can you call Harry for me?" Pepper asked.

"Dialing him now Mrs. Potts," JARVIS replied smoothly.
It rang for a few seconds before it picked up. "Hello, Mrs. Potts."

"Once again, you can call me Pepper." Pepper sighed. It wasn't fair that Tony Stark, one of the rudest people on the planet, had a child so well-behaved. It was like karma had decided to take a day off.

"Yes ma'am," he said, but she could hear the amusement in his voice. She could imagine him giving her the Tony smirk that meant that he was sure to continue to call her Mrs. Potts just to be a little shit. Take back what she was saying about well-behaved.

"I have to take care of some corporate dealings when I get back into New York. Will you be okay with the Parkers until this evening?" she asked.

"I told Tony that I don't need babysitting. You both are aware that I lived on my own for some time, right?"

No, she actually hadn't been aware of that. The background check that she had run shortly after Jasper had showed up on a Harry James Potter hadn't come up with much besides the extreme signs of child abuse. She was still in contact with the British lawyer, but he hadn't discussed Harry's circumstances much.

Tony knew more than her, but that was to be expected. It was good that Harry was talking about it at all.

"Tony's concern isn't about your inability to take care of himself, just fear of someone who dislikes him getting ahold of you," she said neutrally.

"I've had my fair share of people who dislike me trying to get ahold of me, and I'm still alive."

Pepper was missing a large piece of the equation. Something was strange about Harry, and the Avengers knew about it. But she didn't.

Harry sighed on the other end of the phone. "I'll be fine, Pepper, I promise. The Parkers are talking me the Oscorp public science exhibit. Peter said something about genetically altered spiders."

Pepper grinned to herself. "You have to send me a picture in front of the logo. Tony's going to freak. Have you been to Stark Industries R&D? I know Tony was talking about taking you…"

"No," Harry replied, "but I'd love to go."

"Tony would be like a kid in a candy store." They would also need to formally introduce Harry to the SI board. There was a lot of unease among investors over the future of the Company. Technically Tony owned controlling interest, and if he ever so wished, could resume his role as acting CEO.

Pepper ran the company and had for years, but it was still Tony's and would always be. When Harry turned twenty-one in a little over five years, he would have the option to eventually take over Pepper's position as CEO.

Tony had changed his will. The beneficiaries were no longer her, Happy, the Avengers, and a multitude of non-profits. Now, Harry inherited the majority of it.

She more than understood; she had been the one to draw up the paperwork in the first place.

"Alright Harry," she said, "I'll call you in a couple of hours. We are probably going to rent a
penthouse in another building until Tony returns or Loki is gone. And we have a rotating security force scheduled to start tonight."

"Isn't that a little much?" Harry asked, sounding unsure.

"You'll get used Harry. I know people will tell you this a lot, but not only are you the heir to billions of dollars, but you are an international target. Your security is paramount."

Harry muttered on the other line, "I can take care of myself." He took a deep breath. "Alright, thanks Pepper."

"Have fun at Oscorp," she said. She had never wanted the paparazzi to get a picture of something so badly as Harry at Oscorp, if only for the indignant expression that would flash across Tony's face.

She rubbed her eyes, and glanced down at the paperwork she was reading over.

She may be jet-lagged, not have slept in over twenty hours, and have another ten to go, but she was Pepper Potts, CEO extraordinaire and, hey, at least she didn't have to put up with Tony's bullshit until he came back.

She knew deep in her soul that somehow, he would manage to cause her more work despite being out of touch and halfway across the world.

Just wait. It'll happen.

…

They were in a tent talking. A tent.

Talking.

Rage embedded itself in Tony's soul more vehemently the longer they waited. In a tent. Talking.

"We know where he is. We know he is in trouble. I don't understand what there is to discuss. We go in; Rhodey comes out," Tony gritted out.

"Sir," the general almost seemed cowed by Tony. He was the sort of man that Tony used to stare at from under dark sunglasses and charm like the devil into buying this year's long-range ballistic targeting system despite the prior model being perfectly serviceable. And they would eat it up and buy it at five-hundred percent markup cost because the government put that into their military spending budget that was an endless gluttonous hole that Tony had clawed billions from.

"There are protocols Sir," the man said.

"Fuck protocols. We're the Avengers," Tony crossed his arms over his body.

Tony glanced around the tent; Steve caught his eye and an unspoken agreement passed between them. They were going in without the government. They were going to fuck shit up, and they were going to save Rhodey.

"Sir, sir," the man got increasingly panicked. "Sir! Mr. Stark!"

Clint fell in step with Tony, and Natasha trailed behind him her eyes blank and bland. Bruce looked disinterested. Steve stood behind them all with his arms crossed like a mother bear ready to attack anyone who made a move to stop them.
They flanked together outside the tent, and Natasha said in a low voice, "I bugged the room, so we will know if they'll get in our way. Tony, you know how to get to Rhodey?"

"Of course I do," Tony crossed his arms, feeling frustrated at both himself and everyone else. The longer they spent talking and making plans rather than saving Rhodey put him in more danger.

"Let's go get him," Steve nodded.

....

Whiteness dulled into the colors of Killian leaning above him. His blonde hair was in dire need of a wash, and his eyes had the hungry look of a desperate person.

"You see this chip?" Killian asked, raising it up to him, "It's an implant that we are going to put at the base of your skull. It's a prototype that should tap into your nerve endings and create a conversation with your brain so-to-speak."

Rhodey shook his head, "I'm not Tony Stark, but I'm pretty sure that's not how science works."

Killian sneered at him. "We're working on it. It killed the last couple of test subjects."

Rhodey swallowed thickly. "Fucking let me out of here, and I might not come back and blow up your entire evil-science lab."

"AIM is not evil. We're a think tank that is actually trying to better the world. If we manage this technology, we will revolutionize the way we think of the human consciousness and the individual. If we manage this, we will cease to see where the humans end and technology begins. You think that humans will survive the next stage of evolution against these aliens? These beings that can throw lightening from the air. We are weak, pitiful creatures; a mindless mass that wastes it's potential chasing fleeting pleasures. We will kill ourselves off in twenty, thirty, a hundred, two hundred years. But if were not bound to this earth or even our bodies..."

"What? We solve global warming? War would stop? We're able to fight the aliens off?" Rhodey said snidely.

"Yes," Killian exclaimed, "But instead our leading scientist are spineless bastards that either bend to corporate interests or are the corporate interests."

"Tony is leading the field in green technology," Rhodey pointed out. Rhodey rolled his wrists trying to see if he could feel any way to slip out his restraints. His efforts where fruitless as he was tied down extremely tight.

Killian was not paying attention. The man remarked, "Only twenty years too late."

Rhodey strained against his leg restraints, testing for their strength.

"And you are willing to kill people for this?" Rhodey asked, "Are you willing to kill me?"

"Yes," Killian barred his teeth, "For this dream of the world that can be a few lives of the billions saved if more than worth it."

"You're insane."

"Maybe," the man shrugged, "But who knows. But I have you tied to a bed, and I'm here standing above you. Anyways, this was just courtesy information. You're going under operation as soon as
my neurosurgeon is ready. Any words before you go under? They might be the last you ever say.”

Rhodey knew that there would be only one right reply to that.

"Fuck you."

Killian tilted his head, and told Rhodey, "Fair enough."

...

The building was stunning; not as stunning as Avenger's tower, but then again, maybe Harry was biased. His body guards trailed behind the group about ten steps back, and Harry wanted to sink into the ground. He hadn't been out since the announcement, and he was vividly reminded of walking through Diagon Alley for the first time.

People pointed and stared.

Peter had the wide-eyed look of someone who had never experienced that sort of attention.

"It'll be fine," Harry muttered to him under his breath, "They won't hurt us. And if anyone tries, I have bodyguards for a reason."

Peter blinked as if he hadn't even been self-aware of his reaction to the crowd.

"I know," Peter said, "I can't believe you have to live like this."

Harry just caught himself before he replied, I'm used to it. As far as Peter was concerned, Harry shouldn't be used to it. Harry should be the one freaking out right now.

Then a wave of realization flooded over him. This was his life now. It would always be his life. Whether he was in the Wizarding world, or in the Muggle world, he would be gawked at and pointed at. Unfortunately, the Muggle world included more questions of pictures.

Harry didn't like autographs; Harry didn't want to do autographs. Boy-who-lived or Tony Stark's son, people didn't want Harry. They wanted what they thought Harry was.

"Harry Stark? Harry Stark?" someone repeated as Harry walked up to the building. Harry wished that he had sunglasses to slip on to just power forward. Ben flanked the outside of Harry and May huddled with Peter. The bodyguards got closer in step as the New York street started to take notice of who Harry was.

The Oscorp attendant opened the door for them, and Harry and the Parker family slipped inside the building.

Ben looked amused as he said, "That was an adventure."

May laughed, "I'll say."

Harry bit his lip, feeling the need to apologize. It was the same feeling he had when he was being an imposition on the Weasleys. It always seemed like Harry was destined to pilfer off the family of his friends.

"I'm sorry," Harry hunched over a bit as he said it.

Ben raised his eyebrows as if he wasn't expecting that sort of response from Harry. Ben said, "Not your fault kid, if anything we will go billing your father for the traumatic experience.” Ben winked at
Harry.

A group of security guards walked up to the group, a man in the front said, "Excuse me, if you would come with me."

Harry blinked, feeling a little unsettled about that. He wasn't so sure about the idea of following a group of security guards into a back room of the building of one of his father's business rivals. Harry liked to try and think the best of people, but there had been enough attempts on his life to know that that wasn't always the smartest outlook on life.

Who was Harry kidding? He was a very paranoid person, and the situation was setting off some bells.

"Sir," one of Harry's bodyguards asked him – Greg? Jacob? – "are you comfortable with this situation."

No, Harry was not okay with it. But nonetheless he said, "It should be fine, but don't leave us. And if anything happens protect the Parkers."

Ben glanced at him curiously. Harry and he had a staring contest.

Ben said, "The boys are the first priority. Harry, if you aren't comfortable with this, we should leave."

"No, no, no, Peter wanted to see the museum."

Peter flushed, "I can see it anytime. Harry, we can go back to the apartment and watch a movie or something."

Harry shook his head. He made up his mind. Plus, there was him and two-body guards with him. Harry had fought off Voldemort multiple times. He highly doubted that anything major would happen in the middle of a publicly-traded internationally renowned company headquarters.

Then again, five for five on the defense teachers trying to kill him list. And they were supposed to be his teacher, whom he could trust.

Reluctantly, Harry allowed himself to be led into a back conference room with the Parkers. A young man asked them if they would like coffee or water, and they shook their head no.

After a few minutes of waiting, a man with dark slicked back hair and dark eyes walked up to the glass handle and opened the door.

"Harry Stark. It is a stunning honor to see you in our building. You father decline to come?" the man had a fake-warm tone. Harry didn't recognize him, but he would bet good money that the man was someone important in the hierarchy of the company.

Harry remarked dryly, "He's off saving the world. A little busy for frivolous museum trips."

"Ah, can't be that frivolous if the son of the Great-Tony-Stark wishes to see it."

"I'll tell him you called him that," Harry said, "He'll be flattered."

"Norman Osborn," the man held out his hand, and Harry shook it. The man pushed his hand over, trying to dominate the handshake. It was petty. "I have a son your age. He's away at boarding school right now."
Osborn completely ignored Ben, May, and Peter, specifically only interacting with Harry. It was very rude.

Harry yanked Peter forward, "This is my friend Peter Parker. He wants to become – " Harry turned to Peter, and asked him, "What do you want to do again?"

"Uh," Peter stumbled, "I want to be a Bio-Engineer."

"Yes, he was very interested in your spiders. I couldn't care less, but I'm here for him, and I would therefore very much like to make sure we see them." Harry smiled politely, and crossed his arms in front of his body.

Norman gave Harry a very flat look, and he was distinctly reminded of Lucius Malfoy standing in front of him in second year realizing that Harry was a child, but not a stupid one. Harry wondered what the man wanted out of him. Photos? Bragging rights? He doubted it was something more sinister than that, but then again…

Osborn's eyes roamed the room, staring at Ben who had his arms crossed over his body. Ben exuded the sort of cool confidence that he was a man who stand in the kitchen like he had that morning in an apron and still go toe to toe with anyone in a back ally.

Harry really liked him.

And Osborn did not.

Finally, Osborn broke the silence in the room and told Harry, "Come with me."

The just-past-noon sun beat down on the Avengers as they approached the complex. Natasha and Clint sneaked around on the ground with the majority of the team, Tony floated above them, Bruce hung back about a quarter mile looking for military company ready to be called in if need be, and Strange was just returning from a scouting trip in something he called the astral projection.

Tony wondered if Harry could do that.

Strange gave the clear to enter the complex. He told them over coms when he returned to his body, "There's something odd in the main building."

Tony imagined there were a lot of odd things in that complex. He landed near his team, and blasted in the front door. They rushed into the front room of the complex. The white alabaster walls clashed with the nasty yellow accents. Tony would recommend firing their interior designer.

Then he saw it.

"Holy motherfucking Mary Jesus Christ," Tony spewed out.

"Tony I don't think those words should be stringed together in the same sentence," Natasha said, her voice displaying slight amusement.

"I'm an atheist. I don't give a fuck."

Steve, fed up, snapped, "Tony!"

"Fine, fine, fine, but are you seeing what I'm seeing? Please tell me that I'm not making this up. There is a head on a stick. A yellow slightly humanoid thing floating around with miniature legs and
arms. Why does it even need extremities when it can fly?"

Clint's, in an amused tone, asked, "Does this mean that I can send an arrow at your leg now, seeing as you can fly?"

Steve responded, "Clint!"

"Steve."

"Stop acting like children," Tony commented neutrally, with a slight smirk seeing the irony in his own statement.

Strange, who had watched the entire commotion with one raised eyebrow, asked over the coms, "Are they always like this?"

Natasha answered with a simple, "Yes."

"Let's not wake whatever that thing is. It looks like it's, uh, charging." Tony said critically examining it. It looked to be some sort of cyborg, not that such a scientific development had occurred yet in science. He would know about it.

Probably.

