Here there be Dragons, I Suppose

by quicksilver28

Summary

Percy gets a job as Tony Stark's PA. Hi-jinks and snark ensues.

Notes

i've been feeding this plot bunny ever since Forward to the Fray. i'm not sure how long or short this will be or if i will doing a series of drabbles. it's all up in the air. but this story is helping me get back into the writing groove so that i can tackle 'You Gotta'

Enjoy!
"Circe's Magnificent Rump, that's a good cuppa." Percy slumped further into the leather office chair with a sigh.

The tea was strong and dark with a twist of lemon, just the way he liked it. He drained the rest with one gulp and tilted the stark white cup into the light, trying to read the sodden leaves swirled at the bottom and up the sides before setting it down on the matching saucer with a sharp click.

The bottom of the cup was stamped in black ink with the MACUSA logo, its eagle with wings spread looking fearsome even from the bottom of a small ceramic cup. He knew without turning it over that the bottom of the saucer would be similarly stamped and smirked. For a secret government agency, the Magical Congress of the United States of America sure liked to put their stamp on everything.

He waved away the solemn house elf offering more tea from a large silver kettle and let it take the cup and saucer before turning to the woman standing behind the large wooden desk who stood facing the large picture window that looked out unto the New York skyline.

Her back was to him, her mauve wizarding robes cut simply and tailored perfectly to her small frame. Wisps of white blonde hair were pulled taut and collected at the top of her head in an intricate knot work of braids and white gold barrettes that seemed to snake through her wavy lockes.

She was part Fae, Percy was sure, but she would never admit nor deny no matter how many times
he'd asked. Her family name was Higgs, her given name Wendy but Percy would bet galleons that she had a 'Raedself' or a 'Hefeyedd' or a 'Hidhogg' somewhere in her family tree.

Hey voice was musical as she turned with a smile. "I remember well the time I spent 'across the pond' as you Brits love to say. I know how much you people love your tea."

He returned the easy smile. "Not as much as you yanks love your coffee"

She raised a sharp pale eyebrow. "Don't you start with that again. Especially around hereabouts. Some of us practically mainline the stuff. Especially with everything that has been going on these days."

She stepped away from the window and took a seat in the massive wingback chair behind her desk. She seemed like a child sitting behind the ornate wooden desk, placing her elbows on the top and leaning her cheek against one fist.

Percy clasped his hands and rested them on his stomach, idly scratching his belly through the striped white button down shirt and thin grey pullover. His jeans were faded and well-worn and his rough boots left traces of dust every time he shifted them.

His dusty leather jacket had been slung over the back of his chair along with his "All in One CatchALL" bottomless satchel that looked as if it had seen many better days. Considering it had been his constant companion on his misadventures through Africa and South America over the past year or so, he was surprised the charms on the bag still had any magic left in them.

"Does this have anything to do with why you brought me here?"

Higgs gave him and innocent look that he didn't believe for a hot second,

"I … may … have heard that you were on American soil and thought that we could catch up on the old days. I've never forgotten everything you've done for us while you were still with the Ministry of Magic. Fudge was an idiot to the tenth power and if we'd had to put up with him then most of the negotiations between our governments would have fallen through within the first few days of talks. You saved a lot of time and grief for both sides Percy."

Percy shrugged, "I just tried to help where I could. Bones and Thicknesse did most of the heavy lifting."

"Don't sell yourself so short. People in the right circles know how much work you put in behind the scenes. We are not blind to the politics of the wizarding world. Besides, you've made quite and name for yourself among the Goblin Horde and the International Confederation of Wizards in the past year, dealing with Potters and Grangers estates as you did."

A sly smile crept onto her face and she wiggled an eyebrow at him. "I've heard stories through the grapevine, unconfirmed of course, about your helping the Djinn at Hamunaptra negotiate some delicate matters back in Egypt. Or how you helped save an African tribe who had disturbed the lair of a pair of mated Nundus. Even the Caipora in the rainforests around Castelobruxo have taken to calling you 'Jabali' or 'Fire Mane'. I am sure that there is a very good story to go with that."

Percy choked, sitting up. "How did you …? Nobody knows… Wendy!"

Her laughter was like the tinkling of glass. "MACUSA has eyes everywhere and our magical fingers in many pies. You must tell me the whole story about that some time. All the report said was that the trickster forest spirits consider you a 'master opponent' and hold you in high esteem."

Percy blushed and cursed his pale skin despite the tan he'd manage to get traipsing through the wilderness.

"Let's just say I learned a few things from all the pranks the twins played on me over the years and leave it at that shall we?"

He leaned back again with a rueful smile, "So... are you finally willing to tell me why you had me picked up and brought here within hours of me entering the country Higgs... and don't give me bollocks about catching up. You could have at least waited until I'd gotten a hotel room at least. A meal and a hot shower. Some sleep. You could have given me until tomorrow."

"Tomorrow would have been too late." Higgs looked down at her hands and her face turned serious. "Something's come up and we only have a small window of opportunity. We may never get another chance like this."

She looked up and her eyes were sharp and shone with tempered magical power.

"What do you know about the Infinity Stones?"

Percy looked up at Stark Tower from across the street, takeaway cup of coffee in one hand and overcoat slung over the other, his trusty satchel hung from his shoulder. They'd tried to give him a sleek briefcase along with the muggle wardrobe- or nomag wardrobe as they called it over here- but he'd outright refused.

It was one thing to put on the drab clothes and spit-shone shoes ensemble he'd left behind with his life in Wizarding Britain but it was a whole other trial to step right back into the shoes of "Percicles Weatherby" - official bootlicker. It wasn't exactly the same but he needed desperately to cling to the carefree life he'd been leading for the past fourteen months or so. His satchel was a road map of his adventures and he wasn't going to let go of it easily.

It was a bit of a strain to look up at the gargantuan tower of glass and steel and soon enough Percy was rolling his neck and striding across to the large glass doors on the building. The central air was brisk against the temperamental New York weather and he gave a small sigh of relief.

A brief chat with the security desk and soon he was riding the elevator with a set of directions and a newly issued visitor's pass clipped to his jacket. He leaned back against the metal wall of the lift and thought back to his conversation with Higgs the day before.

"I'm not a spy Wendy" he huffed, flipping through the thick file they had on Tony Stark AKA Iron Man. "Don't you have people who do this sort of thing? I'm not sure that I can be of any real help with this."

Higgs came around her desk to perch on its edge. "That's just the thing... we don't need a spy. We have enough of those. We had people in SHIELD before they collapsed, we even have someone at Stark Industries but they never seem to get any further than low level management. I need someone who can successfully navigate the world of muggle business."

She raises a hand to stop Percy from speaking. "This opportunity is something completely different and needs to be handled with the utmost care. Completely off the books. Just throwing out a fishing line and waiting to see what bites."

Percy's eyes narrowed. "For how long?"
"A few months at most… just until our other people can find out more about the stone. All the business with Loki of Asgard a few years ago has had MACUSA's petticoats ruffled and we've been scrambling to play catch up ever since. Many just want to dismiss it as 'that Alien Business' or 'the crazy nomag kerfuffle' but some of us here know that what affects the nomag world will eventually spill over into ours."

She sighed heavily, suddenly looking tired. "Can you imagine what people will think if they discover a whole community of people with similar abilities to the Asgardian Prince?... living not on some far away planet but right next door? We need to get ahead of this and we need someone close to Stark to do it."

"Why Stark?" Percy asked, waving a hand at the open file, "... it says here that he's retired from the Avengers. He's out of the hero business after that whole thing in Sokovia."

"He may not be part of the team but he still bank rolls them and provides the technology they need. We cannot get someone close to the Avengers and the newest iteration of SHIELD is more secretive and paranoid than its predecessor. Hydra is a total bust as every agent we sent to infiltrate them has either been captured or killed. Stark is the only point at which we could gain potential access to the information we need."

Percy crossed his arms and leveled a narrow glare at the diminutive woman.

"What exactly do you want from me Higgs? I won't spy on the man for you nor will I help you steal from him. What do I have that your Aurors and Unspeakables don't?"

Higgs hopped off the edge of the desk and took a seat in the second office chair next to Percy. Her eyes dropped to the file open in his lap and her fingers drummed a pattern on the wooden arm of the chair.

"All we want is someone to give us a heads up if the Tesseract or anything like it appears. I won't ask you to do anything else. I just need to you watch and wait, even if it's just for a while. I don't want you to compromise your ethics or your morals. We don't want to hurt Stark or take what is his. We just need a horse in this race.

I need an Administrator… someone who is not well known in the Magical United States. I need someone I can trust to handle themselves and to do the right thing. There is nobody I can task with this right now that is skilled enough to pull it off or wouldn't have some sort of private agenda. Most of the Magical Congress don't even believe that we need to be worried but a few of us know that trouble could find its way to our doorstep too easily. We need to be prepared for when that time comes."

Percy bowed his head in thought, taking one deep breath after the other.

"No Spying?"

"No."

"No Stealing?"

"None."

"What about my magic… won't it affect his technology?"

"We have a solution for that. Small gold Ring, Goblin charmed."
"So… what do I have to do?"

"well… Stark is in the market for a new Personal Assistant. I figured if you can still herd cats as well as you did back at the ministry then you can handle one eccentric billionaire."

The elevator dinged and the doors slip open, bringing Percy back to the present. Tipping back the last of his coffee, he straightened his shoulders and strode out of the lift, throwing the empty cup into a nearby bin.

The short hall opened up into a large airy space with plush carpeting, dark green plants and adequate seating for the dozen or so other persons who had all turned to look at him as he'd entered.

A large curved receptionist's desk dwarfed the space and the large silver Stark industries decal on the wall behind stood out against the dark wood paneling. It was aloof and inviting at the same time and Percy silently commended the interior decorator.

He approached the receptionist with a polite smile and received one in return, handing over his security pass for her inspection and watching as she ticked his name on a roster. The list itself was short and a quick count and glance at the others told him that he was the last to arrive.

There were seven other hopefuls, men and women ranging from fresh from college to middle aged. He thought there would have been more seeing that the position was so lucrative. Stark PA's had a tendency to go on to bigger and better things… just look at Pepper Potts. Personal Assistant to CEO of a Fortune 500 Hundred Company in less than a decade.

He's the last to go in, having watched the others make their way out looking either dejected or angry or some sort of weird mix of confused and somewhat constipated. The receptionist waves him in and he takes a fortifying breath before gripping his satchel and going in. Higgs' people could only ensure him a place on the list. Getting the position was all up to him.

He pauses at the door to the interview room, confronted with the sight of Pepper Potts herself. And next to her, dressed in causal jeans and Tshirt with sneakers and a sport coat, is Tony Stark, slumped in the chair and playing with his phone, looking bored beyond belief.

Ms. Potts looks up from where she is perusing his file and motions him to a seat. She grills him thoroughly about the CV that Higg's team had put together for him. All the while Stark never looks up from his phone.

"So Mr. Westerly… We have one final question." Ms. Potts clasps her hands over the closed open file and looks up at him with a searching gaze as Stark glances up from his phone for the first time to stare at Percy.

"How would you remove oil stains from a Ermenegildo Zegna Bespoke Suit?"

Percy blinked, "Grisaille, Cashmere or Merino?"

Stark raised a sculpted eyebrow. "Either… All"

Percy tilted his head in thought. "Grisialle or Merino, corn starch or talcum to absorb the oil the treat gently with cleaners until the stain is removed. Cashmere? Throw it out and buy a new one."

Starks laugh was harsh and rusty, as if it hadn't been used in a while. Potts stared at the man for a few seconds in shock before turning back to look at Percy with a trembling smile.
"I like this one." Stark sighs, twisting his chair from side to side. "Tell the others to go home."

He turns to give the redhead a curious gaze from above his crimson lensed shades and pouts.

"Will that be all Ms. Potts? I'm bored out of my mind here. There's genius a-wasting every second y'know. I can practically hear the money trickling out of the coffers. It's a tragedy."

She gives him a indulgent smile and a nod. "That will be all Mr. Stark."

He is out of the door without another word. Ms. Potts closes the file in front of her and sits back in her chair. Percy meets her sharp gaze steadily and after a few seconds, she tilts her head with a smile and nods, finding satisfaction with some unknown that she sees in him.

"I guess this means I'm hired?" He ventures.

Potts brushes her flame coloured hair off her shoulder with a smirk.

"I don't know. Do you really think you have what it takes to deal with being Personal Assistant to Anthony Stark? Are you ready for the pressure that comes with a job such as this?"

Percy gave her a wry look. "I grew up the middle child of seven siblings, was head prefect at a school of over three hundred randy kids and basically ran my old bosses department for him while he was having his head surgically removed from his arse. I know how to handle pressure.

"Besides…" He gave a cheeky grin. "… and the perks are nothing to sneeze at either."

Potts laughed and stood, leaning over the table to stick out her hand.

"Welcome to Stark Industries Mr. Westerly. Let's head down to HR and see about getting you settled in."

Percy stood and grasped it, giving it a firm shake.

"Thank you Ms. Potts. I think that I am going to like it here."
Chapter 2

Ms. Potts… Pepper as she would rather be called, was true to her word as she took him down to HR and got his paperwork expedited. After signing what seemed to be his life away, he was given a security card with a horribly awkward photo of his face and a brand new StarkTab still in the box. Ms. Potts… no sorry, Pepper, informed him that the relevant information would be forwarded to the machine and that he had two days before he was expected to turn up for duty.

It was like getting swooped up into a whirlwind of competence and paperwork that eventually left him standing in the front of the building, a bit dazed and dazzled, holding a brand new tablet computer. It took him over the course of lunch at a nearby Chinese restaurant to figure out how to turn on the damnable thing. He'd dealt with this level of technology before but it seemed that Stark based Technology was truly leaps and bounds beyond all others.

The user interface was friendly and soon enough he was fiddling with all the little bits and bobs on the screen, following the easy step by step instructions on how to set up his email and to use the Google to search and find almost anything under the sun.

He even spent a good half an hour, nibbling on char su pork and imagining the logistics of a wizarding equivalent to the search engine. A Magigoogles. He chuckled to himself, swiping his mouth with the thin paper napkin and tucked the tablet, box and all into his satchel, slinging it over his shoulder.

Higgs and company had gotten him an apartment, a re-purposed MACUSA safe house currently off the books. It was a shoe box of a place really, surely not meant for anyone spending more than a few days; but after spending most of the last year with limited access to clean water and indoor plumbing, he was glad to have a place to call his own. The cramped quarters reminded him of the old house at Ottery St. Catchpole and he felt a sharp pang of longing for his old life there.

Waking up to chickens clucking and the old poltergeist banging on the pipes upstairs. His mother yelling at the twins as they stomped down the stairs and the smell of frying bacon. The rustling of pages as his father read the Daily Prophet and Ginny squealing with laughter as Ron made funny faces behind their mother's back.

God, it hurts to think of it even now. His darling little sister.

He takes a breath and steadily tucks the pain away until he can breathe once again.

Most of the furniture is old and lumpy and the kitchen is dingy. Shadows fall long and dark across the room as his windows look unto a narrow alley squeezed in by a hulking old warehouse turned into apartments. The bedroom is marginally better as it's grubby window faces sunlight, even with the hazardous looking fire escape that seems to be holding unto the building by its rust alone.

The bed is the only redeeming feature as someone must have transfigured it from what was probably a pitiful disaster into the neat and comfortable haven it was now. The bathroom was basically a shower with a sink and toilet in it and the closet was laughable at best.

At least it was a place to stay until he could find another. It had been disconcerting the way Higgs' assistant Sanderson, had all but laughed in his face when he mentioned going apartment hunting, shaking his head in obvious pity and walking away, his laughter echoing down the corridor.

His only personal effects so far was the framed picture of his family he'd snuck out of England and
a small cactus he'd set on the window sill in order to bring some colour and life to the drab place.

Kicking off his shoes and throwing his satchel on the edge of the bed, he flopped face first into the clean, soft bedding with a groan. As he rubbed his face into the cloth, he mentally made a list of the things that he would have to tackle in the two days grace Potts had given him.

Um… Pepper, not Potts. He'd have to keep reminding himself. Hn. Americans and their informal ways of addressing one another. How tiresome. He hoped Stark would be amenable to being addressed formally, he doubted that he could call the man Tony without feeling insolent. He would have to address that issue when it occurred he supposed.

He didn't have much in the way of money, the nest egg he'd tucked away for himself in secret had been whittled away during his time overseas and while he was far from destitute, he was actually glad that he'd gotten a job so quickly after arriving in America. Higgs had been able to re-route some funding into a local bank and it had been just enough to secure some muggle clothes for the interview and other necessities.

He would have to spend the rest wisely until his first paycheck and then go on from there. It would not be too much of a problem, he was no stranger to being frugal. Molly Weasley was the queen of squeezing the value out of every galleon and he'd been an avid student in his youth.

He was half way through the list and sinking into a comfortable doze when a sharp knocking jolted him awake with a half mumbled "Wah?"

The knock came again, this time to the jaunty tune of 'Shave and a haircut.' Percy pouted, grumbling as he pushed himself off the bed and stumbled towards the door, almost tripping over his discarded shoes, cursing and hopping on one foot to balance himself and he scrambled for the door.

"Hecate Dammit Wendy, can't you give me minute to myself?" he yanked the door open with a growl, only to freeze at the sight of his new boss, hand still in the air. "Mr. Stark? I… What… huh?"

Good job Percy, eloquent as always.

Stark lowered his hand with a grin and a raised eyebrow. "First thing's first… Who is Wendy and why won't she leave you alone? Jilted lover? Secret admirer? Obsessed stalker?"

He side steps a gaping Percy into the small apartment and makes a sound of utter disgust.

"Oh My God, this is where you live? How can you even live here? Look at that… is that asbestos? I'm pretty sure that that's asbestos. And look at this furniture. I swear to Thor that something just moved under that cushion. I can practically feel the mould entering my lungs right now…"

Stark has been carefully stepping around the room, making sure not to touch anything physically; making scandalized faces and noises as he made a full circuit and ducked into the bedroom only to duck back out just as quickly.

It took a few seconds for Percy to overcome his surprise and close the door, leaning against it as he let the other man wind himself down.

"What can I do for you Mr. Stark? You do know that I don't start my duties as your Personal Assistant for another two days." he said with a soft sigh.

Stark grinned at him and shoved both his gloved hands in the pockets of his designer jeans.
"I know… Pepper told me. Or at least I think she told me. She is always saying a lot of things and I mostly listen. Well, I listen sometimes anyway. She always reminds me of the important stuff. And lets ixnay on the 'Mr. Stark' business, Mr. Stark was my father and I am much cooler than him anyway….

Percy pinches the bridge of his nose with a tiny grimace. Called it.

"As for why I am here… well, it's because I wanted to get to know you. Did you know that your background check comes up as squeaky clean as a toddler's rap sheet. Not a step out of place since the womb. On paper anyway. And that got me wondering about you because within two seconds of meeting you, I knew that you were something different to your record. Something much more interesting."

"Two seconds you say?" Percy folds his arms across his chest. "Alright, Dazzle me."

"Your bag gave it away." Stark grins. "There's no way you bought it like that. That kind of wear and tear only comes from exposure to the elements… travel. From the patches to have sown on, I recognize two of the languages off the bat. Egyptian and Portuguese… Brazilian Portuguese actually.

There is also a hand carved African talisman hung on the zipper of the front pocket and a hand woven Peruvian beaded bracelet sewn carefully unto the strap. I'd say… a trip from England down to the horn of Africa then back up South America until with a hop, a skip and a jump… you got to the big apple. Somewhat of a long way round don't you think?"

"The journey though… what a ride. " Percy smirks, shaking his head. "You really are a regular Sherlock Holmes aren't you?"

"Elementary my dear Watson." Tony gives a dramatic bow, getting ready to throw himself unto the couch when he makes a face, flailing a little from actually touching anything. He tries to pose as if hadn't just been flailing about like a dork and gives a sheepish grin.

Percy runs a tired hands through his unruly hair. " And what if I had been an enemy? Why would you come to my apartment alone? Does anyone even know where you are right now? Do you know how dangerous this was? Why would you hire me at all if you suspected me of lying?

"You're interesting. Like the puzzle you get in a clear plastic bag… no box cover with a picture on it. The kind you have to work out for yourself. It's challenging and fun to see where the pieces go. To find out what the picture is at the end."

"You're bored." Percy deadpans. It's not a question.

"Yeah" Stark eyes shutter for a moment and he shrugs. "and besides, I didn't come here alone. Friday is with me." he takes a sleek phone from his pocket and an husky Irish lilt comes from the small speakers.

"Sure thing Boss, I have the Mark VII ready to deploy as well as your driver on standby. I also have both Ms. Potts and emergency services on speed dial, both of whom can be here in under three minutes."

"Thanks Fri… " Stark nods, turning to smirk at Percy, "See? Safe as houses."

He looks around the apartment. "Well… not this house anyway. This is actually the opposite of safe. Why are you living in this rat hole anyway?"
Percy narrows his eyes. "Some of us have no choice but to live in the places we can afford. Not all of us can live in ivory tower you know? Granted, this place is a rat hole but I am in the process of looking for something better."

A light turns on behind Stark's eyes and he bounces a little on his toes.

"Well, as owner of an actual Ivory Tower, I can solve that problem. Move in with me."

Percy blinked, "What?"

Stark's smile gets wider as he talks. "We can kill two birds with one stone. You can have a place to live that's not a petri dish of human despair and I can figure you out easier if you're closer to me. It's win win."

"What if I want my privacy, time to myself …. away from your crazy?"

"You'll have a whole floor to yourself. Friday won't peek and tell, not even for me… won't you girl?"

"I'll be the very soul of discretion." the phone says.

"I don't know…" Percy frowns.

"You don't have to pay rent." Stark offers.

Percy nods sharply, "Sold. Let me grab my things."

He ducks into the bedroom and stuffs his coat and family picture into his satchel, shoving his feet into his shoes and grabbing the tiny cactus from the window sill. Everything else is still packed in his bottomless bag. In less than a minute he's back with a surprised looking Stark.

"No need to rush on my account…." Stark chuckles at Percy in his crumpled suit, bag slung over his shoulder and cactus in hand. "… you wouldn't want to leave forget anything. Favourite rat maybe? Disease ridden blankets?"

Percy purses his lips, "Weren't you the one who couldn't get out of here fast enough? I should bring a rat with me, I'd like to see what you would do then Mr. Stark."

"Please don’t… they are hell on electrical wiring. You win." Stark puts his hands up in mock surrender, "… and I told you to quit it with the Mr. Stark thing. Call me Tony."

"Not a chance…. Mist… " Percy huffed. "Boss."

Stark gives him a shrewd look as the phone pipes up.

"I like it."

"You would" Stark shakes his head at the device in fond exasperation. He looks up at Percy and finally nods.

"I'll take it…. For now. I will get you to call me Tony though. Just you wait."

"With bated breath Sir." Percy intoned dryly.

Tony flinched, his smile falling before he blinks the shadow away and starts smiling again.
"Trust me… I'm nothing if not persistent. In the end I always get what I want."

"Keep telling yourself that Si… Boss."

Percy twisted the key to lock the shitty shoe box apartment one last time, slipping the single key under the locked door for Wendy’s people to retrieve. He’d have to make sure and send a picture of his new place to that twat Sanderson at MACUSA with the hashtag 'rent free' when he finally got a hang of American magical social media. It would be worth learning about it for the look on his face alone. Smug American arsehole.

He turned to follow Stark… no… Boss down the dark staircase, wondering how the man had managed to get up to Percy's apartment without freaking out at the state of the place and it's broken elevator but those thoughts flew away when they stepped out into the sun and saw the cherry red Ferrari Sergio convertible parked outside.

"She's a beauty isn't she?" Stark preened at Percy's gob smacked face.

Percy blinked away from the work of vehicular art and blushed hotly at Stark's smug grin. He slid into the passenger seat with a bitten back groan, fondling the custom dashboard with reverent hands. The engine purred to life and Stark deftly pulled the car out into the almost empty street. It was a wonder the car hadn't been stolen during the time in his apartment but he figured that Starks AI would be a good crime deterrent as any.

"Please tell me that one of the perks of this job is that I get to drive THIS someday."

Stark revved the engine, chuckling gleefully at the face Percy made as he gave a full body shudder. 

"Stick around and we'll see."

Well… Percy thought to himself, I may just do that.
Chapter 3

The Tower was a beaut and Percy told Stark as much, which had the man preening. With sleek lines and steel and smart glass everywhere, it was as audacious and daunting and gaudy as its owner and designer. Stark had slung the Ferrari into a private underground parking lot and had smirked smugly as Percy had all but drooled over his collection of wickedly beautiful cars.

A private elevator whipped them up to the personal floors, Stark explaining that the first fifty floors were rented out to various corporations, law firms, government offices and the like and the next fifty were allotted to SI and its various subsidiaries.

The remaining twenty floors had been retrofitted for personal use by the Avengers with apartments, labs, a state of the art gym, heated swimming pool, an indoor basketball court and bowling alley. There was even a fully functioning Café on the seventy fifth floor that kept SI employees caffeinated and stuffed to the gills with exquisite pastries.

Stark takes them to one of the guest suites, a spacious set of rooms that rival the Gryffindor sixth year dorms for size. Decorated in tasteful warm neutrals and boasting a well equipped kitchen and breathtaking floor to ceiling glass windows running along one side of the entire living space.

He introduces Percy formally to Friday, Stark's Go-To-Girl AI who comes across as cheeky with her lilting Irish accent and quick come backs to Stark's snarky irreverence. There is a look of fond exasperation on the darker man's face as he banters with the voice overhead that has Percy thinking about the times Ginny would needle ickle Ronniekins when he was being daft, which was pretty much all the time.

Their Father would shake his head and hide his grin behind his teacup while Ron turned red and stomped away, absently patting Ginny's head when she flopped unto the raggedly old couch next to him and stole a sip of his tea.

Percy exhaled sharply and turned his face away from his new boss is still chatting with the ceiling, blinking away the sting of angry tears as he forced himself to calm. Even after all this time, her loss still cut him just as deeply.

He begs off the rest of the tour, wincing a bit at how Stark's face fell but he was tired and hungry and smelled a bit ripe if he were being honest with himself.

"You do remember that you just hired me this morning right?" he sighed, rolling his tired shoulders.

"I've just escaped from the three ring circus that is your HR department where I had to fill out and sign more forms than I did for my final exams THEN Ms. Potts took me to get a general medical check where the vampires there took my blood, scraped my skin and plucked my bloody hair from my scalp. I'm sure they were just about to ask for either a semen sample or a prostate exam when Potts … fuck… Pepper took pity on me and rescued me from their dastardly schemes.

Any other time and I would love to see the rest of your tower and gape appropriately at Its wonders and your effervescent genius but I won't be able to fanboy good and proper over your toys if I don't get food, sleep and a shower in whichever order I can within the next few minutes. Understood?"

Stark's eyes shine with barely concealed amusement. "You think I'm effervescent?"

Percy gave him a flat stare. "That's what you got from everything I just said? Get out."
"Hey now…” Stark chuckled as Percy pointed resolutely to the door. "Do I have to remind you that you work for me now and that you are living rent free in my … what was it again… ‘Beaut’ of a tower’?"

Percy rolled his eyes and herded the shorter man towards the door. "Do I have to remind YOU that I don't actually report to work for another two days and it was YOU who came to my house and asked me to come and live here rent free?"

He finally got Stark out of the door and was about to shut it in the man's face when Stark faltered, rubbing his hand on his opposite arm and looking at anywhere but Percy.

"Uh… I have food… I can get food… if you want … later. You could come up to the penthouse for dinner…. If you wanted. You know."

Brown eyes finally rose to meet his and Percy nodded with a sigh.

"Will there be greasy American cheeseburgers and oily deep fried things?"

Stark's face brightened with a grin. "The greasiest of burgers and the oiliest of fried things."

"Ok." Percy nodded and shut the door in his face with a sharp snap, turning to lean against the door as he listened to Stark whistling off tune as he strode to the elevator.

Well old boy, Percy thought to himself as he slumped against the hard surface, closing his tired eyes, this is what you signed up for. Being no stranger to loneliness himself, Percy could see the cracks in Stark's façade as plain as the ones he'd seen in his own. Walking away from his own family had broken something in him that only his stubborn stupid pride had been able hold together.

Granted, he hadn't seen it as walking away from them at the time, more like rising above them and their seeming happiness to wallow in squalor like pigs in mud. He had actually thought that he could rise above his station within society and drag his family kicking and screaming up to the status they'd once enjoyed as pure bloods. He'd been so blind and foolish. So fucking ungrateful for everything his family had stood for. Had fought for. Had sacrificed and grieved for.

He dragged his feet to the bedroom, scooping up his bag as he went. It found a new home on a leather arm chair along with his jacket and shirt. He kicked off his shoes and trousers, slipping his boxers off and striding naked into the adjoining bath.

"Merlin's balls" he muttered at the swanky bathroom with hedonistic shower and Jacuzzi tub. He took a moment to look at himself in the mirror. His slim body almost gaunt from more than a year of hard living in the wilds of Africa and south America. His pale skin was tanned and peeling in places, red and splotchy in others. He could count his ribs if he raised his arms up above his head.

He had a large bruise on his leg from where a holy man from a Peruvian village had whacked him with his knobbed staff for his cheek and he rubbed at the brilliantly coloured skin with a grimace. Other than that his skin was unmarked and wasn't that a pity.

The last time he'd had someone take him down good was when he's stayed a few days at a ranch near the sea in El Sotano, Argentina. The owner of the farm had been a squib who hired Percy to get rid of a Nogtail that had been bringing ruin to neighboring farms. Percy had, after a week of tracking the creature, had been able call in a favour with the Departamento de Criaturas Mágicas in Rosario, the Magical Capital of Argentina, to procure an albino blood hound, the only way on record to get rid of the pig-like creature.
After all had been said and done, Thiago had invited Percy to his farmstead for dinner where he cooked Asado over an open flame, plying him with wine made from sweet pink skinned grapes. He’d then taken Percy’s hand and took him to bed where he worshiped Percy's body until the red head was moaning and weeping with pleasure.

He spent a few weeks there before moving on, never staying any one place for too long until he made the final jump to America. There hadn't been anyone else he'd been willing to trust since then and so the bruises had faded with time.

The shower was as good as he imagined it would be, the numerous shower heads, the hot water that never seemed to end. He was in heaven. The tiles floor was heated as well as the towel rack. The bed was fucking glorious and smelled clean and fresh as he burrowed into the bedding with an obscene sigh.

A few hours later he awoke to a chiming from his new stark tab, a confirmation email from HR about his paperwork, security clearance and his medical. He squinted at the information, making sure to read it all before sending back an affirmation. Tossing the tab unto the thick comforter, he sank back into the pillows with a sigh. His stomach rumbled loudly and he groaned as he heaved himself out of the bed and dug into his satchel for some clothes.

After slipping on a pair of muggle sweatpants and a Bulgarian National Team t-shirt he'd once gotten as a present from Victor, he stuffed his feet into a pair of old trainers and asked Friday if it was an appropriate time to call on Stark.

Stark's penthouse was fucking glorious and put Percy's personal suite to shame. The view of the city alone had him laughing a bit hysterically. Even Hogwarts's highest tower had nothing on this. And Percy had flown on dragon transport before.

Stark's cheerful greeting pulled him away from his musing and they ended up vegging out in front of Stark's huge telly, bags and boxes of greasy diner food spread out around them as they binged on old black and white episodes of Twilight Zone.

"What kind of name is Ignatious anyway?" Stark asked while he was making his way through a box of curly fries. "Did your parents hate you or something? Who names their kid that this day and age?"

Percy shrugged, "I know right. All my siblings have names like Fred, George, Charlie and Bill and I get stuck with bloody Ignatious Percicles. I was told that I was named after some long lost great uncle or something. At least I didn't get stuck with Aballach or Ximen or Nagelfar or something, so I'm somewhat grateful."

Percy almost went on to lament his last name but he remembered that he was no longer a Weasley, going by Westerly after fleeing Wizarding Britain. He took a large bite of his burger to keep his mouth from rambling as Stark chuckled, taking a pull from the straw of an enormous cup of soda.

"Gives a new meaning of living up to your name doesn't it? I know how that can be."

Percy scoffs, incredulous. "what the hell do you have to complain about Anthony Edward?"

Stark's chuckle is a little bitter. "It's not those names I have a problem with."

Percy pauses, setting down his burger and picking up his own enormous soda. He could empathize with that on a certain level. To be a Weasley had certain connotations in wizarding society. You had to be red haired, freckle faced, brave, outgoing and firmly on the side of the light… Gryffindor
through and through. In more recent years had added living in squalor and wearing hand me downs to the list of things that every pure blood worth their salt 'knew' about a Weasley.

He'd been born into the name, into how the world viewed him and no matter what Percy had done, no matter how he'd differed from his bothers and his parents, even his fellow Gryffindors, he'd never been able to throw off the heavy mantle.

Just as no matter how Stark… no Tony, tried to do good, make things better with his amazing genius and technology, the world seemed determined to paint him with the same brush as his father. Unable to truly ever escape the heavy chains of legacy that hung on the neck and shoulders like a punishment.

Percy offered Stark…no, Tony a deep fried pickle in commiseration and they shared a smile before finishing up their food. Percy burped and stretched, rubbing his full stomach with a pleased moan.

"That hit the spot."

Tony wiggled his eyebrows and bounced in his seat. "You ready to see the rest of the place now?"

Percy scratched at his stomach absently.

"I think I can work up enough of a fanboy experience to satisfy even your ego."

"Great" Tony clapped his hands and jumped up from the couch, knocking boxes to the floor.

"Oi..." Percy frowned. "Aren't you going to pick up after yourself?"

Tony blinked, looking down at the scattered debris of their meal. "Friday can take care of it."

Percy gave him the gimlet eye. "Friday doesn't even have hands. Also that's not her function."

Tony shrugged. "She can call for service."

That cheeky Irish lilt piped in. "I am actually programmed to see to the upkeep of all Stark residences which includes having a maid service on call twenty four seven."

Percy looked up at the ceiling, aghast. "You'd drag a maid all the way up here just to clean up your rubbish when you can take two minutes to clean up after yourself?"

The other man gave him a look that said 'No duh'.

"They are my employees. That's what I pay them for… in fact, that's what I pay you for."

"I'll give you that..." Percy nodded slowly, "… and even though I technically don't report for duty for another two days… I will, very graciously I might add, help YOU clean up the mess WE made."

Tony took a second to deliberate. "Then we can do the rest of the tour?"

Percy nodded, gathering up empty boxes and wrinkled greasy paper and started stuffing them into the plastic delivery bags.

"I promise to be patiently attentive and suitably impressed."

"Okay, cool." Tony smiled, scooping up boxes and paper by the armful, carrying it all into the kitchen where he dumped the lot into the garbage chute.
"You'll love it, I promise." he called over his shoulder, "It's amaze-balls."

Percy shook his head with somewhat fond amusement.

And, even though he'd only known the man for a short time, Percy found himself believing it.
i’m really enjoying the the organic flow my writing is taking for this story. there isn't much of a plot but more of a mish mash of guilty pleasures and seeing two of my favourite characters getting the care and love they need. thank you to everyone who had left Kudos and commented. i love you all.

Percy sat back in the sleek office chair and looked out beyond the gleaming glass desk that was the centre piece of his personal office, out unto the New York city scape. It was a master piece of darkened smart glass with hidden ports for connecting to Percy's tablet and phone.

On one corner sat his little cactus and the picture of his family in it's simple wooden frame. There were no drawers in the bloody thing, all other files being stored into tasteful inset filing cabinets with soft close drawers and touch keypads for securing sensitive documents.

Even though Tony had tried to convince him to go paperless, Percy still loved the feel of paper and the smell of ink too much to do so. He'd purchased a large charcoal colour leather blotter and a set of Parker gun mental ink pens. The clerk at the store had tried to sell him on custom engraved stationery but Percy had balked at the idea as he'd always wanted letterheads bearing 'from the desk of Percival Weasley' and could not bear to have his childhood wish warped by a different name.

Instead, he'd gotten a set of heavy letter writing paper with matching envelopes and correspondence cards. On the other side of the blotter, he'd set his tablet computer into its cradle and had set his new stark phone unto it's wireless charging pad.

Stark had taken one look at the phone Higgs and company had provided Percy with and scoffed in disgust, saying that no employee of his would ever carry around such a relic of obsolete tech. By breakfast the next morning, he'd woken to a brand new Stark phone in box at his door. A special edition Iron Man version with a LED arc reactor light set in the middle of its sleek red and gold case.

He'd spent most of the morning in bed, nibbling on buttered toast and sipping tea while the large television on the wall blared local and international current events. He'd fiddled with the new phone, setting up his ringtone and alerts, signing up for both muggle and magical social media sites. He'd taken somewhat perverse pleasure at sending that MACUSA twat Sanderson pictures of his swanky new digs, laughing at the angry face emojis sent back almost immediately.

That afternoon, he'd stepped out of the Tower for a late lunch at a small Peruvian hole in the wall restaurant before setting off to do some shopping. Stark had offered to go with him of course and no doubt he’d have been decked out in an expensive custom wardrobe before the day was done but Percy had wanted to do both some muggle and magical shopping that was best done alone.

Besides, Pepper had swept in and had hustled Tony into getting cleaned up and out to a lunch meeting with such efficiency that Percy felt a great desire to pull out a paper and pencil and take notes.

Shopping for suitable muggle clothes in New York was both simple and tedious but in the end,
Percy had been satisfied that he'd been able to build a good base for his business and casual wardrobe with the muggle credit card which Tony had pressed into his hand that morning, insisting that came as one of the perks of the job.

Percy had raised an eyebrow before nodding and expressing his sincere thanks and Tony, who'd been ready to argue the point, had stopped short and mumbled a stunned 'you're welcome' before letting himself be dragged away by a smirking Pepper.

After securing his muggle purchases in his satchel, he'd made his way to one of the Magical Districts hidden throughout the city. The entrance to Bismuth Avenue looked like a crowded and cramped dead end flea market with a hidden entrance to a large indoor market. The warehouse like space was large and open concept with colourful tents and stands and wooden kiosks lining clearly marked and brightly painted walkways while stores lined the walls.

The upper balconies were lined with cafes and restaurants with tree lined paved walkways where customers could promenade and watch the activity below. The uppermost level held various offices and high end custom craftsmen. The roof of the building had been spelled to look like an ornate massive stained glass structure ceiling that cast shifting vibrant colours over the entire market.

Percy browsed for a while, picking up some of his favourite brand of tea and a bottle of cologne Bill had given him that had run out halfway through Nigeria. The market was noisy and crowded and smelled like the strong herbs of the local apothecary and animal musk of the magical Menagerie. He bought some Ice Mice from a cherry young lady with a brightly painted cart and sampled some grilled lamb on a stick from a very forward young greek.

He took a short ride on the subway over to Battery Park where a secret path near Castle Clinton granted him entry into Hodthel, the elvish haven for non-human magical beings. Existing in what amounted to a heavily warded magical stasis bubble, Hodthel had been a sanctuary for non-humans since the nineteenth century, when it had still been known as West Battery.

Heavily wooded and bursting with exotic flora and fauna, the space hosted a variety of residents ranging from Satyrs to Half Giants to a small Centaur herd. Maintained and ruled by a group of High elves, it was a sanctuary for all those who were willing to adhere to its strict rules.

Gringotts Bank even had a small outpost there, a squat, domed, stone structure manned by a solo surly goblin. Behind him, a huge heavy vault door would swing open, revealing a tunnel to a sprawling underground forge where a contingent of Goblins lived and forged their metal crafts and weapons.

Percy ended up buying a colourful knitted afghan from a wood nymph that looked like fallen leaves in autumn and small foe glass from a crone in a dingy, smelly tent. He haggled with the surly goblin and eventually handed over far too many galleons to have a letter sent to Bill in Egypt, acquiescing defeat as the wretched creature grinned crookedly and pocketed the coins.

Evening was falling by the time he'd made his way back to the Tower, laying out his purchases and packing them away carefully. He sourced an iron and ironing board from the housekeeping staff, preferring to do his pressing himself even though Friday offered to get his things professionally laundered.

There had always been something calming about the repetitive motion that Percy enjoyed so one by one, he pressed and hung his new clothes. He emptied most of his satchel unto the bed, throwing away the rubbish and placing the bits and bobs he'd collected during his travels all over his room. His magical books and items went into a trunk he then tucked to the back of his closet.
while his toiletries and a few magical potions were sorted to the bathroom.

Having burned his wand long ago during his flight from wizarding Britain, he'd been forced to acquire a new magical focus during his first few months in the African Wilds. He'd ended up purchasing an athame made of intricately carved steel and a carved African snake wood handle. It had cost him a crap load of galleons and his last bottle of Dreamless Sleep potion but it had been worth it to feel his magic thrum through his fingertips once again.

He'd also purchased a sturdy leather sheathe for the blade which he now tucked under the pillow before packing the rest of his things. Feeling sweaty and grimy from hours exploring the city, he took a shower and put on some jeans and a soft grey Henley, slipping his phone into his pocket before taking the elevator down to the workshop.

Stark's workshop was a muggle techno-wonderland that had Percy speechless the night before when he'd finally been given a tour around the place. Compared to Arthur's little table in the garden shed filled with broken muggle knick knacks and various electronics in various states of disrepair, Tony didn't just putter around and tinker with this and that, no... he was way beyond that by leap years. By light years.

Sleek glossy surfaces of glass and steel glimmered in the cool blue of the holographic images suspended in midair. Machines beeped and booped and hummed and whooshed like something out of muggle space adventure movies.

A huge ratcheted metal table stood in one corner filled with a jumble of spare parts and wires and other odds and ends and a few dirty coffee mugs that had reminded Percy so strongly of his father and he'd had to take a few deep breaths to ease the pain in his chest.

Tony had introduced Percy to his robot minions, complaining bitterly about how clumsy they were, what useless lumps of metal and circuits they continued to prove themselves to be. Yet, under all the lamentation, Percy could hear the strong undercurrent of affection for the excitable robotic arms.

He'd also seen how Stark had watched him closely as he'd politely shaken each bots 'hand' or claw and introduced himself. After that Dum-E, Butterfingers and You had all become quite enamored with him, tugging at his shirt and pants and plying him with yummy fruit smoothies and he'd seen the last of the tenseness in Stark's shoulders loosen and relax.

They'd spent hours into the night in the wondrous place, Percy fanboying so much over the cutting edge technology that for a moment he'd thought that he'd actually channeled his father's spirit. The thought had made him chuckle to himself as he made Tony explain once again what Augmented Reality was and how it was going to change the world.

As the elevator dinged open on the workshop level, Percy could see Tony slouched over a delicate circuit, a large magnifying glass with a bright light suspended between them from a mechanical arm. The man was dressed in a dingy pair of jeans and a dingy maroon t-shirt stretched over his muscled shoulders, his ass balancing on the faded and ripped black leather seat of the stool he hooked his feet on.

Percy felt that familiar flame of attraction and had to admit to himself that Stark was a very sexy man with his lean body and casual brilliance. Sadly, Percy had always been to suss out a person's dynamic and Tony didn't seem like the kind of lover Percy went for.

For one, even though Stark had an easy confidence in his own masculinity, he wasn't self-possessed enough to deal out the kind of handling that Percy craved. Not to mention the man suffered from
raging PTSD and a huge inferiority complex coupled with crippling self-hatred.

It surprised Percy that it had only taken a couple of days with the man and a perusal of Stark's MACUSA file to determine these facts making him wonder what in the Seven Hell's SHIELD and the other Avenger's had been thinking when they'd labelled the man a self-destructive narcissist.

Were they all that blind?

Maybe it was because they all saw him as some poor little rich boy with more money than sense. That growing up rich somehow negated any sorrow and pain Tony may have gone through as a child.

Percy had once thought that way too. He'd been so jealous of the richer pure bloods in school, especially the Slytherins. During his seventh year especially he'd been so dreadfully jealous of Gwendolyn Rhovandis, a sixth year Slytherin girl who'd taken to hanging on Marcus Flint's every word like it was manna from heaven.

She'd been gorgeous and rich, from a old pure blood family that could trace their line back to the Founders. The soft tinkle of her elfin laugh, the dark luscious curls of her raven hair, her pale skin free of any freckles or blemishes; she had been everything that Percy wasn't. Flint had taken delight in flaunting her affection in front of Percy, sneering as he stole a hand up her creamy leg, slipping under her skirt as she jumped and blushed.

It had driven Percy to distraction and he'd taken extra pleasure in handing out detentions and taking points whenever he caught her stepping out of line. It had only been years later when he'd been accompanying the Aurors on a raid for Dark Artifacts that he'd learned the bitter truth about poor Gwendolyn and her unfortunate life.

Her parents had wasted their fortune on gambling, excess and poor investments and were trying to throw their lot in with the Dark Lord, trying to recoup their fortune by joining the ranks of the Death Eaters. After being dismissed by the pure blood elitists like the Malfoys and the Lestranges alike, Gwendolyn had been hard pressed by her parents into ingratiate herself into the good graces of the next generation.

With Draco Malfoy being too young and the other seventh year being either already betrothed or gay, there had only been Marcus Flint. Unfortunately for the poor girl, for all that he was an excellent lover, Marcus Flint truly was a heartless fuck. He'd led her around by the nose then, after graduation, had used her and passed her around at the rowdy death eater parties.

It was only when the Aurors had battered down the rotting doors of the old Rhovandis estate that Percy had learned how much the girl he'd been so jealous of in school had suffered in life. He'd been barely able to look at the gaunt and drawn woman, aged beyond her years as she cowered by the only lit fireplace while the ministry upturned every filthy corner of the old house.

Her father, crazed and half blind from liquor had charged blindly at them and had been stunned by so many wands simultaneously that his weak heart had failed instantly. He was dead before he'd even hit the ground.

They'd found her mother's corpse still laying abed in an upstairs room, dried flowers scattered around her bed. A pale and shaky Percy could only stare as the Aurors around him joked and laughed at the dirty Death Eaters getting their comeuppance, stumbling outside when Gwendolyn began to scream bloody murder as her mother's body was levitated down the stairs.

It had been all in all a horrible day and one Percy would never forget. The next time he'd met up
with Flint in the dingy hotel room, Marcus had been all too eager to regale him with stories of what had been done to the poor girl while he fucked Percy steadily up the bed. That night Percy had cried into a cup of strong tea and had sworn to himself never to let Flint's filthy hands touch him ever again.

Of course, Percy was weak and a coward to the next time Flint sent for him, he'd gone; eager and needy for that heavy cock and bruising hands. He'd hated himself a little more after that, even as he whimpered and begged for more, spreading his legs wider so that Flint could thrust deeper.

Percy shook himself, swallowing back bile as he keyed in his code for the workshop door, the loud blear of heavy metal assaulting his ears as the doors slid open. He winced, shoving one hand in his pocket as he stroll across the lab, the other shaking hands with an enthusiastic Dum-E.

He takes a seat near Tony, his chin propped on one hand as he watches the genius work his magic on the metal and wires. He absently sips at a smoothie pressed into his hand and hums contentedly at the taste. He likes this one better that all other so far and tells the robot so, smiling as it chirps and rolls away toward the blender.

He slips his phone out of his pocket and checks his social feed and a couple of emails from SI and Pepper. He sends a text to Friday to have some food delivered and she pings him back an affirmative. They'd taken to talking and texting throughout the day, the ins and outs for the Care and Upkeep of Eccentric Billionaires.

Friday may have advanced and complex codes but she is no JARVIS and had admitted as much to Percy. She had been able to share her observations of her creator and father with Percy and between them they'd been able to hammer out a few new protocols put forth for further testing.

Friday had just pinged him that the food had arrived when the music cut off abruptly. Percy had been in the middle of switching out his empty smoothie cup for a full one and had just about dropped the cup on poor Dum-E. it was only the robots quick reflexes that had saved the drink and the floor.

He looked up to see Tony blinking at him owlishly, his goggles pushed up into his unruly hair. He gazed at Percy, then at the smoothie then at Dum-E with a frown.

"When did you even get here? How long have you been here? Is that smoothie for me? How come you get one and I don't? Starving Genius here… I need sustenance too you know."

He raps gloved knuckles against Dum-E's arm. " Is this how you gonna treat me now you bucket of bolts? I should reprogram you and be done with it. How would like to be the ball cleaner at a golf course? You can pump the little ball washing thingy, that will be you job from now on. No more blenders for you."

The robot arm whined and hung his camera low, whirring slowly and deeply as it inched away from them both.

"Don't listen to him Dee…" Percy muttered, slipping off his stool and setting his mug down so that he could pet the sulking arm,"… hunger had made him lose what little sense he has left. He's just taking it out on you like the big meanie he is."

"Hey" Tony mumbles from around the rim of the smoothie Percy had set down, draining it in one go. "don't call me a big meanie. That's offensive. I am offended. I am also hungry."

He snaps his fingers at the bot. "What are you waiting for? I need smoothies. What did I even build
For hugs, Percy almost says out loud but swallows the words like stones. He says instead,

"Oh no you don't. you don't need smoothies, you need real actual food that need chewing."

Tony makes an ugly face. "I don't have time for food. I have work to do… amazing, incredible, awesome work that needs to be done right now."

Percy gives him a flat stare. "Ok, let's make a deal. You come upstairs and get some food in you, maybe some liquid of the water variety, maybe some juice and in return I will make sure that when you return to the lab, there will be a fresh pot of coffee waiting for you."

Stark looks skeptical so Percy decides to sweeten the pot a bit. "I will even send out for those crepes you like from Donnatelli's for breakfast tomorrow if you agree to take and shower and change your clothes after eating."

Tony tilts his head, looking confused. "You're not going to lecture me on getting enough sleep?"

Percy shrugs. "Would it make a difference? Or even help? If I whine or nag or harangue you about sleep and drag you out of here and up to your room; even if I tuck you into bed myself would you sleep? You'd probably just lay awake and think about things until you eventually made your way back down here."

Percy shakes his head with a bitter chuckle. "I know what it's like to burn that midnight oil. I had a roommate once who could only go down if he'd exhausted himself physically and mentally then he'd collapse and sleep like the dead. He could never do it any other way. No matter what we tried, it was just how he was hard wired. All we could try to do was manage it to that he could get enough rest so as not to lose his mind to sleep deprivation. That shit was bloody awful."

"Yeah… that can get bad." Stark eyes are sharp and stormy. "You said… that you managed it?"

"it's trial and error, something's worked… some didn't. in the end we were able to create a number of routines he'd be able to use whenever the need arose."

Tony blinked slowly, glancing away. "Percentages?"

"74% success in getting brain activity calm enough for achieving a restful state. 60% success rate in getting sufficient REM cycle sleep to keep the body and mind at close to optimum health."

"60%" The genius nodded absently, staring off into the distance. He cut his eyes to Percy sharply.

"So…. Food?"

Percy smiled. "Food."
Chapter 5

First day of official duty and Percy was up at five am for a short work out in the huge gym, his grunts echoing through the empty space as he went a few rounds with the kickboxing dummy. The sun is tipping a toe over the horizon by the time he's back at his rooms, fresh from the shower and sipping on some strong hot tea while Friday streams current events on the plasma.

He has time for dry toast before he's slipping on a simple dark charcoal suit and white shirt. He forgoes the tie and leaves the top button undone. Grey socks and sharp black shoes complete the ensemble. He slips on a black Diesel Analog watch and his gold Goblin-made, magical suppression ring.

He'd been wearing it 24/7 since the day of the interview, a snug flat gold band on his left pinkie finger. It fit perfectly and was charmed so that if a person didn't know that it was there, they wouldn't be able to see it. Percy knew that the Americans were usually the first and foremost in marrying magic and muggle technology amongst the various magical communities around the world but they in turn had nothing on millennia old Goblin warding and rune work.

The small gold ring was deceptively simple looking but Percy knew that the magic forged into the very metal was hideously complicated. Higgs must have pulled in some pretty big favours to get one issued for Percy's use.

Slipping his phone into his pocket, he made his way down to his office as the sunrise painted the city in breathtaking light and colour. Picking up his tablet from its charging port and running through his emails, he looks over Stark's itinerary for the week and schedules a video chat with Ms. Potts for later that morning, taking a minute to shoot the breeze with Potts' executive assistant Rosemund, who is also on work at this early hour.

He spends a while going over protocols with Friday and between them they come up with several new ones for Tony to look over and approve. He lets Friday place an order for some crepes from Tony's favourite place in New York; a selection of chocolate and various fruits with some whip cream on the side.

Friday informs him that Tony had slept on the work room couch for approximately two hours before awakening and going back to work. Percy purses his lips and taps his pen against his leather desk blotter. Tony's work week was shaping up to be a nightmare with SI board meetings, R&D Department visits not to mention all of the work he was doing for the Avengers and his clean energy project.

Adding to that a messed up sleep cycle, odd eating habits and re-emerging alcohol abuse to the mix and the genius was going to burn himself out sooner rather than later. Percy may not be able to help the man with his psychological issues but he could at least do something about his physical wellbeing.

Looks like Tony was in for a bit of mothering taken straight from the Molly Weasely Handbook.

Leaving his office, Percy stepped into the elevator and hesitated before asking Friday to take him up to the penthouse. He wonders if Tony still feels comfortable in the Avengers common living space since the team's exodus to the new compound.

Friday had informed him that the rest of the team still had standing invitations to the tower and that the cleaning crew still visited the vacated personal quarters but there was a difference between
laying out a welcome mat and being one.

Having to sit alone in a space where there had always been others before had often a cold and jarring experience for him personally so he had Friday re-direct the breakfast delivery to the penthouse. Percy himself stopped off at the avengers common room because it had the best stocked pantry which he then raided shamelessly.

Tapping on his phone, he sent off a quick email to the service staff to have the penthouse kitchen stocked fully and to have the common area cleaned thoroughly and everything perishable either thrown away or given to the needy.

As an extra thought, he made a note to have all avengers private quarters, cleaned and sealed off, all personal items packed into plastic crates and sent off to the avengers compound. He'd run that one by Pepper first of course, before having it implemented.

He took his bounty up to the penthouse and set to work, searching for and finding a glass carafe before setting a pot of water to boil on the stove. With a practiced efficiency that takes him back to his days in potions class under Snape's watchful glare, he starts tossing things into the water. Some dried licorice root, dried burdock root, some chopped fresh ginger, cinnamon chips, some cardamom pods with dried eleuthero that he was surprised to find way to the back of the pantry.

What Stark needed with dried Siberian Ginseng in the first place Percy didn't know but he wouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth, even when that gift horse came bearing whacky, rare ingredients.

By the time the crepes arrive, Percy has strained the boiling liquid into the glass carafe and added some honey to taste. He gives a pleased hum. Just like he remembered it. He has Friday patch him through to the workshop via video feed and is unsurprised to see Tony hunched over the worktable. He clears his throat to alert the man, not wanting to startle him and cause an accident.

When Tony looks up at the screen, blinking behind his safety goggles, Percy holds up one of the distinctive boxes.

"As I promised. Hot and ready from that place you like. You'd better get up here before I eat them all."

He cuts off the feed at Stark's indignant squawk and makes a note to check back in ten minutes just in case the genius gets distracted by work once again. He ends up not having to because Tony stagers into the kitchen five minutes later, wiping grease from his hands with an equally oil-stained cloth. He looks tired, dark shadows under his eyes and his skin sallow.

He makes a be-line for the coffee maker and frowns when he sees it silent and empty. He stands there for a few seconds as if he can't comprehend what he's seeing and Percy takes the time to gently guide him away to sit at the raised breakfast bar, placing a plate and some cutlery in front him. He pushes the open boxes of crepes closer and fills a couple of glass mugs from the carafe.

"But… Coffee?" Tony whines, his bewildered gaze still on the silent coffee maker.

"I thought that we could try something new?"

Percy placed one of the glass mugs on the table before sitting down and taking a sip of his own. He winced a bit at the strength and added some more honey while Stark glared at his own mug like it would bite him.

"is this… Tea?" Tony made a face, leaning over the mug to take a sniff. He curled his lip in disgust before taking another sniff. "I need coffee. Strong black American coffee. Hot enough to scald the
tongue and put hair on a man's chest. Not this weak ass, dish water looking, horse piss you people try to pass off as a hot beverage."

Percy froze, his mug halfway to his mouth. Taking a deep breath, he carefully placed his mug down on the bar and placing his hands flat on either side of it. He stares at Tony for a few seconds until that wary brown gaze stops shifting long enough to meet his.

"I knew going that there were going to be some growing pains in our working relationship with you being a belligerent American ass and me being a stuck up British twat so I am going to let your negative opinions on my nationality, my culture, my beverage preferences and what seems to be my sexuality slide this time; mostly because you've probably been awake and puttering about your workshop since god knows and sleep deprivation probably has you barmy."

He held up a hand at Tony's sputtering, "I know that you didn't mean it like that and I understand that sometimes... most times I should think, your brain to mouth filter doesn't work like other peoples' do. Therefore I think that it's best that we get some things settled now."

Tony frowned, his eyes wary as he shifted in his chair. "Things like what?"

Percy cut carefully into his crepe, chewing slowly before answering. "You may have hired me to be your Personal assistant, well no... actually... Miss Potts hired me to be your Personal Assistant. You hired me because you were bored and you think I'm interesting. I am quite okay with whatever the reasoning was because I needed a job and this one is turning out to be quite a bit of a pip actually. I get to stay in these posh digs, I have a chance to drive some smashing cars and just being in your workshop is really quite stunning."

Percy smiles as Tony preens at the praise. "That being said, I am not your parent, sibling or significant other and as such cannot and will not utilize any undue influence on you to change your life in any way or to make certain choices - be they business oriented or personal. You are a grown man, despite what people may say about your so-called childish behaviour, how you live your life is ultimately up to you and you alone. I would, however, like to be your friend because I get the feeling that both of us have come through life so far with too few of those."

Tony ducks his head, avoiding Percy's steady gaze by cutting and eating his crepes almost mechanically.

Percy felt something in his chest twinge and absently placed another crepe in Stark's plate, along with some fruit and some cream. Tony hummed his thanks and kept on eating. "I will, however, as your assistant, do the job I was hired for to the best of my ability and place myself as a buffer between you and the rest of the world so that you don't have to juggle so many things at once. Anyone that wants to get to you will have to go through Friday and myself, as well as Miss Potts to a certain degree. My aim is to lift away enough burdens on your mind and your time until your work load becomes somewhat manageable and sustainable."

Percy set down his knife and fork and wiped at his mouth with a napkin, smiling when Tony looked up and caught his eye. "As you friend, I am afraid I will have no other choice but to mother you constantly as I was taught by me own mother. Granted, she was often overbearing to the point of being suffocating at times but she taught me a lot about providing care to stubborn and troublesome people who fight against
any kind of affection and emotional support. I fully intend to make sure you eat and sleep properly
and take better care of yourself and I fully expect you to fight me every step of the way."

He pointed the napkin at Tony's bemused face.

"You may be a genius but I am my mother's son and the mollycoddling begins right now. That… "
he pointed to the tea, "… is something called Jump Juice. It promotes physical performance and
endurance, supports cognitive abilities and mood and boosts immune functions and vitality without
the empty calories and bad side effects of caffeine. I'm not trying to get you to give up on coffee
entirely but after being awake for so long, you need something that will give you a boost but won't
keep you awake."

Tony looked at the steaming cup with a skeptical eye before taking a sip. He made a weird face,
smacking his lips before taking another sip. He huffs reluctant approval before smirking at Percy.

"So it's good for endurance and vitality huh?" he wiggles his eyebrows salaciously. "Maybe we can
test that out later?"

Percy gave him a flat stare. "Given the history of exorbitant rumours of you seducing people's
underwear off at thirty paces and the way you seem to thoroughly enjoy wit and humour skewed
towards the lewd and innuendo…. You can do so much better than that weak attempt at a come on.
That being said, you're not my type so knock it off."

"Are you kidding me… " Tony barked a harsh and bitter laugh. "… I'm everyone's type. Rich."

Percy raised an eyebrow at the self-loathing in Stark's words, deciding to broach that subject
another time.

"If you had met me three years ago or so, I may have very well let you seduce me, me being the
power hungry little prick that I was back then. Fortunately for both of us, I left my groveling
sycophant days behind me in merry ole England. Consider yourself lucky that my 'give a fuck' is
broken when it comes to ambition and success at any cost."

Percy smirked and topped up both their mugs from the glass carafe.

"That is to say, I do thoroughly enjoy living in your tower and look forward to any opportunity to
drive your beautiful cars. And my salary is pretty sweet to….. " Percy trailed off with a light blush.
"I do enjoy perks."

Tony grinned, sitting up in his chair but Percy cut him off.

"Not your 'perk' though so keep it in your pants buddy."

Tony pouted, slouching in his chair as he took a long drag at the mug, humming at the taste. He
looked up at Percy through his lashes, turning the mug in his hands.

"I don't do well with people trying to mother me, I'm warning you now. Pepper and Rhodey do it
all the time and it never works."

Percy shrugs and sips his tea. "I'll take my chances."

"I'm the worst boss ever. I'm inappropriate and infuriating and unreliable and don't like to be
handed things."

Percy nodded, "I can work with that."
Tony sighed heavily, "I will give you the weirdest tasks and hit on you constantly."

Percy smirked and countered. "My last boss tried to have me thrown in jail for life on trumped up charges just so he could save his own skin."

Tony paused. "Damn. That's stone cold."

The redhead nodded again "You can say that again."

"He still in his position?" Stark's voice is hard and it makes Percy glance up in surprise.

"Nah, last I heard he was arrested and put in the clink by Interpol or some such… one of those International Investigative Agencies got an anonymous tip exposing all of his dirty little secrets. Got sent to some gulag in Siberia for his crimes."

Stark sits back with a smug little upturn of his lips. "Anonymous tip huh?"

Percy blinked innocently. "And wasn't it just the luckiest thing. They even managed to take most of his cronies down with him. It was a bit of a hullabaloo… or so I heard anyway. Me being in Africa at the time."

Tony chuckled and shook his head. "I knew there was a reason I liked you."

"what can I say…” Percy grinned. "… I am a likeable person."
The first time Percy attended a Stark Industries Board meeting as Tony's PA, he spent the first half hour biting the inside of his cheek raw to keep from speaking rudely out of turn and the next two hours plotting complete and bloody revenge on the old piss pots that made up the rest of the board of directors.

First of all, the Board of Directors aka the Bag of Dicks as he took to calling them in his head, had moved the meeting time up without warning, making Tony and Pepper scramble to get themselves together with little to no notice. After shoving Tony into the bathroom, Percy had sent a frazzled yet grateful Pepper off to get herself ready while he browsed through Tony's wardrobe and laid out a complete outfit on his bed, down to underwear and socks.

After sending for the car; because the Bag of Dicks had demanded that the meeting be held in the old SI headquarters situated out of the tower, Percy had checked on the traffic report and; after some conference with Friday, nixed the car and called for a helicopter. After satisfactorily lighting a perverbial fire under the chopper pilot's ass, he called ahead to the head of SI Secretariat, Raizel.

She was a formidable woman, a silver haired battle axe who rode herd over the main offices and proudly wore her holocaust tattoo with the same grace as she did her Chanel bag and Gucci pumps. She reminded him strongly of Minerva McGonagall with her piercing stare and her lifelong mission to take shit from absolutely no one, ever.

The subtle art of networking was one of the many skills Percy had honed to a fine edge in his years at the Ministry of magic and the first thing he'd done in his new job was to get the lay of the land and connect with the hands that really greased the wheels at Stark Industries.

Currently his strongest links were Pepper's assistant Rosemund Bakerson, SI Admin Head Raizel Vilner, head of R&D Dr. Vihaan Pranay, Security Chief Happy Hogan and head of Tower Sanitation, Bill Jacobs. Between the five of them; and Friday of course, Percy had been able to keep a steady bead of the goings on within the Tower and the company as a whole.

Given time, Percy was sure that he could build a strong enough network that would give anyone trying to make a move against Tony in any way a serious run for their money.

Chatting with Raizel was had given Percy a veritable lay of the land at SI HQ and he briefed both Tony and Pepper via video chat as they dressed. Luckily for them all, the project that the Bag of Dicks wanted to be briefed on had already been put together by Tony so Percy sent the package off to Raizel for printing and binding, having been assured that they would be ready and distributed by the time the meeting began.

Soon enough Percy was hustling Tony and Pepper unto the helicopter and handing them dark chocolate almond mint KIND bars as they'd had to forgo breakfast. Tony made a face but at Percy's flat look and promise of coffee at the meeting, grumbled thanks and slipped the bar into his pocket.

They made it to the meeting with minutes to spare, much to the surprise of some of the BoD. Percy made note of the differing reactions by the board and of who in particular seemed more disgruntled than seemed reasonable. He'd had talks with Pepper previously about the board and their attitude towards Tony but the level of hostility seemed somewhat alarming.

Between doodling little cartoons of the Bag of Dicks being killed in ways both heinous and
hilarious and exchanging quick messages with Friday to start in depth background checks on each of the stodgy bastards currently sitting around the beautiful glass table of the main conference room, Percy sat in his small chair against the wall and silently observed the proceedings, occasionally refreshing the cups of coffee next to Tony's and Pepper's elbows.

By the time the meeting wrapped, Percy had complied almost ten legal pad pages of hand written observations and notes which he would later transcribe to Friday. Tony and Pepper lounged at the table, picking apart catered muffins and slurping coffee; exhausted from the near interrogation at the hands of the BoD.

He wandered over to the breakfast bar, which had been near picked clean by the vultures on the board, and grabbed a slightly smushed and lonely banana nut muffin and a couple of bottles of water before joining his bosses at the table.

"Well, that was brutal." he sighed as he pushed one of the waters towards where Tony say slumped. Tony gave the bottle water a wary look but didn't push it away so Percy counted it as a win.

Pepper watched the short interaction with a dry chuckle. "Actually, that wasn't much worse than usual. Good thing we came on time and prepared to kick corporate ass. Those fuckers would have raked us over the coals if we'd come in the time the meeting was supposed to start. Thanks for the heads up by the way."

Percy acknowledged her gratitude with a brief nod. "They do seem bound and determined to put a stymie in anything you try to push forward. Is this a recent development or were they always such tossers?"

Tony barked a laugh. "They've always been a thorn in our side… most of them have been main stays from Howard's days. The others were brought in under Obadiah."

Tony's face hardens and he downs the rest of his cooling coffee. He makes a disgusted face and scowls at Percy when the redhead uses the end of his pencil to surreptitiously push the water bottle closer. With a put upon sigh, Tony grabs the bottle, cracks it open and takes a few gulps. He absently plays with the bottle for a few seconds, seeming in deep thought before speaking again.

"We were able to weed out a couple after Ob… Stane's death but none of them believe that I am any kind of CEO material. Even before I made Pepper CEO, even before the Avengers, Ironman… even before Afghanistan and the decision to get out of the weapons business."

Tony glanced up and Pepper and then at Percy before concentrating on the water once again.

"I've been a fuck up from a long ways back. The drinking, whoring and partying didn't help matters any but I realized long ago that no matter what I did, in their eyes I would always just be Howard's greatest disappointment."

Tony's lip curled with a growl.

"Too much of an unstable influence to the bottom line' they said. Too scared for their profit margin… for their quarterly reports. Too afraid that the coffers won't be able to line their fat pockets the way they used too. Too set in their ways to welcome any kind of change, too willing to hold on to the 'tried and true' even though what worked in the past can't possibly work now or in the future. All too ready to squeeze that little golden goose a little harder each time until it eventually chokes to death. "
"They still refuse to see that SI can be more than what Howard built it to be. We can be more than the ones to build the bigger sticks. That there are things more profitable that war. Even after everything we've accomplished the still refuse to see past their own petty mewling to the pure potential that's right in front of us. For the taking."

"Even after the moving the company into technology and clean energy had been a complete and undeniable success. Even after our profit margin had grown steadily overall year after year. Even when a motherfucking alien invasion came tumbling down on our heads and our stock never fluctuated more than SEVEN FUCKING POINTS!"

The bottle hits the wall and splashes open, water dripping down unto the carpet as Tony spins out of his chair and starts to pace, his body tense. Percy exchanges a glance with a concerned Pepper and nods as he motions for him to give them some privacy.

Quietly gathering his notes, Percy slipped out of the conference room, trusting Pepper to take care of Tony as she had far more experience in doing so. Taking the elevator down to Secretariat, confers with Friday to have tentative lunch reservations made in case Tony felt like eating out and placed an order for Fish Tacos from Pepper's favourite place to be delivered to her offices. Surely she deserved a treat after her morning.

He taps out a few messages to Rosemund and checks Tony's SI emails. Friday was usually good at filtering messages but often referred the odd ones to Percy to parse through. The elevator lets him out and he spots Raizel at the end of the hall, most likely tearing someone a new asshole from the look on the unfortunate man's face.

She spots him and waves him over, dismissing the underling with a disinterested shooing motion. The man scowls and flushes red before making himself scarce and all of the office looky loos suddenly find themselves deeply engrossed in their own duties.

The older woman waves Percy into her office and with one last blistering stare at the milling worker bees, closes the door to give them some privacy. She offers Percy a seat before perching on the edge of her desk. She doesn't have a sleek glass one like most of the others do, instead an ornate wooden monstrosity dominates her office.

She's wearing a grey knit wool dress that accentuates all of her sharp edges and matching heels with toes sharp enough to stab a man. Sensible jewelry and sharp angular bob of silver grey hair complete the look of a modern day ice queen. When they first met, Percy was sure that she had some magic or the other within her but she was full on muggle. That bright spark within her was in fact a core of steel that came from her time in the concentration camps when she was a mere girl and the only survivor in her family.

"So… " She shakes her head. "… what did those alter cockers complain about this time? Were the project packages too complicated to read? Too heavy to lift? Were the muffins too soft? The coffee to cold? Did Stark not bend over backwards far enough? Hell, did Potts not bend forward far enough? Feh!"

Percy crosses one leg over the other and gets comfortable in the chair. "I take it that you've heard about their persistent obstinacy to certain new ideas?"

Raizel harrumphs and shakes her head. "Certain ideas? That bunch of old blowhards wouldn't know how to find their own asses even with a GPS and a swift kick in the pants. Stane was one helluva snake charmer and he had them all eating out of his hands. They still think of Stark as some uppity kid playing among the grownups. And when he made Potts CEO? Hah… a woman in charge? They just about shit themselves."
The older woman pushes herself off the table and rounds it, sitting back in her leather chair.

"It’s been an uphill battle for the both of them since day one. Sometimes I wish those vultures would just drop dead and we could finally wash our hands of them."