Steve stepped forward to get a closer look. The man had no sense of self preservation, and Tony would argue to his death that it was Steve who had the reckless self-endangerment problem. Despite being a super-soldier, he was only a human in bullet-proof armor. Neither made him as invincible as he liked to think he was.

Okay. Fine. Maybe Tony had that problem too, but that didn't negate the point.

"Captain, we should leave it alone. Rhodey is to the right," Tony pointed down the hallways.

"We have company coming," Natasha commented casually. She crouched low, with knives in both hands.

Tony wondered where she had stored them with her skintight leather suit.

Steve commanded. "Strange, you and Tony go find Rhodey. We will fight this off." Tony nodded in agreement with the decision; Strange was the other person other than Bruce with experience in medicine.

Suddenly, the large floating head creature opened his eyes, and they almost seemed to glow red. It took in the room, seemingly confused by their presence. Everyone tensed, unsure of what the creature was going to do.

"Tony go," Steve commanded.

"Aye aye Captain, you deal with the Bratz doll." Tony turned to the caped magician, "Strange." Strange raised his eyebrows and Tony and they took off down the corridor.

"I am MODOK. I am the ultimate killing machine," it said. It floated forward, eyes blazing.

"Call in the Big Green guy," Clint said notching an arrow.

"Bruce, you hear that," Steve asked, over the coms.
Bruce didn't reply. Steve glanced over to Clint, as if to check to make sure that his coms were working.

"Bruce? Bruce!"

No reply came through. The floating head creature encroached upon them. It said, "I am the next step in the evolutionary process. I am the ultimate killing machine."

Steve had a deep sinking feeling in his gut that Bruce was not okay, but he couldn't deal with that at this exact moment. They had a floating head to deal with.

....

Justin just wanted a fucking paycheck. Villainy wasn't the plan from the beginning, but after a he left clamp in the body of a patient during a routine surgery and he got sued and put out of a job, he didn't have very many options.

He had two little girls at home to feed, and a wife who had left him and his children during the lawsuit.

At first Justin had been desperate and AIM had seemed legit. Working for a scientific think tank focusing on real problems? That sounded like the dream. When he realized otherwise, he had been trapped.

This was not the sort of organization that allowed one to walk away.

Just started down at Colonel Rhodes; the man was a hero. Abet, he worked for the American Government, but he still had put his life at risk for some higher good and purpose, and there was laid across an operating table. When he did this in the hospital nurse, he would have an anesthesiologist, and a few nurses monitoring the surgery.

AIM was too cheap for that, so Justin would have to do it alone.

Killian barked at him, "What are you going staring at him."

Justin turned to his boss. "The last couple died," he said.

"So?" Killian asked, "We don't pay you to keep them alive. We pay you to do what I say."

Justin frowned. He wasn't a murderer. It wasn't him that killed the men, but the technology he imputed.

"Do it. Now," Killian gritted out.

Justin stared down at the Colonel and then nodded. He wouldn't have another person die because of him; at least he hoped so.

Alarms stared to go off.

Killian turned to him, and told him, "If you stop for any reason, I will personally go to your house and murder your entire family."

Justin believed him. He said, "Yes sir," and Killain rushed out of the room.

Justin placed the scalpel at the bed of the Colonel's neck and started to push in. A thin red line of blood started to emerge.
Tony flew down the hallway, Dr. Strange following after him. JARVIS was tapped into the building mainframe, and he was downloading the entirety of AIM's files.

The last time Rhodey had been spotted on their security feed was fifteen minutes prior before he had been wheeled unconscious into another room.

"It's to the right," Tony said, and they turned to corner.

_Rhodey, we're coming for you._

Peter was in complete awe. His brain was spinning, as _Norman Osborn_ led them through the back hallways to the labs. They didn't even have to go through the public museum. Instead, he was showing them the behind the scenes.

Harry had a very serious look on his face, and he seemed to be on guard.

Peter was always a little stunned when Harry redressed people; normally, he was so nice, if a bit of dry sarcasm. But when someone pissed Harry off, he tended to _go off_ on them. The last couple of times had been in Peter's defense too.

Peter was okay with that; he tended to freeze up in high stress situations and the words wouldn't come out.

His uncle and aunt trailed behind them, chatting about weekend plans. May and Ben had a work dinner that night.

Peter leaned over and told Harry, "_Thank you._"

Harry shrugged as if it was no big deal. Then, he got a smug look on his face. He whispered to Peter so that Mr. Osborn didn't hear, "Wait to you see my dad's labs. And I'm sure you can even use the tools in them."

"You don't have to," Peter whispered back.

Harry laughed, "Are you kidding; once Tony realizes this, he's going to insist."

Norman placed his hand on a pad, and the door opened to a large lab. Scientists meandered about; some on computers, some working on specific projects.

Peter's jaw dropped, stunned at it all. One day, he wanted to work in a lab like this. He wanted to invent and discover new inventions, machines, and molecules that would change the course of human history. He was struck by a sense of magnitude.

This is it. _This is what he wanted to do._

Peter just about spun around looking at everything, and Harry put a hand on him to stop him from walking into a table before him.

Mr. Osborn gave him a sharp look, and told him, "Be careful."

Peter flushed in embarrassment.
"These are state of the art labs. We are the leaders in medical scientific process." Harry still stood looking at Mr. Osborn with intense suspicion. It radiated from his body.

Peter asked him, "What's wrong."

"Trying to figure out what he's hoping to get out of this. Showing us the labs and all."

Peter tilted his head. That made sense of course. Having Tony Stark's son in the building must have been almost a direct threat on the company's IP. They must have worried that Harry was here for corporate espionage.

What was Mr. Osborn getting out of this?

Peter walked forward a little more staring at the room. The scientists paid them little attention, aside from a side-glance here and there.

He turned to Harry, and started to ask, "What do you think – "

Suddenly, Peter felt a sharp pain on his neck. He reached up automatically, and felt the blood rush to his head. The world around him started to spin, and bright lights danced on the corner of his eyes.

Then, Peter's world went to black.

....

Natasha blades flew across the room sticking into the front of a man's hazmat suit. She counted the number in her head.

*Five*. Fifth kill of the day. One would think being part of a superhero team would include less death and destruction.

The yellow-suited man she had been fighting stumbled allowing Natasha to sweep him around and slam the man back on his head and back. He was either unconscious or dead.

*Eh. Five and a half.*

It was only Steve, Clint, and her against a mass of minions and a cyborg like creature. It wasn't the best odds she had encountered. Not the worst, but that wasn't saying much.

Bruce was missing; he should have come with them. It was always a hard call. If the Hulk wasn't necessary, then unleashing it wouldn't be worth it. Bruce always teetered on the edge of losing himself, and none of them wanted to push it towards it.

The creature seemed to be talking in a repetitive loop, claiming, *"I am MODOK. I am MODOK."

Natasha didn't have a bloody clue what MODOK was, but she knew that they needed to take it down. She turned to see, a man approaching Clint from the back ready to strike.

She yelled out in warning, "Clint," as her hand flew to her belt to grab her throwing knife. At that moment, MODOK reached out and raised Steve into the air. He hovered there, flailing.

The three of them were unequipped. She watched her knife spin in the air, striking Clint attacker, but not before he had managed to slice into Clint's back. Clint called out in pain, and Natasha turned to sprint towards her partner.

MODOK slammed Steve into the wall who hit with a solid thunk, and turned his attention to
Natasha.

He repeated, "I am MODOK," and raised his small arms the same way he had with Steve. It would have been ridiculous if she wasn't under his mercy at that moment.

He said again, "I am MODOK."

….

Tony blasted the door into the room, hoping to see Rhodey. Strange followed behind, his hands lit with energy.

Rhodey lay before them upside down on an operating table with a long incision in his neck. Tony turned to the man holding the scalpel who had a started look on his face. Tony raised up his repulsors and blasted him into the wall.

The man smacked the concert with a loud thud, his head whipping back. Tony paid that no mind, as he rushed forward to Rhodey who seemed to be in a bad condition. Strange removed his cloak, his hands shaking and a terrified look on his face.

"Help him," Tony commanded.

"I don't know," Strange said, "I can't."

"Yes you can!" Tony told him, "You're the best in the entire world. It would be like saying I can't invent."

Strange took a deep breath, grabbed some gloves near the table, and gently touched Rhodey bleeding neck.

Strange swallowed hard, and told Tony, "There's something in there."

"What?"

"There's some sort of metal device attached to his spine. I don't know how to properly remove it." Strange's hands shook as he touched Rhodey's skin.

"We can't leave it in there," Tony said. "We have to fix it."

"It doesn't work like that Tony," Strange, "That's not how it fucking works."

"Fix it!"

….

General Ross cold eyes showed a rare sign of emotion. He was thrilled.

The Avengers could deal with Colonel Rhodes. He could care less about the man. Especially when they had the big prize.

He had the beast.

Chapter End Notes
*whistles innocently*

I’m so sorry. I moved back to college last weekend, and this chapter was especially hard. It’s not beta-ed yet, but I tried to proof read it, but you know me… that’s not my strength. Anyways, here it is!! Hope you enjoyed. Action scenes are not my forte. But I tried!

On another note, I just want to say thank you so much to every single one of you guys whether you have been with me since the beginning, or have just discovered this. Your support is what keeps this story moving. Last chapter had like fifty reviews and I’m over a thousand subscribers here, and I’m stunned. I cannot thank you all enough. I love each and every one of you.

Anyways, it’s late and I have class early tomorrow, so I’ll keep this short and sweet.

Questions: what did you think? ;)

Love you all, Emm
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Bruce is captured. Peter is passed out. Dr. Strange needs to do Surgery on Rhodey. Steve, Natasha, and Clint are in trouble.

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Disclaimer: Not my characters. Not my world.

Content warning: talk of child abuse. Also, minor suicidal themes with Bruce's parts. As always, please PM me for an edited chapter if you need one. Mental health comes first!

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

When Bruce became aware again, the blackness around him was omnipresent. It burned into his soul, and made him feel like he was floating in the universe. He felt peaceful, adrift in his own mind. Bruce was not afraid of the dark.

The dark had always been something of a safe space for him, to hide away from the world and the pressures of constant stimulus. In the dark, nothing could scare him; nothing could make him angry; nothing could excite him. In the dark, he was seven years old again, hiding from his father believing that the act of turning off the light would put a physical barrier between him and the monster.

The monster that became more internalized as he grew.

However, there was a certain peace in this darkness that was not natural for Bruce. For a moment, he didn't recognize it. The feeling of pulling deep breaths and not being weighed down seemed so natural. Like he should have always felt.

But it wasn't like it always was. There was something wrong about this darkness.

The monster wasn't inside of him. The rage was gone. Instead of heavy pressure at the base of his throat ready to burst out, all he felt was the swallows of his saliva. Bruce felt stunned and trilled in tandem.

It was gone. He was free. Truly, completely, and utterly free for the first time that he could ever remember. Elation bubbled up within him. Bruce felt a genuine smile span his face.

Then, a powerful rumbling roar emanated from the darkness that peace he felt. It was familiar.

It was the Hulk.

Him. Him.

It was wrong. He shouldn't be able to hear that sound because he was the one who usually made it. It erupted again, thrashing his ear drums, making him feel small. That sound spoke of destruction and bad memories that Bruce could only grasp at through hazy filters.
His heart beat in his chest. Bruce expected the pressure to bubble inside of him, trying to escape. He expected the rage and anger to ball in his stomach with mounting potential energy ready to spring forward into kinetic motion. He expected the inevitable feeling of turning into the Monster.

But Bruce didn't feel that. Instead he felt his own fear. He felt his own heartbeat.

Lub-dub… lub-dub… lub-dub.

Bruce breathing started to pick up.

The sound of a lumbering body moving closer radiated through the darkness.

*Lub-dub… lub-dub… lub-dub.*

Then the Hulk appeared: enormous, sickly green, and unstoppably angry. It stood less than twenty feet away from him. Black beady eyes trained on Bruce. Yellow-stained teeth unruled behind an unnatural grin. The creature panted before opening its mouth and displaying his dominance with a thunderous roar.

*Lub-dub… lub-dub… lub-dub… lubdub… lubdub … lubdublubdublubdub…*

Bruce stood face to face with the Hulk, his heart racing far past the turning point. The beast didn't emerge from within because it wasn't *inside* of him anymore. For the first time, he felt real unadulterated fear.

Bruce was exposed and vulnerable, alone in the dark. There was no monster inside of him to battle the monster in front of him.

He was six-years-old again. Bruce cowered.

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Harry leapt forward automatically towards Peter. His heart pounded, and he felt a sense of dread. He had known that something was *off* about this corporation. Osborn seemed like not only a slimy man, but someone who walked the line of ethical science, if not broadly crossed it.

Harry was not an innocent in the field of pushing too far in the name of innovation, but his experiments had never hurt anyone.

May cried out, "Peter!"

Harry's two body guards leaped into action. The one with curly blonde hair checked for a pulse and after a couple of tense seconds announced, "Around hundred ten BPM. Pulse steady. No obvious sign of reaction. He seems mostly normal."

The other nodded to his partner and stood up, almost protecting Peter and Harry who had come down to the floor next to Peter, but hadn't touched him, almost unsure of what to do.

When the men had announced Peter's state, Harry sucked in a deep breath he didn't even know he was holding. Ben had come to the other side of Peter, double checking vital with the efficiency of someone who had done something of the sort before.

Osborn looked uncomfortable and caged. A few scientists starred at Peter as if he was a foreign object, but something had reacted to press a large button on the wall that put the lab into lockdown. The fire alarms started to go off, and an older scientist started to bark orders.
"Emergency responders have been notified. No one else touch–"

"Peter Parker," Harry supplied.

"Mr. Parker until the emergency responders are here. We don't know what sort of contaminates or biotoxins he could have touched. No one is allowed to leave until we clear the area. Does Mr. Parker have any allergies?"

Everyone looked to May and Ben.

May shook her head adamantly, "Not that we know of."

Harry caught Ben scanning the room from the corner of his eye, as if he was searching for causes of what happened to his nephew.

Suddenly, Peter moved slightly, and everyone's eyes were transfixed on the teenager. Peter groaned and his eyes fluttered open. He met Harry's eyes. He mumbled out, "You have really green eyes."