Percy cocks an eyebrow. "Is this just wishful thinking …? " he trails off as she gives him a sharp look.

"According to Legal, what we say in this office right now considered hearsay and not admissible in court… That being said… don't think we haven't tried alternative methods to getting those asses booted out of here for good. Unfortunately they don't have any dirty secrets or they’ve hidden them too deep for us to find. And believe me we've tried. The only choices left were either buying them all out or arranging some unfortunate accidents but Stark nixed the first one and Potts put a kebosh on the second, so our hands are tied."

"How extraordinarily mercenary of you Raizel. I'm impressed." Percy grinned. "I didn't know corporate America was so very cut throat."

Raizel's laugh is husky and wicked. "Boyo, you haven't even scratched the surface of corporate espionage. It's just too bad Stark won't let us hire one of those clandestine company saboteurs, those motherfuckers are ruthless."

Percy chuckled, tilting his head. "You get more amazing the longer I know you. Tell me, what are you doing here in secretariat? You could probably have made VP of something important by now."

"And get shuttled into some lonely office in some corner of the tower and dictate memos all day? Never. Better to be the neck than the head my grandmother used to say, God bless her soul. You're a smart boy… you know by now where the power base really lies. Why else would you come and introduce yourself to me on your first day? Surely not for my sweet grandmotherly reputation?"

"True enough" Percy admits before saying his goodbyes and making his way back up to the conference room.

He finds Tony and Pepper in her office, eating tacos and laughing so he has Friday cancel the various lunch reservations and breathes a sigh of relief. Tony seemed to be in a much better mood, his shoulders and mouth no longer tense. They invite him to share in the tacos and he accepts, absently tapping notes and texts with his phone as Tony regales them with hilarious stories from his travels abroad.

Percy lets the problem turn over and over in the back of his mind, humming and laughing in response to easy chatter. The Bag of Dicks situation would have to be addressed and as much as he wanted to walk up to the fools and cast any one of the unforgivables, he really wasn't that kind of person. That did not exclude magic entirely though.

He sends off a quick text to Sanderson at MACUSA. The man may be a bit of a twat but so was Percy. Not to mention that he was one of the best aurors in Higgs small unit.

*I need information on some no-majs. Who do you know that can get it for me? Affordable. Discreet. No questions asked.*

A few minutes later his phone pings.

*Fuck you English. Is this a secure line?*

Percy rolls his eyes. *Good grief man, I'm not asking for state secrets. Keep your panties on.*
"Hah, you wish you could see my panties."

"Don't be juvenile. Do you know someone or not?"

"Maybe. What do you need info for?"

"Weren't you the one concerned about this being a secure line? What the fuck?"

"Well excuse me Mr. Priss. I may have to ask around. What's in it for me though?"

"Aren't you supposed to be helping me out anyways?"

"Fuck that. If you wanted official MACUSA help you would have asked Higgs."

He had him there. Percy huffs and scowled.

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want to visit Stark Tower."

"Fuck no. I can get you a Iron Man Cell phone case signed by Stark himself."

"Shit yes. Deal. Give me a bit."

Percy shakes his head and tucks his phone away, concentrating on his tacos. He's able to get both Tony and Pepper to eat most of the fare and drink a fair amount of water before his phone pings again.

"Got a fair niffler for you, English. Gnome that lives out at Hodthel at Battery Park. Guaranteed to dig up anything you need. Even no-maj secrets. Expensive though. Goes by handle - Digger. Don't forget the phone case fucker."

Percy twists his lips. Digger indeed, what a name. He thinks about the expense account attached to his job and wonders if it would be able to cover Digger's fees. It should be. He'll have to meet with the gnome first. That meant a trip down to Battery Park. He tucks the thought away for later and tidies up the detritus from lunch.

"Will that be all Mr. Stark?" Pepper smiles and settle behind her desk, kicking off her shoes and pulling the closest file towards her. Tony gives her a small genuine smile that somehow seems brighter than his flashiest Paparazzi one.

Percy is somewhat grateful that they've both let their guard down enough for him to witness. It's soft and warm and speaks of years of friendship and fondness. It changes Tony's face and is so warm that Percy finds himself having to turn away from the intimate moment.

"That will be all Ms. Potts."

Percy escorts Tony back to the tower, letting him escape into the workshop after such a frustrating morning for some much needed engineering. He does some paperwork, transcribing his notes and taking care of the minutia of Tony Stark's life. Then, after checking in with Tony once more and instructing Friday to alert him if need be, he changes into some muggle clothes and makes his way out of the tower.

He has to see a gnome about a job.
there are so many fics out there where writers go into detail of what Tony is going through emotionally. I love all of them and appreciate them very much. this fic though is seen from Percy's view and so I won't go into all the stuff that I want to see happen for Tony because there will be parts of Tony's life that he has to deal with himself and that he probably won't discuss with Percy.

Percy is not privvy to a fair bit of Tony's business and is not really integral to SHIELD's survival. that's why Tony has employees who do that stuff. All Percy can do is try pick up the slack in places that JARVIS used to take care of and that Friday is still learning to do.

To me Percy is sort of a conglomeration of Old Jarvis and New, taking care of Tony, being his support so that Tony can go out and rock the world's socks off.

I'm trying to not make Percy a Mary Sue in this. I hope it's working.

Locating a reclusive gnome, even among the denizens of Hodthel was more difficult than Percy anticipated and he'd ended up leaving word with the old crone he'd bought the foe glass from. He'd had to make a few purchases in her smelly tent as well as leave behind his brand new shiny watch as an incentive for Digger. To show the bauble loving gnome that he meant business.

He stuffed the terribly useless knick knacks into his jacket's pockets, rubbing at his now bare wrist with a frown. He'd really liked that watch. The crone had been vague about if and when Digger might show so all Percy could do now was hurry up and wait... and trust that the crone stayed true to her word and actually passed the watch on to its intended recipient.

He had a late lunch at a road side hot dog stand and checked in with Friday. Tony had not left the lab since he'd retreated there this morning and had been existing on Dum-e's smoothies and little else. Not wanting to get in the habit of eating takeout food too often and having little in the way of real cooking skill, despite his mother's frequent lessons in 'how to be a good spouse and run a household' that ALL the Weasley children were mandated to attend... along with 'how to be a grown up and take care of yourself' and 'how to save your own skin by using any and everything around you'.

Basically, everything Molly Weasley had ever learned on her own and from her husband and brothers, she'd tried to pass down to her children. Not everything stuck though, with each of the children picking up different aspects but in the end Percy could keep his apartment reasonably clean, could do his taxes and balance his bank account without help, could use mundane household charms to incapacitate an enemy long enough for Percy to get away and even put a passable feast on a table in a pinch.

He doubted that one could live for very long on a rotation of the three or more dishes he could throw together so he contacted Tony's private chef and made an appointment to discuss meal plans. He had heard from Pepper that the Avengers had set up some sort of rotation when it came to
kitchen duties and it had been mostly successful. Sadly, now that most of the team were located at
the new compound, that set up was no longer feasible.

The next few days are mish mash of daily video chats with Pepper, Raizel and Happy. Meeting
with Tower staff and distilling most of the business of the day down to a few pertinent points he
shared with Tony and got Yay or Nay on. Pepper signed off on the closing off of the Avengers
living quarters for both security reasons and that she was still a bit pissed that the team had just left
Tony behind without even a Fare-thee-well.

Friday had shown them video footage of Tony ghosting through the empty halls at night, cracking
open the plastic storage containers and sitting on the empty beds with his former team's mementos
in his hands. His shoulders would hunch and his head would hang low as he ran trembling fingers
over one of Rogers' books, one of Barton's broken arrows or Banner's old shirts. It was such a
desolate picture of loneliness and surrender that Percy had ended up clenching his fists until he'd
left marks in his palms.

In between coaxing, bribing and outright threatening Tony into taking an appropriate level of care
of himself be eating small meals several times a day, alternating between coffee and jump juice
depending on how much sleep Tony needed, clearing all of the junk stacked up in the small
bathroom of the workshop and setting up a closet with toiletries and clothes as well as a small
washer and dryer that he made Tony promise not to tinker with or install a simple AI into.

They'd argued hotly about the lumpy couch in the workshop and its viability as a source of a
comfortable night's sleep. Eventually Tony had capitulated when Percy found the perfect
replacement at a small estate sale. It was a truly hideous thing made of supple leather and reminded
Percy giant slug with wrinkled brown skin but it made up for its unfortunate appearance in spades
by being the most comfortable sleeping surface Percy had ever experienced without magic.

Percy had found himself nodding off more than once on the thing and was never surprised to find
Tony sprawled out, face down on the sofa after working himself to exhaustion. Pepper had even
fallen asleep mid-sentence once, stark tablet slipping from her hand unto the seat. Percy had
watched how Tony gently and lovingly shifted her into a much more comfortable sleeping
position, that same warm smile on his face.

What time he wasn't spending on his duties and his off the books investigations into the Bag of
Dicks, Percy was reading. Old SHEILD files released unto the internet, Jarvis' own files, Friday's
new ones, old Team debriefings, news articles, anything and everything he could get his hands on
pertaining to Tony and the avengers that had happened while he was deep in the wilds of Africa
and South America.

He made an appointment with Joo-Won Yeong-Suk Park - Head of SI Public Relations, a friendly
and scarily efficient Korean Woman, and Aaron Quinn - Head of Stark Legal, a a short, pudgy
black man with salt and pepper hair, a friendly smile and sharp, intelligent eyes.

"So… Ultron." Percy waved them to sit and sat back in his own chair, his hands clasped across his
stomach. "How big of a cluster fuck are we looking at here in regards to both the company and Mr.
Stark personally and what can I do to assist?"

Joo-Won is the first to speak "it's not good … but it's not as bad as it could be. Both SI's and Tony
reputations took a hit with the whole Sokovia fiasco and it's been an uphill battle since then. Ms.
Potts and Mr. Stark have been working really hard to get the Company back in good standing with
numerous public appearances and press releases and working closely with the Sokovian
Government and the survivors. The Maria Stark Foundation has several outreach programs going
and it helped a helluva lot when Tony was seen at ground zero along with hundreds of Staff
volunteers, helping out with digging for survivors and providing aide."

She flips her elegantly cut black hair over the shoulder of her sensible pink suit and tapped absently at her Starkpad. "It's not all unicorns and rainbows though. There's been a lot of anti-Stark mentality for a while now and no matter how much effort we put forward, there are those that will see our actions as either bids for attention or signs of guilt. We still have a ways to go."

Quinn nodded sagely. "We've been able to handle and even counter most of the Civil suits being filed against both SI and Mr. Stark personally. There have been grumblings at the UN, especially coming from what's left of the Sokovian government and several other countries where the Avengers' numerous excursions have left behind some serious property damage."

"Stark Industries has an Aid fund set up that covers reparations and the like, which is currently funded in part by SI and Mr. Stark himself but that in itself is finite and can only go so far. If it keeps going on like this, we are looking at the real possibility of Tony Stark declaring legal bankruptcy."

Quinn shifted in his seat and frowned. "There have been rumblings at the UN. Talks about how to go about 'handling' super heroes, what they are liable for legally and such. Since SHIELD fell and the so-called 'World Council' slipped back into the shadows, there has been no oversight, just the efforts Tony has been putting forth on behalf of the Avengers. Not many people are happy with that situation. My contacts at the White House have been alluding to some sort of presidential mandate but it's being kept top secret for now."

Percy blinked in shock. "It's that bad?"

Quinn splayed his hands in a helpless gesture. "Not yet, but if things don't change soon and for the better, it's a likely scenario."

Percy pursed his lips and turned to Joo-won. "What about the Avengers? How are they doing in public opinion?"

"Not as much as they should. They don't leave the compound much except for missions and whenever they do make an appearance, they don't stay around for long after. Maybe if the public saw them sticking around to help with the clean up or even giving emergency services a hand, it would go a long way in keeping public opinion positive."

"What do you suggest then? What can we do to help Tony's image?" Percy frowns, swinging his chair from side to side. "We need a way to show the public that Tony is more than just The Tony Fucking Stark… That there is more to his than his money and his ego… that underneath it all he's just a man who's trying to do the best he can."

Joo-won leaned forward eagerly, her dark eyes shining. "There are only so many press conferences and public appearances a person can do before people start to get sick of seeing their face. We need a way to help the public see Tony as a human being without over-exposing him. I think that social media is the best way to do this."

Quinn rested his cheek on his fist and furrowed his brow. "You mean like myspace?"

The Asian woman rolled her eyes heavily. "Oh My God Aaron, MySpace? Nevermind. " she shook her head as if to throw that suggestion off her shoulders like water. "I was thinking more of Twitter or Instagram. Just small glimpses into everyday life at Stark Tower. People need to be able to see Tony as a person, the funny, witty, somewhat insecure eccentric genius those who know him personally know him to be."
Percy nodded, deep in thought. "I think that I might be able to help with that."

They ended the meeting shortly after, two more people joining Percy's network which grows stronger and more complex as each day passes. He pulls Tony out of the lab with the promise of food and mothers him into taking a drive in one of Tony's exquisite cars. They spend the afternoon driving the outskirts of the city, stopping at various road side stands and small greasy spoons and stuffing their face with fresh fruit and all manner of fried goods and messy burgers.

Tony is not entirely unrecognizable with his hoodie and baseball cap either but the few people who realize who he is seem satisfied in not making too much of a spectacle, mostly asking for an autograph or two. Percy takes a picture of Tony handling some fruit at a road side stand because it's too good of an opportunity to pass up. Tony is talking farming practices with the surprised vendor as her star struck daughter gazes up at Tony with awe.

He takes another when they are at a honey stand and it turns out that Tony has never tried honeycomb before. Neither has Percy so they both give it a try. It's delicious and they end up buying six jars, even though they have to pack them awkwardly in the small seats of the car.

He takes another of Tony leaning against the hood of the car, eating churros and checking his phone. They are parked near the ocean and the sun is setting orange and pink and purple and it almost looks like an Instagram filter. Tony laughs and asks him what he's doing, licking powdered sugar from the corner of his mouth.

Percy sits beside him on the hood of the car and tells him about the social media idea, that he wanted to take the pictures first and then talk to Tony. If Tony approved then Percy would have Friday set up and account. If not, Percy would send the pictures to Pepper and Rhodey because, frankly, they were adorable. Tony flushed at the word, shaking his head and chuckling.

"What the hell… go ahead." he mumbled around the fried dough. "Anything I can do to help Pepper and the team with pulling SI back up, I'm up for it."

Percy nods and says that he will take care of it and they don't speak of it again because he wants this trip to be about more than just photo ops. He wants Tony to enjoy himself and step out of the work mindset he'd boxed himself in. instead, he's true to his word and sends pics to Pepper and Rhodey.

Pepper replies with happy emojis and Rhodey pings back a confused face emoji. He wants to know what Tony is doing buying fruit by the road and ends with vague hilarious threats if Tony doesn't send some of the Honeycomb for the compound. Tony chuckles and replies that if Rhodes wanted to see a drop of the deliciousness, that he needed to get his patriotic ass to the tower himself.

By the time they get back to the tower, Tony is relaxed and happy, slouching on the large sofa and asking Friday to pull up a list of movies. Percy ruefully admits that he's never seen Star Wars and Tony gapes for a full minute before springing up off the couch and demanding that Friday queue all three of the original movies. He all but shoves Percy toward the elevator, ordering him to go and change into something comfortable because they are making a night of it.

They invite Pepper but she sadly declines because of a previous engagement. Tony hides his disappointment poorly but rallies fairly quickly and soon enough there is popcorn and pizza and orange soda and Star Wars. Percy is part amazed, part appalled at the trilogy. The things muggles were capable of always amazed him. He thinks of Luke and Vader's relationship, comparing it to Potter and Voldemort. At first he compares Dumbledore to Obi-wan but by the time the story ends, he sees Dumbledore so strongly in the emperor that it makes him a bit sick.
He eventually packs a sleepy and sated Tony off to bed and cleans up before heading to bed himself. He stumbles into his room and flops face down on the bed, groaning at the thought of getting up to brush his teeth; only to freeze when a gravelly voice echoes through the room.

"So… what's a wizardling Weasley doing all the way over here in the continent?"

Percy pops up, rolling off the bed to crouch behind it. His hand darts under the pillow and he palms his athame while glancing at the foe glass on his night stand. It's empty and he frowns. The voice had come from his darkened closet and several bumps and bangs followed it. Percy carefully rounded the bed, whispering a quick *lumos* at which the tips of the blade started to glow.

The strange noises continued until he got to the door of the closet and stuck the light in. to the back of his closet, his small wizarding chest had been prized open and someone or something was bent over waist deep into the trunk. Short legs wibbled in large striped pants that slacked down, revealing quite a bit of grubby arse crack.

Percy made a face at the sight, scowling as culprit continued to dig about unashamedly through his private things. Just then, he sees the flash of gold against the light and slumps tiredly against the doorway. He recognizes the watch he'd given the old crone at Hodthel.

"Master Digger I presume?"

The gnome pulls his head out of the trunk with a wide grin, two rows of gigantic white teeth gleaming in the light of the nox. He's holding a stamped gold ingot that Percy had acquired in El Dorado and Percy huffs as the gold disappears into one of the numerous pockets of the voluminous pants. He lets the issue go without a fuss. He was pretty sure that the gold was cursed anyway because it had been a parting gift from the chief’s daughter who hands in marriage he'd politely yet firmly refused.

"Ye presume right wixen child. I hear ye have a job for me?"

Chapter End Notes

I'm off for a four day weekend with nothing but my tablet and i HATE tablet typing. i may or may not muddle my way through and post. nothing is sure.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the Typo in the last chapter's notes. i am trying NOT to make Percy a Mary Sue in this. He doesn't magically save Tony and makes all his problems go away. also, there is some trust between them because Tony is a cinnamon roll who keeps trusting people even though they hurt him but he is also careful and it will be a while before he sees Percy as a friend.

i just want these two characters to be bros. i love them both so much.

Percy snorted awake, hips still jerking as he came, hot and sticky, in his boxers. His body curled in on itself with pleasure and he buried a moan into his bedding before finally slumping, boneless and panting through the tail of the orgasm. He blinked sleepily against the late morning sun, sighing deeply as he rode out the last of the aftershocks.

God, he really needed to get laid. It had been way too long since he'd been properly taken down.

He'd had a few lovers during his time on walkabout but he could still remember vividly the weight of Flint's body over his, the feel of calloused hands as they bruised pale his skin, the burn of his thick cock as he fucked Percy stupid. Flint may have been a card carrying, Death Eating psychotic cunt and 24 hour asshole but he knew how to work Percy over like a fucking master.

Or was that a Fucking Master. Whatever he was… he knew exactly how to throw some next level cock Percy's way.

Giving one last sigh he curled on his side, hugging the luxury body pillow that he'd gotten from the Tower's Pillow Concierge. Because of course Stark Tower had a fucking Pillow Concierge. The custom pillow was long and weirdly shaped and curled around Percy like a lover on the lonely nights. It never ceased to amaze him, the many things muggles came up with to make life easy.

He stretched lazily, debating whether to get out of his all too comfy bed and forage for food or roll himself back into his blankets and sleep for a few hours more. It was his first day off since he'd started working for Stark and even though he'd made a list of personal matters to attend to, he just couldn't seem to scrape together the energy to be productive.

His grumbling belly finally drove him out of his blanket nest and he stumbled towards the bathroom, asking Friday to please start the kettle. He stepped into the shower, letting the warm water beat against his body as he palms his cock once again. He leans forward under the spray, one hand braced against the tile as he fists himself. soon enough He shudders through another orgasm and lets the steady pressure of the water beat the tension of the past few days out of him.

He pulls on an old t-shirt of Charlie's with a faded dragon motif and a pair of grey sweats before padding into the kitchen to fix himself a nice cuppa, his ginger hair still damp and curling around his ears. He's considering whether or not he should go for trim when sees a figure slumped at his small kitchen table. Percy pauses for a moment before making his way to the cupboard. He really needed some tea before he could deal with anything today.
"You do know that it's my day off right?" he frowns as he digs around at the back of the cupboard for his nearly empty box of Twinings. He shakes the box experimentally, making a mental note that he would have to pick some up on his next trip to the market. "I thought we had an agreement about this. It's in my job contract and everything. My off days are my own."

Tony has a cup of coffee in his hands, gazing unseeing into its dark depths. Percy frowns and puts the tea to steep. Leaning back against the counter opposite the silent genius, he crosses his arms over his chest. He'll have to make sure to leave all of the exits open so that Tony doesn't feel closed in. Percy's seen the older man in low moods before but never quite like this. This utter silence.

He turns and goes about the routine of making his tea, popping some bread into the toaster and digging through the fridge for some butter and jam. He keeps his movements slow and well within sight of the darker man, having noticed how tense Tony held himself. He sets his fare on the table and takes a seat opposite the genius, smearing some jam on his toast and taking a large bite. He hums at his first sip of ambrosia, glancing at Tony occasionally as he demolishes his meal.

The silence between them is a bit terse and Percy finds himself concerned at how quiet Stark is being. He is just wiping at his mouth with a napkin when Tony looks up at him through thick dark lashes. He takes a sip of his own coffee and makes a face at the cool temperature.

"You know that I have Friday wired through the whole tower?"

Percy arches an eyebrow. "Of course I do."

"Even through all the guest suites. I mean, she's everywhere… she has to be. For security reasons."

Percy nods. "As long as she's not perving on me in the loo, I don't have a problem with Friday playing Overwatch. I agreed to as much when I first moved in, remember?"

"I assure you Sir that I would never…" pipes from the ceiling and Percy chuckles, raising his hands in mock surrender.

"I know, I know…" he capitulates quickly, "You are the soul of discretion and are the true lady of the house. I was just trying to get a rise out of your boss. My apologies if my thoughtless words have offended you."

"Apology accepted." came the curt reply and Percy silently cursed his sometimes ill-timed and thought out attempts at humour. He'd too often stuck his foot in his mouth at school and at the ministry, thoroughly embarrassing himself in front of student and co-worker alike.

The twins had never ever let him live down those cock-ups. Just as Delaney and Vicente from the Department of Magical Games and Sports took absolute delight in teasing Percy because of his scathing professional assessment review had kept the both of them benched at the Ludicrous Patents Office indefinitely. Not that they didn't deserve the poor review, the fuck ups.

It still burned him like bad heartburn though that his own brothers were never able to set aside their utter glee at seeing Percy pulled down a peg in order to help his poor stunted sense of humour and love of mischief grow. It wasn't like he was born without one as they loved to tell any and everyone. It had just been smothered by fear of the Dark Lord in his formative years.

Oh well, it was a moot point now. The twins were back in England and Percy was here now. There was nothing else for it.

"I'm sorry Tony" because in his jest he's somehow insulted both AI and Creator. "I know that everything Friday does, she does to protect you."
Tony frowns into his empty cup. "Heh… yeah… I seem to have some trust issues. It's a thing that I'm dealing with… after everything with the battle of New York and uh.. You know… Ultron. But you already knew this…” he looks up at Percy, "… since that day at your rat hole of an apartment."

Percy sat back in his chair, playing absently with his tea cup, "You hired me because you were bored and you find me interesting. Trust has to be earned and I'm a bit of an unknown. My life on paper doesn't really give an explanation of who I am in real life and you have some just concerns. I know all of these things. It's not that much of surprise that you would have Friday keeping an eye on me."

"Another thing I have Friday keeping an eye out for is weird signals and anomalies just like the ones given out by Loki's sceptre." Tony's eyes narrow, "… Just like the ones detected in your rooms last night."

"Shit." Percy closes his eyes briefly and then opens them again to meet Tony's laser sharp gaze. "I need bacon for this conversation. You want any?"

He slips out of the chair and puts a pan on the stove. He works in silence until the meat is sizzling away, feeling Tony's gaze burning into his back as he works. He can't tell Tony about the magical world. That would have MACUSA and her Obliviators down on them both in two shakes of a snidget's wings. Percy would be deported before he could even catch his breath.

He slides the plate of bacon unto the table and takes a large bite of one of the cooling strips. He sighs as he chews, swallowing before raising his gaze up to meet Tony's. He finishes the strip before speaking.

"So you know how before Thor crash landed in New Mexico, everyone thought that Norse Gods were just Myths and everyone thought that they were the sole sentient species on the planet. Just like everyone thought that the earth was flat and that the sun revolved around the earth. Then Thor came and the Chitauri came and suddenly real live fucking Aliens from actual fucking Outer Space were front and centre in everyone's minds and on their twitter feeds."

Tony's eyes are wide as he tries to drink coffee from his empty cup before setting it down on the table with a thump. "Uh huh"

Percy pushes the plate of bacon his way but not before snagging another piece.

"Well, there are some out there who are just as thoroughly enjoy not being in the spotlight. Who happen to love living their lives in complete and utter anonymity and shadow. There are certain circles that you don't know about, can't now about, will probably never know about and …. Well…. I just happen to... you know…. My circles happen to .... sometimes overlap on their circles…. Not in any real way mind you but i..... I just know certain people who can do…. certain things."

Percy huffs, his hands miming circles in the air in front of him. He flushes at Tony's skeptical look, grabbing at another strip of bacon and biting into it angrily.

"The circle fucking overlap ok?" he snaps around the food in his mouth, " I can't tell you anything more alright. You aren't part of the …." he makes another frantic circle motion with his hand. "There are rules."

Tony bites his lip to keep from grinning and blinks at Percy. "There are rules… to the circle?"

Percy rolls his eyes. "Don't laugh asshole, I'm trying to explain something important here but I can't
tell you at the same time. It's a bit of a conundrum."

Tony nods sagely. "I get it. First rule of fight club. Don't talk about fight club."

He scoffs at the confused face Percy makes and makes a note with Friday to make that their choice for the next movie night. Tony sobered and leans forward.

"What about the anomalies though? Care to explain those?"

Percy nods. "I could see how overtly hostile the Bag of Dicks was being towards you and how upset it made you. I know that you and Pepper have been trying to get rid of those old fucks for a while now with little success. It so happens that I have a friend who is into the information gathering business and I thought I would give him a call to see what he could dig up. He has a certain skill for going deeper than the conventional and he's discreet. Expensive but totally worth the cost."

Tony ruminates on that for a minute before tilting his head with a smirk. "Bag of Dicks?"

Percy hangs his head with a sigh. "That's what you got out of that whole thing? Not me going behind your back, trying to gather information underhandedly so that we could black mail your board of directors to step down, essentially pulling a hostile takeover of your own company and using your own money to do it? None of that registered with you?"

"Of course I figured all of that out, I am a genius after all." Tony shrugged. "… but that Bag of Dicks thing, it's fucking hilarious. I have to share that with Pepper. She'll think it’s a hoot. I'm gonna call them that in my head from now on. That's fucking gold."

"Speaking of gold…" Percy's mouth twists. "I… may have used part of my company expense account to pay for this clandestine venture... heh... just so you know."

Tony furrowed his brow. "How much exactly? I hope that you didn't pay it all up front? Tell me that much at least."

"Noooo" Percy denied hotly, drawing the word out. "I'm not new. Half up front. Half on delivery of goods. The total sum came up to about half of what was in the account."

Tony shrugged. "Well... I've spent a quarter mil on less. We'll put it down as a business expense. Think of it as an investment towards the companies' future. If it pays off it will be more than worth it to see the Bag of Dicks gone. Shit, that is such an appropriate name for those fossils."

He chuckles a bit before turning back to Percy. "Any further explanation on the strange readings from your room last night?"

"A carefully crafted and localized jammer. Totally unique to the individual and cannot be duplicated." Percy assured, "He won't come after you though. The kind of people who hire his services aren't really the kind of people who would be interested in you frankly."

Tony takes a deep breath. "… the kind of people that run in these certain circles you speak of?"

Percy slumps a bit. "uh... yeah."

Tony studies him for a while before nodding. "Okay. I will leave it alone for now. Friday will continue to read and analyze any strange readings, even the sudden lack of readings altogether. Make sure to meet your contact out of the tower next time. I don't like my girl having blank spots."
"Yes Boss."

"So…. " Tony claps his hands with a smile, reaching out to grab a piece of bacon from the almost empty plate. "What are we doing today?"

Percy scowls. "We are not doing anything today. It's my day off. You need to go back to wherever you came from and leave me alone. Thank you very much."

"But … But… " Tony pouted. "What about Fight Club?"

"Circe's Tits… " Percy groaned, pointing at the door, "What don't you understand about taking a day to enjoy one's self? AWAY from work?"

"But every day spent with me is a joy, didn't you know?"

"GET OUT"

"Okay geez, I'm going. Tough crowd."

And then the fucker swipes Percy's last strip of bacon and is out the door before Percy can even protest.

"Fucking wanker" Percy mutters, shaking his head as he puts his dirty dishes in the dish washer. Molly Weasley may have taught all her children how to clean house but Percy was not above letting muggle technology make life easier.

"Serves you right." Friday's smug tone comes from the inset speaker just above his head, startling him and almost making him drop his favourite teacup. He fumbles but manages to save the fine china from smashing on the floor.

Percy closes his eyes and tries to still his racing heart. Great. It seemed that Friday was still mad at him.

"Fuck today." He gives a gusty sigh and shakes his head once again. "I'm going back to bed."
"Ok..." Percy nodded to himself as he slung his Balenciaga suit jacket over the back of a nearby chair and rolled up his white shirt sleeves to the elbows. "I can do this. No problem."

He plucked a dark blue apron from a peg on the inside of the pantry door and deftly tied it to his front. There was white writing on the front stating that 'Cooking is Science for Hungry People" and the cloth was soft and comfortable from much usage. Percy especially appreciated how the wide panel protected his white shirt and favourite slacks.

"Come on then old chap. It's make your mama proud time. " he turned towards the stove, giving a great sigh and putting his hands on his hips. "Friday?"

It seemed so simple on paper, well... email really. Tony's personal chef had whipped up a batch of Roasted Tomato and Basil soup in the slow cooker and had left simple instructions on how to prepare the final steps for Percy to execute whenever Tony came home.

Considering today was Tony's monthly visit to the R&D department to kick around with his lab coat army, it was toss up whether or not he would get back to the tower for dinner or for breakfast the next morning. It seemed that everything had gone well though because Tony had waltzed back into the penthouse that evening with a spring in his step and a grin on his face, tapping away on his phone and talking specs with Friday as Percy picked up the pieces of the suit he'd stripped off and tossed absently unto the bed.

As Percy tutted and hung the suit aside for dry cleaning, Tony had slipped past and gone down to the workshop in a pair of worn jeans, his ratty converse and an old KISS tshirt. Percy had let him go without a word because he'd figured out by now when Tony was in one of those inventing 'zones' as Pepper called them. All he could do at those times was to make sure to keep Tony fed and watered and supplied with really good, really expensive coffee.

There was a small space in the workshop that consisted of a metal cabinet and small counter with sink where dummy washed his blenders, that made up a sort of pantry. The main focus of which being the huge black and silver coffee machine that Tony often stroked lovingly and called Lucille. It was a monster of a machine and it had taken Percy nearly a week to work the buttons and touch screens to get what he needed.

Next to behemoth there was a smaller, much older and even more hideously complicated, gold coffee machine that Tony had brought over from an old café in Italy. Tony called this one Scontroso which meant grumpy in Italian and reflected both the temperament of the machine as well as the old man who had previously owned it.

Getting a cup of coffee from the thing was an uphill battle.

Getting a cup of espresso? Witch Please.

Percy had watched in ill-disguised horror as Tony had all but molested the contraption for a full ten minutes, pulling out what seemed like self-defense moves and continuous mumbled curses until it had eventually eeked out enough liquid to fill one of the tiny ceramic cups that hung from little hooks along the side. Tony had held out the cup to Percy, grinning like he'd just come out of some back alley scuffle the proud victor.

Percy had given the man and the cup the hairy eyeball before carefully accepting the tiny coffee
and taking a sip. Tony had laughed uproariously at Percy's wanton groan at tasting what had to be the nectar of the gods and nodded smugly.

"Totally worth it right?" He'd said.

Percy had promptly taken a crash course in the art of being a barista from a local Immigrant run café, which happened to be owned by the granddaughter of the man Tony had purchased the original machine from in Italy. It had been an intense three nights of after work training and at the end he'd come away with enough working knowledge to work in a Starbucks if this job ever fell through and enough inner confidence to try his own against Scontroso.

He still failed two times out of three, Tony being the only one who knew how to work the devil machine with any kind of success but whenever Percy played it just right and was rewarded with that little cup of ambrosia, he considered the war won overall.

Getting back to dinner though, Percy knew enough of the culinary arts from his mother to make his way though some grilled cheese sandwiches. Of course Molly never had Chevre -Goat Cheese and Pullman bread nor a gourmet panini press to make the gooey on the inside, crusty on the outside sandwiches. After making a stack, he cut them into triangle halves and out them in the warmer before turning to the soup.

"Uh… Friday?" He frowned at the large cooker compared to the smaller blender that stood next to it. "We may have a bit of a problem."

"There's no problem Red" the AI piped up, "Just use the immersion blender."

Percy looked up at the ceiling. "The what now?"

"The immersion Blender. It's a hand held… Nevermind. Just look in the second drawer on your left."

Percy did as told and made a face. "The fuck is that? It looks like the dildo from hell."

He picked up the cylindrical machine painted in the same deep red of the Tony's armor and groaned.

"Merlin's hairy nutsack. Just add a little gold trim and it's Iron Man's dick."

He timidly pressed the on button and shrieked with laughter as it started whirring.

"It even vibrates" he gasped, bent over at the waist against the counter and the tube buzzed in his hands. "Oh God. I just pictured it in my mind. It's burned into my brain now Friday. I'm just a wee lad. What did I do to deserve this?"

It takes him a bit to get over the hysterics and brews himself a cup of strong tea while Friday attempts to console him. She doesn't really get the humour and Percy is loathe to share this little nugget with Tony just yet. Finally he suppresses his giggles and 'mans up', taking the hand held blender in a cool and confident grip and blending the tomato and basil soup to a smooth consistency.

He nearly loses it again when Friday tells him that the internet suggests moving the thing back and forth repeatedly to get the best results. Percy Weasley everyone. Semi-professional chef and hand job expert. He manages to keep himself together enough to spoon the rich soup into bowls and arrange the grilled sandwiches. He added a bottle of chilled Sangiovese Rose wine to match well with the cheese and two glasses, heading down to the workshop.
AC/DC is blaring in the workspace and he greets Dum-E with a smile and a nod as the bot waves at him and trundles over, pulling out a tray table for Percy to set the meal on. It's a compromise they'd come up with when Percy had first realized that any empty flat space in the workshop soon became a home for some half completed project or random spare parts or was disfigured by fire and acid burns or in that one instance when the poor table had been cut in half by a stray laser.

Percy had finally gotten fed up and had gone down to an IKEA and purchased a sleek and sturdy little table and, with Friday's and Dum-E's help, had installed it on tracks under one of the larger riveted metal tables near the 'pantry'. Tony had frowned at it the first he'd seen it in use but soon lost interest after learning its purpose. He'd patted Dum-E on the chassis proudly and returned to work but not before grabbing one of the plates that chef had prepared.

He cracks open the wine, letting it air. It a light and crisp selection, citrusy, to go with the rich tomato and creamy cheese. Tony is playing with his holograms, putting together and taking apart some kind of complex circuit. It's like a dance the genius does, his arms waving, his quick fingers flickering over the thin and shining blue lines. He gives Friday quick commands, his brown eyes shining with intelligence and a little bit of manic energy.

Percy clears a bit of space on the crowded table and places the soup and sandwiches there, pouring a glass of wine and setting it far from gesturing hands. He deftly places a sandwich in Tony's hand when it stills for a moment and grins as the genius absently bites into the crusty bread. Percy leaves him to find his way to the rest of the nearby plate and goes around the table to where his own meal sat.

The soup is rich and decadent, the sandwiches crunchy and creamy. The wine was light and sweet against his tongue. He savours the meal, forgoing checking his phone or work email. He doesn't even think about work, always enjoying the rare times he can get his mind to just float along, never zeroing in on one topic or the other.

The rock music washes over him, he's not actively listening to any particular thing. He's aware of Dum-E rolling nearby, of Tony awash in hologram blue, the chill of the central air on his bare forearms. He hadn't rolled down his sleeves or taken off the apron before coming down and it's comfortable. He fits in here like no other place he's ever been.

Not at home. Not at Hogwarts. Not at the Ministry. He'd always been the odd man out, just a little set apart from everyone else. Always awkward in his attempts at finding a place to slot into. But here… here there was another person who wasn't quite like anyone around him.

Someone who was often 'the smartest person in the room', the 'arrogant know it all', the 'insufferable arsehole full of himself', the 'socially awkward egg-head' who played the role of self over-confidence so perfectly that no one saw the lonely little boy who was never really allowed to just be himself.

But here, in this cluttered workshop, in a New York sky scraper, surrounded by charming robot arms and a cheeky artificial intelligence, he felt comfortable. He felt… settled.

"That's Bruce's."

Tony's voice startled him into looking up from his empty plate and the last of his wine swirling in the glass.

"Beg your pardon?"

Tony frowned, his eyes sad. "The apron. It's Bruce's."
"Oh. I see." Percy looked down at the dark blue cloth and ran his palm down the words printed on it. "It's a very good apron. He has good taste. And a sense of humour too I bet."

Tony huffed a laugh, his voice a little rough. "Yeah. He does."

"Do you think he would mind me using it?" Percy asked, thinking: Do you mind me using it?

Stark was still for a few seconds before finally shaking his head ruefully. "Nah. He'd probably be glad that someone is still getting some use out of it at least. He banned me from using it the day after I bought it for him. Burned a hole near the bottom with bacon grease. I kept telling him that it wasn't my fault but he wouldn't change his mind."

He shrugged and popped the last sandwich in his mouth.

"It was that asshole Hawkeye. Trying to twirl his new flame arrows like batons RIGHT THERE in the middle of the living room. One of them got away and fell right into the bacon. One minute I'm graciously helping Steve make breakfast and the next I'm lying on the kitchen floor, a super soldier huddled over me and I'm literally on fire. No... no Dum-E I'm not on fire NOW. I'm just telling a story geez."

He waves the enthusiastic claw with its extinguisher away, chuckling as it droops low.

"Anyway, picture a fireball six feet high and four across raining flaming bacon and hot grease all over the kitchen. The security footage really didn't do it justice. So after getting the fire put out and Steve and I being treated for burns by Medical, Natasha ended up putting Clint in the naughty corner for playing twirl with experimental weapons tech while we waited for the hulk to calm down.

Bruce took one look at the burns on the apron and forbid me from ever using it again. He told me later that it was easier for him to be mad about the apron than anything else that happened. It was such a small thing that he could allow himself to be angry about it without the hulk dropping in. I didn't mind though, it got me out of cooking rotation."

Percy runs his fingertips along the small burn pattern near the bottom of the apron. A small smattering of holes with discoloured and warped edges. He thought about the former owner and everything he'd heard so far from Tony's anecdotes, Pepper's musings, Friday's observations and SHEILD's own files. He put an elbow on the table and rested his chin in his hand, tilting his head a little to look at the genius.

"I guess he found it easier to be mad about the apron being burned than being scared that you were burned."

Tony looks down at his bowl for a long while before slurping the rest of his soup, placing the bowl to the side. Nothing else is said. Percy silently clears the dishes and leaves Tony to his work, hanging the apron neatly back on its hook. It's about pride of place. It's about letting the apron hang there in case it's owner ever came back. It's about having a place you can always.... always come back to.

It's about coming home.
Chapter 10

One of the perks of being personal assistant to Tony Stark was access to his fleet of cars. And we're not talking about the lovely, well maintained, sleek black sedans and flashy SUVs. Nor were we discussing the luxury cars with their shiny chrome trim and custom leather interiors. Not those, nice as they were. No.

What we were talking about was the collection of exquisite vehicles that Tony had personally picked, bought and maintained with loving care. There was Audi, Bugatti, Ford, Tesla. There was Rolls Royce, Ferrari and Cadillac. Bright and shining jewels that gleamed in the perfect lighting of the garage and never failed to steal Percy's attention whenever he was near.

It was not that they were monuments to modern innovation and human imagination. That they were tributes to muggle ingenuity and a perfect amalgam of both raw power and grace. It wasn't just that they were so finely tuned, responsive to the driver and handled like a dream. It wasn't just all of those things to Percy really.

It was that they were fast.
So breathtakingly, heart-racingly, orgasmically fast.
Yes, he knew that he was making up words but normal English language just didn't seem to do them justice.

The only hiccup was that as much as Percy knew how to drive a muggle car, he did not in fact have a valid driver's license. Oh, he'd had one back when he was at the Ministry of Magic, it had been needed for his forays into the muggle world, but that did not transfer over to his new life. While he'd been on walkabout, no one had cared if he'd had the proper paperwork, all that had mattered was that he could drive… and drive fast.

It didn't matter, he'd driven cars, trucks, bikes, even farm equipment. He'd even driven a tank once during a short lived rebel attack on a rural African village. He'd ended up driving the tank off a cliff and apperating away, therefore ending the battle in its tracks.

It took one call from Pepper to SI's HR department to get the paperwork pushed through, proclaiming that Tony's PA needed to be ready for anything. She'd even suggested flying and helicopter lessons and as someone who loved learning new things, especially things that went very fast, Percy had happily agreed.

She'd introduced him to the head mechanic at SI, one Asta Cloudsister, daughter of hippies and a former marine with a bleach blonde crew cut and a prosthetic leg. Asta looked like a young Brigit Neilson, tall and built like an amazon with her tanned skin and tattoos, happy covered in grease and elbow deep in car guts.

The leg was a custom made number, fitted for her by Tony himself even before she'd taken the job. It was a prototype that allowed the kind of movement and strength needed for mechanic work that paved the way for a new wave of prosthetics geared towards getting military veterans and other heavily active people back on their feet and back to the lives they lived before their injury.

There were days when Tony, Asta and Percy would wade into the backlog of SI's Transportation division, getting their hands dirty with the grunt work of auto-repair, showing Percy the ins and outs of internal combustion while trading good natured barbs and truly filthy language. Often Percy would find himself in stitches from the scorching zingers Asta and Tony traded.
For his flying lessons, Percy's instructor was a friendly and scarily competent African Immigrant Kwasi Ime Ikenna. She was Tony's personal pilot and had a wicked sense of humor and an utterly disarming smile.

"My parents wanted a boy…" she laughed, running through the pre-flight routine, "… hence the name Kwasi. He kicked me out when I refused to enter into an arranged marriage with a man three times my age. My aunt took me in and helped me get an education, she was a real firecracker … an 'owesifazane eqinile' … that means…"

"Strong woman."

Kwasi nodded, surprised. "You know Zulu?"

Percy shrugged, "I've picked up a few things here and there."

"I ended up being the first person from my village to go to college and the first person in the whole county to become a pilot. When I got my first international job, I went home to my village and opened a school for girls and named it for my Aunt who had saved me. I even invited my father to the grand opening. I was not surprised when he declined to attend."

Percy just laughed and said "You, my friend, are a bonafide badass."

Kwasi smiled as they taxied the jet down the runway. "Why yes, yes I am."

"I want to have hot filthy sex with you."

Tony chuckled and looked up from his latest project. "Are you talking to me or to the car?"

Percy shrugged. "Whichever one that lets me get behind the wheel faster I suppose."

The Hennessy Venom GT sprawled smugly across the garage floor looking like hot wet sex on a stick. One of Tony's exquisite car collection, looking sparkling new as if it had just been rolled off the factory floor. The slung low bucket seats still had their plastic coverings for merlin's sake. All gunmetal grey and sleek lines, it was half hidden in shadows that swallowed most of the garage space outside the small sphere of light that surrounded Tony's workspace.

Percy had come searching for the elusive genius with a tablet full of paperwork that Pepper needed signatures on ASAP or so help her she would come and stomp on someone's gonads with her six inch Jimmy Choos. As someone who valued self-preservation and had a deep attachment to his own gonads, he'd set out looking for his boss forthwith.

Now, the tablet hung forgotten in his fingers as he stared unabashedly at the best thing he'd seen since he'd discovered hot man cock. He clenched his jaw against the tingling of his saliva glands, Percy Weasley had never drooled over anything publicly in his life thank you very much and he didn't intend to start now.

As it was, his own cock had started twitching in his pants at the sight before him and he wouldn't be surprised or ashamed if it was already leaking pre-cum unto his boxers. His blood felt hot in his veins and his fists tightened around the tablet just as his gut tightened and burned low.

"Should I leave you two alone?" Tony's voice is low and darkly amused and it tumbles down
"Fuck you Stark" Percy sputtered, his face and neck heating against the chill of the garage as his lungs struggled to pull in air. "You once told me that you'd fuck the iron man suit if you could so you don't have room to talk."

"Please…" Tony scoffed softly, "Everyone wants to fuck the suit. It's a goddamn sexy motherfucker."

They both fell into silence, staring at the car as it all but oozes sex appeal from its parking spot. Percy narrowed his eyes at the car, his hands itching to touch. In fact, not only his hands but his whole body wanted to rub along the swooping lines of the car's hood, to feel the growl of the engine vibrate through his body. Fucking cock tease, he moans mentally, you dirty bitch you.

"So, " Percy turned to catch Tony's eye solemnly. "Who's cock do I have to suck around here to drive that thing?"

Stark barked a laugh and went to a lock box mounted on a nearby wall, punching in a key code and revealing rows upon rows of keys on hooks. He selected one from the box and closed it, turning on his heel towards Percy.

He jingled the keys in his hand with a grin. "Seeing as you've brushed off every pass I've ever made at you, I'm just going to take that as a rhetorical question and not a literal one."

Percy smirked. "Considering how long it's been since I got some and how much I want to drive this car, my question may have just been more literal and less rhetorical than you thought."

As Tony's eyes glaze over at the thought, Percy swipes the keys from his lax fingers and replaces them with the tablet. "Sign those before Pepper has both our guts for garters."

Tony frowned at the tablet then at Percy. "Or we could go take this baby for a spin instead. She can reach up to 270 MPH with 1,244-hp 7.0-liter twin-turbocharged V8 under the hood. Never had the time to really open her up on the track. Never had the time. Asta keeps her looking all gussied up but she's never been on a date."

"Never been…" Percy licked his lips, the keys clutched tightly in his fist. "… but Pepper…"

"...will kill us for sure… " Tony grinned wickedly, "But at least we'll die happy."

Percy gave Tony a sly look as the genius wriggled his eyebrows salaciously. "You, Sir, are a bad influence."

Tony laughed, grabbing his leather jacket as Percy pipped the lock.

They made their way ninety miles outside of New York to the Monticello Motor Club because of course Tony is a card carrying member. Friday had called ahead and reserved the track and Tony makes quick work of signing the paperwork because as much as they both liked living dangerously, they also liked the more delicate parts of their anatomy healthy and unharmed. Finally, as they pull up to the Club, Tony signs the last document with a flick and sends off an email, tucking the tablet into the pocket in the seat.

The calm and friendly Senior Concierge greets them at the track; along with the stoic Track
Master. After some brief introductions and an order for a late lunch at the Club's in house restaurant, Percy eased the car unto the track. The run is 4.1 miles of smooth, race grade asphalt and the Vemon GT roars as Percy opened her up, shifting from gear to gear with the ease of a master.

Percy can distantly hear Tony's exited whooping but his ears are filled with the deep vibrating growl of the engine that he can feel through his feet on the pedals, his hands on the wheel, his ass in the deep bucket seat. It's a good thing the car still had the heat sealed plastic covers on them because he was 75% sure that he was going to cum all over himself before he was through.

His hands, covered in black racing gloves, tightens on the steering wheel as they take a sharp curve, Tony screaming with laughter at his side as the billionaire braced his arms and legs against the dashboard and floor. Percy's vision tunnels down to his heartbeat, the steady throb of his pulse in his head, his heart, his cock. His breathing deepens, evening out until there's nothing left but him and the road being eaten up by the beast under him.

He feels its power, he feels its control, he feels the barely restrained savagery that could and would kill them both horribly if he lost control for a moment. The scenery blurs by, the wind whipping off the aerodynamic lines of the car. Percy can imagine the sounds it makes, can almost feel it tugging on his clothes, pulling at his hair like a lover, seeking to own him, to show him who really held control.

The speedometer climbs steadily, the car slinging low to the ground as the headwinds push its nose down. Percy's hands are sure and steady, controlling the wheel as it fought and bucked against his hold. The car hugs the turns, pressing him against the seat or the belt accordingly. If he's lucky he'll have bruises on his chest tonight. Delicious marks that he can touch and tease as he lays in his bed tonight.

His breath hitches, his heart racing as the car growls and jumps forward, sending a tremor through the whole of him and Percy is gone, bright sparks in the corners of his sight as he shudders through climax. He rides the high, laughing freely as pleasure ripples out like never ending waves.

He makes a couple more laps as he comes down, finally rolling to a stop near the track gates. Slumping against the seat as he pants and tries to marshal his weakened limbs. The lack of g-force constantly pulling at him leaves him weak and jittery and he rolls his head to the side to check on Tony. The darker man is panting harshly, his pupils blown wide as he turns to meet Percy's gaze.

Tony giggles a bit hysterically and soon enough they are both laughing wildly. By the time they've calmed down the Concierge and Track master have returned with bottles of water. Percy shifts awkwardly in his seat, his pants wet and sticky from his orgasm.

"Um…" He winces, flushing hotly. "… I may need a new pair of trousers."

"Of course Sir" the Concierge smiles benignly and kips off after getting his sizes.

The Track Master watches her walk off then turns back to look at the red faced Brit. He directs them to the Clubhouse Spa Centre just off the track and tells them that the staff will be expecting them.

"Don' worry about it." he intones seriously, folding his beefy arms across his broad chest. "It happens more than you'd think."

Percy and Tony exchange looks and head off to the spa. The clubhouse provides custom monogramed tracksuits after they've showered and the sit down for a late lunch of exquisite steak.
The restaurant has floor to ceiling glass windows and the view is breathtaking. There's hardly a reaction to Tony's presence and the noise level never goes above the comfortable low murmur that good restaurants just seemed to have.

Tony tips well and by the time they get back to the car it's been cleaned and detailed, their clothes laundered and hanging in garment bags. On the drive back, Tony tweets about the great service and the Monticello PR team retweets almost immediately. By the time they get back to the tower, they are trending because of Tony's Instagram pics of them in their snazzy tracksuits.

He gets a happy emoji from Joo-Won in PR and a turd emoji from Sanderson at MACUSA. Most likely from his new stark phone, complete with a signed Ironman phone case. The ungrateful fucker.

Percy sees Tony off to his workshop and logs in to his computer, making his way through his backlog of emails and duties. He checks in with Raizel and Rosemund, makes arrangements for a light dinner with Chef and teleconferences with building security and building maintenance on some pressing matters.

He checks his phone for any special messages from Digger. Turns out that even magical thieving gnomes had Snapchat. There's nothing yet but Percy can be patient if it meant that a proper and thorough job was being done.

There is an email from Pepper thanking him for the getting the documents signed and sent back so quickly. There is also a post script that if he can keep Tony's level of interest and response on the up and up, she may not have to crush their balls after all.

Percy chuckled at the teasing but still shifted uncomfortably and crossed his legs.

You never really knew with Pepper.

He felt loose and relaxed, much like how he felt after good sex, that free floaty feeling that lingered in the soreness of his muscles and left his mind clear and uncluttered. He pressed a hand to his chest, the seat belt did leave bruises and as he prodded them with his fingertips, he trembled and moaned softly.

Maybe he had time for a little self-love before wrangling Tony for dinner and a movie night.

Yes, that sounded like an excellent plan. He'd have to get right on that.

"Friday, Hold my calls would you?"

"Of course Percy."

"Thanks love."

There was a reason why Percy did not play quidditch while at Hogwarts. It was a simple one actually.

No, it was not that he was terrible on a broom or that he thought studying and his education was more important than sports. It wasn't that he felt jealous of Bill and Charlie's exceptional skills and it definitely was not that he hated sports all together.

It was because Percival Ignatious Weasley liked to go fast.
Really fast.

Really, mind-blowingly, recklessly, stupidly, complete disregard for personal safety, fast.

It was the summer before his first year at Hogwarts and after weeks of begging and pleading, he'd finally been given permission to ride a real broom by exasperated Molly Weasley. Partly because both Bill and Charlie, both already heroes of the quidditch pitch at school, had insured her that they would be keeping a strict eye on their eager little brother; and partly because Percy was such a well behaved boy and hardly asked for anything for himself. It was also due, in part, to the fact that her little angel's earnest and shining eyes just melted her heart something awful.

So as the sun rose hot, chasing across the pale morning sky, the wooden back door off the kitchen slammed open and out strutted Percy, clothed head to foot in his brother's quidditch leathers which hung somewhat large on his lithe frame; a thick leather skull cap tucked over a riot of red curls and buckled at the chin; a pair of slightly cracked and worn goggles that Arthur had dug up from his knick knack shed and had belonged to the late Fabien Prewitt; and thick gloves usually used to de-gnome the garden.

On his shoulder sat an ancient yet very well cared for and oiled Clean Sweep, the first broom Percy would ride that was not one of those frustratingly slow and stupid kiddie brooms. Creeping along like snails just above the ground, they'd done nothing but ignite Percy into a scorching little ball of impatience and temper with their refusal to do anything but mosey around the lawn like a tame pony.

Heck. Riding an actual pony would be better.

He could see Bill trying to stifle a giggle as he ran through the rules of flying a real broom, Charlie coughing into his fist often as he checked over Percy's gear. The twins' childish sniggering echoed from the kitchen window, the red headed duo practically hanging over the sill, despite their mother's threats to whap their bottoms with a wooden spoon. It was a small mercy that she'd made them stay inside, saying that Bill and Charlie had hands full with Percy already.

Percy studiously ignored them, concentrating on Bill's instructions. He'd heard so much about Hogwarts and he knew that quidditch was a large part of that experience. Not only were his brothers naturals on the field, his family bloodlines on both his mother's and father's sides were chock-a-block with quidditch prodigies. He was already socially awkward and a bit of a know it all twat, he needed all the social currency he could get.

After a last check and some adjustment to the heavy leather robes and gloves, Percy secured the goggles with a grin and nodded at his brothers' pushing off from the ground a good twenty feet with a wobble. He steadied himself with a nervous laugh, almost giddy that he was already higher than any kiddie broom would ever go. He knew that if he wanted to go higher he could. If he wanted to go faster he could. It was like the whole world suddenly unfurled before him, spreading out like a brightly coloured blanket.

Later, when he finally woke up at St. Mungo's with a broken arm, broken leg, broken clavicle and a concussion, with his family either crying on him (Arthur) screaming at him (Molly) pale with worry (Bill) Red with anger (Charlie) or filled with awe (Fred and George); he'd known in his heart of hearts that he had always and would always love things that went fast.

With all the arguing, screeching, crying and all around over reaction, Percy was able to piece together events as they'd happened; along with bits and pieces of his own memory of course. Apparently he'd shot off into the air without so much as a by your leave to his shocked brothers,
zipping around the property like a maniac. He flew high, he flew low, all but ignoring the squealing from the kitchen window and the caterwaul that came from his mother at the back door.

He'd twisted sideways to duck under a clothes line, the laundry fluttering madly as he whipped past. He'd skimmed the toes of his boots along the shingled roof, kicking a couple off to shatter upon the ground far below. He almost had a run in with the old iron weather vane, barely dodging in time to avoid an awful crash and taking out the poor rooster at the top with the tail of his heavy coat.

He'd veered upwards, climbing higher and higher as he grinned like the very devil into the shrieking winds. Then, in a moment that had almost stopped all their hearts, he hung in midair, the only sounds his ragged panting and the rush of blood in his ears, before falling to the ground and pulling off a near perfect Wronsky Feint.

At that point his mother had fainted dead away and had not actually seen him come out of the Feint whole and unharmed, only to veer suddenly in the face of their father's Ford Angelina, which had rolled itself out of the shed at all the ruckus, and wipe out spectacularly in some nearby bushes.

Bill, being the oldest family member at home and still conscious, had sent Charlie to deal with the wailing twins and check on their mother while he went to see to Percy. Charlie, after soothing the twins and casting a cushioning charm under his mother (he had yet to master 'envenerate' in school, quickly flooed Arthur at the ministry.

In the end, the head nurse at St. Mungos came to Percy's room and in no uncertain terms told the Weasely clan that this was a damned hospital and to either shut the hell up or get the hell out because visiting hours were long over and it was only her acquaintance with Arthur through the ministry that they were all still allowed in there.

Molly, red in the face, had puffed up her chest and, after tucking the blanket around Percy once more and kissing his forehead, gathered her brood around her to leave. Arthur ran his hand through Percy's curls gently, giving him a wobbly smile. The twins grinned widely and waved before tucking themselves into molly's skirts.

Charlie, still a bit angry that Percy had broken his Clean Sweep, just patted Percy's hand and gave it a small squeeze. Bill leaned in close and whispered that even though Percy had most likely scared a decade off his life, that was still the best Wronsky Feint he'd ever had the pleasure of witnessing first hand.

Later, in the darkness of the room, skele-gro and pain potions coursing through his system, his mind drifted hazily back, feeling the wind in his face, the sun on his cheeks, the strength of his grip on the broom, the sheer determination to escape the clutches of gravity and soar right up into the clouds.

It had been worth it though.

Even though his mother all but banned him from ever getting on a broom again.
Even though they were in debt to the hospital and had to use money that they'd been saving for new school supplies.
Even though his father had been reprimanded at work for leaving so abruptly in the middle of his shift.
Even though they could not afford a broom for Charlie to replace the one Percy broke.
Even though he hurt like the dickens as his bones re-grew.

He chuckled weakly to himself as he settled back into the hospital bed.
"Worth it."
"Tank. Talon. ETA on Hazard and Hellfire, two minutes. Twenty feet to exit."

"Roger that Hornet. Vehicle is on route."

Percy did a quick sweep of the room and frowned. "Hold. Hellfire delayed by an over-eager beaver."

A few feet away a young business woman with a slightly twisted pencil skirt and loose fly away curls escaping from her sloppy bun was looking up at Ms. Potts with awe filled eyes, an ugly attaché case hugged tightly to her ample chest. Pepper, immaculate in her white power suit and six inch Jimmy Choos, nodded and smiled at the breathless chatter spilling from the woman's lips.

Percy huffed a laugh under his breath as Tony blatantly looked at his watch for the second time in as many seconds. Way to be subtle Boss, he thought to himself, exchanging a knowing look with Happy who was stationed at the door. Beyond the door stood four of Happy's security team, all former SHIELD agents who had been absorbed by Stark Industries after the whole winter soldier/collapse of SHIELD fiasco.

In fact, many of former SHIELD employees had been welcomed into the wacky SI family, after extensive psychological and mental evaluations of course. The agents trained in combat had been brought into the Security and Logistics Division while the scientists had been shoved into the deep end of R&D. the administrative division had been sent off like ducklings to Raizel's 'tender loving care' and then sorted into the various departments and branches worldwide.

The biggest changes were to the PR Division and Stark Legal. If Percy thought those divisions were sharks in suits before, that was nothing on what they were now. Under the Joo-Won and Aaron, those departments thrived and cut down any who stood in SI's way.

Rosemund, Pepper's personal assistant now had a contingent of three undersecretaries that ran roughshod over bureaucracy like Charlie's angels on a good day and like rabid harpies on bad. Raizel was in her glee in secretariat, putting her new charges through the wringer and grinning in delight when they passed all of her rigorous training. HR had almost been overwhelmed until Maria Hill had walked in looking for a job.

Tony had patched through to the office where she was being interviewed and yelled.

"You're hired. Get the fuck to work."

Hill had made a face and retorted. "Stop channeling Fury, Stark."

"Please, as if I couldn't rock the leather and eye patch." Tony scoffed before hanging up.

Percy was pulled out of his meanderings when the couple started moving for the door. Happy signaled to the team, who immediately started making a path through the paparazzi to the town car that had just pulled up, flanked by two black SUVs.

A petite platinum blonde in a fitted black uniform hopped from the car to open the door, completing the smooth pathway from the door into the car. Percy ducked into the second SUV while Happy took the Town Car's passenger seat and within seconds they were off, FRIDAY coordinating navigation that took them quickly through the city.
"Hazard and Hellfire secure, Overwatch, ETA to airport?" Percy murmured into his comm unit.

"Thirty minutes if traffic patterns hold Hornet. Re-calculating for an accident near the tunnel. Sending alternate route to convoy GPS now. ETA now thirty seven minutes"

"Understood Overwatch." Percy acknowledged, sending off a quick text alert to their security team at the airport and private jet. "Copy Tank? Talon?"

"Copy" Happy's gruff voice came over the comm.


Percy smiled as he pictured Happy and Svea giving each other the hairy eyeball in the front seat of the Town car. Hogan had never been happy at letting anybody else drive Tony and/or Pepper as long as he could help it. Even when he'd been moved from Tony's driver to Head of Security, he'd still held a job as Pepper's personal driver as Tony had taken to driving himself everywhere.

It was finally Percy who'd put his foot down after a horrid week of trying to be Tony Stark's Personal Assistant/Driver/Bodyguard/Friend that had left Percy with a black eye and a very fast and out of place member of the paparazzi with a restraining order against him and the Eye of Sauron that was Stark Legal looking at him with acute interest.

After slapping a bag of frozen peas on his face, he'd glared at Tony across the kitchen counter and, in plain terms, informed Tony that he would be getting a Driver/Bodyguard or by Merlin, Percy was going to make his life very uncomfortable. With Pepper standing next to him with a frown, Tony wilted under the gaze of both redheads and capitulated.

Svea Raubvogel was a half human, half veela squib who worked as a freelance driver for MACUSA when she wasn't competing in Roller Derby. Standing at 5'1" no one thought that the tiny woman was hell on wheels, either on the track or one the streets. With hardly any magic at all, she had been kicked out of her family home in germany for being both half human as well as magically weak.

Her only traits from her veela heritage were tiny grey feathers that sprouted from her hair behind ears and her sharpened nails. She also had a strength that belied her small stature but could only be used in short bursts. Her roller derby name was 'bird of prey' which suited her because of her birdlike features as well as being the literal translation of her last name.

Svea was a woman of few words and it drove Happy crazy that he couldn't get a rood read on her. It tickled Percy pink to see them interact. No matter their differences though, they were both loyal to a fault and did their jobs extremely well.

"What I don't understand…" Tony's voice came across the comm, "… is why I have to be called Hazard? Couldn't you pick a cooler nickname for me? Happy my man, at least you get to be the Tank! Why couldn't you hook your boy up with something cool? I like Arsenal, how about that? Or maybe Kingpin? Or Steel Shot… I'm partial to Strike Eagle myself, you know. Now THAT is a badass name. Strike Eagle! And Pepper could be Stiletto, my beautiful Femme Fatale and right hand woman."

Percy could picture Tony gesturing wildly behind the tinted glass of the town car as Happy gave an exasperated sigh.

"Stiletto?" Pepper's amused voice responded.

"Yeah!" Tony enthused, "… you know… because your shoes are as sharp as your mind and you
can cut a man to pieces both verbally and literally. Probably without even getting your clothes dirty or your hair messed up."

"Good one." the agent at Percy's side muttered off comm and they shared a grin.

"You're lucky you're cute." Pepper chuckled, followed by the sound of a kiss. Tony hummed.

"Damn lucky." his voice was a little rough and he cleared his throat before continuing.

"So What do you say Hap? Strike Eagle? The Eagle had Landed?"

"I picked the names. " Percy interrupted before Happy got put too much on the spot. "We needed codes that were not to common so that whoever was listening in on our frequency would know immediately who we were talking about."

"... And Strike Eagle? Please. You might have well called you Iron Man and be done with it. " He scoffed, "We picked Hazard because it suits your wild behaviour in and out of the suit. Be glad we didn't choose one of the other names on the list. You could have been Crash Test, Turnip King or Disco Potato. We almost went with Prometheus even if it was only so we could call Ms. Potts Pandora but it was too bloody long to roll off the tongue."

Pepper giggled while Tony made choking noises over the comm. " The first woman. A means to deliver misfortune into the house of man, to cheat mankind of the company of the good spirits? Is that why you went with Hellfire for me?"

"Of course mum… "Percy acquiesced. "Between your red hair and your ability to light a fire under the Boss' ass like no other… I think the words 'hell hath no fury' was bounced around the room a few times."

Pepper's laughter tumbles freely over the comms and Percy grins.

Tony finally recovers and shoots over the radio. "And you are Hornet because you buzz around our ears like the annoying bug you are I bet?"

Percy nods even though they can't see him. "Of course. I also can sting you in the ass when I need to get you moving and like all hornets around the world can attest, I'm basically an asshole who will fuck your shit up if you test me. Buzz Buzz Muthafucka"

Even Tony laughs at this, even though Percy can tell he doesn't want too. They pull into the airport and are taken directly to the plane. Percy checks in with the pilot and sends some emails off to Raizel and Joo-Won while Pepper and Tony kiss goodbye on the Tarmac and Happy gets the luggage loaded. Pepper was headed over to Malibu to oversee some inspections of the newest SI facility there and would be gone for a couple weeks. Happy and a team of five would be accompanying her, including two of the team that driven in with them.

Tony, Percy, Svea and a team of two guards would be staying behind in New York. Percy could tell that Tony wasn't happy about being away from his lover for so long but he was in the middle of at least three different projects that couldn't be halted or postponed and the facility needed this personal oversight from its CEO if they wanted to get it reopened under the deadline.

Tony leans against the car to watch the plane take off, even though it drives his security team up the wall for him to stay in such an exposed place for so long but they suck it up and do their jobs. It's only after the plane disappears into the darkening sky that Tony turns to Percy with a sigh and a wistful expression on his face.
"What's next on the agenda Perce?" he shoved his hands into his pockets and rolled his shoulders.

"You have a dinner/slash meeting with the buyers from Osaka Group at seven, A Video Conference with Ventriss Industries in New Dehli at nine and you need to look over the Liquid Circuitry projections Dr. Pranay sent over for the presentation tomorrow." Percy listed as he got into the Town Car with his boss.

Tony sighed again, letting his eyes close as he rested his head against the seat. Percy exchanged a look with Svea who pulled off, keeping the ride smooth as she could. Percy checked Tony's schedule on his tablet once again, making a note to slot something fun into his boss' schedule for the week. Tony always needed a pick me up whenever Pepper was away.

Percy would have to be extra vigilant and not let Tony hide out in his workshop too often.

Looks like another visit to Monticello was in order.

"Is that a falcon?"

Percy looked up at Tony's question, following the man's questioning gaze out to the landing pad where said falcon was perched, as comfy as you please, on one of the handrails. He frowned, blinking at the sight.

"Yes, a Peregrine if I am not mistaken."

Tony furrowed his brow, moving closer to the large glass doors that open out unto the landing pad. "What is it even doing here? It shouldn't even be here. I have special Avian Aversion Tech installed in all my buildings, the Tower especially. There shouldn't be any birds on or around the Tower… at all."

Percy stepped up to his side. "Avian Aversion technology? Are you allergic to feathers or do you just not like birds?"

Tony gave him a look from the corners of his eyes. "Did you know that over 900,000 birds die from flying into glass in New York City alone, over a billion all over the world? To birds, Stark Tower is like the Sky Scraper of Death. Every Stark facility has an Ultra Sonic Repeller that puts out a continuous near silent ultrasonic sound waves that let the birds know 'Hey! something is here… fly around it!'"

He waved his hands at the last few words. Percy nodded and looked back out at the falcon. A flash of red and gold glinted at the bird's claws and Percy frowned, squinting his eyes at the birds. The colour flashes again and Percy blanches.

Was that a Wizarding Mail Falcon?

He knew that in America mail owls were not as prevalent as in the UK but he couldn't think of anyone that used falcons for deliver messages. Maybe MACUSA but Higgs would never risk contacting him this way. She knew better. Sanderson had a muggle cellphone and an obsession with emojis to is wasn't him. That left a scarce few and none of the options were favourable.

"Friday?" Percy asked while shooting off a quick text to Sanderson. "Can you do a scan of the bird on the rooftop for me?"

"Of course Percy." the AI replied.
Tony shook his head with a laugh at Percy's frown. "What do you think it is? Some shape shifting assassin sent to kill me? That's not possible."

Percy gave him a look. "A lot of things aren't possible until they are. You should know. Aliens weren't possible, Asgard wasn't possible. Exploding People wasn't possible."

"Until it was" Tony finished with a grim look. Percy nodded and they both looked out at the bird.

"Scan Complete." Friday announced. "No anomalies detected. It's just a normal Peregrine Falcon, Historically known as the Duck Hawk. Male. There is a pouch tied to its leg, red, with a gold engraved coin that says Gringotts on the face."

Percy face palmed "Oh bugger me" he groaned.

Tony raised a curious eye. "Friends of yours?"

With a long suffering sigh Percy finally looked up. "If that is from who I think it's from, I am in the shit."

Tony gave a slow and wicked grin, rubbing his palms together. "Oh, Do tell."

Percy made a pass at the kitchen to grab some leftover chicken strips and a bowl of water, instructing Friday to open the glass doors. Before he could go outside though, the falcon flew in and perched on the kitchen counter as if he owned the place.

While Tony's eyes widened in shock, Percy carefully placed the chicken and water before the bird. "I don't have any treats but you can never go wrong with chicken."

The bird huffed and waddled over to the food, inspecting it carefully before deeming it satisfactory. It leaned over and held it's leg out, letting Percy carefully unravel the red velvet pouch before ripping into the meat.

"Uh….. " Tony gaped as he stared at the bird, ignoring Percy's attempts to open the pouch at his side. "… what the fuck? I've heard of carrier pigeons and trained falcons but Trained Carrier Falcons? What the actual fuck?"

Percy paid him no mind, finally opening the pouch after brushing his magic over the galleon attached to the neck. With much trepidation, he upended the pouch into his palm, gulping heavily as a small black case fell out, looking like a muggle compact. Most of him wanted to fling the damnable thing off the side of the tower but a small part, seeing the W marked in an Egyptian cartouche inlaid in gold against the black gave him pause.

Before he could try to make an excuse to his boss and face what was coming in private, the compact clicked open in his palm.

"Fuck" was all he had time to breath before the cacophony started.

"TWO YEARS! TWO MERLIN DAMNED YEARS YOU'VE BEEN TREKKING ACROSS MOTHER NATURE'S GREEN EARTH WITH NOTHING BUT A POST CARD OR TWO SAYING THAT YOU ARE ALIVE! TWO FUCKING YEARS AND I DON'T EVEN KNOW IF YOU ARE DEAD IN A DITCH SOMEWHERE LITTLE BROTHER!"