Harry blinked, and felt himself flush. He was usually pretty in control of his actions, as yes, unfortunately, it was not unusual for random people in the Wizarding world to make lude and rude comments to him. That being said, this was Peter. He wasn't expecting it.

May in the background barked out a laugh, both startled and happy. Ben sagged in relief.

"Mr. Parker," the scientist who had stepped up earlier asked, "are you okay?"

Peter pushed himself up into a sitting position despite the obvious protest of one of Harry's bodyguards, and said, "I think so." Ben tensed up, as if ready to catch the boy.

Norman Osborn, who had pushed himself against the wall throughout the affair, announced, "I need you to sign a release."

Harry narrowed his eyes and told him, "Peter isn't signing anything," at the same time that Ben Parker announced, "Absolutely not."

Harry and Ben's eyes met. Peter looked clueless, but wild-eyed between them. The bodyguard that had stood with his gun out, moved discreetly between Harry and the Parkers and Norman Osborn.

"Mr. Stark, Mr. Parker is clearly fine and whatever happened is most certainly of his own design. Did you have lunch son?" Norman addressed Peter.

Peter nodded. "Yes."

The scientist from earlier glared at Norman Osborn behind the man's back. Harry raised his eyebrows and the scientist nodded back at him. Harry had multiple allies in the room with the Parkers, his bodyguards, and now Norman's own scientist.

The man addressed Peter, "Do you have any idea what caused you to faint, Mr. Parker?"

Peter's eyes grew wide, and he hesitated, before he finally replied, "No."

Harry frowned at that. Peter's body language said otherwise. He would grill Peter about it later, but right now, Harry wanted them out of the building.

"Do you still need emergency services?" Norman asked.
Peter shook his head.

One of the underling scientists told Norman, "Everything in the lab has been checked. There are no chemical spills and none of the experiments seem to be compromised.

"I want everyone to sign NDAs."

"No."

"Mr. Stark," Norman Osborn intoned, "I really insist that you all sign the NDA."

Harry narrowed his eyes at the man, and the room held in a silent staring contest.

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If Steve hadn't been a super soldier, his head slamming against the wall would have surely killed him. As it was, the world spun around him as he struggled to focus. Yellow flooded his field of vision. All he could hear was a loud ringing. The world continued to spin, and the darkness closed in.

He wanted to give into it. Sleep. The ringing would then stop.

No. No.

This thing would not best him. He was Captain America – no – he was Brooklyn bred Steve Rogers. A fall from thousands of feet into ice didn't best him; an army of aliens hasn't gotten them. They could take on one ridiculous looking yellow creature.

Steve closed his eyes, centered his mind, and pushed away the urge to fall asleep. He sprung into action. Throwing his shield and smacking the thing on the side of the head.

The red eyes seemed to widen in shock. Steve didn't give it time to recover. He tackled the creature like a football player into the ground. If this was a machine, then there had to be an off button.

It shrieked at him, "How dare you touch MODOK. I am the finest human creation…"

Steve tuned the thing out, his mind telling him that he had to make a split-second decision.

Steve couldn't see and off button, and he wasn't Tony who could look at a machine and just know everything about. Well, when all else fails breaking it must turn it off right? It was like when his smoke alarm at the small apartment he has lived in for some time when he defrosted had broken. It beeped, and beeped, and beeped, and he couldn't figure how to turn the damn thing off, so he smashed it.

He got someone to fix it later.

It seemed like the right plan here.

Steve punched the glass of the creature. It spider-webbed underneath his knuckles. Its voice became scratched, like a broken record.

"I-I-I aaa-mm-am MO-MO-DDD…"

Steve decided that this was the best course of action. He punched it again.

Crack. Steve's breath knocked out of his chest as he felt a snap in his hand. He got a boxer's break.
No unusual for him, but painful nonetheless. He switched to the other hand, and punched the glass again.

Finally, it cracked through and he could see the wires underneath. He figured they were important, so he yanked as much out of the thing as he could.

Steve's breathing caught up to him, and his tunnel vision left, as he became aware of the room again. Natasha stood to his right fighting off about fifteen of the villain's underlings. Some had run away. Clint was sitting against the wall, slumped slightly to the side, firing off arrows around the room.

He was hurt. Steve leapt up off MODOCK and sprinted over to help the two.

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*Fit it.*

Dr. Strange's hands shook violently. His whole body shook. He hadn't picked up medical equipment since right after his accident and he was trying to *fix it*, fix himself. Strange tried not to think about it.

Eventually, Stephen had gone to the MacDuff Medical Center for Magical Mishaps and Maladies when he has discovered that his type of magic wasn't the only type of magic. The Ancient One hadn't informed him of that fact when he came desperate to fix his hands.

Now they were, in theory, *healed.*

But they weren't. They shook as he stared down at the Colonial. *Fix it. Fix it. Fix. It. FIX. IT.*

Strange balled his hands into fists. Tony Stark was tense and wild-looking besides him. Stephen took a deep breath.

He gritted his teeth. He could do this. He couldn't fix himself after his accident, but Stephen could fix the Colonial.

Probably.

…

General Ross had the *monster* in a room designed to withstand nuclear testing, being pumped full of the strongest sedation medicine possible. He wanted the thing to pass out in its green from so he could send people in to test it.

Unfortunately, the monster was not cooperating. Banner would shrink between his human façade before shaking violently and expanding to become the thing. The way that the monster was convulsing was almost like he was trying to tear himself apart.

He wanted to sent men into the room, but even with gas masks, it wasn't safe. Not that that usually would deter Ross, but he didn't want to many casualties on his side. He had all the time in the world. The Avengers – ridiculous name – were occupied. Ross hated the idea of superheroes. They were a paramilitary force connected to no government. They could turn on America or the world at large at any second. Weapons should be in control.

When he had first started his crusade to recreate the super soldier serum, he had thought he wanted a Captain America, a good solider, but now that he had met the man he realized how wrong he was. Steve Rogers had too much slack.
He was not a point-able weapon, but a loose cannon.

But the beast… that had potential. A mindless creature he could control that he could point at the enemy and unleash, was something that Ross salivated over. The monster couldn’t question his commands. It would be a force to be reckoned with.

However, first he had to break the creature. Force it to become a pawn for Ross. Then, the monster would be an American monster. Dangerous still, but just to his enemies.

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"Scalpel."

"What?"

Stephan gave Tony a flat angry look. The type that Tony was used to giving.

He replied, "If you want me to fix him, then you volunteered to be my assistant. Now, hand me the fucking scalpel."

Strange's hand had balled up into fists and had a slight shake to them. To say that Tony was not a medical doctor was an understatement, but he was no stranger to stitching himself up after battles. He picked up the silver pick looking thing and handed it to Strange.

The man muttered to himself, "He needs antibiotics the second we get him to a real hospital." Tony took a deep breath, his eyes glued to Strange's hands that gently sliced through the stitches on the back of Rhodey's neck.

Over the com he heard, "Stark?"

It was Natasha.

"We found Rhodes. Strange is preforming emergency surgery," Tony told her.

"Clamps," Strange motioned to Tony. Tony looked around and handed him what looked like the scissors.

Natasha held silence for a second. She replied, "Clint has a gash in his back-

"-it's not going to fucking kill me-

She talked right over her partner, "It's not bad, but goes need attention. The – uh – MODOCK is down. Steve smashed it."

Steve was silent on the com. Tony got a vivid image of what that smashing entailed. "Bruce?"

"We don't know."

Tony's heart almost stopped. Bruce didn't show? That could mean a number of things, none of which were good. For Bruce or for the people in the region. They needed to address that as soon as they could.

Finally, the star-spangled-man decided to add the input, "We need to get Clint medical attention and look for Bruce. You and Strange good to take Rhodey out. Do you have an ETA?"

Strange who was intent on his patient, didn't even glance up at Tony as he said, "Five more minutes.
Quicker if you would all shut the fuck up."

Clint slightly slurried his sarcastic reply as he remarked, "Nice guy."

"Sounds like the man has a plan," Tony said to his team.

"Stark I need you," Strange said, beckoning him over. Stephan Strange looked intent on Rhodey as he pushed the scalpel against the device that Rhodey had lodged in his spine. It was tiny, about the size of a penny, and just as thin. It seemed to be almost grabbing against the spine.

Strange's eyes became intent as he finally pushed the device away from the spine.

"Hand me a forcep," Strange said demandingly. Tony looked at the equipment, and tried to figure out which ones were the forceps.

"The tweezers," Strange snapped, clarifying.

Tony immediately handed the tool to the surgeon. If Strange wasn't operating on his best friend, Tony would have replied with something snarky, but it wasn't worth it here.

Gently, Strange gabbed the device between the forcep and pulled it out of Rhodey's necked. When he finally had removed the device, Tony let out a breath he didn't know he was holding. Tony watched Strange stich up Rhodey's neck, who hadn't even so much as moved while they had been in the room.

"Is he going to be okay?" Tony asked.

Strange continued intently to stich as he replied, "I don't know Stark. I'm a Sorcerer, not a miracle worker."

Tony gulped. He reached out and grabbed the device that had been in Rhodey's neck. It would be better to have it if something was wrong with Rhodey.

Finally, Strange finished stitching. He looked up, and they knew that they needed to get out of the compound and get Rhodey to a real hospital. They barely spoke as Tony grabbed Rhodey bridal style and they hurried out of the room.

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Bruce cowered trying to slink into the darkness away from the beast. It roared at him, opening its mouth wide showing off two rows of sharp teeth. It could eat him. Not that the Hulk ever had as far as Bruce was aware – and goddamn did he have nightmares over what he couldn't remember when he was the creature – as it was far more interested in smashing.

Now, Bruce was human and breakable. Maybe this would be okay. If he died, would the Hulk die? It would be better for the rest of the world.

Bruce closed his eyes expecting it to strike him. He felt sorry that he hadn't been able to say goodbye to his new family. He would have liked to tell Tony that the man had made him feel human again; tell Steve that his optimism reminded him that there was good in the world; tell Natasha that her strength at overcoming her inner demons reminded him that he wasn't alone; tell Clint that his clam made Bruce feel calm for once. And Thor, well, he was more existential. He reminded Bruce that there was a whole universe out there and Bruce's purpose was now to protect it a little part of it.

Bruce wasn't religious, but he liked to think that the universe had some meaning to it. Now, his death
would mean that no one would suffer under the hands of the green monster.

Bruce waited for the blow. The darkness that would probably never end. It would be comforting.

Bruce waited.

…

"Mr. Osborn," Harry said in a flat tone, "You forget who I am. We are under no legal obligation to sign NDAs, and if you continue to press this, I will sue you for – what is the American term? – false imprisonment."

Harry wasn't really sure if there was a law like that or if it only applied to the police, but the way Norman Osborn's face went pale, he was quite sure that the threat landed.

"If you continue to hold us against our will, it's kidnapping. If you force us to sign anything at this point, it will be under duress and extortion, and I'm sure that Mr. Stark's lawyers will have a field day with that." Ben stood up to face Norman Osborn, and pulled up to his full height. Ben was in his late forties, athletically inclined, with an angry look on his face. That, paired with the larger bodyguard that had stepped between Peter and Norman, made it explicitly clear that there would be no papers signed.

For the first time, the bulky bodyguard opened his mouth. He had a deep booming voice. "Mr. Osborn, I suggest you leave my clients alone. My team has a very good lawyer on my side too which I assure you, would enjoy talking you on for fun."

He made Norman Osborn look like a child in his own tower. Norman's face contorted in anger.

"Get out," the man barked.

The scientist that had took charge earlier protested, "Mr. Osborn, we really should wait and decontaminate everyone before leaving. And emergency services are coming and should look over the child."

The bodyguard who had checked Peter's vitals earlier said, "As far as I can tell, he's okay. That being said, I insist that Peter doesn't move until paramedics come. I'm EMT trained, but I would prefer someone with more experience to look over Peter."

Peter huffed and muttered under his breath, "I'm okay."

Norman ignored all of them. He snapped, "I want you gone."

Ben asked gently to Peter, "Are you okay to leave?"

Peter climbed to his feet with Harry's help.

One of the bodyguard's protested with a strong, "Sir."

"It's okay," Harry nodded to the man.

Peter stumbled a bit on the way up, and Harry caught him. Peter looked woozy. In Harry's hypocritical opinion, Peter really should go to the hospital or wait as the EMT trained professional had insisted. Then again, Harry was not one to talk.

Peter told his Uncle, "Yeah, I'm okay."
May protested, "Ben, we really should wait."

Ben came next to Peter, and asked frankly, "Are you okay to walk?"

Peter swallowed hard, then nodded determined. "Yes."

Ben grunted, and told his wife, "May we really need to leave."

Norman who had clenched his jaw together throughout the affair commanded, "Open the lab elevator." Someone turned off the emergency system, and Ben and Harry helped Peter to the elevator. They stumbled out. Both of the bodyguards tensed up besides them. Harry did in fact feel safe with the two men. There was something about the duo.

When they reached the front door, the paramedics had arrived. Ben looked to Peter as if to ask if he needed to be looked over.

Peter gave the largest puppy-dog eyes, and told them, "Can I just go home? I feel fine."

May said softly, "If you're sure honey."

"If you promise the second you are feeling a little off, you will tell us. There is zero shame in getting help Peter. You understand me?" Ben told him commandingly.

Peter grinned weekly said, "Yes Sir."

Harry felt awkward and very out of place in the very family moment. He wanted to shrink in onto himself. He pulled away from the family, both of black suited men flanking him. The EMT trained one came besides Harry and asked, "Sir, are you okay?"

Harry nodded. "I'm fine. I'm not the one who passed out."

The other man, a larger African-American man in his mid-thirties who looked like he didn't believe an ounce of Harry's bullshit, told him, "It's okay to feel shaken after a tense situation. There's nothing weak about it."

Harry hummed, and uncharacteristically offered, "Someone passing out is hardly a tense situation. I've faced far worse." Like basilisks, dragons, Cruciatus curses through by megalomaniacs, Cedric and Sirius dying in front of him, his guardians beating him, his dearest desire being offered by a man who had taken it away in the first place, and everything in between. Harry was a veteran of so-called tense situations.

The body-guard didn't know that. He just gave Harry a flat look as if he didn't believe that the type of child who was rich enough to hire bodyguards had faced much in his life. It wasn't a mean look, just one misplaced.