I COULDN'T BEHOOVE YOU TO PICK UP A PHONE, A PEN, TO SEND A FUCKING TELEGRAM? AND WHEN YOU DO SEND A POST CARD ONCE IN A BLUE FUCKING MOON, IT'S JUST GOT THREE OR FOUR WORDS ON IT. 'I'M FINE. WOTCHER PERCE'!
WHAT THE FUCK KIND OF MESSAGE IS THAT?

YOU HAVE CHARLIE GOING OUT OF HIS MIND WITH WORRY. FLEUR WANTED TO YOU BE THERE FOR THE BIRTH OF OUR DAUGHTER. DAD GOT IN CONTACT WITH ME ASKING ABOUT YOU AND I COULDN'T TELL HIM SHITE BUT THAT YOU'D GONE TO AFRICA. NOT EVEN A SPECIFIC COUNTRY… JUST THE ENTIRE FUCKING CONTINENT. I'M IN FUCKING AFRICA IF YOU WANT TO GET TECHNICAL ABOUT IT.

I HAD TO CALL IN A FAVOUR WITH MY BOSSES TO GET THIS MESSAGE TO YOU JUST TO FIND OUT THAT YOU ARE SETTLED DOWN IN AMERICA FOR MONTHS WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A LINE DROPPED TO US. MONTHS. I OUGHT TO TAN YOUR HIDE YOU WANKER.

Oh, and Fleur says hello and can't wait for our little Victoire to meet her Uncle Perce. CALL ME!"

The silence in the kitchen was like a heavy blanket after that, the only sound he could hear was the blood rushing in his ears. Percy swallowed heavily, shaky and pale as calloused hands guided him to sit in a nearby chair. The falcon had flown away at the first few words, leaving chicken bits strewn across the table. Tony gently took the small compact from his trembling hands and replaced it with a glass of water.

Percy made a face at the water and it was promptly switched out for a glass of whisky. He slung it back, savouring the burn in this throat and squeezing his eyes shut. When he finally opened them again, it was to see Tony inspecting the small device, turning it over in his hands. The older man looked up as if he could sense Percy watching and gave him a compassionate smile.

"You ok?"

Percy rubbed a hand down his face and shrugged. "Not really."

"So… big brother huh?"

"Yes. Bill… William."

"Charlie too?"

"Yes."

"Flower?"

"Fleur. Bill's wife."

"Victoire?"

"Apparently my niece."

"Dad?"

"Estranged."

"And the rest?"

"Just… strange. We don't talk…I've never got along well with my family. They are a very close knit group and I could just never fit in with them. I left and it's just been better on my own. Easier."

"I hear that." Tony nodded. "Another drink?"
Percy cleared his throat. "No thank you. I'd rather have that glass of water now."

"Sure." the glass is placed in his hand and he sipped it.

"Um… Tony?"

"Yes"

"Do you happen to know where one can send a telegraph here in New York?"

"Not really but I'm sure Friday can find out for you can't you Fry?"

"Of course Boss, scanning now."

"Good girl."

............................

edited because i forgot the time line of my own story. LMAO. Continuity BITCHES!!!
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Digger is back and the Bag of Dicks gets what's coming to them. Team Tony for the win!!!!

Percy is at a brunch meeting with Raizel and Maria Hill when his phone pings. Dragging his eyes away from the impending apocalypse that is the friendship of these two powerhouse women was difficult to say the least. He had the inkling that if he looked away for too long, they would end up taking over the world, or at least pulling the strings. He wondered what it would be like if Pepper joined on their power brunches in but he was convinced that the world was not yet ready for that triumvirate of BAMF.

Percy certainly wasn't.

He slipped his phone from his pocket and glanced at it. It was a snapchat of a mouth full of wide, dingy white teeth with thick wine stained lips curled back from almost blackened guns. Digger. The gnome he'd hired to 'dig' into the Bag od Dicks. His phone pinged again, this time a grainy surveillance photo of one of the more stalwart members of the BoD in a highly compromising position. The caption 'it gets better' attached.

Percy made a face and turned the phone to the side. He didn't think it was possible to twist the human body into that position without magical potions. Raizel snapped her fingers, bringing attention to his apparent inattention.

"Your face is telling a story I would like to hear." she takes a sip of her samosa and gestures to the waiter for another round. "I Know that we agreed to no devices at Brunch."

Percy bows his head sheepishly before handing his phone over. "I think you may just make an exception for this."

Raizel has to pull out her designer readers and peers at the picture with a frown, shifting to let Maria have a look as well. Soon enough their confused faces transform into amused ones as Maria snorts. Both women turn their head to the side in unison, turning the phone this way and that.

"My my…" Raizel smirks wickedly, "… I didn't know that Old Man Hodgins was so….. "

"Flexible?" Maria prompts.

"Adventurous?" Percy volunteered.

"Horny" Raizel deadpanned. She looked up at Percy with a calculating stare "It gets better?"

Maria joins her and for a hot second Percy gets the feeling of being a bug under glass. He puts his hand out for his phone and after a second's hesitation , she slaps it down in his palm. He grins and sends off a confirmation message before slipping his phone back into his pocket.

"It seems that I may have come across some pertinent information about our dear old board. Information that they've been paying big money to keep buried. "
Raizel shared his devilish grin. "Information that may just end up burying them all?"

"Up to the eyeballs," the redhead confirmed, murmuring thanks the waiter as he refreshed their drinks.

The lithe blond was cute yes, with the way he sent Percy little pouty smiles and stuck out his butt whenever he leaned forward to serve the table and Percy wasn't above bending over a twink or two once in a while so he slipped the scribbled phone number on the napkin into his other pocket.

With a promise to forward all the information received to Riazel so that she could swoop down on the Bag of Dicks like an avenging angel, he bid his goodbyes and winked at the blushing waiter as the valet brought his Cherry red Jaguar XF around.

He has a gnome to meet at Battery Park.

---------------------------------------------------------------------------

Hodthel was a busy and as dirty as ever, the tents and booths milling with crowds of magical folk. The elves were hosting some sort of fair or expo and there was a large arena stamped out to one side of the grounds.

It was always amazing to Percy that no one ever looked twice at his muggle clothing, the magical community more integrated into the muggle world than Magical Britain ever was. Sure, the Americans weren't perfect but they were miles ahead of where Percy had grown up.

Stopping at the clothing stall, Percy eyed a half cape, in a fine knit in shades of grey, that when turned inside out was pure black for more formal occasions. The capelet would go well with his business suits and was the perfect blend of muggle and magical fashion. Paying a pretty penny for it and shrugging it on then and there, Percy felt closer to his old self than he'd felt in the last few years.

His next stop was Gringotts where he neatly bypassed the miserable old goblin by the door after showing it Bill's Cartouche. He was then able to see one of the branch managers who helped him open a new account and establish a magical message exchange that connected straight to Bill's offices in Egypt. They would be able to exchange letters more easily, with a small fee to the bank of course, and so be able to keep in touch.

He also arranged to half the second half of Digger's fee wired into an untraceable money voucher that the gnome could redeem for goblin gold at any Gringott's branch in the world. Tucking the deep green with gold filigree envelope into his suit pocket, he ventured over to the grimy tent of the old hag with the dubious knick knacks he had frequented twice before. How she ended up as Digger's public contact, Percy would never know and frankly didn't want to know.

The tent is just as smelly as he remembered, a heavy mix of herbs, potions ingredients and other mysterious odours that the red head didn't really want to identify. He tried not to make a face as she shuffled to and fro, trying to sell him her odd and cracked baubles or read his palm, for a reasonable price of course.

Percy frowned as he spotted a highly illegal magical artifact and at least three illegally cursed muggle artifacts jumbled together on a rickety table just behind some jars of eyeballs and other body parts that Percy sincerely hoped were animal in origin. That particular one was definitely doxy heads floating in blue fluid. Percy cringed and clutched his new capelet closer to his body.

The hag cackled just then, making him jump, and pointed to the back of the tent. In the back room,
The gnome was rifling through the contents of an upturned bag, piles of priceless gems, both mounted into necklaces, bracelets, rings and tiaras and strewn loose across the rough and scarred old table.

The gnome was chewing on the end of a short and stubby cigar, breathing of noxious smoke that hung in the room, making it hazy except for the sparkling of the gems. Grubby hands sorted the jewels, throwing the priceless stones this way and that, sending some of the loose ones rolling off the table. A ruby the size of Percy's big toe rolled to a stop next to his shoe and he stepped back swiftly, his eyes shifting between the stone and the creature at the table.

"Ye nah interested in meh shiny shiny eh Wixen child?" the big white teeth knash against the stubby cigar.

Percy gives the gnome a blank look. "I have no interest in anything that I haven't paid for. I have a feeling that dealing with items I don't know the price of would get me into more trouble I can handle."

Digger chuckles and it sounds like the grating of small stones against each other. "All wixen hear the call of treasure bright. Most follow along like fools and often run afoul the dangers. What makes you so different to ye brethren horde?"

Percy frowns thoughtfully. "I've walked the path to the shiny shiny as you call it. My shiny was power, recognition, money to a certain extent." he shrugged. "I've seen what that path does to men, better men than me. They did indeed run afoul in the end. I was fortunate enough not to fall into the pit but many that were close to me did. I have no hunger for treasure of that sort anymore."

The gnome breathes out another breath of noxious smoke and regards Percy for a long while. Seemingly satisfied with what he has seen, he gestured towards and old, worn biscuit tin sitting on a chair in the corner. It rusted all around and the images are half worn off.

Percy gives the gnome and the tin a gimlet stare before gingerly picking up the tin. It rattles as he tries to prize the lid off, wishing he was wearing gloves as his fingers came away stained with rust. Inside, wrapped in a ratty tea cozy was a high density memory card. Quickly, he slotted the card into a device he'd brought along for this purpose and scrolled through the numerous files, each labelled after a member of the board and one marked MISC.

Digger laughed. "Found a little more than ye were looking fer. Included it in return fer the cursed gold ye let me liberate from ye. The evil sprite that lived in it made a mighty tasty treat. A bit spicy but the ones from South America always are."

Percy gaped for a bit before stammering a thank you. He pulled the green envelope from his suit pocket and, at the gnome's direction, placed it on top of the tea cozy and closed the tin over it. Tucking the device with card securely into his coat pocket he took his leave of the gnome.

"Wixen child!"

The gravelly voice had him stopping at the door flap of the tent and turning around. He fumbled to catch something thrown at him, opening his palm to reveal a large smooth stone of dark pinks and purples with a line of yellow fire running down it's middle. It was a dragon opal, mysterious, beautiful and highly valued amongst the Wizarding community. Percy gaped at the stone and then at the gnome.

Digger grinned, his Cheshire smile the only thing visible in the haze of smoke that hung around him in the dim lighting of the tent.
"That's for the watch. Blanche has a hankering for muggle things."

Percy's eyebrows raised. "Blanche?"

Digger nodded towards the old hag's side of the tent. Percy's mouth rounded in a silent 'o' and he quickly excused himself before he asked a question he didn't want to know the answer to. He nodded at the old hag as she shuffled her thick ragged shawl, the flash of several shining muggle watches of gold and silver fastened around her skinny arm before it was covered again by dirty cloth.

Stepping out into the fresh air of the grounds was a relief and Percy took a deep breath before glancing at the opal one more time and slipping it into his pocket and stalking towards the nearest drink stall. He needed something fortifying after that odd encounter.

He stuck around the grounds for a while, buying food and drink and watching a couple of the arena matches. It was near dark by the time he made it back to the tower, depositing his purchases in his room before herding Tony up from the lab with the temptation of food and some of the snacks he'd purchased at Hodthel. Muggle safe of course.

They eat dinner and watch Fight Club, Tony laughing unapologetically at Percy's reaction to the end. They end up eating all of the snacks as Friday cues up Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels. Percy pulls out the device and scrolls through the information Digger provided. He breathed out a soft curse. Well worth the money, he mused, the files were a gold mine.

He opens a private file on one of Friday's servers and copies the files, sending links to Pepper, Raizel and Tony before signing off and tucking the device away. He'd done his part. The others could now use what he'd sourced to string the Bag of Dicks up by their toes and nail their balls to the walls.

All he wanted was a front row seat to the action.

And maybe one last handful of those honey roasted nuts he'd gotten at the grounds.

Those were brill.

"HOLY FUCKING SHIT"

Percy almost dropped his teacup at Pepper's exclamation, tea sloshing onto his shirt sleeve as he turned quickly to face his fellow redhead. Her face was life size and in high definition on the screen near his elbow, the California coast sprawled behind her.

She was scrolling through some information off screen, her eyebrows creeping further up her forehead as she read. He took the time to dab at the stain on his sleeve and contemplate changing his shirt for the day when she turned to him.

"Has Tony seen this? This is incredible!"

Percy shook his head, "I set up the link to be sent when he woke up. I thought he needed a night's sleep before wading into it."

"Wading into what?" Tony muttered sleepily, squinting against the morning sun as he groped for his favourite cup. Percy had already set a pot of coffee to brew so Tony had no trouble in getting his needed fix. Two gulped mugs later, the genius was finally ready to wrap his vast intellect
around whatever it was that Pepper was so excited about.

A few minutes later he set the device down and drained his nth cup of coffee, lapsing into silence and Percy and Pepper looked on in concern. Tony spun the empty cup a few times before looking up at them both.

"Holy fucking shit" he breathed.

"Exactly!" Pepper half screamed, half laughed and they shared looks of joy and disbelief.

Percy smirked behind his cup as they both started talking rapidly to each other, already making plans and giggling like exited teenagers. He'd just set about clearing the dishes when off of a sudden arms wrapped around him from behind. Percy froze, dishes in hand as he was hugged. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Pepper on screen, a soft, fond expression of her face.

A almost silent thank you is mumbled into his shoulder blade and Percy chuckles ruefully, shrugging his shoulder gently.

"Are you getting emotional of me Stark? Don't you know I'm allergic to 'feels'?"

Tony grinned against his shoulder, chuckling as he pulled away, turning to grin at Pepper.

"Can you believe this guy? Just handed me the best present ever, all wrapped up in a bow and expects me not to show my appreciation. Do you know how many people I've hugged in the last year? Me. Tony fucking Stark. You can practically take that to the bank!"

Percy shared a look with Pepper before placing the dishes in the sink.

"My Idea of appreciation goes more along the lines of a new car, maybe a fantastic year-end bonus. You know… things I can actually take to the bank."

Pepper laughs, bright and carefree as Tony sputtered in outrage.

Percy turned back to the dishes as Tony and Pepper make arrangements, smiling as the conversation flows over him. Finally Pepper signed off and in the ensuing silence, a warm hand came to rest on his shoulder.

"Still…" the hand squeezed gently before falling away." … thank you for this. You don't know how much this means to me."

Percy nodded without turning around. It was only when Tony neared the exit did he speak.

"There Is something you can do for me"

Tony cocked his head to one side, wary. "Yeah, what's that?"

Percy turned, grabbing up a towel to dry his hands.

"Can I be there when it goes down?"

Tony smiled widely, his shoulders relaxing as he tucked his hands into his pockets.

"Sure thing."
It was as devastating and thrilling as he'd imagined it would be. Like a nuclear explosion. There were several times he'd wished for a pair of those thick protective glasses, if only to let him see the utter destruction wrought by a grim and unsmiling Tony, a smoldering Pepper who'd flown back in just for the occasion and a cool, sharp Raizel who stood at their back like a shark patrolling the dark depth of the sea.

Percy was glad that he'd forgone his second cup of fortifying tea that morning because he was sure that would have pissed himself by now. He was also grateful that Friday had been ordered to record every second of this glorious experience to be watched and re-watched at a later date. It allowed him to sit in his chair tucked in the corner and 'enjoy the now.'

He was absolutely certain that by the end of the meeting, secret shrines would be going up to the three people before him in the depths and back closets of SI offices everywhere. He was in the presence of greatness, of business genius, of ruthless power players. He itched to pull out pen and paper and make copious notes.

He could write a fucking thesis on what he was seeing before him.

You know what? Fuck it… he WOULD write a fucking thesis on this.

Maybe submit it to a business journal for funsies. Merlin Dammit, he wanted to weep for joy.

Ten minutes into the meeting, Tony and Pepper had herded the Bag of Dicks where they wanted them, setting up a false sense of security before dropping the bomb. Personally tailored files sent to each board members device. There were a few seconds of tense silence as mild confusion turned into horrified understanding and it was like Pandora's box opened up and out tumbled pandemoneum.

They raged, they shouted, two broke down crying on the spot while one fainted dead away and was coldly stepped over by a fellow director who turned an alarming shade of red, spittle flying from his mouth as he cursed and ranted.

It was like a performance of Dante's inferno Percy had seen performed in a Chilean Village. There was wailing and gnashing of teeth, hair pulling and tearing of clothes. He almost wished for some sack clothes and ashes to complete the aesthetic but he knew that if he opened his mouth, if he even moved, he would start howling with laughter and wouldn't stop.

And that would ruin the effect. The others had planned it all out and Percy was grateful that he could be a 'fly on the wall'. Near the end, when things started winding down and the Bag of Dicks were starting to realize how deep in the shit they were, Percy's jaw hurt from clenching it, his hands hurt from gripping the seat and his fist had been bitten in his fight to stay silent.

Then, like some avenging angel, Raizel went around placing brick thick Non-Disclosure Agreements in front of each director, nudging the unconscious ones awake with her sharp toed stiletto. When they'd all climbed up and slumped into their seats, Tony laid it out in no uncertain terms that they were to sign the agreements in front of them without a peep, that they would sell their combined shares back to the company for market price and walk away with their pride and reputations intact.

Anyone found in breach of the agreement would be sued for every red cent they had and their files would be made public. In addition, specific information from every other member of the board would also be released so they all needed to keep each other in check.

It was air tight and bulletproof and painted each soon to be former member of the board into a
corner. Actually, it rather pushed them into a deep dark hole that they would be hard pressed to get out of. And with SI buying their shares back, they could not claim that they'd been robbed or stolen from.

It was brilliant, it was epic, it made Percy was to chortle manically and while petting some kind of feline in his lap.

When the former BoD finally trudged out of the room in utter humiliation and defeat, Percy had turned to Raizel and gushed, "I love you. Would you adopt me and be my grams?"

The silver haired woman cackled, ruffling his hair as she walked to the door and summoned Rosemund and a few legal aids to collect and deliver the NDAs to Stark Legal for immediate processing.

"I have enough grandkids Boyo, I could use a handsome young thing to be my plus one at the Synagogue's annual picnic and family day next month. You could be my sweet little Goy Boy. That should make all those other grandmother's swallow their wagging tongues."

She swept out of the room with a smile and a wink that had Percy blushing. What a fire cracker.

He turns back to the room, taking in the scene. It was one of ruination, papers, pens, water bottles and other detritus was strewn around the room. Someone had even taken out the muffin table in their ire and the poor muffins lay ripped apart and trampled like the aftermath of a war.

Tony was sitting in his chair at the head of the table, his arms around Pepper who was sitting on his lap. They were wrapped up in each other in such an intimate moment that Percy had to turn away and stare out of the window for a while. He gazed at the New York Skyline as their soft whispered conversation went on for a while tapering off into the soft sounds of lingering kisses.

When Pepper finally pulled away and came over to Percy, her eyes were red and a bit puffy but her smile was breathtaking. She pressed a kiss to Percy's cheek and squeezed his hand in both of hers before picking up her tablet and closing the door behind her as she left.

That left just Percy and Tony in silence. Out of the corner of his eye Percy could see Tony was struggling to say something, opening and closing his mouth several times. Tony's eyes, when he swiveled his chair Percy's way, were pools of chocolate brown and the red head could feel his breath clogging his throat. He couldn't do this. He wasn't pulled together enough for this.

"I want a 1965 Shelby Cobra, dark blue with Wimbledon White Stripes. There's one for sale in Texas I've had my eye on and with a bit of expediting, it could be here in a week. So.. Uh… you don't have to thank me or anything. You're welcome. No problem, nuff said. Water under the bridge."

At Tony's startled gaze, Percy huffed and nervous laugh shrugged, popping out of the chair. He busied himself with picking up the debris in the immediate area, stacking up any important paperwork and leaving the rest for the cleaning staff.

He felt Tony's assessing gaze on him as he worked, intense and laser focused as the man himself. It wasn't he'd tidied as much as he could and turned to face his Boss with a deep breath that the genius spoke.

"Dark Blue with wimbledon white stripes you say?"

Percy nodded.
"How much?"

The redhead cocked his head to one side. "About $200,000 after taxes and shipping."

Tony looked at the ceiling and smiled. "Make it happen Fry."

"Yes Boss." the AI chirped.

Percy blinked stupidly, before making a weird squeaking noise in his throat. Tony laughed, shaking his head and standing up out of the chair. He tugged his suit into place and ran a hand through his artfully tousled hair.

"What do you say we grab some lunch huh? I could use a cheeseburger right now."

Percy shrugged helplessly because what was his life. "I know of a great place. Better than sex they say."

Tony made a face. "I don't know what Pepper would say to that."

Percy chuckled. "I heard that. Relying on what 'they' say has never worked out for me but I have tried the burger and it's really bloody good."

"Better than sex?" Tony arched an eyebrow.

Percy makes a face and does a so-so motion with his hand. "Better than most sex maybe. Better than great sex? Definitely not. It's all relative."

Tony nodded sagely. "Sex and burgers often are."

They left the room, arguing good naturedly about burgers and great sex all the way to the lobby where Svea was waiting with the car. Two weeks later, a shiny 1965 Shelby Cobra joined the ranks of the beautiful cars under Asta's care and if Percy squealed like a little girl when it was delivered, that was only for him to know.

Well, and Asta who face palmed at his hysterics.

And Friday, who recorded his spastic flailing.

And Tony who laughed for a week at the video clip.

And of course he escorted Raizel to the Picnic, dressed to the nines, in his new Shelby fucking Cobra and they made all of the other grannies swallow their wagging tongues.

God he loved his job.
"Remind me again why I had to spend my hard earned salary to come and sit on sticky bleachers, drink watery beer and eat imitation cheese on stale nachos with you crazy people?"

Percy had to lean in closer to Asta Cloudsister to be heard over the noisy, screaming crowd, frowning as the lukewarm piss masquerading as American beer slopped over the rim of his cup unto his trousers. He muttered a curse which was swallowed up completely by the surge of noise that rose up around him.

He looked around for a napkin, sighing when he found none salvageable enough to dab at the material. Making a face, he set the cup down between his feet and shook the last of the liquid off his hand.

Asta fell heavily unto the seat next to his, shaking the bleachers a bit too ominously for Percy's taste. Her hair was wild and curling with sweat at the base of her neck and around her ears and her pale skin was flushed pink, no doubt due to the jumping and screaming she'd been doing prior hence.

With a loud and braying laugh, she elbowed him in the arm, her sky blue eyes glued to the track before her.

"Oh come on P, A little birdie told me that you've never been to the Roller Derby before. You're a certified Derby virgin. Of course we were going to bring you here even if we had to drag you by your shirt tails " She rasped before turning back to the action and letting out a stream of profanity that left Percy's ears burning.

Blinking away his consternation, he followed her gaze to the track beyond, narrowing his eyes at the supposed 'little birdie' who had apparently sung like a canary and landed him in this mess.

Out on the track, women of various sizes and ages were participating in some kind of violent ritual that Percy just could not make head or tails of… and he'd been a massive quidditch fan. They had tried to explain the rules in the car on the way here but seeing the sport in action was more horrifying and confusing that he could have ever imagined.

Amongst the indiscriminate and oddly titillating violence, a petite blonde with heavily tattooed arms, heavy elbow and knee pads and a skimpy outfit body checked a larger opponent, sending the other player off the track in a spectacular tumble which took out three more players.

The platinum blonde didn't even look back, shouting curt orders to a team mate who then performed some kind of human slingshot maneuver. Apparently whatever it was worked because the crowd went wild, screaming and cheering as the bleachers creaked and rocked.

Muttering a prayer under his breath and marking the nearest emergency exits, Percy took a second the glare at the laughing blonde being held on the shoulders of her triumphant teammates.

By day, Svea Durnovo was the personal driver / body guard for eccentric billionaire Tony Stark, but by night the diminutive half Veela squib was apparently a terror on roller skates. She had a sharp, almost bitter sense of humour, an air of restrained violence that belied her short stature and somehow she'd come to see Percy as a friend. Well, at least as a friendly work colleague.

Percy wasn't really sure how it happened. Just that he'd been spending more time with Tony's personal security team in weeks past. After an attempted kidnapping which left Percy with a scar
On his calf and an extremely pissed off boss, Happy had offered Percy some training with the team. So after work, for a couple of hours every day, Percy, Happy, Svea and sometimes Tony, would head down to the large gym and practice self-defense. He learned how to fall, how to use his slight form and quick reflexes to out maneuver his opponent.

Leonard "Leo" Elric, the leader of the four man team told him flat out that they were not teaching Percy how to win a fight, they were teaching him how to survive one.

"To quote Jack Sparrow…" he'd chuckled, smile lines popping up on his expressive, dark skinned face. "… we fight… to run away."

An elbow in the side brought him back to the present, the bleachers were almost deserted, the most of the crowd milling around the few food stalls and littered parking lot.

Asta nodded to the side, a sly look on her face. "That's the other reason you're here tonight."

Percy glanced over her shoulder, his eyes widening at the sight of Rosamund Bakerson, Pepper's go to gal, flirting clumsily with the only female member of the Alpha Team; Shivani Chowlha.

Known to most of SHEILD as The Bengal, similar to how Melinda May was known as The Cavalry; Shivani was one of the deep cover operatives who'd been hung out to dry in Madripoor when Romanoff and Rogers flooded the internet with all of SHIELD's dirty laundry.

By the time rescue had gotten to her, she'd escaped captivity and had been hunting and killing her captors through the Asian jungle. She'd come out of the ordeal with white whip scars across her back and a deadly reputation.

Shivani was all luscious dark skin and lithe muscular curves, jet black curls tumbling about her shoulders as she smiled at the pale and blushing woman next to her. Rosamund's skin was flushed a rosy pink, her pale lavender hair curled in ringlets that just brushed her shoulders.

They were both leaning towards each other, Percy could tell by body language that the attraction was mutual. He glanced back at Asta with a raised eyebrow. She chuckled.

"Rose was too nervous to come alone so we arranged it like a group thing."

Percy hummed in understanding. "Ah yes, so it wouldn't be awkward if it didn't work out. Safety in numbers and all that."

The blonde nodded, breaking out in a loud cheer as she spotted Svea walking towards them in her street clothes, a large tacky medal slung around her neck.

"So… "Svea quirked up a corner of her lip in what on other people would be a smile, "What did you think? My team is awesome no?"

Asta thrust a fist in the air, one arm hanging off Percy's shoulders. "Hell yeah girlfriend. HEAD HUNTERS RULE!"

Percy twisted away from her, slapping a hand over his ear. He rolled his eyes and turned to the petite blond.

"It was equal parts terrifying and exhilarating." he admitted but then added solemnly. "The facilities and refreshments leave much to be desired though. I may have to burn these clothes."
"Duly Noted."

Svea nodded and chuckled, swinging her free arm around Percy's other side, the two blondes pulling him forward as they picked up the other two ladies and headed for the door.

The five of them troupied into Rosamund's sedan and made for the nearest pizza place. Dan's Pizza Palace didn't sound like much to begin with and hadn't looked like much either but the pizza was hot and cheesy enough to overlook the grease dripping off it.

By the time the night was over, Percy had all but fallen out of the car in front of the tower, tipsy and fit to burst as he waved good bye to a giggly Asta behind the wheel while Rose and Shivani made out hot and heavy in the backseat.

The next morning found Percy eating antacids like Chiclets and sipping weak tea as he browsed through his emails. His daily video chat with Rosamund showed that she was also suffering but there was an underlying smugness about her that Percy honed in on.

"You've been shagging haven't you, you slag." He smirked as her face burned bright red. "Talk about catching a tiger by the toe. Well done you."

Her lavender curls bounced as she laughed brightly. "Well, there was a lot of hollering."

Percy grinned and tipped his cuppa toward her. "Well, here's to living dangerously… at least someone getting laid around here."

The thing was, Percy's situation had been getting dire for a while. Sure, he'd been able to arrange a few one night stands with horny, pouty twinks who loved being fucked hard. And by George, he'd fucked them hard and left them begging for more.

The problem was, while his dick was happy, the rest of him aching for bruising hands. He'd thought about going to S&M Clubs, finding a hot Dom to treat him the way he needed to be treated but he'd never been able to cross that last line.

It was about trust.

Not that he'd trusted Flint but then again, he'd believed that he'd had nothing left to lose at that point. His job was shit. His life was shit. The least he could do was to get shagged on the regular.

But these days he had more to worry about. Working for Tony Stark made his life so much better and so much more complicated at the same time. He had to be careful now, more cautious with his body and with his trust.

A potential solution to his problem came in the form of MacDonald 'Mack' Gearhardt, a former Army Ranger and the only member of Alpha Team who wasn't exSHEILD. The man was all rugged masculinity with a side of tenderness that called to the nurturer in Percy; with large calloused hands that looked like they could work wonders on his pale skin.

He completed the Alpha Team dynamic. There was Leo, the leader of the group ad an expert tactician, who'd been one of the SHEILD strike team leaders and whose family had been saved from assassination by Stark's quick actions.

There was Zaheer al Kashim, a handsome Arabic former deep cover operative and explosives expert who had been one of those personally rescued by Ironman himself from a camp belonging to what was left of the Ten Rings. Shivani was their analyst and spec ops while Mack rounded out the group as sniper and ballistics expert.
For the past two weeks Percy had been channeling his inner Ravenclaw, trying to suss out whether Mack would be open to the kind of relationship Percy was seeking but information remained elusive. Mack liked to keep things close to his chest and the most Percy had been able to find out was that he’d been married before, been divorced and had a child whom he never visited.

Taking the last sip of his tea, he gathered up his tablet and headed down to the workshop, pushing the issue to the back burner for now. He gathered a small basket of scones and a few fruits on the way and set them up on the small pull out table for ease of reach. He spent a few minutes pushing buttons on Lucille before he was awarded a hot and delicious cup of coffee.

He set the Coffee, two blueberry scones and a banana on a thick napkin near Tony's elbow and went off to greet the bots. After a twenty minute standoff with Dummy over some of his more dubious recent smoothie recipes, they came to an accord that satisfied both parties to a degree but had the benefit of being entirely better for Tony's digestive tract.

Grabbing the now empty cup, he quickly refilled it, clearing away the scone crumbs and banana peel and setting a few KIND bars in their place. He made a round of the workshop bath room, sending the used towels down the laundry chute and restocking most of the items as the maid service did not include the workshop for security reasons.

Sadly, the bots could not maneuver within the small space without cause damage so Percy made sure to check it regularly. He picked up a pair of Pepper's heels, a rolled up pair of stockings and a suit jacket and tucked them away in a little rolling shelf reserved for any items she left behind in the workshop. The last time she left a Chanel scarf on the couch, Tony had grabbed it to use as an oil rag.

Suffice it to say, the scarf was ruined and the red head had torn a strip into both Tony and Percy. After that, and much groveling and contacting the company personally to have the discontinued scarf replaced, Tony had earned his girlfriend's forgiveness by building a custom multi compartment shelf to store her things while in the workshop.

It was shiny chrome with delicate etching across the front and side and definitely DID NOT have an AI installed in it. Pepper's eyes had gotten that soft, gushy look and Percy had made himself scarce as the couple stumbled to the couch.

He deftly side stepped a rumba as it patrolled the rug in front of the couch and began to check the couch cushions for random pieces of technology. Most people lost coins and buttons but Tony fucking Stark lost switches and circuits and weird thiggamajigs and whatsits often made of rare and valuable metals.

There was even that time when a bauble with low radioactivity had been there long enough the burn a small hole in the cushion cover. Since then, Percy had made it a habit to check the couch more often, after they'd all been checked by Medical for radiation poisoning and been cleared of course.

A groan made him look up to see Tony stretching his back and shoulders and shutting down the various screens in front of him. Grabbing the coffee and draining it in one go, he turned to Percy and blinked.

"So, how was the girls' night?" he smirked. "Johnstone at the front desk mentioned that you all but crawled in the front doors last night."

Percy huffed. "Johnstone at the front desk needs to learn the art of discretion."
He cut a look at the brunette. "And it wasn't a girls' night… technically…. You know…. because I am a man. We went to the Roller Derby then ate our weight in greasy pizza and then drowned it all in two for one Margaritas at Amigo's."

Tony quirked an impressed eyebrow. "Isn't that the Mexican Restaurant by day slash Gay Bar by night on 23rd Ave? I heard they have excellent Baja Style Fish Tacos there."

Percy nodded and rubbed at his sternum, wishing he had another TUMS but alas he'd left them on his desk upstairs..

"It is as excellent as reviewed but it puts the devil in heartburn the next day."

Tony chuckled. "Noted."

Dummy rolled over with a mint green smoothie. The bot waffled for a bit before finally giving the smoothie to Percy. The red head took it with an aggrieved smile, wondering how awful he must look for the bot to take such pity on him over his own creator.

"Thank you Dummy." he shrugged and took a sip, humming contentedly as the creamy liquid soothed the burning in his esophagus. "You truly are a Godsend."

Tony laughed as the bot preened.
ok, BONUS CHAPTER because i was in a writing mood so you guys get to benefit. Here is the kidnap attempt Percy was talking about in the previous chapter. i started this morning and hammered out a whopping 4600+ words. go me!

As far as kidnappings went, this one was more of a comedy of errors. Not that Percy had ever experienced being kidnapped himself. Most of his knowledge came from listening to Aurors tell raucous stories in the cafeteria over his lunch break or in the old storeroom they'd commandeered and made into secret lounge behind a painting of ever sleeping Wizengamot members around a cluttered table.

Sometimes the Unspeakables would appear out of the shadows with their cloaks still up, freaking everyone out. They would then pour themselves a stiff drink or join in at the poker table while everyone hearts stopped leaping in their chests. They made for the best story tellers though, spinning almost unbelievable yarns that had everyone at the edge of their seat. There was , of course, doubt that the stories were even true but with Unspeakables, you never really knew.

There's been some grumbling when Percy had first started showing up but the grumbles soon died after the Dark Lord's fall and half the mismatched chairs in the secret lounge had sat empty. There was less talk and more drinking in those days, everyone clinging to some shadow in their heart. Percy had used as a safe place to get sloshed daily, often waking up the next morning to crumpled clothes, breath smelling like dead cat and a lingering headache.

He remembered most of the stories though, tucking away the titbits and advice the men and women gathered passed to each other over drinks and cards. So when he spotted something hinky during a PR visit to the local Kids Hospital, he did not hesitate to contact his team.

The Make a Wish Foundation had contacted Pepper, a little girl In Boston wanted nothing more than to meet Ironman, even though he'd retired. They'd sent along a heart rending video message from the girl and her single parent Father calling Tony a hero. At the end of it, there was not a dry eye in the place and Tony had quietly agreed to take the suit of out mothballs for this one time appearance.

Tony, Percy, Svea and the four person Alpha Team packed the suit and other gear into the jet, taking care with the Ironman/ Avenger Merchandise they were going to give out to all the kids in the ward. The flight was a little over an hour and Percy split his time talking to Kwasi, the pilot and shooting the breeze with Tony and the team.

He made sure to take some candid pics for social media though he wouldn't post them until they were safely back in New York. He'd sat through more than enough security briefings about the subject to endanger boss albeit unwittingly.

The hospital staff managed to keep their excitement under calm and professional demeanor though the Make -A - Wish representative was a little too awestruck for Percy's taste. The kids on the other hand were besides themselves in amazement at the seeing Ironman in the flesh, much less when Tony started handing out Avengers Toys and products to the kids and their grateful parents.
The little girl, Charlene, and her Father Richard were crying happily as they took picture after picture with Tony, even when he stepped out of the suit and sat on the edge of her hospital bed to chat. She seemed so small in the large bed, surrounded by a jungle of machines that beeped and booped and was scary to look at much less have connected to your body.

Her eyes were bright against her pale skin and pastel rainbow knit hat that no doubt covered her thinning hair. She had on an Ironman hoodie over My Little Pony pyjamas. As billionaire and child got into an in depth discussion about an IronPony mash up which included crude drawings coloured in with bright crayon, Percy exchanged a bemused look with Richard and guided the tired looking man out into the hall, leaving Svea in the room.

The other four members of Alpha team were spread out in the hallway with Zaheer stationed at the car garage. They'd been kitted out with cutting edge stark tech, form fitting armor that looked like normal cloth but was actually some kind of advanced mesh that Tony had been telling Percy about one afternoon. All Stark security personnel wore the stuff, even Percy who wore his as a vest, knee length tights combo.

They were dark gryffindor red and fit against his body like a second skin but breathed well, with loads of little pockets to hold things like blades and the like. Percy himself had a set of small blades that reminded him of senbon. He wasn't a master of weaponry per say but he could palm the scalpel like blades and stab a man's eye out if he was so inclined.

After chatting briefly with the teary eyes father about incidentals, he gently ushered him back into the room and looked around for a vending machine. He was feeling a bit peckish. Nodding at Shivani, he studied the poor fare the machine offered and debated whether he was hungry enough to gobble down any of the myriad of questionable choices.

Movement caught his eye and looked up the corridor. A nurse had just backed out of a nearby storeroom, wheeling a trolley our after him. At first Percy's eyes caught on the broad muscled back and frankly incredible bubble butt, grateful that the man's back was turned to him so that he could stare overtly. The teal scrubs were stretched tight over his ass as he bent down to pick up a plastic packet that had fallen off the trolley. Percy bit his lip and swallowed a helpless groan.

Circe preserve him, that ass.

He glanced away, taking a deep breath, only to take another look. The nurse's top rode up a bit, showing a nice strip of tanned skin and Percy bit his lip. He glanced around nervously to make sure no one was witnessing his pervy behaviour and caught Shivani's knowing smirk. Flushing hotly, he grinned back.

The nurse straightened up and turned, tugging the edge of his top down to cover his admirable wash board abs. Fortunately, he wasn't fast enough and Percy caught a glimpse of a tattoo half hidden by the drawstring of the scrub pants. Percy blinked. The tattoo looked familiar but he just couldn't pin down where he remembered it from.

He turned his head away before the man caught him staring and looked at his reflection in the glass of the vending machine. He was handsome enough but he had a closed off expression which was strange for someone in such a care giving profession as nursing.

His eyes were blue, his hair blonde with dark roots. In fact, Percy thought he looked like a knockoff version of Steve Rogers, only more stern around the eyes and more cruel around the mouth. Percy quickly choose a random snack and made a show of opening the cheese pretzel pack as an excuse to take a closer look at the nurse who was starting to roll the trolley down the same hall Percy had just come out of.
Something tingled up his back, a bell clanged in the back of his head and he frowned, snack all but forgotten in his hands. He took a calming breath and breathed out slowly, catching Shivani's attention with a simple gesture. She stared at him, alert, as he surreptitiously pointed to the man moving closer and closer to Charlene's room. If they were wrong they could always apologize later but he wasn't about to ignore his instincts.

She nodded, tapping her earpiece and speaking softly to the team lead. Just as she was taking a step toward the nurse, the lights went out with a grating noise. Percy immediately dropped to the ground as screams and crashes rang through the ward.

It took a terrifying seconds for the emergency lights to kick in and he gasped at the harsh light. The hallway was deserted and shadowed, the trolley capsized, all the small plastic packets and kits of pallets and q-tips scattered across the floor.

His comm unit was silent except for a few intermittent beeps and his stark phone was a blizzard of black and white. Frowning at the device, he turned to the nurses station but their phone was also dead. A quick check determined that all cellphones were useless as well as the computers. As the head nurse directed the others to start checking on the patients and calming them down, he snagged a candy stripper by the apron and stuck his phone in her hand.

"Gat as far away from here as you can, until the phone starts working again then press 9-1-1. A big red button will pop up on the screen. Press it and follow the instructions the voice tells you okay?"

The young woman nodded shakily. "Should I bring it back after?"

Percy shook his head gently, giving her a reassuring smile. "Just follow the instructions and you'll be fine. My name is Percy, What's yours?"

"Stacy" the voice had a slight wobble. "Stacy Burgis"

"You're a very brave young woman Stacy Burgis. Thank you for doing this for me. Now go… quickly."

He looked on as she fled down the corridor and into the emergency stairwell. Hopefully whatever was jamming their signal didn't go past the hospital building itself. Turning toward the empty corridor, he pulled one of the blades from his under suit and crept towards the room he'd last seen his boss.

Charlene's room was dark, the only lights coming from the various machines, some of which were blaring in alarm. The little girl's bed was empty and Percy's stomach dropped. A quick search found Richard on the floor, moaning from a blow to the head. Grabbing the cover off the bed, Percy balled it up and gently placed it under the man's head.

"They took her. They took my baby. The man… he wanted the suit. Oh God Charlie…"

Percy made reassuring noises, dabbing at the blood on the prone man's face as he scanned the room for clues. There were scuff marks on the linoleum floor and a couple of the machines had been knocked over. There was a thump on the closed bathroom door and, holding his blade aloft, Percy made his way towards the door.

For a few seconds he stood terrified at what lay beyond but finally marshalled his courage and threw the door open, ready to slash at whatever came at him. What he found was a pissed off Shivani shimmying half way out of layers of duct tape. With a soft concerned noise, Percy helped cut the rest of the bonds away.
The Indian woman snarled as she ripped away the rest of the tape, reaching behind her to pull out a secondary weapon; checking the clip.

"The UnSub pulled a knife on the little girl and took stark and the suit. Stark convinced him to take one of the machines the girl needed and that he needed Svea to carry it because he was holding the suit-case. He hinted that he wasn't working alone then made Svea tie me up. I can't raise the others."

Percy nodded along. "There's some kind of jammer. I gave my phone to a candy striper and made her go see how far the signal goes, if it is a signal and not some EMP device. Hopefully she would have contacted Friday by now."

The woman shook her head as she checked on Richard. "EMP would have fried the equipment and they wouldn't have wanted to kill the suit if capturing it was their goal."

She ducked her head out to check the corridor and motioned him to follow. Then, with one last look at Richard, he did.

The emergency lights gave everything a surreal look as they crept down the hall, Shivani trying and failing to raise the others on the comm. They quickly waved back anyone who tried sticking their heads out of doorways. One of the hospital security lay slumped against a wall, another victim of a gun butt to the head. Percy quickly checked his pulse. It was steady. He nodded to Shivani and they moved on.

Soon enough they heard voices and the sound of soft crying. Motioning for Percy to stay put, the agent crept forward to reconnoiter. Percy tucked himself against the wall, trying to still his racing heart. It was times like these he keenly missed his wand. A few stupifies, an accio and protego would do the situation good right now. Of course then MACUSA would send her Obliviators and ret-con them back to infancy and that wasn't so good.

A large hand stole over his mouth and Percy froze in terror, his eyes bulging as he gripped his little blade. The hand gently turned his head and his eyes met Mack's. he slumped weakly against the wall for a few moments before anger surged through his veins.

He glared at the man, whapping ineffectually at his armor covered arm.

*What the bloody hell man?* he mouthed, his eyes burning with ire, *You want to give me a heart attack or something?*

The bloody bugger had the audacity to smirk at him, motioning towards the corridor beyond. They both took a peak, seeing Shivani creeping slowly towards the swinging doors of the operating theatre the voices had been coming from.

*Where's Leo?* Percy mouthed. Mack's face got serious as he pointed at the theatre.

He pulled Percy back a few feet and crouched, bring their heads closer together until Percy could feel the man's hot breath against his cheek. Firmly pushing done any inappropriate thoughts (now REALLY wasn't the time), Percy listened as Mack gave a run down of the situation as he knew it.

Leo had made for the room as soon as the lights went out and had met up with the hostage situation as they were coming heading into the OR. They'd been set to take out the bad guy in a two pronged assault when Leo had been taken down. Apparently one of the hospital security officers was working as an inside man.

Luckily for them, the man hadn't known about Mack but he must have informed the knife wielder
about the number of people on the team. Shivani scuttled around the corner with a grim look, her eyes widening as she spotted Mack.

The situation inside the OR was a bad one. Leo was kneeling, unarmed and clearly injured beside a pissed off and bound Tony. Svea was sitting on the floor, holding on to a whimpering Charlene who was looking paler by the minute. Tony was arguing with the bad guy about letting the little girl go but the discount Steve Rogers was adamant that she remain as she was a good bargaining chip and a proven way to keep the genius on good behaviour.

Since there was no way to contact the outside world or even down to the parking lot for Faheer and they didn't know if the candy striper had managed to contact Friday or not; it was up to them to handle the situation.

Well, more like it was up to Mack and Shivani to handle the situation while Percy crouched around the corner.

"Don't forget Svea. She's our ace in the hole." Shivani murmured. "The unSub brought her along because he thinks because she's tiny that she's weak. He won't be looking for any trouble on her end. She also has the child in arms. If we can get him to turn his back on her…"

"She'll gut him like a fish." Percy agreed.

They had to move quickly because if Tall, Blonde and Bad's bragging was truthful, he was expecting back up any minute. With one last look at Percy, Mack followed Shivani down the hallway and disappeared into the shadows.

Casting around for something that would help him in any way as he waited, Percy spotted a storage closet. Inside were medical supplies and he started pulling things and stuffing them into a soft plastic pouch. Emergency first aid kit in hand, he popped his head out of the corridor. There was a noise from the shadows at one end, like someone kicking a can across the floor and he palmed his blade, crouching just inside the door frame.

Out of the shadow came the same security guard who'd been slumped against a wall a few corridors ago. He seemed to be stumbling forward, his hand trailing against the wall as he walked forward. If he kept going as he did, he would surely stumble his way right into the OR and that would really bollocks things up.

Steeling his spine, Percy stepped out into the corridor. The guard jumped, coming to a sudden stop as one hand went to his belt where he kept his pepper spray.

"Who goes there?" he said loudly.

Percy winced as the voice echoed through the hall. He quickly shushed the man.

"The name's Westerly. I'm part of the Stark Entourage. You need to be quiet now."

The guard blinked stupidly at first but after a minute or so he seemed to understand the gravity of the situation. He wanted to take a look down the corridor but Percy was able to dissuade him from doing something so fool hardy.

"The important thing is to make sure all the patients are safe…" Percy coaxed him down the hall, away from the action. "… and to get you checked out by a doctor. You seem a bit, you know, wobbly."

The guard huffed, wincing as he reached to touch behind his head. "Yeah that big fucker got me
from behind. One moment I was doing my rounds, the next I'm waking up with a goose egg on my noggin."

"Hmmm…" Percy frowned, tilting his head in mild confusion. "… um…but if you didn't see anyone, how do you know that he was a so called 'big fucker'?"

The guard laughed sheepishly, squinting at the redhead. "You told me all about him didn't you?"

Percy frowned. "No. No I didn't."

"You must have…" the other man swung his hand up midsentence, hitting Percy on the jaw and sending him back on his arse. The red head gave a cry and rolled with the hit, putting some distance between himself and the guard. His blade fell from his hand and clattered to the linoleum floor.

"Uppity llittle pencil pusher" the other man growled, picking up the blade with one hand, his can of pepper spray in the other. "... hidden blade and everything you little shit. What were you going to do … stab my eye out?"

Percy scrambled back, casting about for a weapon … anything. All he had in his hand was his cobbled together first aid pouch and that bounced off the guard too little effect. The other man's grin was cruel as he stalked towards the red head and Percy really lamented not having a wand this very moment.

He kicked out at the man , catching him in the knee and the guard yowled and cursed; spraying the redhead with pepper spray. Percy brought his arms up over his eyes but they only stopped some of the chemical. His eyes and face burned as he writhed on the squeaky floors, trying to crawl away from his assaulter.

"Oh no you don't ginger…" the guard sniggered as he lurched his way back unto his feet. "You're not getting away so easy. I think my knee is fractured and you're going to pay dearly for that. The job was to get Stark and the suit. Everyone else is considered collateral damage. Including Stark's own PA so get ready for a world of hurt, pipsqueak."

Percy kept crawling, hearing the lurching steps as the guard's shoes squeaked against the floors. The man lurched forward and swung the blade down against Percy's thigh but luckily the body armor deflected the blade. The second strike wasn't so lucky for him as the blade came down on his calf, sinking into the flesh.

Percy screamed, flailing his other leg and he pulled the injured one closer. His foot thrashed out, hitting the same injured knee which gave a loud crack and bent at a sickening angle. The guard screamed in turn and fell unto Percy in incoherent rage, pummeling the red head with his fists as he cursed to high heaven.

Percy fought as hard as he could, weeping through the burning on his face, the searing pain in his calf and the heavy fists on his stomach and sides. He finally was able to swing his elbow with all his might into the guard's sternum, knocking the wind out of the man and sending him sprawling. Slipping the blood coming from his leg, Percy dragged himself back a few paces as the guard groaned and began to rise once again. Percy couldn't see far enough to search for a new weapon, breath coming in short gasps as he tried to rack his brain for some solution.

A sharp pain in his leg brought his attention to the blade sticking out of his calf and with a truly aggrieved cry, he pulled the blade from his leg just as the guard leapt for him. He trust upwards
with all his might, feeling the gush of warm blood and hearing the sound of a blade entering flesh.

The body over him flailed and stilled, slowly falling to the side to sprawl on the blood stained linoleum. Blinking his burning eyes and shaking like a leaf, Percy kicked at the body to make sure it wasn't going to rise again. When the steel bands constricting his chest finally loosened enough for him to breathe, he crawled a bit closer to check on the traitorous guard.

The man lay spread eagled on the floor, one eyes staring sightlessly at the ceiling. His other eye was a mess of blood and nasty looking milky goo with Percy's blade buried near to the hilt; enough to know that the blade had gone through the eye and up into the brain. Percy went white at the sight, swallowing heavily as he brought one shaky hand up to his throat.

"Seems as though I did indeed stab his eye out. Who would have thought?"

Then his eyes rolled back in his head and he fainted.

The next time he woke it was in a bed on the medical floor for Stark Tower to a smiling Tony, cup of water with a straw in one hand, Stark tablet in the other.

"There we are. The unsung hero of the day. How are you feeling?"

After taking a sip of some offered water, Percy cleared his throat and squinted at the brunette.

"Like I face the business end of a Blast Ended Skrewt."

Tony blinked. "Okay. Still on the good drugs then."

Percy huffed. "My face feels burnt half off. Do I still have my eyebrows?"

The brunette chuckled. "You still have your stunning eyebrows. Pepper spray is more chemical irritant than accelerant. You also have three stiches in your calf which the doctors say won't even scar which is a pity because lovers dig scars."

Percy smiled weakly. "Remind me next time to sear the full under suit... even if it feels like I'm wearing long johns."

The smile fell off the billionaire's face and he looked down at his coffee. "Yeah."

Percy frowned, reaching over to grab Tony's hand. "Hey what's wrong? Is the little girl ok? What happened to Richard and the discount bin Steve Rogers?"

That pulled a smile from the brunette, which is what Percy was hoping for.

"Discount Bin Steve Rogers?" he chuckled, "I can't wait to tell Cap about that. Charlie's fine. After the doctors looked her over she told me that it was the best adventure she'd ever had. Fighting side by side with Iron Man and saving the day. She's been telling all the other kids in the ward about it nonstop."

It turned out that the candy striper, Stacy had managed to reach three blocks away before the signal came back up on Percy's phone. Friday had immediately called Pepper who in turn called Happy. She'd also called Rhodes who'd been in Washington DC on Avengers business.

Within minutes War Machine (because Tony refused to call the suit Iron Patriot) was on its way to Boston. Meanwhile, Shivani and Mack had managed to take down the bad guys with the help of Svea who had broken the head baddie's arm in three places and broke his pelvis with a brutal kick to the groin area.
Rhodes had gotten there just in time to see them securing the crooks. They'd found Percy and the dead guard on the way back to Charlie's room, the little girl torn between exhaustion and awe at meeting both Iron Man and War Machine on the same day. Richard had burst into tears at having his daughter in his arms again.

They eventually found the device that had been jamming their signals in the parking lot where a smug Zaheer had been leaning back on the hood of the SUV, four more villains hog tied in a row in front of him. Apparently, that had been the back up the crooks had been expecting.

Zaheer and Shivani had stayed behind with Rhodes to settle things with the local authorities while Percy himself and Leo had been medivac'd back to the tower with Tony, Mack and Svea with the assurance that Percy would make a statement when he regained consciousness.

"… and that's about the size of it." Tony shrugged, wrapping up the tale.

Percy blinked and reached up his other hand to feel at the puffiness around his eyes, wincing at the pain. The dropped his hand and looked at the unusually silent man slumped before him.

"Are you blaming yourself?" he said bluntly, his pain medication obliterating any chance of subtlety on his part.

Tony's shoulder slumped further. "If I hadn't been there…"

"Oh shut it" Percy snapped. Tony jumped, blinking at the harsh tone.

The red head squeezed the brunette's hand hard and gave it a tug.

"Bollocks to all that. You don't choose to be special. You just are. And because of that there are always going to be people who want what you have, no matter if you want them too or not. You can either choose to live your life in spite of it or hide away because of it. That choice is yours and yours alone. Nothing else."

Boy, one of these days Percy was really going to have to apologize to Harry Potter for being such a dick to him at Hogwarts.

"And don't give me any talk about getting any of the rest of us hurt because of you. We choose to come and work for you. We knew the risks and accepted them the day each of us signed the employee contract. And no… we are not here simply to get a paycheck. Not anymore anyways. Every one of us wants to be here with you.

You don't even realize the loyalty you inspire in us Tony do you? You are not just our employer… you're our boss and there's nothing you can do to make us push you away so you might as well get whatever cockamamie plan you have rattling around in that big brain of your out right now."

Tony flushed, chuckling softly as he squeezed Percy's hand.

"You're getting to know me pretty well huh?"

"Well, you've grown on me." Percy grinned back, shrugging. "… and I've decided to keep you."

Tony blinked rapidly, his eyes shining as he cleared his throat roughly. "Yeah?"

"Yeah." Percy nodded.

"So… " the red head sighed, looking around the room. "Can you believe I stabbed a man's eye
out?"

Tony laughed.
sorry it took so long to get something on this out but i was caught up with my NCIS/Hawaii 5-0 and April HP Rough Trade. i'm trying to get more out before July Rough Trade though so fingers crossed.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Friday, please pull up the tower profile on Colonel Rhodes." Percy swung his chair towards his desk from the large picture window that lined one side of his office. Several blue lit holograms sprung up from his glass top desk. He took a few minutes to peruse the detailed bio, making several notes on a small pad of paper.

"Have housekeeping get the Colonel's room aired out and ready and send his preference list down to the pillow concierge." Percy tapped on a bullet point and it dropped down into a short list. "Schedule a conference call with Chef Dunn to talk about meals. We will probably have to stagger home cooked and take out so that Rhodes can have a taste of all his favourites while he is here."

He tapped a finger to his lips. "Make a few reservations at that steak house they both like. And send a message to the chef to stock the ingredients for that crazy loaded nachos dish they always order. If they don't end up going to dine out, we can always get them to deliver."

"Sure thing Red" Friday piped up, annotations appearing on the lists as the conversation went on.

"Have a masseuse on call, make it Cherrie, she's the best. Also the sauna. How are we on the shopping?"

"We have most of the colonel's favourite items stocked and ready. The IP beer he likes is on its way to the tower now. It should be stocked and chilled within the next three hours. I also took the liberty of ordering some of those gourmet popcorns the Bossman and his bestie love for movie nights."

Percy smiled and nodded, "That was very thoughtful of you my dear. I'm sure they will be pleased."

Friday makes a soft humming sound that he'd come to associate with her blushing or preening. It was the same noise the bots made when they showed their pleasure. They chatted for a bit more, making sure that everything was in place for the upcoming visit.

The last Percy had seen Colonel James Rhodes and the first time he'd met him in person, Percy had been drugged up and groggy at Tower Medical after having stabbed a man's eye out. Rhodes had been a blurry figure at the door of his room, arm slung around Tony's shoulders as they spoke quietly.

By the time Percy was lucid enough, the other man had already been called back out to duty. His detour to Boston had been unplanned and had come in the middle of important proceedings at the capital.
This time though, the man was coming in on some R&R, which made Tony very happy if the lively singing in the shower Percy had heard that morning as he laid out the man's suit for the day was any indication. In fact, Tony had been up in spirits ever since Rhodes had called to give him the good news, humming little ditties and practically skipping around the penthouse before Percy ushered him to his various obligations. Even Pepper could not escape the happy cloud that followed Tony around, their daily video chats filled with laughter.

Tucking his phone into one pocket, his hand held work tablet in the other, Percy stood; checking his watch briefly as he grabbed his jacket of the back of the chair. He had several meetings today, Bill Jacobson in Tower Maintenance, Aaron Quinn in Legal, and a conference with both Happy and Leo about some upcoming trips overseas Tony had planned.

Speaking of his boss, Tony was at R&D today with Zaheer and the Bengal as escort, for his weekly geek out with Doctor Pranay and his team. They'd been working on some really revolutionary stuff in the field of clean energy, something that Tony held close to his heart. Most of it flew over Percy's head but the seeing the genius’ eyes light up when he talked about bout it, complete with hand gestures and funny faces, was worth it.

He stepped out of the elevator to the lobby, checking his phone messages as he turned towards the large glass doors. A throat cleared close behind him and he jumped, swinging himself away and stepping back as he brought one arm up in a defensive position. A firm hand caught his wrist and stopped Percy cold.

"You're getting better." Mack smirked.

Percy gaped for a second, then flushed hotly, yanking his arm out of the other man's hold.

"What is it with you and scaring me half to death?" the redhead huffed angrily, "I should put a bell on you, you wanker. What are you even doing here anyway? Hazard's not even in the tower."

He used Tony's codename, seeing as they were in a semi-public space. Johnstone was on duty at the large security desk and Percy could see him grinning at them both out of the corner of his eyes. Merlin's beard, that man was more of a busybody than his 180 year old Great Grandma Weasley.

He scowled, shaking his head and straightening at his suit jacket as Mack's smirk widened into a grin. Damn the man was entirely too sexy. It was utterly unfair for him to be dripping hot sex in those dark jeans and fitted wine red henley, blonde chest hairs peeping out from the unbuttoned neck.

His worn brown leather jacket hugged his biceps and expertly covered the holstered weapon strapped to his side. Scuffed steel tip boots competed the look of sexy ruffian that never failed to get under Percy's skin.

Really, it just wasn't fair at all.

"Leo asked me to shadow you today. There've been some threats called in recently. Nothing too serious but the Boss'll feel better if his people have eyes on them for the foreseeable future."

Percy gave him a shrewd look. On one hand he was perfectly capable of taking care of himself and having someone follow his around could prove an annoyance. On the other hand, if there was a threat being taken seriously by Stark Security then he would be remiss if he hindered their efforts in anyway. Also, if it made Tony feel less stressed to have his inner circle protected the Percy was happy to do so.
On the third hand, he would get to spend some one on one time with the man he was crushing on and have a valuable opportunity to suss out if there was any true potential for future sexual gratification.

"Fine." The redhead sighed and slumped his shoulders. "But I don’t have to be happy about it."

Twisting on his heel sharply and walking away, Percy glared flatly at a grinning Johnstone and tried to ignore the eyes one his back and the soft step of the man behind him. Stepping out into the sunlight, he slipped on his glasses and smiled at the valet who'd brought his car around to the front of the building.

He grinned as he slid behind the wheel, the pure joy of owning this beauty still thrumming through his veins. The 1965 Shelby Cobra had been a gift from his boss after the epic and still fucking hilarious take down of the Bag of Dicks.

The day was still one that lived in infamy amongst the business community, Percy's article in a popular Business Magazine- sent in anonymously of course- had sent many corporate petticoats a-fluttering. Friday still continued to set aside choice titbits of news pertaining to the article which Percy usually perused and chuckled at over tea and scones.

He still had Digger's contact on his mobile. The gnome had proven to be both effective and discreet, two things that Percy admired. He still mourned for his watch though, frowning every time he imagined it around the dirty old hag's thin wrist with the other watches she'd lined up alongside it on her spindly arms.

He shuddered in the warm sunlight at the visual, glancing over as Mack slid into the passenger seat. Percy thrummed the engine, giving the other man a glare until he'd made a show of snapping on his seat belt before smirking and pulling into New York traffic smoothly.

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Stark Legal was located in the old Stark New York Headquarters, the one department that was not in transition to relocate to the new tower headquarters. It had been agreed that their current location was much more suitable because of its relative location to several key resources and infrastructure.

So as the other department's slowly cleared out of the building, the Legal department of SI slowly spread to the floors above and below; settling into the new spaces like a giant finally settling with a great exhale. SIL was already a giant in itself and had only grown as their boss and then CEO had donned a suit of red and gold metal alloy and made a bid to privatize world peace.

Percy had seen a movie once, about a shark with five heads. He'd been half asleep, vegged out on the massive couch when it had come on and he had been too lazy to change the channel. He'd laughed himself sick at the utter idiocy of the movie but the image of the massive five headed shark had stuck in his mind whenever he had a meeting with Aaron or any of his hyper competent staff.

He'd mentioned this to Raizel over brunch one day and she'd given that raspy chuckle that never failed to give him goose bumps. An odd mix between loving Jewish grandmother and ruthless minx, she always kept Percy on his toes with her sharp, bright gaze and iron will.

Maria Hill, another strong and competent female in Percy's life and regular brunch companion, had rolled her eyes while she drained her mimosa and they'd quickly moved on to another topic.

Imagine his surprise when at the next meeting with Aaron, he'd spotted a lovely 3d rendering of a
savage five headed shark acting as a paperweight on the man's large desk. Aaron had chuckled delightedly, turning the gift carefully from side to side so that Percy to could take in all the details.

The paperweight had been beautifully made and had looked as savage and ruthless as the lawyer looked cheerful and unassuming. Proving that underneath Aaron's jovial façade was strong, writhing muscles and a massive maw filled with row upon row of sharp teeth ready to rip into soft flesh and brittle bone.

Today, the paperweight was sitting in pride of place atop a pile of thick manila folders at Aaron's elbow. Percy nodded in thanks at the secretary as she waved him and, glancing once more at Mack who'd already made himself at home in the small waiting area. He saluted Percy with a magazine and grinned as the redhead huffed and shut the door behind him.

Aaron stood to greet him, shaking hands and getting all pleasantries out of the way before settling in to talk shop. Finally, he lifted the paperweight and pulled one of the folders free, handing it to Percy.

"I need you to get these over to Mr. Stark. I would send it via email but this is Eyes Only. We shouldn't even have access to it yet but a friend at the Justice Department owes me a favour."

Percy looked down at the file. It looked like any other folder, secured with grommets laced with string. "May I?" he lifted the folder.

Aaron frowned, shaking his head. "Let Stark read it first. He can decide whether he wants you to see it or not."

The redhead straightened in his seat. "Can you give me a hint about the contents?"

The dark skinned man turned his chair away from the window, looking down at this watch so that his face was in shadow. "It a copy of a document coming out from the DoD…"

His voice was sotto voce. Percy had to strain to hear him.

Percy stilled, "The Department of Defence? What do they want with Mr. Stark?"

Percy also kept his voice soft, tilting his face away from the large window. He didn't know the reasons for the other man's manner but he would follow along all the same. Better to be safe than sorry. It's not paranoia if they are really out to get you.

"Not Mr. Stark directly but the Avengers on a whole." the other man frowned, the expression looking out of place on his usually jovial face, "… but Mr. Stark may end up being tarred with the same brush."

Percy looked down at the innocuous folder, wondering what secrets of Pandora were held inside.

They discussed a few other minor subject and bid their good byes. Percy left the offices with a pensive expression on his face, the folder tucked neatly into his jacket. Mack said nothing, falling into stride a step behind. The redhead was grateful for the man's presence and his silence, his mind twirling with too many thoughts to wrangle into some semblance of order.

He was still pensive as he stopped in at the Marketing Department, forcing himself to keep a calm and empathetic expression with Javier in the Art Department as they discussed Avengers Merchandizing for the next fiscal quarter. The stocky Hispanic man was at his wits end as all of his messages to the compound had either been pushed aside or ignored all together.
Percy spent a while soothing the man's agitation, promising to see to the matter and making note on his phone to contact Hill. She'd taken up command at the compound and had been managing logistics for the Avengers for a while now.

They took the car back to the tower, Percy reveling in the sunlight as they made their way through traffic. Somehow though the light wasn't as warm as he remembered it being that morning, the weight of the folder in his jacket pocket putting a damper on his mood.

Letting out a loud huff, he swerved unto a side street and into the parking lot of a chain steakhouse. Mack gave him a slightly judgmental look and Percy flushed, cursing his pale skin.

"They serve good steaks here." Percy groused, snapping out of his belt and stepping out of the car. He leaned his hands on the door and gave Mack a flat look. "I was going to offer to buy you lunch but since you clearly doubt my taste, you can sit and watch me eat or stay here in the car. Your choice."

"I'll take option three." The rugged blonde grinned and got out of the car and slowly walked around the Cobra to lean next to Percy, folding his arms across his broad chest. "There's a great little bistro just across the street. Serves an excellent rib eye. How about I buy you lunch?"

Percy's eyes followed his pointed finger at a small, charming looking place with outdoor seating and real wrought iron furniture. It looked infinitely better than the place Percy had in mind. He bit his lip and looked back at Mack.

The man was close enough to feel his body heat, to smell his cologne. His muscled form looked like sex on a stick as he leaned against the car right next to Percy's hand, his denim clad hip just a finger twitch away from touching. Percy's gaze flickered down to the blonde chest hairs teasing from the deep open neck of the henley and then back up to clear blue eyes.

"The food is good, trust me." Mack leaned in a bit closer, his breath hot against Percy's pinked cheeks. "I know a thing or two about good red meat."

Percy made a soft noise on want, slapping his fingers over his mouth in mortification as he stumbled back a few steps; hot and bothered under his collar. He blinked rapidly and took a deep breath as he tried to get his libido back under control.

"That was bloody awful." He sniffed as he straightened his jacket, giving the grinning man a mock fierce glare. "I'm having serious doubts about your taste level and intelligence if you thought that was an acceptable double entendre."

"The look on your face though" The blond threw back his head and laughed. "I couldn't resist. Plus…" his grin turned sly, "You're not exactly here for my witty repartee."

"I have no idea what you're talking about" Percy narrowed his eyes. "the only thing that we are here for is lunch."

"Cut the bullshit Red" Mack raised a hand and shaking his head. "We both know what I'm talking about. I know that you've been looking. I've been looking too. We can be adults about this."

Percy's mouth twisted into a frown as he studied the other man, his thoughts racing around his head like headless chickens. He quickly shut his panic down, shoving all the noise in his brain into a lock box and kicking said box into the shadows.

A voice very much like Ginny's sounded in his mind as clear as a bell and just as bloody loud. Right now there's a full on hottie looking at you like a snack, you stupid twat; get out of your own
mind and into his pants already.

Later he would draw himself a nice bath and contemplate this entire exchange over and over, mining every little detail of what was said and left unsaid. The only thing that mattered now was that the right hottie he'd been lusting after for a while now was also interested in starting something. What that something was, Percy was ready to find out.

He nodded to himself and tilted his head. "So … your treat was it?"

Mack's grin was slow and promised wicked things. "Sure."

Chapter End Notes

RHODEY"S HERE... almost. he'll be in the next chapter.

I also didn't expect Mack to make a move like that when i started this chapter but i'm glad he did. maybe Percy can get some vitamin D already. LOL.

also, Aaron is being a bit paranoid but there's a good reason. more about that soon.
Chapter 16

By the time Percy made it back to the tower after his long and sexually tense lunch with Mack, Colonel Rhodes had arrived and was already ensconced on the large penthouse sofa with Tony. There was a generic action movie blearing, unwatched on the TV in front of them and Rhodes was nodding off, all but draped over Tony's shoulder and mostly asleep from all the food they'd just devoured. The remains of dishes from a favoured local restaurant lay spread on the large glass coffee table before them like bones on a battlefield, picked clean by vultures.

Nodding a quick greeting to his boss, who looked just as comfortable playing pillow to his best friend as he made notes on a starkpad; Percy made quick work of cleaning up and disposing of the empty containers. He repackaged the scant leftovers and stuck them in the fridge; then made a pot of strong black coffee, taking a mug filled with the rich liquid to Tony's side.

Wordlessly, he placed the cup on the small side table, well within reach of the trapped genius and fluffed the pillows behind both men. He then got two water bottles and left them nearby as well.

Tony gave him a small, thankful smile and Percy bowed his head slightly in return before taking the envelope from his jacket pocket and tucking it between Tony's leg and the edge of the couch.

The brunette frowned, looking down at the document and the 'for eyes only' stamped in red ink. He glanced up at Percy, his brown eyes sharp.

Percy mouthed "Stark Legal" and at the other man's nod of understanding, excused himself. Tony would read it at his leisure and would decide whether or not he would show it to Rhodes. It wouldn't be any of Percy's concern unless Tony asked him to weigh in on it.

Slipping off his jacket and hanging it over his office chair, he had Friday initiate a call to the Avengers Compound, more importantly, Maria Hill's office. Soon enough, Hill's face appeared on his monitor.

"You're not cancelling brunch are you?" she raised a thin eyebrow, "You usually send an email for work related issues. What does Stark need now?"

Percy sat back in his chair and crossed his fingers over his stomach with a soft sigh. "It's not the boss man I'm calling for this time and so far emails haven't been getting the job done. Seems that SI Marketing Department have been trying to get feedback from the Avengers for a while now and they are just about ready to tear out their hair and set the place on fire."

"This again." Hill echoed his sigh with a deeper, more exasperated one. "I've had three meetings about this already. I don't know what you want me to do. They're grown people. I can't make them answer emails. Especially if they only see the people sending them as 'superficial, money hungry assholes trying to make a quick buck off the avengers good names'."

"Come again?" Percy gaped a bit then snapped his mouth shut. "That sounds like a pretty specific quote to me."

"Tell me about it." Hill rolled her eyes. "It's like beating my head against a brick wall sometimes."

Percy pursed his lips, "Would that brick wall happen to be star-spangled?"

"You would think so... but no." Hill mused, resting her cheek against her fist. "It's mostly been Maximoff so far but they others are slowly coming around to her viewpoint. Just the same sentiment over and over like a stuck record."
He'd heard many a frustrated rant from Tony about the #tonystarkistheactualdevil mentality the former Hydra operative had embraced and still continued to stubbornly cling to. It was another thing entirely for the rest of the Avengers to start talking like that as well. There was an alarming precedent being set here.