Harry licked his lips, "Let's just say that my last guardians were far from nice."

Suddenly, the man seemed to reevaluate Harry. He narrowed his eyes. Thankfully, there was no pity, but there was more of a sense of equality or kinship. The man seemed to understand that Harry was far from just a fifteen-year-old heir.

Harry had to make a decision. The three Parkers were fusing over each other, and Harry knew that they would continue until they reached their home. As much as Harry was concerned about Peter, he didn't want to insert himself in that family dynamic. He wanted to give them some space.
"Can one of you escort the Parkers home, and the other take me to the pent house that Pepper rented?"

The blonde-curly haired one nodded as if he agreed with the proposal. He turned to the other man and asked, "I'll take the Parkers. You have Mr. Potter?"

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The whole team was huddled in a military tent. Clint sat backwards on a chair, slumped over to relieve the stitching on his back. Steve's hands were both wrapped, and he aggressively read the book in front of him. Rhodey had been passed off to military medical, and they were sending him back to New York on a plane as soon as it was safe to be treated a hospital stateside.

"Fuck this. What's taking them so long?" Clint asked.

Steve glanced up from his book, but made no comment over Clint's language.

"There is a lot of land to canvas," Natasha pointed out the obvious.

"He couldn't have gone that far," Clint argued.

Natasha agreed. It shouldn't be taking that long.

She reached up and turned on her com and asked, "Stark, you see anything."

"Negative. No sign of the Hulk or Bruce," Tony said.

Strange added, "No signs of rampage either. The Hulk hasn't been anywhere we have checked."

Steve bit his lip on the ground. He and Clint had turned on their coms when Natasha did.

Steve commanded, "Come back and regroup. If he's not around as the Hulk, then something else happened."

Stark commented, "That something else is what I'm afraid of."

Natasha agreed. If someone had taken Bruce, then they were in a world of trouble.

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The blow never came, and Bruce squeezed his eyes tighter. His heart pounded rapidly in his chest. He could hear the sound of the beast breathing in front of him. It's body heat radiated, encompassing Bruce.

Bruce finally opened his eyes. The Hulk stood in front of him, crouched over slightly, like an ape. It stared at him, face contorted in anger.

Bruce looked wildly at it, unsure of what he should do. Should he run? Was there anywhere to run in this darkness?

"Do it," Bruce commanded. He was tired of waiting. Growing up, the anxiety and fear of his father beating him was almost worse than the actual violence. The intense constant reminding that Bruce was at the mercy of his father's mood made him an anxiety terrified child.

"Do it," Bruce repeated, "Hulk smash."
The Hulk tilted its head at Bruce. "Smash?" it asked.

Bruce's breathing caught. He had never heard the creature speak. Others, of course, had told him that it could, but he almost didn't believe it.

A deep part of Bruce wished that the Hulk was totally mindless and therefore that the deeds that the creature committed would be less culpable.

"Yes. Smash! Smash me."

"Smash me?" the creature repeated.

Bruce closed his eyes. He started to laugh suddenly and violently. This situation was absurd.

The Hulk bowed forward more putting its face right up to Bruce's and asked, "Me okay?"

The rancid smell of the Hulk's breath perforated Bruce's nose, and Bruce struggled not to cough in the creature's face.

"Yes, me okay," Bruce answered before the perfectionist in him realized the atrocious grammar. He corrected, "I – uh, yes. I'm okay."

The Hulk shook his head, "No. Me not okay. Hulk scare me. Hulk no smash me. Hulk protect me."

Bruce swallowed heavily. The Hulk was still right in his face. He swayed slightly and looked Bruce on as curiously as Bruce could ever imagine.

Suddenly Bruce needed to know. "Why?" he asked breathlessly. "Why do you protect me?"

The Hulk grinned and replied, "Bruce need protection."

That… was not an answer. They stared at each other.

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Angela Yasui was tired of waiting. The Avengers were off across the world, and Harry Potter had left the tower. That left them, somehow, in charge of the alien Wizard that had attacked New York the year prior. To say that she was unhappy, would be an understatement.

"You will soon be obsolete," Loki's voice came from behind. Angela spun around to see the Wizard sitting on the couch reading a book.

"Where are your guards?" Angela asked.

Loki gave her a smirk.

JARVIS, Tony Stark's creepy electronic butler, answered her, "They are passed out on the third floor. One has just regained conscience and I have informed them of Loki's whereabouts."

"How did you…" she trailed off.

Loki rolled his eyes. "My father may have made he appear to be human, but I haven't lost my Asgardian training. I was raised to be a warrior and not depend on my magic which is more than I can say for your society."

Angela kept silent. After all, it would hardly be appropriate to agree with the mass murder.
"The world has accepted aliens. Keeping magic a secret depends on a severe amount of human ability to block out what doesn't fit in their box. You know this, don't you. Why not get ahead. Use the Avengers as a way to beat the curve," Loki then started to cough violently, and leaned over. His face was red and his eyes burned a bright green.

Something was wrong with the alien.

"Magic is going to stay secret. You underestimate human willingness to turn a blind eye. The majority of the British wizarding world thinks that the Battle of New York was a hoax created by Muggles."

Loki, who was still bent over from coughing, looked up at her.

He had a frown on his face. "If the humans even have the slightest chance against the Thanos, it would be with the human sorcerers fighting. You might not have a choose of secrecy. That is, unless you are willing to give your world over to the Dark Lord."

Angela swallowed hard. Loki's guards rushed into the room frantic.

"Ma'am, ma'am," they said, "Are you okay? Has he harmed you."

Angela shook her head, her eyes still pinned on Loki. She replied to them, "No, he hasn't touched me."

Loki smirked, as if he knew that he had gotten to her. The world had faced many Dark Lords, even in her lifetime. Britain had its fair share. However, never had there been ones that threatened the entire planet. If Britain couldn't get it together to defeat Lord Voldemort, how were they going to fair against a force far worse?

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Harry tapped his hand against his leg right where his wand was. He has decided to sit in the passenger seat with the guard on the way back. He had almost taken it out back in the lab which would have been very bad. It was one thing to tell the Avengers about his magic. It would have been far worse to tell the heard of a for-profit science – well, besides his father – about magic. It would be a disaster.

The body guard seemed to pick up on Harry's energy. The man glanced over to him.

"You sure you okay, kid?" the man asked.

Harry nodded.

"Everything is going to be okay," the man said, "that's what we are here for."

In reality, Harry tended to think of the men as just for show. Harry could take care of himself, as he has proven time and time again. However, he realized that he couldn't use magic in situations that could reveal his magic. Now, not all of the threats against him would be just magical.

"First time with bodyguards?" the man asked, as if he was trying to put him at ease with the chatter.

Harry finally replied verbally, "Yeah. That's new."

The man hummed. "You know, my partner reminds me a bit of you. Rich family and something happened where he wasn't in contact with the world for quite some time. When he came back, I
think he wasn't quite accumulated to his new life. Didn't know how to deal with having been thrust into a world that was alien to him. Maybe you should try and talk to him."

Harry raised his eyebrows, trying to think back to the man’s partner. The blonde curly haired guy that looked like he was still uncomfortable in an adult body.

Harry commented, "He must not have adjusted well if he decided to go into personal security."

The other man licked his lips as if he was trying to stop from laughing.

"Yeah, yeah, you're right kid." They pulled up to building that Harry assumed he and Pepper were staying at.

Harry turned to his bodyguard, and said, "I'm sorry, I never caught your name."

The man shrugged, as if it didn't concern him. He said, "Name's Luke." Harry nodded. Alight, maybe he could deal with a bodyguard. His father wanted him to have one, and Luke wasn't awful.

The man came around and grabbed Harry's door, and they made their way into the building.

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Peter felt violently sick, but pushed it down. He was sure that if he threw up now, that his Uncle would end up dragging him to the emergency room. There was an intense uncomfortable tingling that entered his body whenever that prospect came up, as if going to the hospital represented some sort of danger.

All of Peter screamed that it would be a bad idea.

Peter hadn't been kidding when he said that he wanted to crawl right into bed the second that he got home. He felt bad that he hadn't been able to say goodbye to Harry. Harry had taken off after everything that had happened.

Peter flushed thinking about his comment to Harry about his eyes being really green. He hoped that he could pass it off as being discombobulated from passing out.

Dear lord, Peter had made a fool out of himself in front of Harry.

His phone buzzed, and Peter looked down to see a text from Harry. It read: Sorry I left so suddenly. I hope you are okay. Please tell your Aunt and Uncle how grateful I am for having me over last night.

Peter announced, "Harry told me to tell you guys thank you for letting him come over."

Peter's Aunt smiled, "I like Harry. He's always welcome. You feeling a bit better?"

No. Not really. Peter's head pounded and he was sure that he had a fever. Peter lied, "A little bit."

Ben gave him a sharp look. His Uncle always knew when Peter was lying.

Peter quickly typed: I'm… okay. Feeling kind of queasy. They said you are welcome anytime.

Seconds later, Harry's reply came: I would think that you wouldn't be so keen to repeat today's experience.

Harry had the tendency to type like he was writing a letter in the 18th century. His words caused Peter flushed more than he already was. He bit the inside of his lip. He typed: Well, no, but I had fun last night.
No, Peter deleted that. Fun wasn't the right word. They had talked about Harry's having been abused. He tried again: *I always want you over.*

No, he deleted that. That sounded creepy. Too much. He thought about it as they pulled up the apartment.

Finally, he tired again: *Nah, I'll be fine. I'm going to sleep. Ttyl?*

Harry's response came quickly. It said: *Get some good rest. I'll talk to you later, Peter.*

For some reason that made Peter feel warm inside and it wasn't from the fever.

....

There was a silence in the Quinjet as they flew. Bruce wasn't with them.

"I can't believe we are leaving him," Clint said.

Natasha frowned, "We need to get back to New York where we can regroup and figure out what happened to him. We are no help to him there."

Clint muttered, "It still feels wrong."

Steve flinched at Clint's word. Steve had been military. He didn't leave soldiers behind either.

Tony sat in the cockpit of the Jet avoiding them. He was the most upset of them. They hadn't received news of whether the Colonel had woken up yet, and with Bruce gone, Tony was all out of sorts. In a bit, Natasha would send Steve up to check on the man.

....

Jasper had the Minster knocking on his door far too early in the morning. Rachel rolled over in bed, and said to him, "You get it."

He lumbered out of bed, spelled on some clothes, and walked to the door. He opened it, and was half tempted to shut it back in the man's face.

"Harry Potter is not James Potter's son."

Jasper rubbed his forehead. "You're point?"

"The Potter lordship seats shouldn't be the child's. You knew this. You told me you didn't know where Potter was."

Jasper said nothing.

"I want you to bring the child back. I'm going to put him before Wizengamot. If you think that he gets to keep the Potter name and inheritance when he isn't even James Potter's real son, then you are delusional." Fudge spitting out the word *delusional* at him at six in the morning felt deeply ironic to Jasper.

Well, it seemed that Jasper had litigation to file and a trip America to make.

And he had told that damn boy to keep his head down.

Well, Jasper could and would adapt. There was a reason why he had sent Harry to Tony after all.
Jasper smiled politely at the Minster and replied, "Then I guess I'm delusional Minster. I will see you in court. Now, if you excuse me, I would like to go back to bed…"

Hermione loved her parents dearly, but sometimes she struggled to connect with them. As a child, it would be an understatement to say she had few friends. As a consequence, her parents had done their best to supplement that in other ways.

They had signed her up for art classes, gymnastics, and other non-school oriented activities. Her mother had also been something akin to a best friend. They went shopping on weekends, got their fingernails painted, and ran errands.

She had been a bright eleven-year-old with a stable happy home, few friends, and a thirst for knowledge as a replacement for socialization. If Hermione could be the best, brightest, smartest in her class than it wouldn't matter that the other students – not hate, hate would be the wrong word – strongly disliked her. Some of it was, in fact, Hermione's fault. Socialization was awkward for her. Some of it wasn't. Her mother said she was intimidating and she should never dumb herself down for the comfort of others.

She was different; very different it seemed. A witch in fact.

So the precarious eleven year old had gone off to Hogwarts, leaving her parents waving and broken at a train stop. Hermione knew for a fact that her parents didn't want to her go back to Hogwarts. Every Christmas break, her mother cried that she had missed Hermione growing and changing; there would be no first date send off, first heartbreak ice-cream and movie, weekend grocery shopping, or family dinners. Every year she grew further and further apart from their world.

It filled Hermione with such a sense of shame that it ate at her every moment she lived in her home. Her mother had fussed over her when she arrived back, claimed her clothes threadbare, and dragged her shopping. It had been an enjoyable afternoon.

Hermione sat in an armchair reading an Agatha Christie book she had read a million times while her mother made dinner, and her father watched the news.

Suddenly, her father interrupted her concentration.

"Hermione darling," he said.

Hermione pulled the headphones from her ears. She missed music dearly at school. She looked at him expectantly.

"Isn't that your friend Harry?" he said, motioning to the TV. Hermione glanced up to the TV and sure enough, Harry was standing behind a podium next to Tony Stark of all people. The battle of New York had been a stunning event last summer that the Wizarding World seemed to ignore.

Aliens existed, and the majority of Wizarding Britain brushed off the reality, claiming that Muggle news was ridiculous and false. Ron, even, didn't seem to believe it. It showed the pitfalls of an almost completely closed society.

"Yes," she answered, "although I'm not sure why…"

Harry had already told her that he wasn't planning to have Hedwig during the summer, so they had agreed that writing really wouldn't be possible. Hermione had been hesitant to agree with Harry on that point as he had just lost Sirius and she was worried for him.
The ultimate questions were, what was he doing in New York, and what was he doing with Tony Stark?

That was quickly answered.

"Oh," her mother exclaimed. She turned to Hermione, "Did you know?"

Did she know that Harry was the son of Tony Stark? No. As far as Harry had ever said, James Potter was and had always been Harry's father.

Hermione hesitated. She finally answered, "He never said anything."

Her father hummed, "I'm sure he had his reasons."

Harry always had reasons. With him, it was like pulling teeth, especially in the last two years. When they were younger, Harry had been like her in that he had been desperate for friends and connections but unsure how to communicate with his peers. Something changed in third year. Harry became more withdrawn and independent.

That was fine of course; personality changes happened, and didn't stop Hermione from loving Harry like a little brother. However, it made it harder for her help him through it all. Harry teetered on the edge of depression, Hermione suppressed all of her social anxiety through a veneer of a put-together bookworm, and Ron tried his best to hold them all together with positivity.

Hermione got up and got parchment to pen a letter to Ron. Then, she needed to figure out how to get a hold of Harry. The three of them had been together for so long. She wasn't going to allow Harry to cut himself off from them.

Ron and her should have known about Harry's true parentage and helped him through it. Sometimes she felt like he kept them in the dark because he was afraid that they wouldn't understand.

Maybe her and Ron wouldn't, not really, because they were blessed with both parents who loved them. But Harry wasn't the only person with difficulties in his life. And he surely, even more now, wasn't alone.

Hermione was going to make sure that he knew that.

…..

Harry stared down at the papers that Victor von Doom had given him. His hands shook.

Souls.

The man wanted to use magic to return souls. It wasn't quite necromancy since the suggestion wasn't bringing a soul back from the dead, but rather at the moment of death, pulling the leaving soul through time. It was brilliant, but completely and utterly horrific.

Harry's mind raced.

It wasn't the only magic in the paper that he had been given, but it was by far the most insidious.

Harry entire body shivered. The temperature in the room seemed to have dropped. Harry heart pounded in his chest. He should take the work to someone. Tell them about the magic. Doom experimenting with necromancy would get him landed in Azkaban.

At the same time, a dark part of Harry's brain protested that. This wasn't really necromancy. They
weren't sacrificing babies. They were simply pulling the soul through time so that it could exist in the future. It was kind of like saving the person's life at that moment, but then freezing them only for them to wake up much later.

He could save his parents. He could save Sirius. It was so tempting to continue to work on what Doom had started; finishing the equations wouldn't be that hard. It might be morally dubious, but he wasn't hurting anyone, and he could save so many more.

No. No. No no no. Harry shoved the papers into his bag. Not tonight. Harry had to think on this. Just because he could do something didn't mean he should do something. The creators of the nuclear bomb hadn't thought like that.

Harry laid on the bed and closed his eyes trying to sleep. However, the moment his eyes snapped shut all he could see where Sirius, Lily, and James' deaths on a loop. Sirius falling into the veil. James turning to face Voldemort to try and give time for his wife and son. Lily refusing to move aside to protect Harry. To protect him.

And here he was refusing to try and save her.

Harry shot up in bed, grabbed the papers and stared down at the magical equations.

No. He shoved them back into the bag. He laid back and closed his eyes again.

That night he dreamed of the dead.

....

Tony stared forward at the night sky unable to see the line between the sea and the infinite expanse of space. He fiddled with the device that had been surgically implanted in Rhodey's neck.

He knew that he should probably call Pepper or his son, but Tony didn't want to. He wanted to be selfish. He wanted to be alone.

Bruce was gone and Rhodey was hurt. The last couple weeks of his life had been some of the most exhausting he had ever experienced. Tony was trying to hard to be a good father, teammate, and friend and at that moment he felt the weight and stress of it all.

He stared down at the small device.

"JARVIS?" he prompted.

"Sir," his AI replied.

"Can you open a new folder for me and put the schematics of this device on it."

"Doing it right now Sir. What do you want to label the folder?"

Tony frowned and flipped it around in his hand. Finally, he settled on, "Lets call it... Extremis."

Chapter End Notes

It's my birthday and getting this chapter up is a present to myself! As such, however, I
posted it without really editing it for spelling and grammar which I'm sorry about!

I do, however, feel like I owe you all an explanation for why this chapter took so long. I had something… happen to me that threw my life into an emotional upheaval. I promise that it was not my intent to leave you hanging with so many cliff hangers, but my emotional health was, and still is, all over the place. On top of that, I am trying to keep the rest of my life from falling apart as a consequence. I don't know how regular updates will be like they were this summer, but I can promise you now that I am committed to this fic and I am committed to you guys. This story is completely plotted out, so I know where its going and I know what I want to do.

Thank everyone for all their love and support, and my sincerest apologies for not replying to recent reviewers. All of your comments were loved and apricated, and I will strive to do better this chapter with replying to every one of you guys.

Now, enough of that and onto the fun stuff.

So many exciting things happened in this chapter.

Questions!

1) Are you guys worried for any of the characters? Rhodey? Bruce?

2) What do you think of everything happening with Bruce?

3) Should Harry work on Doom's project? Should Tony look into extremis?

4) And the Wizarding world is back in play! Are you guys excited for all of that?

5) And in general, thoughts on the chapter. What stood out? (What grammar/spelling errors did I make that I should edit?)

Also OUTTAKE:

If Lily the living ward was a human child, she would be pouting. JARVIS knew that much.

"Why didn't my Harry stay in the tower? I can protect him in the tower."

"Sir didn't want to leave young Sir alone with Loki," JARVIS tried to explain to the young ward.

"He wouldn't be alone. He would have us," she protested.

"True," JARVIS acknowledged, "But Sir forgets that sometimes."

"He shouldn't. I want my Harry back. I don't like not being able to protect him."

"Soon little one, soon."
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Victor von Doom interlude! Part 1 of 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Disclaimer: These characters are not mine. I would also like to say I do not own the rights to the characters of Victor von Doom, the Fantastic Four, or any other marvel property owned by Disney or any other media companies.

Content warning: Should I warn that there are allusions to a threesome relationship?

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: INTERLUDE VICTOR VON DOOM

The house barely stood; it's walls bending and bowing to the wind and nature that asserted dominance over the structure as if mocking its attempt to stand the test of time. It would fall one day; collapse in on itself, folding up when the weight of the sky became too much.

As if by a miracle, it had lasted.

Victor wondered if the house falls and no one was there to see it, would there be anyone to mourn its fate?

He stood there looking at the structure, his mind conjuring vivid scenes of Sunday mornings rushing off to Church, and Saturday night sitting on the front porch with his parents staring at the stars. He could almost feel the warmth of the fire radiating from the hearth, as his mother chided him to stop reading and start helping his father.

It had been a good childhood.

(Victor refused to remember his father's yelling and his mother's tears. No point in being angry with the dead.)

Victor von Doom had been seven when the first bomb had hit his little town. His older brother had been sent off to fight in the war. He was most likely dead. He remembered the raining ash, dusting over the town in the morning. It floated down like gentle snowfall, but instead of instead of dissolving with the sun, it perforated every surface, clinging and sticking viciously. No matter how many times Victor washed his hands, the ash would not come off.

It had been called the Second Great War, as if there was something great about war. In the end, the power of the war was horrifyingly tremendous. Entire towns had been razed. Victor was just another child drifting in the aftermath where nowhere to go and no one to care.

Victor stepped into the house. The right side had fallen in on itself, and his parents bed had rotted. His eyes swept around the room; eyes frantically looking. His pupils blew out wide. His breath came out slow, but loud. His teeth scraped along his bottom lip.
He gasped out, "Mama. Mama. Mama."

Victor sank to his knees in front of a body. After four years, it had been reduced to bones and cloth. He recognized the faded green of the dress and the long cord around her neck that carried a stone he had carved for her when he was five.

He gripped the bones of the hand.

He wanted to ask the skeleton to wake up. He wanted to beg to his mother to come back. He wanted to tell her how lonely and afraid he was. Victor wanted his mother to wrap him in a hug and tell him that he would be okay.

Instead, all he held were bones. They didn't hold the light of his mother's eyes; they didn't smile at him and whisper soft words when he cried.

Victor curled up next to the skeleton, his hand gripping his mother's boney hand.

He whispered, "Mama, please come back to me."

The house creaked in an unintelligible response. Victor closed his eyes. The orphanage didn't have the money for a winter coat, and Victor's thin shirt didn't protect against the cold. He knew that if he let sleep take him, he wouldn't wake up.

Nobody would come looking for him either.

**Did Victor want to die?**

Despite it all, no, the child didn't wish to die. Instead he wanted the dead to live again. He wanted his family back.

Victor opened his heads. His little hands reached out and grasped the leather cord around his mother's neck, and he yanked it off. His slipped it on, and climbed to his feet. He looked down at the body.

That wasn't his mother.

It was just bones. Victor grabbed the quilt off the bed and wrapped it around his body. It dragged as he walked out the door. He reached into his pocket, finding matches. He lit one up, watching the dancing colors pop against the white covered winter backdrop.

He stared at it for a second more, before he reached down and put the match against the dry frame of the house. It took three matches before the side paneling caught on fire.

It wasn't showing, but the air was cold. Victor huddled in the blanket and watched the structure burn. Twice more he had to restart the fire. Hours past in a trance with Victor huddled in his blanket watching the dancing flames.

Finally, long after the sun had set, the young boy trudged back through the woods. The sun rose in the distance as Victor finally stumbled through the doorway of the orphanage. He collapsed on his small bed, cold and alone.

No one came to check on him.

....

There was a man in the village, old and gray, with eyes that seemed to be an open portal to the void.
He rarely talked with the other villagers, choosing instead to sit underneath an apple tree on the South side of town reading books.

The man had landed in the village after the war and the general consensus was that he had lost his family, and he was biding his time until he too died.

One day, as Victor walked by, the man had called out to him. "Child."

Victor blinked, and shoved his hands in his pockets. At that time, he was fifteen, and resented the label of child.

But Victor wasn't a rude boy. He answered, "Yes mister?"

"Come here," the man commanded.

Victor approached slowly. Although not the largest of boys in the orphanage, Victor was far from small. The old man posed no threat to him. However, when Victor got to the tree, the man stared up at him, and Victor stumbled back in fear.

The man's eyes, while usually were an unnerving pale blue in color, now glowed a bright white. Victor's breath caught in his throat. He stumbled backwards, and fell hard against the ground, smacking the back of his temple against a tree root.

Before the world turned back, Victor could hear the voice of the man speaking. The words, while whispered, seemed to permeate the air and endued the world with a transitory quality.

He said, "What is a child with your powers doing in a place like this?"

Nothing would be the same for Victor after that moment.

....

"Brilliant young man, I tell you. How old are you again, Victor?"

"Twenty-Five sir," Victor flashed a smile in polite response. He sat at a faculty dinner at Columbia University, surrounded by old white men teaching outdated facts, and surrounded so-called brilliant uprising young white men too terrified to correct them.

"And already on your way to a doctorate. You should meet Reed Richards, talented man let me tell you. He's changing the face of science and he's not even thirty yet."

Victor politely corrected, "Second doctorate."

"What?" the man asked.

"I'm on my way to a second doctorate. I already have one from Cambridge," Victor replied serenely.

The man raised his eyebrows, "I didn't know that. Then you must meet Dr. Richards."

....

Victor first meet Reed Richards on a Tuesday afternoon. He had been told that the man was working on a project in the lab in the Mechanical Engineering department. Victor had trudged across campus, curious.

Victor's first impression of Reed, was his wild hair and spaced-out eyes hidden by a skinny frame
and large thick glasses. Victor's presence hadn't been noticed by the young man, so he cleared his throat.

Reed's head jerked up violently, and the back it smashed on the metal bar of a machine he was working out.

He howled in pain.

Victor couldn't suppress a laugh.

Reed crossed his arms and pouted, "What are you laughing at?"

Victor raised his eyebrows as if to show that it was self-explanatory. Reed huffed.

"I'd like to see you do the wiring. It's not rocket science, but I keep on getting them crossed up even though I know how they should be arranged."

Victor shrugged, "Sure. I have nimble hands."

Reed blinked at him, as Victor moved forward to look at the schematics. Victor climbed down underneath the machine.

Reed stood there stunned for a moment, as if he wasn't expecting that answer. Finally, when he gained his wits about him, he started to protest.

"No, wait," Reed exclaimed, "Don't touch that. You're going to mess it up."

Victor snorted, and moved back up. He smirked at Reed.

"I don't need to touch it anymore. It's already done."

Reed's eyes blew out wide. "It is? I've been working on the wiring for two hours! How did you do that?"

....

It became very apparent very quickly that Reed Richards was an absolute asshole. Not that turned Victor off; he would be a hypocrite if he denounced Reed's dickish nature too much.

Reed ranted at an undergrad, "I told you not to touch the... you messed it up and costing the university hundreds of dollars... I could get you expelled... never come back to lab," Victor listened in distantly, mostly focusing on the paper he was writing.

Finally, Reed sent the young man shame faced out of the lab. Victor could see the tears welling up in the boy's eyes, and Victor saw Reed vicious smile of satisfaction at the achievement.

"I'm hardly one to talk, but wasn't that a little harsh," Victor asked, absentmindedly working on his proof.

Reed gave a lazy shrug. "He shouldn't have been touching equipment he doesn't know how to use. It's hardly my fault that he's an idiot."

Victor gave a small smile. "Fair, but everyone is an idiot compared to the brilliance of Reed Richards."

Reed took the compliment unironically; or maybe he understood the sarcastic meaning, but choose to
ignore it.

Reed's smirk and the intense light in his eyes worked like a gravitational center for all the air in the room. Victor couldn't help but look on silently.

"Victor, there are those who can keep up with us, and those who can't. It's not our duty to inform the ignorant." *Just berate them* was left unsaid.

Reed Richards was an absolute arrogant asshole. Victor couldn't help but fall hopelessly in love.

....

The hour was either very early in the morning, or very late at night depending on one's perspective on the passing of time. Victor liked to believe that he wouldn't bow to the whims of the setting and rising sun, and that the universe instead should bow to him.

That being said, the world blurred before Victor's eyes as he tried to focus on the equations on the page.

Victor closed his eyes for a second – just one – so that he could refocus and push back the haze of sleep deprivation.

"Have you hit your forth wind yet, or are you finally willing to admit defeat," a voice originated from his right.

Victor didn't open his eyes. "Fuck off Reed."

"Such language," Reed chided, "You kiss your mother with that mouth? Oh wait, she's dead."

Victor's eyes snapped open. "That's just cruel and uncalled for."

"So, you are going to admit defeat. It's been sixty-hours Victor. And there are only nineteen more until Saturday and in which case, I win the bet. Go to sleep and lose with dignity," Reed grinned manically.