"Should we be concerned about this?" Percy leaned forward unto his desk. "It seems a bit fishy to me. I know that the avengers and Mr. Stark parted on not so good terms but this kind of shift in opinion seems rather rushed. You did say her powers were of mind control didn't you?" he mused loudly.

Hill's eyes sharpened and looked past the camera as if her thoughts were racing behind her still countenance. After a few moments, she hissed a soft curse and looked back at the redhead.

"You don't think…" She shook her head, blinking rapidly as she pressed finely trembling fingers to her temple. "… no, that would be… ah fuck. I can't believe that I didn't even think of that. I mean… I don't think I did." She paused for a long while, staring unseeingly into space then looked back up at Percy, a quiet fury burning behind her eyes. "I'll look into it."

Percy only nodded as she signed off abruptly. He hadn't been expecting the conversation to go in that direction so quickly. He'd just been concerned about the already unsteady relationship between Tony and his former team.

He come up against expert Legillimens on more than one occasion during his time at the Ministry. Having someone able to read your mind without your knowledge or consent was uncomfortable enough but Maximoff's power bordered on the Imperious and it left Percy's insides feeling twisty and cold.

He knew of mutants who had mind control power, like Charles Xavier and his protégé Jean Grey but from what he'd heard about the Maximoff twins and their dubious super origins made him think that they might have been squibs rather than full muggles. Muggles would never have been able to adapt to the power of the Mind Stone as they'd been able too.

He'd done a report on the subject back when he'd been Under Secretary, about the after effects of magical rituals on Muggles. The research had been horrifying and somewhat soul killing as his contacts in the Department of Mysteries had reluctantly shared horror stories of the things they'd seen.

Of the few who actually survived whatever magic they'd been subjected to, most died or committed suicide within a year. The rest often lived a short and painful life thereafter. Of course, the infinity stones didn't resonate the same as wizarding magic did but from the reports Wendy had let him read, exposure to full muggles would still have proven deadly.

He sat back and tapped his pointed fingers against his chin as he thought.

If Maximoff turned out to be a squib, would that put her under MACUSA jurisdiction? Could they be called in to deal with her or would they leave her alone for fear of being exposed to such a public figure? Would obviate even work on her if things went wrong? It was a large issue to wrap one's mind around.

Absently, he made a note to reach out to Wendy from MACUSA about it and turned his mind to another troubling matter. The weakening relationship between Tony and the rest of the Avengers.

While SI and the Avengers Initiative were solid business partners, with 'partners' being the term in question. Basically SI was bankrolling the Avengers doing whatever the fuck they wanted. It was
uneven at best and abusive at worst. Also, Tony Stark personal relationships with his former team had been slowly eroding over the past few months.

Personally, Percy felt that SI should cut ties with the team completely and he had a feeling that Pepper was in agreement with him. Not that the Avengers didn't do some good for the world, but that they needed to be more self-sustainable and independent than they currently were.

They also needed to be more discerning of the matters they pushed themselves into. They were a team brought together to fight the battles the world couldn't. It didn't make sense for them to be inserting themselves into matters that could more than likely be handled by local police and military.

Their seemingly utter lack of concern over collateral damage also left a sour taste in Percy's mouth, wincing in remembrance of some of the post mission reports he'd read. Marketing was right, the Avengers needed to start working on their image ASAP if they wanted to stay on the world's good side.

Their relationship with Tony was in worse shape, being decidedly one sided in the heroes' favour. Frankly, Percy believed that Tony needed to cut the purse strings and let the team of heroes toddle off for themselves. As Maria Hill had curtly stated. They were grown people.

In the end though, that wasn't his decision to make. Tony was capable of a deep and abiding love and forgiveness for people he thought his own and the Avengers were still a part of that in his mind and his broken heart. He would the only one to decide when enough was too much.

Percy made his daily video call to Pepper, who expressed regret that she couldn't fly back for Rhodes' leave and after discussing several matters concerning Tony's itinerary, he broached the subject the Avengers copyrights.

"Tony only secured them all so that the team would have complete control over their images and likeness. It's too easy these days for people to misuse the Avengers for personal gain. You should have seen some of the stuff people put out before we finally secured all the rights to Captain America." Pepper explained. "This way, we have more control over how and when their names and likenesses are used. The profits get funneled into an account that is kept on the team's behalf and covers personal expenses and their credit cards."

She sighed "We'd planned for the money to be used towards sustaining the compound but that was something meant to be discussed and decided as a team and it didn't pan out in the end. SI has been pulling out slowly over the past year and it's been basically Tony's personal wealth that has been funding the team."

The red head looked tired at that admission, absentmindedly tucking her hair behind one ear with a faraway look in her normally bright eyes. "With that and all the AIDE we've been providing to areas damaged during missions, it's been taking a toll on him, personally and financially."

"Thank you for talking with me." Percy took in the subtle frustration on her and frowned. "Do you want me to look into it? A pair of fresh eyes couldn't hurt. I may have some ideas we can discuss."

She gave him a tired, yet grateful smile. "Yes, thank you. I'd appreciate that. There's just so much on my plate right now."

"I understand perfectly" Percy nodded, making a note on his calendar for a week ahead.

They said their goodbyes and he spent the next hour making notes on the matter. Just basically
jotting down any thoughts that came to mind. Eventually he stood, slipping his jacket back on and tidyng up his desk. He slipped his phone into his pocket and headed for the elevator.

He checked in with Friday on dinner plans and after being informed of Tony's plans to take Rhodey out to their favourite restaurant for dinner, made his way down to Tony's room to lay out a few outfit options. He set out a few pieces, a mix between suit and casual because Tony's fashion choices were sometimes as mercurial as his moods.

He was just steaming the wrinkled out of one of the brunette's vintage tees when Colonel Rhodes stuck his head in the doorway.

"Tones?" he looked around, blinking as he spotted Percy, steamer in one hand and hem of the t-shirt in the other. "Hey, Westerly right?" The darker man stepped further into the room. "The redhead who stabbed someone's eye out."

Percy made a face. "Is that how you remember me?" he blurted before flushing a mortified pink. "I'm sorry Colonel. That just came out. You can call me Percy if you wish."

"After how many times I heard that story? You betcha." Rhodes chuckled, coming a bit closer. He looked around the master suite. "Is Tony here? I've looked all over for him. In the labs, the kitchen even the garage."

Percy thought for a moment. "Have you tried his office? If he's not there, I'm sure Friday can locate him for you."

"Tony actually uses his office?" the other man looked surprised, perching on the arm of a puffy arm chair as he shrugged. "It's fine. I'll just wait here for him. Friday, can you let him know where I am?"

"Of course Colonel Rhodes." the AI chirped, eagerly.

When it seemed that the Colonel was settling in for a wait, sliding to drape his long frame over the overstuffed chair; Percy got back to his steaming. A few moments passed in comfortable silence before Rhodes spoke once again.

"So ... Percy." he shifted in his seat, "Tony talks about you... A lot. He just can't say enough about you. Pepper as well. She can't stop singing your praises about how organized Tony is now. How relaxed and focused. She even talked about your part in the take down of the 'Bag of Dicks' great name by the way; I will never not call them that. Having Pepper Potts for a fan is no easy feat."

He shrugged. "Not to mention that time at the hospital? You'd think that you rescued Tony and his entire security team single handedly, the number I've heard that story. They both think very highly of you."

Percy felt his cheeks reddening but said nothing as the Colonel seemed like he wasn’t finished speaking.

Rhodes tilted his head in a curious manner. "And Tony's different. I've been hearing it over the phone and through our emails but seeing him today in person has made it all the more clear on how much he's changed. He's calmer. Happier. Maybe even healing a bit after everything he's been through."

He levelled a steady look at the redhead, his face solemn.

"I know that I haven't been around lately but I've known Tony for more than twenty years and I've
never been able to 'handle' him the way I've heard that you can.' his voice was half contemplative, half accusatory.

Percy stared back at the sprawling man. He didn't detect jealousy or anger in the man's voice or body language; only a caution that came from seeing someone you care about hurt over and over again. He took his time to process the other man's words and was grateful that Rhodes sat patiently as he did.

"I believe the crux of the matter is that I am not Tony's friend… Well, not the kind of friend you become from knowing someone for such a short time. I haven't known him as long as you have, I'm not as emotionally invested nor have I been 'through the trenches' as it were. Though there is potential for it."

He set the steamer aside. "First and foremost, I'm Mr. Stark's employee. I here to assist him and, along with Friday, fill in the gap left by JARVIS. It's my job to make Mr. Stark… Tony's life easier in any way I can. That usually means laying out his clothes or making sure he hasn't left some kind of laser burning when he passes out in the lab. Basically I am here to be a buffer Mr. Stark needs between him and the world."

He gave a slight shrug. "Frankly, you and Miss Potts are the ones who have to do the heavy lifting. You are the ones who have to deal with the deeper issues. The PTSD, the depression and anxiety. Tony needs you for that. Your patience. Your love. Your strength of character and will. He needs the years of friendship that you've built together. I have no chance in hell of being that kind of support for him."

He gave a sheepish smile. "I just make sure that the fridge is stocked, the suits and pressed and the pillow concierge is kept up to date."

Rhodes seemed a bit nonplussed at that. "We have a pillow concierge?"

Percy chuckled. "Yes, and a Masseuse and an in-house Feng Shui expert. We also have an Aromachologist but she's only a consultant."

Rhodes huffed a laugh and slung his long legs off of the chair and ambled over to the window to look out unto the city. Percy took his silence as permission to turn back to his steaming. A few minutes later Tony popped his head through the door much in the way Rhodes had done. He grinned at the sight of his best friend.

"Platypus. Friday said that you've been searching high and low for little old me."

He walked over and tucked himself against his bestie's side, letting Rhodes sling an arm over his shoulder with a smile. As the two men talked, Percy finished setting out the rest of the genius clothing options and confirmed with Friday about the reservations via text.

"Hey Perce…” Tony spun to smile at him, walking over to inspect the clothes. "I see that you and Honey Bear have finally met. Last time in the hospital you were too doped up on morphine to do much more than gurgle and earlier today Rhodey was too busy drooling to notice you fluffing his pillows."

Both men exchanged chagrined looks at those words, Rhodes sighed before dragging his hand down his face. "Tones"

Tony gave him an unrepentant grin in return. "I hardly ever have any embarrassing stories of either one of you. I need to milk this situation as long as I can."
Percy couldn’t help but grin as the two friends started to give each other grief, excusing himself as they joked and laughed with each other. Tony seemed so relaxed when Rhodey was around. Just as he seemed more at ease with Pepper nearby. But with Miss. Potts in Malibu for the for seeable future and Colonel Rhodes on Duty most of the time, when he wasn’t seconded to the Avengers that is; it meant that Tony was alone in New York without his much needed support system.

Percy was right when he told Colonel Rhodes that Tony needed much more than and PA and an AI to keep him on a steady keel. He needed his friends. He needed his family, whatever form that took.

Percy stopped in the hallway as a sudden thought came to him. Spinning on his heels he made his way back to the Master Suite. Both men looked up at him and he strode in through the door and strode up to the bed where they’d been laughing as cat videos on Youtube.

"I have the best idea." Percy stated bluntly, pointing at the genius. "You need to go to Malibu."

Tony blinked in surprise then frowned. "Why? Has something happened? Is it Pepper?"

Percy shook his head quickly, paling as he held up his hands "No, No, Nothing's wrong. That came out wrong. I didn't think carefully enough… I just got the idea and just blurted it out like a bloody fool… I'm so sorry…"

Rhodes held out a calming hand towards the redhead, his other on Tony's shoulder, keeping him seated. "Okay. Okay. Both of you need to just calm down and breathe."

Percy took a deep breath and felt a pang of regret at watching the panic slowly fade from his boss' eyes. "I am so sorry." he repeated. "I just thought… I thought that you could benefit from a trip to Malibu."

Tony made a face. "Okaaay" he said, drawing out the last syllable.

Percy gave a sheepish shrug. "You miss Pepper, she misses you. Colonel Rhodes has to go back on duty soon. Raizel has SI New York firmly in hand. I mean, all you have are the bots and they can go wherever you go. I think that you should just say Fuck New York and go stay in sunny California for a while."

He made a soft helpless noise and winced. "I mean, in my humble opinion, it would be good for you." He felt his face heat as both men continued to stare at him. He rubbed the back of his head and shifted on his feet.

Slowly, he backed away from the two me. "That's all I had to say so I am going to go do something else now. Ahem. Yes. Okay""}

Friday's answering chime was wordless but seemed to convey the compassion and comradery he needed right now. He looked up at the nearest camera and mouthed a silent "thanks". As the
elevator doors opened, he gave one final huff of disgust before vowing to think about something else entirely.

His mind ran on Mack and the charged and enjoyable lunch they'd had earlier. Getting to know the man in a social setting had been a revelation. Aside from being hot as burning, the rugged man was intelligent with a sharp tongue and a dry wit bordering on scathing. He had such a smug smirk than equal parts irritated the hell out of the red head and made him want to kiss it off the man's face.

He had to stop to adjust his pants as he made his way to the workshop to check things over and greet the bots. At least the man had made his intentions quite clear. He was willing to pursue a physical relationship and although they had not discussed the more sensitive points and preferences, at least Percy was closer to getting some than he'd been in a long time.

And boy did he need some.

His phone chirped. It was Wendy Higgs. He quickly stepped into the small bathroom of the workshop and pressed the privacy switch. Although Friday didn't actively monitor the bathrooms in the tower, she did collect passive feedback as part of her security measures. In the lab it was doubly so but Tony had also installed a switch for when utmost privacy was needed.

The redhead, flipped down the toilet seat and sat on the lid before answering the call. "Wendy," he greeted, "Thanks for calling me back. Can we meet?"

"Sure thing Red. How about six tonight at a great Vietnamese place I know. I'll message you the directions." Higgs' voice was musical over the phone, sounding as comfortable with muggle technology as the wizards back in Britain painfully weren't. "Or should I find somewhere more private."

'More Private' meant a MACUSA safe house and privacy wards.

"No" he assured her. "I just have a concern and I need your advice. I would usually go to Sanderson but this is a little above his pay grade and experience I think."

"Understood." she hummed then chuckled. "It's hilarious how you and Sandy have hit it off. He talks about you all the time. Mind you, it's mostly bitter complaining but that's a good thing. Not many people get under his skin enough for him to even remember their name."

Percy barked a laugh. "He doesn't even remember my name. He calls my English, Miss Priss and Queen Mother all the bloody time and complains constantly whenever I call or text."

"At least he answers you. He mostly ignores everyone else." Wendy's laugh was like the tinkling of bells. "I'll see you later Red."

She rung off and Percy spent the next few minutes sitting in the silent bathroom as his mind raced. He wasn't sure what the situation with Maximoff would end up being but he was certainly out of his depth. Wendy would make a good sounding board and could take action if it needed to be taken.

He scrolled through his social media accounts, both magical and muggle and posted a random photo on Tony's Instagram of DUM-E and U facing off over a neon green tennis ball. Research had shown that any pictures of the bots, with or without their creator usually pulled a large positive response. The public loved them and loved Tony even more when they saw how open and caring he was of them.

The head of PR had sent him an edible bouquet when they'd hit 1 million followers and had been
sending over tokens every time another million followed. Percy in turn told her to stop sending him gifts and start holding giveaways on the media site itself, gifting one lucky fan with an awesome prize.

After the first one was announced, Tony's IG account had gained two million followers overnight. Seemed that a lot of people wanted "Brunch with the Bots" especially if Tony Stark would also be in attendance. These Brunches had been a success and even better, had been fun for all involved.

Tony had been wary of the idea at first but the fan who'd won the prize had been so over the moon at meeting both the billionaire and his helper bots that the brunch that had been set up in a private conference room on one of the lower floors had been an roaring success.

There'd been three more brunches since then, the candid pictures of DUM-E making smoothies as Butterfingers tried to squeeze fresh orange juice and splattered everyone present going viral almost immediately after each were posted.

Not to be left out, U had apparently learned how to flip pancakes and had taken to making more and more elaborate shapes and colours. The bot now had its own instagram, monitored heavily by FRIDAY of course, where the bot made pancake faces and, oddly enough, simple landscapes and circuitry.

Slowly but surely, Tony's popularity was growing and tilting towards the positive. Too bad the Avengers could not say them same for themselves. Even though SI and Avengers PR departments were working overtime to keep the team in a positive place, the sheer fact that none of the team were willing to be physically present for events and publicity appearances left a bad taste in the public's mouth.

It was also concerning because many of the team had no problem doing their part to bolster the team's image. He knew of many accounts of Captain America visiting VA hospitals, of Thor visiting Children's Wards. Even Black Widow and Hawkeye would make appearances at charity events. All of that seemed to come to an end after the events Sokovia which was unfortunate because this was when they needed to be visible the most.

Percy shook his head at the frankly childish behaviour. Well, he couldn't really judge. He didn't know these people personally so he really wasn't in a position to judge. That didn't stop him from judging the hell out of them though. If only for the wreckage of a man they'd left in their wake.

The physical and emotional wounds left on Tony Stark by the people who were supposed to be his friends, his family were horrible to witness and heartbreaking to watch slowly heal. Watching the amazing man he knew Tony to be, pick up the jagged pieces of his heart and try to push them back into his chest made Percy want to whip out his wand and Crucio someone. It made him that livid.

Shaking off the all too familiar anger that bubbled up at this train of thought, he exited the bathroom and continued his check of the workshop. Heading up to the living quarters, he caught Tony and Rhodes as they were getting ready to leave.

"Hey, here's the guy I was looking for." Tony smiled at the red head, slinging an arm around his shoulders. ".... the guy with the best ideas ever."

Percy gave his boss a look, turning toward a smiling Rhodes. "Yeah? Well, here I am."

Tony laughed, throwing his head back at he shook Percy gently. "Yes, there you are. Great news. I've decided that your idea for a trip to Malibu is an awesome one. New York is such a drag these days. I need some sea air and fish tacos like, yesterday."
He gave Percy a pat on the shoulder. "I already called Pepper and she's on board with it. I just need to get the house ready. I have a house there you know. Well, not the one that got destroyed by a missile and crumbled into the ocean. No I had another one built on the site. It's awesome. You'll love it. Granted I've never actually been there but Pepper has and she says it's great."

Percy stood gaping as he watched his boss ramble on, saved only by Rhodes hooking and arm in Tony's and pulling him toward the elevator.

"Alright man, we can talk about all of that later. Give the kid a chance to process. Meanwhile I'm starving and I have a thick porterhouse steak calling my name. You're gonna have to roll me out of there later. I promise you that."

The elevator closed behind them, leaving Percy in sudden silence. Percy blinked stupidly before shaking like a dog. He looked around the empty living area and then up at the ceiling.

"Uh… Friday?"

"Yes Percy?"

"Did I hear him right? Are we really going to Malibu?"

"Yup" the AI chirped "Miss Potts was very amenable to the suggestion when Boss called her earlier."

"Oh ok." Percy looked around once again, this time his mind listing all the things he would need to get started to prepare for this. But first… dinner with Wendy. He need to get things rolling if they were going to be on the other side of the country for the foreseeable future. If he left now he would make it in time to get a good table.

"Ok then," he said to himself, straightening his jacket. "California it is."

He'd always wanted to visit the american west coast. Sun, sea, sand and hot beach bodies. He smiled to himself as he stepped towards the elevator doors.

This was going to be so much fun.
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

This chapter is Edited. I read it over and had some ideas for changes. I hope it made the chapter better. I think I improved the flow and general feel.

Side Note: I will be posting Smut separately and linking it to the chapter when I write it. This will give readers the choice on whether or not they want to read.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Percy pulled his camel skin coat closer around his body and stamped his booted feet against the chill of a New York night. Tony's sudden decision to move the Stark household to Malibu had pushed back his dinner plans with Wendy from 6 to 9pm.

He'd had to sit for a few minutes with a strong cup of tea to keep from flailing around like a helpless chicken at the gargantuan task that lay before him.

The logistics alone of moving a billionaire genius, his security team, three bots, a plucky AI et al over to the west coast on the continental United States were daunting. The next couple of hours had been spent ensconced with him in his office with Friday, sketching up the barest bones of a plan before finally tossing the pen down and saying fuck it.

All the plans of mice and men could keep until tomorrow. He was hungry, tired and had been in his work suit for too long so he kipped over to his suite for a quick shower and change of clothes. A pair of dark wash jeans, a crisp white shirt and dark green jumper that flattered his pale skin joined with a pair of ankle boots. Slipping his phone and wallet into his pockets, he left the tower and walked the short ways to the subway, following Wendy's text directions to the restaurant.

'I Came Here Fo' da PHO' was a tiny place with crowded tables and open kitchen. The sounds of conversation and hissing fires came through the single door to the street every time someone opened it. Through the window pane he could see groups of customers bent closely over small formica tables, crowded with plates and bowls of delicious looking food.

Soon enough, he heard the clip clop of Wendy's booted heels echoing in the streets well before he saw her. She rounded the corner at a fast clip, dressed in a huge black coat that seemed to swallow her small frame.

She gave him a smile and a curt nod, gesturing for them to enter. The staff and even some of the customers greeted her by name and she reciprocated cheerfully as she shrugged of her massive coat and hung it on a hook near the door. She held out a hand for Percy's and gave an insistent wave when he hesitated. Soon enough their coats were squared away and they were huddled at a small table near the kitchen.

The hissing of the pots, the clanking of the large spoons wielded by the constantly chatting and laughing staff, not to mention the boisterous conversations and tables games going on amongst the customers made it almost impossible to talk quietly until Wendy slipped her wand under the table and cast a silent Muffliato.
Percy gave a sigh of relief in the sudden quiet and sat back in his plastic folding chair. The brightly coloured menus were laminated and served double as place mats and the next few minutes were spent in silence as they both studied their choices.

They gave their orders to a bored looking waitress, no doubt a sister or daughter of the family owned business; conscripted to working a shift after school. Hot bowls of Pho, steamed rice cakes, spring rolls, clay pot fish and more soon sat steaming in dishes across their small cracked table.

They dug in without much conversation, taking the time to enjoy the food hot and steaming from the noisy kitchen. The restaurant was hot and a bit stuffy but that just made it more comforting. The wall of customers between them and the dark New York night made it seem like they were in a whole other world.

Percy was sure that the place was completely muggle but in America, it was harder to tell. Maj and no-maj people acted the same, looked the same. Magical folk had integrated so much into society in this country that it took effort to see the demarcation between the two societies any more.

Only in places like Battery Park where sentient beings congregated apart from everyday witches and wizards could the lines be clearly seen. Still, the two worlds seemed more intertwined than he'd ever seen in what could be called the first world.

As the dishes piled up between them and dessert and coffee had been ordered and delivered, only then did Wendy start to show interest in why he'd asked to meet. Her grey eyes sparkled silver in the harsh lighting, one pale eyebrow curving upwards.

Her wispy platinum blonde hair was still pulled up to the top of her head and clipped with ornate silver clasps but her outfit was a simple one. A slate grey skirt and jacket, a grey satin blouse soft and silky against the thicker tweed. Wendy looked like any other corporate go-getter with her simple jewelry and sensible heels. It was her ethereal grace and luminescent eyes that grabbed attention, that made her seem like something other.

"So…" she wiped at her lips with a paper napkin, "… Want to tell me the reason you called this little pow wow?"

"Never one to beat around the bush eh? I've always liked that about you Wendy." Percy blinked then chuckled. "This is less of a pow wow though, more of a business dinner. That way I can put it on my expense account."

The petit woman smirked. "Fine. Thanks for the dinner. Now lets talk 'business'."

Percy ran his small plastic spoon through the remnants of his dessert, gathering his thoughts. He quickly explained about Wanda Maximoff. About his theory on the powers that she was starting to manifest. Wendy listened solemnly, once in a while asking a succinct question or requesting clarification on a matter. When Percy was done, he felt relived, as if he'd let go some kind of great tension or burden. He slumped back unto his chair and drained the last of his cooled drink.

They sat in silence once more, this time both deep in thought. Wendy had her elbows on the table, her pointed chin perched on her joined hands, her eyes distant. Around them, time and conversation went on. The waitress cleared their table as Percy ordered two more cups of the sweet and strong Vietnamese coffee that tasted fantastic.

"There is a being i know of…" Wendy began, blinking a bit then looking at Percy with a downward twist in her lips. "… The Sorcerer Supreme."
She took a sip from her coffee and hummed. "Reports say that they manifest their power from the earth instead of from within themselves like we wixen do. There's supposed to be a whole sanctuary in Tibet to teach no-majs how to do it as well. A Temple of sorts. Kind of like a Hogwarts of sorts."

She rolled her eyes heavily. "Apparently, they are supposed to be in charge of the "Magical Aspect" of the planet earth." The air quotes were both exaggerated and dismissive.

"MACUSA Special Branch claims to have met one in person some hundred years ago. A woman then. Not sure if she still holds the title. Legends say it passes from one to another. Those deemed worthy of protecting the planet. Fat lot of good it did us when old fuckmort was traipsing around the western world trying to be the next Evil Overlord (TM)."

She drained her cup and signaled for another, along with a second dessert.

"From what I've managed to scrape together from the archives, they have established themselves in certain circles as the leading authority on the infinity stones, or power gems as they are usually known. Word was that they were even in possession of one of them, the Eye of Agamato. It's supposed to control Time itself."

She huffed and sipped at her hot coffee, making a little pleased sound.

"Merlin bring back the days when only one of these damnable stones were on the planet. Those monks were on the job and we didn’t have to worry about someone fucking around and cracking the planet in half. Now there might be three of the things on earth and you are telling me that they can give random no-majs powers now? Merlin's hairy nut sack, I'm getting a headache already."

She shook her head and sighed, setting down her cup. "The paperwork on Jurisdiction alone is going to be a fucking nightmare." she pierced the redhead with a sharp look. "You don't do things by halves don't you?"

"You asked me to keep an ear out for infinity stone information." Percy raised an eyebrow and shrugged, making a 'what can you do' gesture with his hand. "Here you go. Hot off the press. What are you going to do?"

"What can we do?" The blonde exhaled deeply, "I'll have to look into it. Take this to my boss. Maybe this Sorcerer Supreme would want to call dibs on this. Merlin knows it would be less of a pain in the ass for us. I doubt MACUSA would want to make this a statute of secrecy issue but if we have some jumped up no-maj out their casting what is essentially an Imperius on people, they may want to get involved."

Her mouth twisted. "We have come across mind manipulators before. Mutants mostly. Telepathy. Telekinesis. Enhanced Empathy. We usually deal on a case by case business or see if Charles Xavier and his bunch can handle it. Sometimes the no-maj government even steps in. SHeILD mostly.

From what you've said about Maximoff, she falls just at the edge of our jurisdiction. She's not a mutant so Xavier probably may not want to get too involved. She's protected from the no-maj government by her Avenger status and the Sorcerer Supreme may think that she's too much of a small fry to deal with."

Percy huffed. "That is a sticky situation. Makes you wish she were someone else's problem entirely doesn't it?"
"Yes… Wendy blinked, her grey eyes flashing silver for a second before going distant. "… someone …. else's…. problem….. entirely. Yes, that just might be the answer."

Her mouth spread into a devilish grin and she all but beamed at Percy.

"I'll be in touch. Let me make a few calls and I'll see what I can do."

Percy grinned in return. He had no idea what she had in mind but seeing that smile on her face told him that whatever it was going to be good. Seemed that Wendy had a bit of Imp to go along with that Fae blood of hers.

------------------------------------------------

"Um… what?" Percy blinked at his boss as the other man leaned over the work table.

"I said, DUM-E doesn't like to fly so we'll be driving to Malibu." The brunette glanced up at the redhead before turning back to his ministrations. "… kind of like a road trip. You ever been on a road trip?"

He waved his hands, absently knocking away some small holograms that scattered like marbles before Friday sent them back into formation.

"I always wondered what that would be like. Mom and Pop, the kiddies and the family pet trundling down the open road in a supered up RV.

The brunette shrugged. "The closest i ever came was when Jarvis used to take the long drive to boarding school each year. if we timed it right, we would have to stop overnight as a local bed and breakfast owned by this charming couple. Jarvis would let buy us fast food burgers for dinner and then the old lady... Mrs. Mannox would cook this huge breakfast. then Jay would drive me the rest of the way to school. it was great."

He seemed to shake himself out of his memories, blinking rapidly and plastering on a devil may care smile.

"So road trips... It's like the American dream." He looked up at Percy again, his brown eyes abnormally large through his magnifying lens glasses. "Don't you want a piece of the American dream, Red?"

Percy rolled his eyes and stepped closer to the table. He lifted up one finger. "First of all, I never thought that you would actually use the word 'trundling' in a sentence so there's that."

He lifted a another finger. "Second, Colonel Rhodes already gave me the low down of the two of you and the Epic Road Trip That Shall Never Be Discussed On Pain of Death down to the grand canyon that somehow involved the National Guard and the Department of Fish and Wildlife."

Tony gaped. "Hunny Bear told you about that? We swore never to speak of that time ever again."

Percy grinned, "He wanted me to have sufficient blackmail material against you. Thirdly..."

He raised a third finger. "I have been on a road trip. My parents took us down to Leeds one time. It was not as fun as people hype it up to be. Picture it... seven loud and bratty kids, two harassed parents at the end of their wits, a bedraggled owl and a three legged rat trapped for seven hours in a cramped and creaky VW van which guzzled petrol like nothing else."
Percy shuddered dramatically. "I wanted to throw myself into oncoming traffic after the first twenty minutes. I spent the rest of the week making a potential case for justifiable homicide."

Tony barked a laugh, pushing his the thick lensed glasses up into his unruly hair. "A gaggle redheads, an owl and a rat in an old VW van? Sounds like the names of an indie rock band. And don't think you're getting away from telling me how you ended up with an owl and a rat for family pets. Those two are natural enemies you know?"

Percy huffed and plopped down on a nearby stool, shoving some random parts out of the way so that he could put down his tablet. Tony made a frowny face at the move, eyeing the jumble of metal scraps as they crept closer across the table. When the redhead was satisfied that his device wouldn't topple off the crowded space, he sighed and leaned his chin on his fist.

"Tell me about it. Errol and Scabbers were public enemies from day one. If I wasn’t getting pecked by the sharp beak of a crotchety old owl, I was getting bitten by a panicked rodent with anxiety issues a mile wide. It was like that show "When Animals Attack". Most times I’d end up bruised and bloody from chasing those two all over creation.

After a while mum decided to divide the house up into territories, Errol would stay in the kitchen and hunt outside, Scabbers would stay upstairs most of the time. The living room was neutral territory and no fighting was allowed under threat of banishment to meh da's shed out back. Nobody liked the shed. It got right bloody cold in there at night. "

He looked over to see Tony staring at him in a mixture of horrified fascination and disbelief. "Your childhood sounds equal parts traumatizing and totally awesome."

Percy chuckled, "It was kind of both. Sometimes I just wanted to scream and tear my hair out, other times it was good… really good."

He let his shoulders slump as he thought about life back at Ottery St. Catchpole. Home had been loud, hectic and frustrating, his family the main source of his growing anger and resentment. He often longed to just leave them all behind to wallow like pigs in mud, pureblood traitors happy to live in their drab and destitute lives.

He'd forgotten all about the familiar comfort and love; of warm, soft Christmas jumpers knitted with a P and felt like hugs all year round. Of his father's warm hand on his shoulder. Of Ginny tucked snug against his side, smelling like honeysuckle and broom oil, in front of a crackling fire as she read Quidditch Weekly. Of pumpkin pasties fresh out of the oven and the smell of freshly over turned dirt as they pulled gnomes from the garden and flung them over the hedge.

He'd snubbed his nose at that old familiar simplicity and had left it all behind for 'something better, something brighter'. In the end what seemed a better, brighter, golden road had left to him neck deep in shit, cold and alone in a dark and filthy room as Marcus Flint died a horrible death before his eyes.

That kind of cold loneliness still clung to his heart even now, after leaving his old ways behind, even after reconciling with both Bill and Charlie, after doing right by Potter and Granger. Ginny was gone, snatched away too soon by Voldemort's last mad grab at survival, Ron was as good as gone too, his head so far up his own ass he wouldn't even recognize himself most likely.

Percy had never be close to the twins and probably never would be. he would never trust them for understand him of accept him with all the bad blood between them, all the mocking laughter. His parents were somewhere off in Scotland highlands, still hanging off Dumbledore's robes, wherever the old bastard was now after being drummed out of Wizarding Britain.
His thoughts flashed briefly the day he'd found out that his old rat Scabbers turned out to be Peter Pettigrew's animagus form all those years but he quickly and forcefully shoved that thought back into its iron clad box with firm resolve. He would not think of that now. No fucking way. Maybe some day in the future that box would be opened either by an experienced therapist, a skilled Obliviator or a case of fire whiskey and a sound proof room to muffle his cries.

The sound of DUM-E coming closer brought him out of his darkening mood and he blinked and smiled softly at the bot, running his hand down the sleek chassis. "Thanks, buddy."

"Yeah…" He sighed, shaking off his morose thoughts as he turned towards Tony. "Family can be a hellova thing"

The brunette gave him a look of soft understanding. "I hear that."

Brunch with Raizel and Maria was bittersweet and heavy on the champagne mamosas. As they shared hot, interoffice gossip and bitched about co-workers over excellent spinach fritata, Percy felt a pang of sadness at not being able to do this as often anymore. He was going to miss these women a lot and told them as much.

"Pish tosh" Raizel had scoffed, waving the notion away like a pesky bug. "You have a pilot's license. Stark had a fleet of jets. You can get your cute tush back to the east coast twice a month young man or we will have words."

Her gaze was sharp and promised eternal hellfire. Maria gave him the eyebrow of doom.

"Yes'm" Percy agreed demurely, sipping his third cocktail and signaling for another round.

The stumbled the hem of his sleep pants, grumbling at whoever was banging on his door at such a god forsaken hour. His pants slipped down and he yanked them back up just as he flung the door open with a low growl.

Mack grinned at him from the corridor. He lifted a six pack of beer. "Hey, Red"

Percy blinked at him for a few seconds before his mouth twisted into a frown.


He hissed like a cat, hitching up his pants some more and side stepping behind the door, suddenly aware of his bare chest situation. "Do you have any bloody idea what time it is? Do you know how early I have to get up in the morning? We're leaving for bloody Malibu tomorrow and you're here at what…"

"Two seventeen a.m." Friday supplied helpfully above them both.

Percy nodded in both thanks and agreement. "Exactly. So as ask again... what the fuck?"

The rugged blonde shrugged, his slate grey Henley stretched deliciously over his flexing shoulders. "I was up late with Leon ironing out some last minute details for the trip tomorrow. I was about to head home but thought maybe you'd like some company tonight."
There was a smug, self-satisfied grin on his too handsome face.

Percy gave him an unimpressed stare. "So you thought you'd just pop over here with a six pack of shitty beer and I'd just say 'Ohh… a mayun!' and hop on your dick?"

"Well… " Mack chuckled and leaned in close. "More like 'I'm too wired too sleep so I thought I'd come over and maybe eat your ass a little'. I just brought the beer cause my mama says never go visiting without a bringing a little something."