"No."

"My invention is going to win the contest, and when you lose, you're going to present it to me," Reed said with the utmost confidence in himself.

Victor shook his head. Reed didn't get it. Yes, Victor would like to win the contest, but what he was working on was larger than just a trophy that said number one. Victor needed to finish the equations. If he could prove that the human soul existed mathematically, then fuck the school competition, Victor would win a Nobel Prize.

But even more importantly, if he could locate the soul, then maybe he could figure out how to bring one back. He could rescue his mother from the dead.

Pull her back into the world of the living.

Reed didn't understand. His concept of loss was getting second place in a school competition. With new energy, Victor's eyes snapped open and his pencil pushed back on the page.

Despite Victor's spike in determination, the human body wasn't designed to go that long without sleep, and at some point in the next couple of hours, Victor had collapsed onto his work.
Victor woke up the next morning tucked into his bed. Reed must have carried him.

There was a note on his nightstand.

_I win_, it read. Victor rolled his eyes.

....

Three weeks later, Victor gave a speech about the brilliance of his friend Reed Richards in front of the faculty after Reed won the Young Inventor's prize at the college.

Even Howard Stark showed up.

....

Sue Storm was beautiful, brilliant, and dangerous. She reminded Victor of himself; a person who sharpened themselves against the world to succeed.

A twenty-two-year-old female engineering student working towards their PhD in the middle of New York City, having also to support her kid brother, was hardly the sort of woman to be easily woo-ed. Reed tried, oh how he tried.

Sue's eyes were cold in a way that Reed didn't recognize. Reed had two parents at home to run to when the world got tough. Sue – like Victor – had to face the world head-on, knowing that there was no one to depend on but oneself.

Sue's natural beauty undercut the sheer brilliance of her mind as the men of the university saw her as someone to either be amused by or in contempt of. At first, they saw it as _funny_ that a woman would dare to take classes with them, then they became outraged as Sue ruined the curve for those same students.

It only got worse when she started dating Reed. Reed seemed to be utterly oblivious of the bullying that Sue put up with. Snide remarks about fucking her way through a degree seemed be a daily occurrence for the woman.

It made Victor furious.

"Don't," Sue's hand on his arm stopped Victor from marching up to a group of undergrads and making them cry from the sheer vitriol he wanted to spew.

Victor's jaw clicked.

She sighed, "You're only going to make it worse. They're now going to claim that I'm fucking both of you."

That was true. The depths of human depravity.

"I can get them expelled," Victor said, his mind conjuring elaborate plans to get the boys expelled.

Sue gave a wry smile, "You boys and your revenge schemes."

Victor didn't know how she faced what she did, and didn't wish to burn down the world and rebuild it. Victor did. He dreamed of the red flames purging the world, igniting the landscape in hellish fire like the devil himself rising from the ground because God was failing.

Reed bounded up to them, a bright smile stretched across his face. He looked like a two-year-old
handed candy, and Victor could see the darkness in Sue's eyes recede, being replaced by a soft fondness.

Reed Richards had that effect on people. "I did it Victor!" Reed announced, "I solved it!"

Victor blinked, "What?"

"I finished your equation for the human soul. We can build your device now." Victor's entire world stopped, as he tried to control his breathing. Reed had done it? Actually, done it? "Sue can help? Will you help us build it, darling?" he asked.

"Help?" she raised her eyebrows, "I'm sure that I'll be the one building. You boys are good with the math, leave the woman to the building." She stretched out her hands in a flex.

Victor blinked, and tried to focus on the conversation. He said breathlessly, "Don't lump me in with Reed. At least I use a blow torch without lighting the lab on fire."

Reed pouted, "That was one time, Victor."

Victor then sharply turned to Reed, and asked in a very direct tone, "You actually did it?"

Reed gave a rare abashed smile, and said, "Yeah. I did it. I know that it's important to you."

Victor immediately thought, I love you.

"Thank you," Victor put as much sincerity into his voice as he could. He would have dropped to his knees right there if it would make Reed understand how much that it meant to him.

A deep red flush arced across Reed's nose and cheekbones. Reed mumbled, "It's no problem."

Sue raised her eyebrows at the scene, and asked, "Are you just going to stand there awkwardly, or are we going to go? Because I thought we had a machine to build."

....

It took them a month to create the astral projection machine. One month of them spending every waking hour together in the lab. Victor and Reed worked on the schematics and double checked the equations, and Sue drove them like a task master. She had them yes-sir-ing her, as she tied her blonde hair back in a ponytail and pulled a wielding mask over her eyes.

Little Johnny – who at ten resented being called little – spent some time in the lab with them. His small fingers where far better at the detail work than even Sue, but he seemed utterly uninterested in any of the theory behind what they were building.

One night, at around two in the morning, Johnny had passed out on the couch in the corner of the lab and Reed had just fallen asleep on top of his notebook, his face squished against the binding. Victor and Sue stayed up; Sue tinkering with the energy component.

"Screw driver," she commanded. Victor handed it over, his eyes on Reed whose glasses were quirked sideways because of the way he was laying. He was also drooling. It was a combination of adorable and disgusting.

Sue didn't even look up or pause as she spoke. He stated, "You love him."

There was no point in denying it. Not with the finality in her voice.
Victor swallowed hard, and answered, "Yes."

She put down the part she was working on and looked at Victor intently. For first time in Victor's entire life, he felt utterly exposed.

She then smiled softly at him. She was in a high collared white turtleneck that should have been nasty from working in by all accounts, but instead stayed pristine. Her hair was brushed back, and the freckles on her cheeks seemed to almost dance in the dim light. Sue looked beautiful and untouchable. It made his soul ache.

"I do too. He makes me happy. I mean, he's so full of himself and far too smart for his own good, but god do I love him. I don't mind that you do too." She smiled at him like they were in on a little secret.

Victor felt queasy. He wanted her to be angry at him for his feelings. At least then, it would be easier for him to force himself to stop feeling them.

He twitched, and asked, "Aren't you worried that I'll steal him from you?"

She snorted, as if that was impossible. Her voice was light and amused, as she questioned, "Are you planning on it?"

Victor didn't say anything.

"I thought so," she got up from her seat, and kissed him on the forehead. Victor flushed. Sue walked over to Johnny and tucked a blanket around him. She then continued, "Reed's too oblivious. You're too much of a coward. And plus," her voice took on a conspiratorial tone, "you like me too much."

Victor blinked, and blurted, "Are you suggesting…"

Sue laughed, and Victor wished he could push the words back into his mouth.

"Oh God no, Victor, we would destroy the world together. You and your manic brilliance, my sheer determination, and Reed's casual cruel disregard for others and within a week we would be the Supreme Overlords of the New World Order."

Victor wanted to ask what was so wrong about that. He suddenly wanted that with such a viciousness that it hurt.

But he couldn't have it. Reed and Sue were complete together, and Victor was just… Victor. The lonely exchange student from Eastern Europe with no family and obsessed with a death machine.

He stayed silent and stared at him hands. He couldn't face Sue in that moment, or he would break down and beg. Beg for what she was suggesting.

She seemed to understand. Her voice was sad. She spoke in a whispered tone, "I can't give you that, Victor. I have to look out for myself and Johnny. Reed and I balance each other out," her voice hitched, and Victor didn't need to see it to imagine the pain in her eyes, "his parents are going to buy us a place to live after we get married. I can't jeopardize that Victor. I love you, Reed loves you, but I need stability. My brother needs stability."

And Victor couldn't give her and Reed any of that. Being gay would be bad enough, but being gay and in love with two people was beyond wrong. The world would shame them. Sue didn't want that.

"I'm so sorry Victor," she whispered. Then, she said, "I have to go." Victor didn't say anything or look at her as she gently woke her brother up and ushered them out of the room. Victor knew that he
should ask her if she wanted an escort back to her place — it was after all two in the morning in New York City — but Victor couldn't bear to turn around and look at her.

Long after she had left, Victor mumbled, "But I love you."

But love wasn't enough. And people never choose him.

....

Victor threw himself into his work. Their work. He doubled checked equations and stayed later than everyone else to the point that even Reed was concerned.

Sue didn't say anything. She would look at Victor with sad regretful eyes which he would obstinately not meet.

*Love*. It seemed so fleeting. And pointless. And worthless. Victor had lived without it for so many years — the last person who had ever really loved him was his mother — and Victor could survive for many more years without it.

Cold nights in the orphanage with little to no food didn't kill him, and this surely wouldn't.

Reed and Sue talked behind his back; Victor knew it, but pretended not to.

Victor decided that once they had finished the machine, he would drift away from Sue and Reed. Let them be *them*, and he could go on with his life. And if — when really — he succeeded in pulling souls from Death's clutches then Reed and Sue would mean little.

Sue pulled back away from the machine with a large grin on her face. Her eyes were dancing, and an energy buzzed underneath her skin. She announced, "I did it! *We did it!* It's done."

She sprung onto Reed for a kiss. He swung her around, as they cheered. Reed broke away from her and turned to Victor, and said, "Victor, we did it!"

Reed noticed that Victor wasn't responding. Victor stared at the machine, his eyes glazed over.

Reed came up and placed both his hands-on Victor's shoulders and shook him. "We did it! Victor, we are going to receive the Nobel prize. This changes everything."

*It did.*

The entire world would bend around the three of them, recontextualizing itself to fit this new reality. Scientific proof of a soul — scientific proof of an afterlife — extended beyond the realm of just scientific inquiry. It meant that in the end religion won the debate, but what religion and what denomination?

What is a soul? Is it just the individual? Is a soul a part of a larger being and eternal? Or is it singular and fleeting?

Those thoughts, however, were to be pondered later by Victor. In that moment, all he cared about was that he could rescue his mother. It didn't seem real.

Victor's eyes sharpened as he focused on Reed.

He said clearly and forcefully, "Test it on me."

....
"I don't feel comfortable with this," Sue rebuffed.

Victor looked at her flatly and remarked, "I have least to lose. You have Johnny, and Reed has a family."

She crossed her arms and stood to her full height. Sue was the sort of person who could intimidate you with just a look. Victor, however, was not the sort of person to be intimidated.

"You have us," she snapped.

Victor looked at her sharply. He wanted to ask her if she really believed that. He wanted to ask her a million things. Instead, he said simply, "And you and Reed have each other."

She fidgeted, and started softly, "Victor…"

Reed came over to their stand-off, and glanced between the two, picking up on the awkward vibes, and told them, "I doubled-checked everything. It should be all in order. That being said," Reed turned directly to Victor, "I don't know about this. Can't we just wait a couple of days? Go over it again?"

Victor shook his head. No, absolutely not. Not when he had his lifetime goal hanging right there for him to grab.

Victor shook his head, "No, we're going to do this. I'm going to do this. We've worked too hard and too long on this."

Sue looked at him with wide-eyes, and Reed seemed to puff up with a deep breath.

Reed said, "Alright Victor."

....

Staring down the barrel of the machine that they had created, Victor suddenly felt calm. The air in the room sizzled against his skin, as if it was ionized. Reed and Sue had a nervous energy.

But Victor, he felt calm and composed. In the next moment, he could either die or discover one of the greatest secrets of life.

Reed asked, "Are you ready?"

"Yes."

Reed swallowed hard, his Adam's apple bobbing. He flicked opened the control panel on the side of the machine, and put his finger against the starting switch.

"Do it," Victor commanded.

Victor's eyes trained on Reed's hand, as the switch made – to what Victor sounded like – the world's loudest snniiiiwwp as it clicked over.

Victor could hear his own breathing, as a white burst of energy zoomed towards him. The world seemed to slow down around him, and he became infinitely aware of the room, from the aroma of Sue's perfume to minute flutter of Reed's eye lashes as his eyes widened at the machine working.

He felt at one with the room, every dust particle on the lab's surface to every drop of water in the drying beakers by the sink. Victor was vividly aware that he was alive in that moment, and the world
around him teemed with potential, truth, and promise.

And Victor also knew that he was going to die.

He was an idiot, placing his life in the hands of a machine that three people, barley older than children, had built.

The white life grew bright and brighter as it grew nearer, until it finally engrossed him in completely whiteness.

Then.

The white rapidly faded to black as Victor struggled to hold. It was futile.

Victor was going to die.

....

The void.

It was both eternal and suffocatingly small. Victor knew everything and nothing.

Victor was nothing.

Victor was a concept of a human mind self-constructing itself and calling itself Victor. Victor was a soul than had attacked itself to a particular mind; a soul that knew no more or no less than what Victor knew, but was not him in complete construct.

What was one without one's body? Was one even oneself?

Reason could not exist without a body nor did the construct of time. Instead the world mended and bended around them, shifting life an endless sea unsure of which way was up.

If Victor could think, he would have asked himself, did gravity need to exist for time to become? Did matter need to exist for there to be existence?

What is nothing?

Suddenly, Victor's soul felt immense pain as if it existed in a physical form, and the world took shape around it. Nothing became something, and the void, while incomprehensible, was felt. At that moment, Victor existed in Schrodinger's state, both inside the void and outside of it. Both a formless nameless soul, and distinctly Victor. Both alive and dead, and neither alive nor death.

Victor was both everything and nothing. Part of the world, and set apart.

The void whispered to him, a thousand voices weaving into one, forcing itself into Victor's mind.

It asked, "What have you done child?"

If Victor could breath, he would be hyperventilating. He wanted to protest that he did nothing. But he did. Victor had done something. He had existed in a place where nothing should exist.

The void seemed to comprehend his panic. It told Victor, "I own you now. And I will use you. Begone child, return to the land of the living, but know that you don't belong there anymore."

Then, Victor woke.
Oh god, it's been a long time hasn't it?

So maybe no one wanted 10k on a random villain from my story except me, but fuck it, I love writing these interludes. This is part 1 of 2 parts and the second part should either be up tonight or tomorrow morning. This got to be waaayyy too long for just one chapter, so I decided to split it up!

Halfway through the chapter (what y'all just read), I wanted to cry at what I'm doing to my characters. I just wanted Reed, Sue, and Victor to have their happy ending where they have a bunch of pretty babies and take over the world. Where Sue designs terrifying tanks, Reed locks himself in his lab and MUST DESIGN special baby proofed everything because that his solution to any emotional problem, and where Victor heals from his sorrows and for once is just LOVED. And of course, they take over the world together. Fuck me. Why. Can't. I. Have. My. Loving. Supervillians?

Anyways, it all goes downhill from here!

Please review! The second part of this will be up in less than a day. I promise.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Victor von Doom interlude. Part 2 of 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Disclaimer: I wish this was my property, but it isn't. And this makes me sad.

Content warning: Explicit torture. Like seriously, if torture makes you squeamish you might want to sit this one out. Suicidal character/attempts. Character death.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: INTERLUDE VICTOR VON DOOM

Immense pain burned through him. It lit up his world. When he came to, all he could see were bright lights that blinded him.

Then he would fade out into darkness. It wasn't the darkness of the void, but the darkness of sleep. Darkness that consumed gently, erasing away pain but only lasting for seemingly a moment.

Victor dreamed of the void. He dreamed of his mother.

Darling, the false idol would say, come be with me.

But something inside of him simply couldn't. It was as if death was impossible for Victor. No matter how badly his world burned, no matter how badly the pain struck him, death eluded him like a suborn ex-lover.

His world became an alternating reality of dark and light, with bright hospital lights and endless pain, and the short release of the calm of sleep.

....

Tears streaked down his face. Victor could remember few times in his life he had ever cried, but at that moment, the desire overwhelmed him.

He wanted to curse at the world for it's unfairness. He wanted to crush the hospital equipment. He wanted to run away, far from anyone who had ever known him so they didn't have to see the freak he had become.

....

"It's really not that bad," Sue said gently.

Victor stared down at his hands, and spoke softly, "You can barely tell it's a human face."

Sue hesitated. She licked her lips. Reed hadn't had the strength to come and visit him. Victor assumed the man blamed himself, and every part of Victor wanted to blame him too.
(But it wasn't *really* his fault. Victor had insisted on being used as a guinea pig.)

Sue looked at him with such intense pity that Victor wanted to scream and yell at her to leave the hospital. That was another thing, Victor had no clue how he was going to pay for the bills of being there. It wasn't as if he had any money.

Sue spoke softly. She said, "We destroyed the machine. It was a pipe dream anyways. Like we could actually solve the question of the afterlife." She laughed bitterly. Her eyes looked deader, and she seemed to have faded into the background of the room. She was duller than she usually was, as she had become less of a person.

Victor just stared at her.

She reached out to his hands and placed hers upon his. "I'm so sorry Victor."

Victor muttered, "But it had worked. Sue *it worked."

The pity in her gaze intensified.

They said nothing for a long time. Sue not having the cruelty to take him down, and Victor resolved in what he had experienced.

"Reed proposed to me," she told him.

Victor's stomach dropped, and the world around him grew cold. Victor couldn't speak, so he just nodded.

She licked her lips, "I said yes. I don't think I'm going back to school next semester. There is so much to do with planning the wedding. And Johnny. He's struggling with school and Reed promised to mentor him…"

Sue gave him a very thin smile.

Victor closed his eyes, and muttered, "I'm happy for you and Reed."

"No you aren't."

"I want to be."

Sue sighed. "It's better this way."

Victor stared up at the white of the ceiling and admitted. "No one is ever going to love me."

Sue didn't speak for a moment. Finally, she said, "Victor, one day you are going to find someone who loves you for every ounce of what you are. Reed and I aren't good enough for you."

By the time Victor opened his eyes, Sue was long gone. She didn't visit him in the hospital again.

….

Reed came late one night, when Victor was half asleep and the pain medicine made him question if the visit had ever happened.

The man sat by his bed, eyes sad and sorrowful, and told him, "I'm sorry."

Victor said nothing.
When, Victor came back to school, the only people he talked to were his advising professors and the students in his section classes that he taught. Otherwise, Victor found his new life to be very lonely and quiet.

That didn't faze him. He spent his time trying to recreate the equations and make them better, more accurate.

The weather in New York dulled into fall, froze into Winter, and melted into Spring. Reed's eyes seemed to be on Victor when they passed each other, but otherwise they didn't speak. Every time Reed opened his mouth, Victor stared at him as if expecting something.

An apology. An acknowledgement.

But instead, Reed's eyes downcast and he hunched over as if afraid of Victor.

Then, there was the whispers that followed him as he walked. Monster. Inhuman. Broken.

His students couldn't meet his eyes in class, and the Professors shied away from him as if afraid of him. It seemed that people thought that the ugliness of his face reflected what was on the inside.

Victor died a little bit each moment.

"… should be sent to an institution. How can he live like that...?"
"… okay in the head? To take a blow like that and not show signs of being mentally degenerate…"
"… keeping him because of pity."
"… distraction to the students…"
"…going nowhere in life…"

Victor stared at his ceiling, sleep escaping him. Rain gently pelted his window, and he pulled his blanket tighter.

"Boom. Boom. Boom."

A loud knock interrupted his thoughts. Victor rolled over. The person must have the wrong room.

"Boom. Boom. Boom."

Victor closed his eyes. Maybe they would just go away.

"Boom. Boom. Boom."

Victor frowned, and finally stumbled out of bed to open the door.

"… Reed?" he asked, to a frantic looking Reed Richards.

Reed swallowed hard, and pushed into his room. Victor, stunned, did not stop him.
"Victor," his voice pleaded, "You have to leave campus right now."

Victor blinked owlishly.

"What?"

Reed grabbed a bag that sat next to his small dresser, and started to open the drawers and grab clothes.

Victor reached out to Reed, and tried to grab the bag away from him. "Reed, stop. Tell me what is going on."

Reed's eyes were red and bloodshot. He looked like he had been crying for some reason. He begged Victor, "You have to leave right now. They are coming for you."

Victor gritted his teeth, and forced out, "Who is they. For fuck's sake Reed, you can't just burst into my room and demand that I leave."

"The government. The CIA. The FBI. I'm not really sure, but they think you are a spy for the Soviets."

Victor frowned at Reed. "Have you been drinking? Should I have someone get Sue?"

Reed angrily threw the bag that he had packed for him at Victor. "I'm being serious Victor. I mentioned to someone who was snooping around that you were trying to solve the afterlife, and that you were from Latveria. They just kept asking questions. I didn't know Victor I promise."

Victor's laughed at the absurd notion that he was a spy. Yes, the American government and the Russians seemed to be in a frightening power struggle at the moment, but that hardly concerned him. He was a scientist, not a politician.

He raised his eyebrow at Reed, and told him, "Reed, I know that I have an accent that is vaguely Eastern European, and you Americans can't seemed to get it in your head that Latveria isn't part of the USSR. Oh, and that fact that I'm not a spy."

Victor would have been an awful spy anyways. He spent days too absorbed in his own work; he didn't care a single bit about what others were doing around them.

Reed looked at him with big eyes, and nodded. "I know that."

Victor sighed, "Then can you please just leave me alone?"

Reed clenched his hands into fists, and rocked back and forth with a nervous energy. He opened his mouth and words just spilled out. "I know – oh god, I know – that I hurt you Victor. It kills me. And Sue hurt you, and I'm trying to give you space. But can you please leave. If you got taken by the American government…"

"Then what? You would forget about me as you and Sue had pretty little babies? Like you are doing anyways."

Reed bit his lip. "Can you please leave?"

No. No. Victor would not leave. Reed was deluded.

Then, with a loud crash, and his door was smashed open. Men in black tactical suites rushed into his room and surrounded them. They had heavy artillery. Reed stood there with a defeated look on his
The last thing Victor saw before someone pulled a black bag over his face was Reed mouthing *I'm sorry*.

....

His old friend, the darkness, returned. This time – unlike the void where time didn't exist or the darkness of sleep that was but an instant – this darkness way long and maddening. It was the darkness of the hood at first.

Victor didn't know how long they kept it over his face. His hands were secured behind his back in handcuffs, and his ankles were also shackled.

He had been pushed, at first, into some sort of moving vehicle. He lay on the ground, feeling the road bump underneath him, jolting him painfully. He tried to speak at first.

He pleaded with them.

"I'm not a spy," he said, "I don't know anything. I'm just a student."

They kicked him. Victor shut up.

Hours seemed to pass, with the hood over his head. This was the sort of darkness that would drive a man crazy, with only his mind to keep him company.

From a car, Victor was put in a plane. They yanked him around forcefully. His wrists and ankles rubbed raw, and his entire body cramped.

But the darkness of the hood was nothing compared to the darkness of the cell. The cell that would soon become his entire world.

....

The cell was about a meter and a half by two meters. It wasn't quite long enough for Victor to lay in comfortably unless his lay at an angle with his head in one corner and his feet in the other. They would only speak two words to him.

Every day, or at least what Victor assumed was every day, they would demand, "bucket" which Victor quickly realized was for his waste. Victor would hand it over, and it would be replaced. Then, they would demand, "bowl," and Victor would hold it forward for mushy food to be deposited on it.

If Victor would not present them with either, than he would not get food or be able to rid himself of his waste. The hunger overtook his pride, and Victor gave into the system.

The room was very tall, at least fifteen feet, with blank concrete walls and no windows. The door was solid metal and the slit in it was impossible to open from the inside. Victor had once tried to scale the room by bracing against the smaller length. He had gotten about halfway up and slipped. His head cracked against the concrete, and he slipped into unconsciousness.

When he woke, his hair was covered in blood. His eyes blurred for a couple of days, and the dull thudding of the pain almost seemed to lessen the boredom of the cell.

Victor had been stripped before he had been shoved into the cell.

His eyes adjusted to the darkness. The only sound he heard were the screams of what seemed like
torture victims.

The isolation lasted for what seemed like a lifetime, and Victor had nothing to do but stare at the wall. The only discernible way to tell the passing of days was the delivery of food.

Victor begged. He wasn't proud. He got on his hands and knees and pleaded.

"I'm innocent. I'm innocent. Please let me go. I've done nothing."

A first, Victor cried and cried. Cried until he became delirious. Cried until his body seemed to shrivel up from dehydration. Cried until there were no tears left to cry.

Then, the screaming and raging came.

"Fuck you! Fuck you all. I did nothing. Let me go. You have no right. Let me out of here." Victor yelled and yelled.

No one replied. No one spoke to him.

"Why did you even fucking take me if you were going to leave me in here? Let me out!"

That didn't stop him. He pounded and pounded on the door. Screaming at his captors to let him go.

Once, he shoved his arm through the slit in the door when someone brought his food. They closed it forcefully on his arm, and he head a loud crack as his arm broke. Victor howled, they shoved his arm back into his cell, and Victor cradled it in pain.

He hugged his arm against his body, exhausted. No one was coming for him. No one was listening to him. No one gave a fuck about Victor.

Victor had never felt as alone in his entire life as he felt in that moment. He laid his head against the concrete and let sleep take him. The next day when they brought him food, Victor refused. And he did the next time, and the next.

He resolved to die in that cell. He had already experienced the void. Death was a gentle beast.

Victor smiled, at peace with his choice.

....

Death would not take him. The gnawing pain of hunger stayed, but Death refused him.

Victor must have finally slipped into insanity because all he heard was the manic laughter of Death, as if Death found this all too amusing.

....

If starvation wouldn't kill him, would falling from great heights? With a last burst of energy, he scaled the room to the ceiling and let himself fall headfirst.

The pain was unbearable.

....

He woke.
Victor didn’t even have it in him to cry.

....

Victor resumed eating.

....

Victor mediated. He crossed his legs, and thought of the old man in his village. He had told Victor that he had powers. Victor had listened to him for a while, even believed him for a bit. But the man had no proof.

He mediated on it here. There was nothing else to do. Here Victor was, unable to die. He must have some powers, unless it was the cruellness of fate where his only power was to avoid death, the one thing Victor wanted more than anything else in the world.

Powers. Maybe powers could get him out of here.

....

They finally came for him. They opened the door, and pushed a hood on him, yanking him out of the room.

It was almost kind in a way. They might have been handling him roughly, at least someone was touching him. They might have been yelling at him, but at least someone was speaking to him.

....

They chained him upright to a board before pulling off the hood. Sunlight steamed in from a vent on the ceiling, blinding Victor like light never had before. His eyes seemed to sear. When, they finally adjusted, Victor looked around the room. It was about four by four meters, and concrete much like the last.

Except there was a skylight, and two men staring at him. They looked to be fit and were wearing black tactical gear.

One had slightly darker brown hair than the other.

One came up to him, and held out water to Victor’s lips. Victor slurped it up greedily. The only liquid he got was the left-over juices from his daily meal.

It was cold and soothing like nothing ever had been to him before. Then, before Victor knew it, it was over. The man took the glass away.

He smiled at Victor.

The other man gruffly asked, "Your name is Victor von Doom?"

Victor swallowed, and said, "Yes."

His voice was horse from lack of use.

"You are from Latveria."

"Yes."
The man who had given Victor water smiled at him again, "Very good Victor. We apologize for leaving you in there for so long. It's been quite busy around here."

Victor flinched.

"Now, I know you don't want to go back into that cell, so if you cooperate, we will get you a bigger new one, maybe even with a skylight. What do you say?"

"Yes," Victor croaked, "But I don't know anything. I'm not a spy. I haven't lived in Latveria since I was seventeen."

The man frowned at him, as if disappointed, "Now Victor…" he started.

The other man with the gruff voice said to his partner, "I told you we should have left him in there longer."

Victor's eyes blew out wide, and he struggled against his chains. No. No. NO.

He would not go back in that cell. He knew that they were playing a perverse good-cop bad-cop shtick. Victor had seen in the American detective movies, but it was effective. Very very effective.

"No. no, please don't put me back."

Water man smiled at him again, and said gently, "Okay Victor, but you have to cooperate with us."

Victor nodded frantically.

"Who were your handlers in New York?"

Victor swallowed. He needed to make something up. His mind whirled.

"Umm…." He licked his lips. The men looked at him expectantly.

He finally settled on, "Jack and Karen Black. They live in… the Upper East Side. Jack is a butcher. Karen does hair," Victor rambled. He had no clue if those were convincing people for sleeper agents, but they thought he was a sleeper agent, so Victor clearly had no clue.

The gruff man grunted, and muttered disdainfully, "How quick to flip on your own country. How pathetic."

Water guy shot gruff man a look. Then he turned to Victor and said, "Thank you. Now, can you tell me what your purpose was in being at Columbia?"

What would the purpose be at putting a sleeper agent at the college? The first idea that popped into Victor's mind would be to try and convert the professors. That would seem believable, right? But no, they could end in one of his Professors being kidnapped and tortured like he was.

Victor would not wish what he was going through on anyone.

Victor finally said, "They wanted me to learn American scientific methods."

Gruff man grinned, and said, "Would you look at that, finally those damned commies admit that the US is far outpaces them."

Water guy rolled his eyes, then he asked Victor, "Tell me what you know about the KGB? Who are your superiors? Who else is stationed in New York? What are your long term goals."
Victor blanched. What did Victor know about the KGB? Nothing. Victor knew absolutely nothing about the KGB. Not even enough that he could conveniently lie.

"I… uh…" Victor stumbled.

Victor shook his head. "I don't know anything," he admitted.

Water guy sighed. "Victor, do we have to do this again?"

"No, no, please no," he begged.

"Then, Victor, you have to tell me something. This was going so well."

Victor shook his head. "I don't know. I really don't know. Please don't put me back in the room."

Gruff man grunted. He made a motion to the door, and then another two men came in, one with a black hood. Victor started to struggle against the chains.

"Please don't put me back into the room. You promised. Please."

Water man sighed, "When you are ready to talk again, you can have that bigger room."

The hood was then forced over his eyes.

….

Victor felt pathetic.

….

He tried to remember the number of days he spent back in the room. It must have been a week before they dragged him out again. This time, Victor had concocted an elaborate story in his brain of harsh Russian RGB superiors, another fake female sleeper agents at the college.

He hoped that it would be enough to get him into a bigger room with a skylight.

Before Victor could open his mouth to tell his lies, gruff man fixed his gaze on him, and told Victor, "You lied to us last time Victor. I don't appreciate being lied to."

They water boarded him.

Victor, not for the first time, wished he could die.

….

If Victor thought the cell he lived in was small, it was nothing compared to the small wooden crate dog crate he was shoved in. He had lost so much weight during his confinement that he fit in tiny box, with his head shoved between his knees. They left him in there for almost two days.

His neck ached. His muscles cramped as he couldn't move in the space. The darkness and the claustrophobia ate at him.

Water guy stared at him with disappointed eyes, and even pitied him with more water when they yanked him out. He even apologized to Victor.

…..
They had strapped Victor to the board again, and Victor ignored the questions.

He finally asked, "Isn't America about freedom and fairness? Don't your citizens have rights? Isn't what you're doing illegal?"

Griff guy actually smiled at him. He told Victor, "You're not an American citizen. Plus, we're private contractors. We aren't the US government. We were hired by the US government. Big difference."

Victor supposed it was.

....

Time passed. Victor learned gruff guy's name – Brian – and Water man's name – Daniel – and slowly Victor seemed aware of others. There was The Doctor, an elderly gentleman who never spoke. There was The Female, a beady eyed thing who was far crueler than even gruff guy.

Victor never did get a bigger cell.

....

One day, they went too far. Victor should have died. The blood seeped out of his body at far too quick a rate, and Victor heard Brian shouting orders.

They unlocked his chains, and The Doctor rushed in to try and stop the bleeding.

It was futile.

Victor should die.

He didn't. He just laid there.

The Doctor spoke, "I don't understand. It's like his blood is replenishing itself."

"What?"

"This is not normal."

"No shit it's not normal. That bastard just doesn't die. He's some kind of freak. They say he was in an accident with some sort of machine at the college, maybe..."

Daniel's softer voice floated into his ears, "What sort of machine makes it so someone can't die?"

"He's a freak of nature."

In that moment, Victor snapped. He didn't want to spend the rest of his life in a cell. If he was going to live, he was going to live. Death wasn't going to take him, so maybe it was time for him to take life back.

An energy started to bubble up inside of him. A concentrated anger that made him feel more alive than ever. He could do this. He would do this.

It seemed to burst out of Victor explosively. The energy roared out of his body and consumed the room; it disintegrated the people around him.

Brian's eyes grew wide and his mouth formed "what the – " before his body warped from
the power that Victor tapped into. Even the walls bent to Victor's power as everything around him dissolved like paper in water.

....

He woke up in a crater in a tropical rainforest. When he made it to civilization, he learned that they had been keeping him in the Philippines.

He scared the hell out of some villagers when he stumbled into their streets naked. One of the villagers gave him a thick green blanket that he wrapped around himself with a cloak. He liked the way that it covered the torture scars that littered his body and the hood shielded his face.

The way the villagers whispered about him and reverently bowed their heads as they walked by, Victor wondered if they thought of him as a god risen from hell.

He liked the idea of that.

....

He was now an international terrorist. At least, according to the newspapers.

He had been held for five years.

Five years had slipped by Victor. It was 1967. Everything was louder. The skirts were shorter. The colors were brighter than Victor ever remembered them. Tensions seemed to have risen between the United States and Russia. America was still at war with Vietnam. They were racing to get people on the moon. Many launches had failed.

....

Victor returned to New York. He didn't stay long.

....

Sue and Reed were gone. Sue and Reed were gone. Sue, Reed, and little Johnny were dead. And Ben, the man who Reed had asked to be his best man after Victor had been... arrested. Victor didn't feel his bad about that one.

He wondered what they had thought of him. He wondered if they had come to believe that he was a spy.

It was Reed's fault. He had said something, he even admitted it, to someone. Reed had destroyed his face and sent him to hell, and Victor couldn't even be mad at him because he was dead.

They had launched themselves into the sky and had never come back.

....

Victor visited their graves. It was stupid. There weren't even bodies buried there.

He sat there. He told them, "Once I fancied myself in love with you. But I think that I liked the idea of it more than I actually liked either of you. I wanted people to stand with me against the world, but I realize now that was naive of me. I was meant to be alone, and you were meant to die."

And Victor left.
He wandered Asia, and realized he wasn't aging. He met the Sorcerer Supreme.

He studied for a while, and learned *magic*. But it wasn't really magic. Magic implies something outside of science, and this most definitely was not.

The green cloak became his symbol. He added a mask to avoid the whispers. No matter what magic he tried to heal his scars, they stayed.

Death laughed at him.

He realized that all humans were the same, and that wars were pointless. They were fought for pride and only brought pain.

Communist. Democratic. Both governments were corrupted and had pitfalls. Both types saw themselves as superior.

They valued their ideology over human lives and cared little for who they hurt in their little game. They would be willing to destroy the world in nuclear holocaust if only they could win the game. They would rather there be nothing than a world ruled by the other ideology.

It disgusted Victor.

The air in the bar seemed to slide around Victor as he walked, as if the years of constant smoking in the premises strained it heavy. His eyes adjusted to the dark.

The velvet of his dark green cloak scraped the ground as he walked, and a goblin sitting at the bar eyed him suspiciously. There was a game of poker being played off to his right, and a hag had the largest stack of chips around her. The male Half-Veela at the table looked panicked, as if he wasn't used to losing.

Victor sat at a table, keeping his cloak in mask on. A waiter hesitated before choosing not to approach him.

Finally, a man slid into the seat opposite of him. He had dark hair that was brushed over neatly and pale eyes. His suit was well kept of fine material.

The man frowned at him, and stated, "You lack an aura."

Victor choose to say nothing. He knew as much. Most magical beings sensed something off about him; he had been told by many that –

"It's almost like you're dead," the man eyed him suspiciously.

Victor chuckled, and said, "I wish."

The man's face twitched, as if irritated by his reply. He said, "They say you are the man who cannot be killed."
"Do they?" Victor asked. He wondered who they were.

"Are you?"

"Depends on whose asking," Victor said, evaluating the man.

The man held out a pale speckled hand, and smiled insincerely at him. He told Victor, "Tom Riddle. Now I was wondering if you could tell me about your little trick."

....

The man was furious when Victor would not tell him his secrets. Victor would not wish his curse on anyone, even slimy British men whom had delusions of grandeur.

....

Victor had hated Hitler as a child, believing the man to be the cause of his parent's death. When he grew, his view of the Second World War became more nuanced. Oh, he still despised Hitler, but he also grew to hate the greed of governments and men.

When he discovered the magical world, he learned that there was another face behind the devastating war.

Grindelwald.

Staring at the man who had engineered World War II and effectively killed his parents, Victor wondered if he should feel more anger. Instead, he just felt more disconnected.

The man was huddled in the corner of a cell, his body almost held together by the rags hanging off his figure. He didn't move when Victor approached the cell.

"You know, I had thought I would want to kill, but I don't. I just find you pathetic," Victor said, almost musing to himself.

The man blinked lazily, and laughed. "I killed someone you love, didn't I?"

"Yes," Victor answered flatly.

The man looked up at him, and said, "I killed a lot of people that were loved."

"Was it worth it?" Victor asked.

The man shrugged, "In the end, Death takes us all. What does it matter if fate decides on earlier rather than later. I was once trying to escape Death, but now I welcome it like an old friend." Then, the man's eyes sharpened on Victor, "Expect for you. Death, is not coming for you, is it?"

"What do you know?" Victor snarled.

Grindelwald smiled at getting a rise out of Victor, "At first, I thought you were the Master of Death. But no. You're not. It's like you're a bastardized version."

"What do you know?"

"You're Death's whipping boy, not his master. He doesn't love you enough." The man chuckled. His chuckle turned until a full-blown belly laugh. Victor stood there as the man laughed, and laughed, and laughed.
This was the man who had orchestrated the death of millions. Allowed to live in a cell, dressed in rags, getting amusement out of life.

He should be dead. He should die.

The void would be too kind to the man. Why give him something Victor wanted so dearly?

....

Tom Riddle and the Knights of Walpurgus desired to take over magical Britain. Tom Riddle asked him for assistance. He was going by Lord Voldemort these days. Victor turned him down.

He was just another Westerner who wanted power for the sake of power, and would only bring death and destruction with it.

....

The roads of Latveria were mostly still dust, and the people he saw were bone thin. It was like he had stepped back into the past, and last twenty years of innovation and achievements had slipped by his country.

He stood in the doorway of his old orphanage only see more children huddled around a fire. How had his country come to this? This was his home, and Victor had left it.

The United States and the Russians were playing a proxy war in his country. The government was communist, but it was being fought by underground revolutionists who wanted to instill a democratic government.

And yet, those revolutionaries were being backed by the United States and were just as keen to ignore the people's will.

Through this madness, the common person suffered as the government failed and subsistence farming was converted to cash crop farming.

No, no, Victor couldn't stand this. Not in his country. Not with his people. Not when he had been hurt so much by this war already.

....

Within two months, Victor had gained control of the government. With magic, it had been easy. Latveria was small. He instilled himself as President for life, and created a functioning government around him. He then closed off the country to any outsiders.

Victor knew that he would rule much better than a government controlled by outside interests. He cared about his people. Victor would protect them.

From the US, from the USSR, and even – if need be – from himself.

....

Victor found that ruling a country didn't take near as much time as he thought it would.

He had created a functioning democracy around his Presidency. Victor had the final say on laws, and he spent much of his power trying to develop the country. Infrastructure, schools, sustainable energy and business were his main political points.
Nonetheless, Victor still had time on his hands. Time, and a renewed desire to delve back into his projects. Maybe, now that he was far more learned in magic he would be able to solve the question of the void.

If he was going to live forever, then maybe he could bring his family back to live with him.

....

Lord Voldemort failed. Harry Potter survived the killing curse. This intrigued Victor.

....

Victor liked to read the Magical Theory academic journals. They kept him up to date, and helped with his own experimentation. But never had he been curious about somebody as much as Evan White. Mr. White, for all purposes, did not exist.

But his brain was brilliant, and these theories might just be what Victor was looking for.

....

This time, Tom Riddle meet Victor in his house. Victor sat on his throne, in his cape and his mask, above the self-styled Lord Voldemort. The man was no longer the beautiful youth he had been.

He had turned himself into a monster in the pursuit of immortality. Victor wondered, absently, if Death marred people on purpose during that pursuit. Was that Death's way of marking his unfavorable?

"Tom, it's good to see you old friend," Victor said.

Tom clenched his jaw. Victor knew it must have irked him to see Victor have what he wanted, immorality and a country to rule.

"You have moved up in the world," Tom said, his world coming out with a certain breathless quality.

"I have," Victor agreed.

"I would like your alliance," Tom stated. "I would like your help with the brat."

"The brat?" Victor asked, leaning forward in his throne.

Tom gave a toothy grimace, and said, "Harry Potter."

Victor hummed. The boy intrigued him.

Victor asked, "What would I be gaining from this alliance?"

....

Victor went to New York, and observed the child.

When he realized, he laughed manically. Harry fucking Potter was the Master of Death. The one that Grindelwald wanted to be, and that Voldemort wanted to destroy. He was also Evan White. Tom Riddle had no clue what he was going against.

Victor felt a flash of excitement in his bones. He had not been this entertained in decades. He would
befriend Harry and play Tom. In the end, though, Victor would be the ultimate winner.

After all, as life had proven, Victor really only had himself to depend on.

Chapter End Notes

And that's a wrap for Victor's POV. That was so much fun to write, you guys. I mean, it was emotionally draining, and I cried a couple of times, but I now love Victor von Doom. He's my baby.

I've also decided to nickname these last two chapters Victor von Doom's adventures through the multiverse.

So, question time!

1) What are your thoughts of Victor? Love him? Hate him? Pity him? Sue? Reed?

2) Do you see him as a villain now? Ally?

3) Do you guys like these interludes? I don't intend to make them every chapter or even every five chapters, but what do you think of them when they come up? Do you feel like you have a better grounding in this world?

4) Any other thoughts feelings on this chapter and story in general!

5) Also, spelling errors that I can/should correct.

Also, side note, does the dynamic I gave the three of them in college remind anyone vaguely of Danny Phantom's parents and Vlad in college? IDK of the demographic reading my story, or how many of you would be familiar with that particular cartoon, but I realized much later that Victor is Vlad Masters, and I'm strangely okay with that.

Anyways, thank you all for reading. I love you all so much! Back to regular scheduled programming next chapter ;)

Love, Emm

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