Percy paled at the words then flushed hot, heat curling in his chest as his cock twitched in his thin pyjamas pants. He licked his suddenly dry lips, His heart skipping a beat in his chest as he ran his eyes down the other man's well-built body.

"Oh…um…. oh"

Without another word, he stepped back; opening the door just enough to let the other man slip in. Then, with a quick glance down the hall; he closed the door with a soft snap.

Chapter End Notes

I'm going to put all my smut in a separate work and will link it here when i write it. Unlike For Sire and Land, My Sons which was just Percy fucking escapades with some plot thrown in, i feel differently with this work. so i will give readers a choice... smut or no smut.

there will still be dirty talk and explicit language cause Percy is still a thot. if you ain't warned to this by now, i'm not sure what series you've been reading.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

In which there is some hot sex. please be warned accordingly.

Chapter Notes

WARNING--- SMUT AHEAD---- WARNING --- EXPLICIT SEX AHEAD

ok... please be warned. I thought about it long and hard *cough cough* and decided to put my smut scenes in the main story. what i will do however is keep them in separate chapters so that people can skip over them at will. those chapters may be short or long depending on the scene.

if in the future the sexy times have to happen mid scene then i will warn at the beginning. that's it. please be warned accordingly.

this is the one where Mack makes good on the 'eating Percy's ass out' remark.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Its late, almost two thirty in the morning and this wasn't a good idea. Percy should not be doing this. There were so many reasons why this shouldn't be happening. He's exhausted from all the running around he'd been doing. Days upon days of planning, packing, making sure everything was accounted for, on time and being taken care of.

And he had to get up in just a couple hours do it all again.

But....

Still....

He'd been fantasizing about Mack Gearhardt's abs for week now. Of licking down that taut stomach, falling to his knees and taking that hard cock in his mouth. His mouth watered at the very thought of it, his jaw clenching as he gulped heavily.

Mack looked positively edible, standing in the middle of his living room, with his dirty blonde scruff and broad shoulders, his big, rough hand loosely gripping the handle of the cheap beer carton. Looking too fucking hot to be allowed with his tight, worn jeans and combat boots.

Percy leaned against the door, his head tilted back and his eyes hooded as he watched the man turn slowly, taking in the room; checking all the exits and potential hiding places. Percy had observed him doing that with every room he entered. It seemed engrained in his behaviour.

Finally, the blond turned back towards him and quirked an eyebrow, holding up the beer as if to say 'well?'
Huffing a soft laugh, Percy pushed off the wall and strode towards the other man, stepping right into his personal space. Mack smelled of musk, sweat and the faint aftershave that always served to quicken Percy's pulse. He pressed a soft, open mouthed kiss to the man's stubbled jaw, just below his ear, as his quick fingers divested the man of his burden.

"At least let me put the shitty beer in the fridge. I hate room temperature beer."

Mack chuckled, his voice low and rough in a way that sent a shiver down Percy's spine. "Don't bother. Doesn't make a difference hot or cold. Still tastes like horse piss."

"Well, next time pick up some hot wings or a bottle of whiskey is all I'm saying." Percy pushed aside some left over take out in order to set the six pack in the fridge "I don't like to drink piss of any type."

Mack smirked, "Not into wet works then? Watersports?" Percy cut him a flat look. "No." he said decisively. "No blood, scat or heavy pain or public humiliation either.

Mack stepped closer, resting his hands on Percy's waist with just enough possessiveness for Percy's knees to go a bit weak. "So… what do you like?"

His breath was hot against Percy's pale neck as he pulled the smaller man flush with him; their bodies touching from nipples to knees. Percy inhaled sharply, letting his head fall back as a rough tongue licked a scorching hot trail up to his earlobe. He tries to speak a few times before finally answering.

"I like being ….. un…being held down. I like being man-handled, bruised. I like to feel them for days, see them on my body when I undress, to know they are under my clothes. Where nobody else knows about them but me and the person who put them there."

He moaned wantonly as Mack claimed his mouth in a desperate kiss, his large hands caressing Percy's back before sliding down his back to cup his ass and squeeze, grinding their crotches together.

When Mack finally let go, Percy sighed, falling to his knees gracefully; his cheeks flushed as he gazed up at the other man.

"I want to be yours. However you want me, where ever you want me."

He closed his eyes at the admission, feeling so open and vulnerable. Merlin, he'd missed that feeling. He hadn't known anyone long enough to trust part of himself for a long time. His skin felt heated, tight and ill fitting. Fine tremors wracked his limbs and it was all he could do to keep his position at the other man's feet.

Even with Marcus he'd never been able to let himself go as quickly as he'd just done with Mack. Maybe it was because he'd have been insane to trust Flint with his emotions and hearts as much as he'd trusted him with his body.

Even back then he'd had multiple charms and spells in place to ensure that the former Slytherin would not too enthusiastic and hurt him in some way. He'd always done all the prep and after care himself, knowing that Marcus was not interested in anything other than getting his own rocks off.

He leaned into Mack's palm, the rough skin cool against his heated cheek before the calloused fingers found their way into his hair, tugging on his unruly curls. Percy sighed and let his head be...
guided back, his eyes slitting open.

The blond was smiling indulgently down at him, a sort of wonder in his eyes.

"That’s what I like to hear." The blonde hummed low, almost a growl as he tugged Percy to stand once more. "So what I say goes, right?"

Percy nodded lazily, humming a yes before turning and kissing Mack's wrist. He could feel the quickening of his pulse under his lips as he sucked lazily at the skin. The blonde made a hungry noise, latching his mouth unto Percy's neck and biting gently.

Percy whined, his knees giving out and Mack had to think fast to stop the redhead from slumping to the ground.

"Fuck" Percy gasped, holding unto thick muscled arms as he tried to right himself. "It's been a while." He tried to laugh it off but Mack's pleased grin made him flush instead.

"So what am I going to do with you?" the blond made a show of thinking about it and Percy gave a mock growl, yanking at the other man's Henley.

"You're the one who showed up here at ass o'clock in the morning with shitty beer. You better know what you're fucking doing Gearhardt."

Mack barked a laugh, raw and rusty. "I'm thinking that I had the right idea before. I want to get a taste of that ass tonight. Strip and get on the bed."

He stepped back, letting go of the redhead, hooking his thumbs in his belt as he stood back to watch. Percy, never one to do any fancy strip tease, pushed the loose waist band of the sleep pants off his hips and stood in all his naked glory. He could feel the blonds eyes on him like a physical caress and felt more that saw the blushing heat that crept down his neck and chest.

He felt shy, yet somehow confident as he slowly turned and walked towards the bed, crawling unto the comforter and kneeling. He let his knees spread, folding his arms on the soft bedding and resting his head on them. He arched his back into the position, presenting himself without a shred of shame.

In fact, he felt powerful. He'd heard Mack's sharp inhale, the low hungry sound that came from the man behind him. He knew that the sight of him, ready and willing to be used for pleasure was a heady one.

"Holy fuck" Mack growled, his voice unsteady.

Percy grinned against his arms, spreading his knees a bit wider as he arched his back a bit more. "I sure am."

He was rewarded for his cheek with a swift, stinging smack on his arse, making him yelp and wriggle in reflex. Mack soon soothed the slight hurt with his hands, his calloused palms catching on the sensitive skin of Percy's taint. He shivered at the feeling of hands not his own touching such a private part of him.

He hadn't felt this cared for and taken care of since Victor Krum. Though they'd only shared one night together, Victor had been one of the best lovers he'd ever had and the only one that had ever made him weep from pleasure alone.

Mack's skilled fingers soon had his mind hazing over; the man, in turns, caressing and squeezing
his ass, thighs and lower back in continuous soft strokes. Once in a while he would come close to
Percy's quivering hole and the edge of his thumb would brush against the clenching muscle but
touch would always be all too brief. Percy whimpered helplessly each time, pushing back into each
touch, each caress.

"Look at you," Mack rumbled low, running his hands on the insides of Percy's thighs, "So good for
me, so responsive. We are going to have so much fun together. I'm going to be so good to you
baby, so fucking good."

Percy gasped, his already leaking cock twitching at those growled words. He moaned into his arm,
shuddering as the heat already curling in his gut spread through his veins, seeming to pulse with
every heartbeat.

"You're so good form me baby. So ready..." Mack's hands were on his lower back, rubbing small
circles into his skin. "Do you have lube, baby?"

It took Percy a few moments to form words. "Bed side... table."

The blond was quick and was soon back, his hands on Percy once more. Soon enough the lube was
warmed between the expert hands and skilled fingers finally brushed against his most private place
with intent. Percy grunted and jerked at the touch, his knees spreading wider as fingers teased the
tight ring of muscle.

Mack took his time, moving his digits in patterns across the sensitive hole. Circles and figure
eights, gently massaging the quivering muscle. Once in a while, he would press the tip of his finger
into Percy, going deeper with each pass.

He would never linger though, torturing the redhead with pleasure, making him writhe on the bed.
A long string of helpless noises escaped Percy as every nerve in his body seemed to centre in his
ass. He had to grip the sheets within his fist and bite down on the thick comforter to stop from
crying out to loudly.

"I want to hear you baby," the blond cooed, sinking one thick finger passed the clenching and
sensitive ring, "Don't even muffle yourself for me. I want to hear how good I'm making you feel."

The finger curled deliciously inside him and Percy cried out, bucking his hips wildly. Mack's other
hand clamped unto his hip, pushing him flat unto the bed and keeping him still. His leaking cock
slip against the bedding, just enough friction to drive him even more wild. Held in place by that
steady and comforting grip, Percy arched his back and keened softly when a second fingers joined
the first.

The burn of it, the feeling of his ass clenching down on the intrusion felt so fucking good. His toes
curled as he panted through clenched teeth. He wanted to beg for more, for his lover to take and
take and take what he wanted, do what he wanted, to hold Percy down and take him apart. To leave
his hand prints on Percy's skin like a fucking brand.

Then the fingers were gone and he was left bereft and drifting, the rush of his own heartbeat heavy
in his ears. Before he could gather himself to cry out in denial, there was a hot breath against his
hole.

His world went white as a wet, rough tongue swiped across trembling ring, hot and insistent as it
pressed past the resistance and delved into his tight, wet heat. A scream seemed stuck in his throat,
coming out as strangled whine as the tongue went deeper. He could feel the scrape of the blonde's
stubble against the sensitive skin of his taint, the weight of his hands as he kept Percy spread open
and helpless to his ministrations.

Percy toes curled, his eyes rolling as he squirmed on the bed, only the strong hands at his hips keeping him from bucking too wildly. Mack's tongue was like an electrical wire, sending sparks through the redhead's body as he licked and suckled at the sensitive rim and beyond. At times he would travel down, licking and mouthing at Percy's perineum and the base of his ball sac before returning to tongue fuck his hole.

Just then, the tongue inside dove deep and questing, the barest touch of teeth against his skin and Percy was cumming, hard enough that his mind went blank and his vision white. It was like sitting on an electric dynamo. Ecstasy surged like lightning though his entire body, overwhelming him completely and sending his entire system into reboot.

He was distantly aware of his own wailing, the surge spreading through straight to the tips of his fingers and toes. Even the ends of his hair seemed to curl in orgasm. He shook, eyes rolling up in his head as he rode that dark tsunami that swept him up and out to sea.

By the time he came back to himself, he'd been cleaned up and tucked under the cover. He hummed, lethargic in his afterglow. The side of the bed dipped and fingers ran through his riot of curls. Percy smiled wide, leaning into the touch and forced his eyes to open.

Mack was smiling down at him, eyes warm as he ran his hand down the back of Percy's neck and cupped his cheek. He turned the redhead towards him and dipped down for a kiss, soft and lazy. Percy whined as the blonde pulled away, raising a 'too heavy' hand to grasp unto a muscled forearm.

"Stay." he asked softly, curling around the appendage like a cat.

Mack chuckled and leaned down to kiss his forehead.

"I can't. we both have work in a couple of hours. We need to rest."

Percy frowned and rubbed his face against a thick, denim clad thigh. "You can sleep here. I don't mind."

Mack chuckled again, this time his laugh was darker, his voice gruffer.

"Baby, if I stay here any longer, I guarantee you neither of us will be getting any rest."

The redhead blinked in confusion lifting his head slightly. It was then he noticed the not so subtle erection pressing against the blonde's jeans.

"You didn't… " he stammered, "I could…"

Blonde kissed him dirty, one hand slipping under the covers to cup Percy's ass.

"Oh baby, don't worry about me. I can handle myself."

Percy moaned and arched into the touch, his ass aching pleasantly from before.

"I wanted to be good for you. I wanted you to feel good."

"I do baby. You make me feel so good."

"I don't understand …" Percy bit his lip, feeling confused. "Didn't you want to…? I mean… " 
A calloused hand cupped his cheek gently, bringing his stinging eyes to meet the other man's.

"Hey, Hey" Mack assured him, "You were incredible, believe me, you were so fucking good for me baby. It's just that tonight was about you. About your pleasure. Seeing you like that, how responsive you were to me… I've never had anyone be like that for me before. You are so amazing, like everything I've ever wanted in one neat little ginger package."

He kissed away Percy's objection once again and left the red head panting.

"It's enough for me tonight to see you like this. Anything else can wait for another day, ok?"

Percy finally nodded and was rewarded with a sweet and dizzying kiss. He tugged the other man down for yet another kiss, arching up against his lover with a sigh. When Mack finally pulled away he looked a bit dazed and Percy indulged in a small smile of satisfaction.

"Oh baby, you are trouble aren't you." The blond's voice was warm and teasing.

Percy chuckled, leaning back unto the pillows, letting the cover fall down low around his waist. He ran his hand up the other man's thigh, stopping just short of what was sure to be a painful hard-on. "You sure I can't help you with this before you go?"

Mack covered Percy's hand with his and guided them both to cup his bulging crotch.

"Honey, if we start something now, be sure it's going to end with me fucking you through the mattress. You can't imagine the things I want to do to you."

Percy let out a helpless sound and flushed hotly. He nodded shakily, mind beset with images of just what those things might be. He let himself be tugged forward for one last kiss, absently touching his swollen lips as Mack smiled and got up, letting himself out of the room as quietly as he'd entered.

Percy sank back into the bed, his sore ass and aching muscles letting themselves be known even through the rush of dopamine coursing through his veins. His hands sought and soon found the bruises starting to form on his skin and he was grateful for the fact that he bruised easily. He lifted the covers a little and caught sight of the large hand prints that curled around his waist and on the insides of his creamy thighs.

His breath caught as he pressed his fingertips against the darkening spot, small zings of pleasure pain making his sore ass clench and his cock twitch.

"Holy fuck me Batman" he giggled a bit hysterically, sinking down under the covers.

He raised his eyes to the ceiling, sending a silent prayer of thanks to the Goddess Hedone before whipping the blanket over his head with another childish giggle and snuggling into the soft bedding.

He could still smell Mack's aftershave, turning his face into the pillow with a grin and inhaling deeply. After a fit of girlish giggling, he ordered his unruly mind to settle, sighing deeply as he dragged his thoughts away from the way the other man's crotch felt under his fingers.

"Oh bugger it all man, stop thinking about cock and go to sleep" he ordered himself, snorting at his choice of words and pulling the covers snug around his body. He really needed to get some sleep. He had a big day tomorrow.

"It's not like he won't be in Malibu as well."
And with that lingering thought, he fell asleep with a smile on his face.

Chapter End Notes

Hedone was the personification and goddess of pleasure, enjoyment, and delight. Hedone, also known as Voluptas in Roman mythology, is the daughter of the Greek gods Eros (Cupid) and Psyche. She was associated more specifically with sensual pleasure. Her opposites were the Algōs, personifications of pain - WIKIPEDIA
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Hey there, it's been a while... yeah.

Anyway, I've never been on Route 66 so i'm going off of what I've learned on the internet. So much goggling and reading. whew. Don't expect too much accuracy and details ok? Just good vibes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"At least it's not a murder van." Percy sighed as he hefted the last duffel bag unto the wide bench seat of the 1962 Volkswagen Kombi . It bounced on the refurbished leather upholstery and fell unto it's side. Good thing it was only filled with snacks and some personal toiletries.

"Oh. I tried to get one of those…” Tony cackled as he secured the last of DUM-E's support straps and patted the robot arm as it beeped excitedly. "…you know the big boxy ones from the 70's that looked straight out of an afternoon special on stranger danger. Asta and Leon ganged up with Happy and vetoed it though. Ruin all my fun why don't they."

Percy rolled his eyes. He'd been there when Asta Cloudsister had first laid eyes on the rust factory that had been the infamous 'murder van', and seeing the scandalized look on her face had been enough for him to make a hasty retreat from the area.

Scuttlebutt was that she'd actually placed herself bodily in front of the van and refused to let it into her pristine garage, much to the ire of the delivery driver. In the end, the 'murder van' had been sent packing off to the junk yard to be melted into slag and a fully kitted out VW van had acquired for the trip.

"Still… though. You couldn't have at least gotten one with windows?" Percy leaned into the van and smiled at DUM-E as the bot investigated his new environment. "…so that Dum-E can see the sights with us."

"Too high of a security risk for Leon's nerves" Tony shrugged. "He can look out the front over our shoulders but that's about it."

Percy pouted a bit but understood the concern. Leon, Mack and happy had spent many a late night nursing headaches over the planned road trip. This wasn't a fleet of sleek black armored vehicles thundering down the highways. No, Tony had wanted the trip strictly low key. Just a small caravan of two cars and a tricked out vintage VW van.

Asta had almost pulled out the rest of her blonde pixie cut making the cars secure enough for the trip. There was a mauve 2003 Chrysler Sebring that Svea and Shivani would switch off on driving, and Zaheer and Mack's Blue Dodge Ram Charger with a white canvas top that looked like it drove right off of every family road trip home video.

Tony had twisted his face at the boring escort vehicles but Asta had put her foot down. If the
genius wanted to drive across the country in the hippy mobile then she got to do whatever she wanted to make sure that the rest of the caravan was up to par.

That led to the most intense version of "Pimp My Ride" that Percy had ever witnessed. At least, that's what Svea called it. Percy had tried to look for the television show on the you tube but hadn't gotten passed the first episode. The car had come out looking like a carnival ride and while Percy gave the customization experts their well earned respect, it reminded him too much of the night bus for his taste.

All three vehicles were outfitted with armored panels, four wheel drive, power steering, bullet proof glass and all sorts of other bits and bobs that Asta and her staff could shove up under that chassis and below the hood. Tony had his suitcase suit under the Van's bench seat and the Charger's frame was re-enforced to have as much ramming power as a small tank. There was even a drone, Controlled by FRIDAY which would fly overhead and an SI satellite dedicated solely to Tony during the entire trip.

With Leon and Happy finally satisfied that the caravan was as secure as they could make it, the trip was given it's finally go ahead. The drive, non-stop, was about forty odd hours or so; but with stops for sleep and food, it would take them six days to get from New York to Malibu.

Percy was excited. Tony had planned for them to take the famous Route 66 and he'd been researching some of the more interesting attractions to see along the way. Starting off at dawn, Percy had made sure that everyone was well caffeinated and that breakfast was mobile.

Tony took the first shift driving with the Sebring in front and the Charger behind. Blinking the sleep from his eyes and squinting at the map on his tablet, Percy juggled his bagel and travel mug while Tony pointed out random places and chatted amiably over the radio with the other two cars.

As the hours lapsed by, they made stops to eat and use the rest rooms as well at switch out drivers. They stopped in Cleveland, checking into their hotel and napping a bit before taking a tour of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and having dinner at Lola's. it turned out that Zaheer was a veritable font of Rock and Roll Knowledge and Percy and Svea could only look on flabergasted as he and Tony talked a mile a minute while Mack and Shivani stayed back at the hotel, resting up for their shifts later.

Percy fell into bed that night, utterly exhausted. Preparing for the next day, debriefing with the team, making sure Tony and DUM-E were both settled in their respective charging stations and making sure the genius didn't just spend the night in the van with his bot had been tiring.

Thankfully the team had already taken measures and organized for Shivani to spend the night in the van. With Tony reassured that his bot was safe, it was easy for Percy to hustle the man to a night of proper bed rest.

They made it to Chicago the next day, stopping off at Lou Malnati's for some deep dish pizza before walking it off in Millennium Park. Percy ending up staring at the Cloud Gate, utterly entranced by the silver bean like sculpture, until Mack had gently guided him away.

There was a couple of hours free time before they resumed their trip and Percy took the opportunity to slip away and visit the city's magical hot spot. Halsted Street West was a magical extension of the original, named after two famous squib brothers who'd invested heavily in real estate back in the 1839's. What muggles didn't know was that one of the main goals of their numerous purchases was to secure a sacred druidic temple buried beneath the developing city. With the site secured and warded heavily, it became home to the magical community in the city.

Halsted West was crowded and a bit smelly but was filled with amazing little booths and
storefronts that boasted magical fare imported from across the world. Children ran up and down
the long street, screaming and laughing as vendors hawked their wares. Percy bought a small tin of
candies he'd loved as a child and hadn't seen for years, a beautiful self-inking pen and a pair of
charmed fingerless gloves for Tony for when nights got cold in the workshop. The charm was mild
and wouldn't affect the man or his machinery too much.

They left Chicago, driving on as Tony directed them to some of the weirder attractions like the
Lauterbatch Muffler Man, the Gemini Giant and the World's Largest Ketchup Bottle and Rocking
Chair.

The St. Louis Arch was beautiful at night and both Percy and Mack were able to sneak in some
time with each other to have dinner. It was their first real date and Percy enjoyed it immensely.
Yes, the sexual tension was still there but Mack proved to be a charming and witty
conversationalist even though his dry and sarcastic humor occasionally drove Percy up a wall.

They drove through the Devil's elbow with its stunning hills and winding roads. Tony would laugh
at every corner, DUM-E beeping and chirping happily as he swung in his secure harness.

The scenery is beautiful and ever changing, Percy taking pictures with his phone to post to social
media later. He'd already arranged for scheduled posts with FRIDAY, Tony's security was too
important to let the world at large know that he was travelling cross country with just a team of
five. That was just asking for trouble.

They visit the Happy Blue Hippo and the Big Blue Whale which Svea quickly scrambled to the top
of so that Shivani could take her picture. Percy had panicked, looking around for any site
employees who would no doubt be calling the authorities while Zaheer and Tony encouraged the
scamp to do a bloody hand stand. The redhead was glad to be driving away from the place,
thanking whichever deity was listening that they had not been found out.

That night, to calm Percy's fretting, they'd all trooped out for a night picnic, loaded with thick
blankets, food and drinks. The cars were parked in a circle and the back doors of the van were
opened so that DUM-E to be a part of the impromptu party.

Sitting there, leaning against Mack's warm, firm body; sipping at cold beer and listening to Tony
talk about the stars went a long way to settling his anxiety. He guessed that you could take the
Head Boy out of Hogwarts but you could not make him relax when points deserved to be taken.

He huffed to himself, snuggling closer to Mack and looking up at the amazing sky full of stars. He
hadn't seen skies like this since he'd left the Amazon. Being in the wilds so far from the life he'd
always known had been such a freeing experience and he'd never regretted it. There was no going
back to wizarding Britain and though he missed the wild and savage beauty of Africa, he was
finding the United States to be pretty amazing in its own right.

They visited the Cadillac Ranch and the Buggy Ranch, Tony crowing in delight as Percy stood
back and wondered why anyone would want to stick cars into the dirt, arse over tea kettle.

They spent a night in a Wigwam hotel, eat greasy take out in the car park of the Blue Swallow
hotel; the night awash with colourful neon. They swam in swimming holes bluer that the blue sky
and explore dusty ghost towns.

Percy's phone was soon filled with pictures of amazing places, incredible scenery and delicious
local food; and nightly he shared them on a private server with Friday. He made sure to copy
Pepper and Rhodes; especially candid shots of Tony looking relaxed and happy.
They make it to Santa Monica's famous last stop on the eight day, a bit late but still within the time frame that they'd put together. Percy had actually catered for ten days, depending if they had any problems or if Tony wanted to linger anywhere. It had been important for the red head to give his boss that freedom. The genius had been under so much stress, pulled in so many directions that having a relaxed schedule had been key.

Thankfully the trip had been an easy one, with no major problems. Well, except for the near coronary Mack and experienced when Tony had taken the suit flying over the desert at night. The man had all but sat all night on the laughing genius when he'd touched down and tucked away the suit.

They ate tacos and donuts by the ocean, the salty sea air and warm sunlight making the day even more perfect. Percy was able to shed the last layers of his clothing, sunning himself in a pair of khakis and a white button down shirt. Well, after he'd slathered himself in sunscreen of course.

He was a Weasley after all.

They made it to the house just as the sun was setting, Percy mouth falling open with awe. He'd seen the plans of the house already, long meetings with Pepper, the architect and the interior designer over video chat; ironing out all the details to her satisfaction. A team of trusted SI technicians had wired the entire house and massive grounds with FRIDAY's sprawling systems and it was only for Tony to come and overlook everything after the fact.

That didn't warn him though of how incredibly stunning the property was. Whereas Tony's old Malibu home was a sleek and aerodynamic ode to modern architecture, his new house looked like a villa out of an issue of AlfDaFré magazine (Italian Home).

The house was modern and sleek with stark lines and sleek glass, the walls a startling white that gleamed in the sun like a jewel. Palms trees and vibrant gardens molded against the natural slope of the land and a majestic pool, azure and crystal clear shimmered invitingly between the main building and the sheer cliffs that surrounded more than half the property. A small walkway led down to a private white sand beach and hidden cave where a speed boat was docked.

Inside was a tasteful mixed of warm and sophisticated, showing signs of Pepper's taste with a bit of Tony's fondness for technology. FRIDAY's voice welcomed them all happily at they trooped in while Pepper, barefoot and in her slightly rumpled work clothes; jumped into Tony's arms and kissed him senseless before he could even utter a word.

Percy just chuckled and left them to their reunion, seeking a long hot shower to wash away the grit of the road. Cheerfully leaving Mack and Company to report to Leon and Svea to report to Happy, Percy soon found his room and took a heavenly hedonistic shower. Finally tumbling out of the bathroom, feeling like a prune and wrapped in a thick, divinely soft terry cloth robe, he was pleasantly surprised to find a light meal and a fresh pit of tea waiting for him.

"Thank you FRIDAY girl" he murmured around the rim of the cup, moaning gratefully at the taste. There just wasn't anything like properly brewed tea, certainly nothing that could be found on the road.

He checked his phone, yawning heavily, to see if there were any fires that needed to be put out urgently. Thankfully there were none, just a lone message from Pepper saying that Tony wouldn’t be available until after lunch the next day, at least. And as a matter of fact, neither would she. He chuckled at the message and tossed his phone unto the bed, stretching out with a deep sigh. Merlin, he was knackered. Who knew sitting in a car for a week would make someone bone tired?
Snuffling against his pillow, he thought about Mack and what it would be like to have the man in this big bed with him. Sadly though, even his cock was too tired to make any kind of effort and he fell asleep within one breath to the next.

Everything would just have to wait till morning.

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Percy couldn't wait to get out of the crowded old van. Ron was sniffling through a cold, his crumpled, dirty tissues creeping ever closer to Percy's clean trousers. Ginny's sharp and knobby elbow was digging into his side as she sang the silly, bawdy little song that the Twins had started caterwauling a few hours back.

Thankfully they were down to seven maidens on a crooked fence from the hundred they'd started with, each maiden toppling off the fence in more and more scandalous ways. Thank Merlin their mother was snoring heavily in the passenger seat of the van or she would have been boxing ears at least thirty tipsy maiden ago.

Arthur was smiling along, singing under his breath as he tapped his hands on the steering wheel. Bill's head was half way out the window like a dog's, his growing red hair flying around his face in the breeze. Percy didn't know quite how their mother got both Bill and Charlie to come on the trip to Leeds with them but he was certain that when he was of age, he would refuse to ever come on one of these absurd things again.

Charlie was hanging over the seat from his spot in the van's boot space, perch precariously on top the various trunks and bags their mother had stuffed in there for the trip. Percy honestly believed that almost all of Ottery St. Catchpole was in the back of the van.

A nervous squeaking made him look down. Scabbers was peeking out of his pocket, no doubt looking for food. There wasn't much else that would bring the poor thing out when the twins were making such a ruckus.

Percy smiled at his pet, running his fingertips softly over the rodent's head and under its chin. Scabbers squeaked in contentment at the petting and sat up to clutch at Percy's cuff with his one foreleg. Pulling a napkin from his pocket, Percy unwrapped a piece of crumbled cupcake from their afternoon tea and offered it to the rat, watching carefully as it ate the proffered sweet.

"I'll get something better for you when we reach uncle Aldous's boat house. He'd bound to have some yummy cheese for you."

For a moment there, it almost looked like the rat had nodded, an intelligent gleam in his beady eye; but Percy must have imagined it. He'd always hoped that Scabbers could have become his familiar but alas the rodent had never shown any signs or tendencies for it.

Suddenly, he as jostled hard in his side; Ginny's elbow digging deep into his waist. He yelled and twisted away, scaring poor Scabbers who squealed and disappeared under the seat. Percy bit the inside of his cheek, biting back a swear as Ginny muttered and fake and simpering apology as the twins sniggered and Ron sneezed all over everything.

Rubbing his aching side, Percy looked to the front of the van but only saw his father's same indulgent smile at his children's antics in the mirror. He sat back with a bitter sigh, blinking back the sting of tears and knowing that he would get no support there. He never did. Maybe if his mother were awake… but …. that in itself was a two edged sword.
The others soon went back to their raucous singing, the last few tipsy maidens creating quite a comical scandal on that rickety fence; leaving Percy alone with his thoughts. As usual. How could someone be surrounded by so many people and still feel so alone.

Sadly, for all his studies, he'd never been able to answer that particular question.

He rested his head against the car door and stared out the window at the scenery passing by. Merlin, he couldn't wait till he was old enough that he didn't have to come on these things anymore.

Wouldn't have to stuff himself into an old borrowed van with seven other noisy, sweaty people, a menagerie of pets and a mountain of home-cooked food because they couldn't afford to eat out.

Wouldn't have to tolerate his younger siblings with their singing and laughing and teasing and sneezing all over every bloody thing. Wouldn't have his older siblings patronize him and laugh behind his back when he tried to act mature.

Yes, he was looking forward to the day when he would never have to do this again.

Chapter End Notes

it's too late to edit. will look for mistakes tomorrow. good night.
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

OHOHOHO it has been a while since i updated this one, hasn't it? life has been hectic and i've gotten through two NANO challenges and some other short fics in that time. And before i tackle another MCU story i have in my head, i wanted to concentrate on this fic because it's one of my faves.

BTW, it's my birthday today. Happy Birthday to Me !!!!!

Malibu was hot and beautiful and so very different from non-stop action and manic energy of New York. The California coast was laid back, with its bright sunshine, sea air, jewel blue waters and scrumptious fish tacos. Percy adored it.

He changed his wardrobe from sharp knit suits and thick coats to lighter linen and cotton numbers that suited the warmer climate. He invested a small fortune in magical sunscreen that allowed him to spend more than two minutes in direct sunlight without turning into a walking blister.

Thankfully, both the house and most of the SI facilities were wonderfully air-conditioned and he had the use of Tony’s fleet of cars as his little Shelby Cobra was still under Asta’s care back east. He soon adopted a smart little yellow 2020 Audi R8 Quattro Spyder for his day to day runs though once in a while, he got to take Tony’s Aston Martin Vanquish out for a spin at the local race track.

He delved into his duties with vigour, getting Tony and his bots settled in their Malibu lab before heading over to SI headquarters. SI Malibu was a lovely complex on the outskirts of the city, sprawled over a large estate of sloping green hills. Small white golf carts trundled along the paved pathways between glass and concrete buildings that sparkled and shone against a backdrop of cloudless blue sky.

Rosamund had made the move cross country with them, taking up her rightful position as Pepper’s right hand once more and quickly bringing the small secretariat team under her firm hand just as Raizel had done in New York. She’d shyly told Percy over drinks after work that she and Shivani had started discussing maybe moving in together but that they were both okay with taking it slow. Percy had been glad for her because both women were amazing and deserved to be happy.

The core security team of Mack and Shivani were joined by two new members, as both Leo and Zaheer were both staying in New York. Leo’s kids were in the middle of the school year and he hadn’t wanted to leave or move them while Zaheer was in the middle of completing a college degree with NYU.

Shivani had been appointed team lead and the Indian woman had taken to the role swimmingly, handling the chaos that was Tony Stark’s Protection Detail with little to no growing pains. They hadn’t wanted to pull members from Pepper’s own security team so, with Happy’s approval and extensive interviews and background checks, they’d selected two new members from the lower ranks of the Security Details.

David Spinner was a stocky, salt and pepper bearded former Marine, but then again, ‘one never really left the marines’ as he liked to say. He was a widower and a father of three grown kids, all of
whom had also enlisted. He had an extremely dry wit that got along a bit too well with Mack’s scathing humour for Percy’s liking and was a crack shot with almost any ammo loaded weapon on the planet.

Samara Souza was former SHIELD whose little brother had just escaped kidnapping and almost certain execution by the timely intervention of SI security forces. She’d been deep cover in Europe at the time of the fall of SHIELDRA and had been frantic when her identity had been blown and the details of her personal life had been unceremoniously dumped over the information super highway.

She’d almost been near tears when word had come that her only remaining family member was safe inside of SI Malibu headquarters with several other targeted families. When the blanket offer came from SI offering employment, she’d been amongst the first to sign up. Her skills were in undercover, explosives and other ordinance but she was an expert in Krav Maga and an absolute devil with a bladed weapon.

Tony had looked at the new team members, glibly commented on the odds of having such pretty people guarding his body as he’d wiggled his eyebrows; then choked when Pepper elbowed him sharply in the stomach. Granted, she told Percy later that if she wasn’t so secure in Tony’s love and devotion to her, she would also have been suspect at how good looking the core team were.

Percy had retorted that it was because they all thought that competence was hella sexy and that it couldn’t be helped that the team were amongst the best in their field. She’d chuckled and sipped her wine in commiseration.

It took him a while to get the lay of the land, to lay the groundwork of making Tony Stark’s life as uncomplicated as he could. His domestic life that is. His boss’ life in general was like sipping on pepper up potion constantly, bright spots of manic energy and action with few moments of rest in between.

It had to be exhausting sometimes, even to someone whose mind raced just as quickly and the signs of wear on Tony were visible to those who knew what to look for. The move back to Malibu seemed like a good one so far, with Tony being away from New York and from the memories and heartbreak that lingered there.

It also gave the man some emotional distance from the Avengers so that the situation could be dealt with in his stead. Between, Pepper, Maria Hill, Colonel Rhodes and with some help from Percy and Wendy from MACUSA, hopefully they could handle whatever the rag tag super hero group dealt out.

In the meantime, Percy wheedled Tony into teaching him to surf and confessed that he’d never learned how to use a skateboard. Svea soon scoped out the local Roller Derby world and dragged ‘the girls’ along with her when she finally joined a new team.

Samara showed them all where the best food trucks were and got them all into cross fit which Percy utterly detested but still took part in the local tournaments for charity. His entire body always hurt like hell the next day but he never missed one when she asked.

David was an avid surfer and Percy ended up dragging a grumbling Tony and an eager Shivani with him at the crack of dawn as the older man put them all through their paces out on the waves. He surely gave the magical sunscreen a proper workout and had probably swallowed more seawater than was safe. Still, he’d never had more fun in his life.

He learned to skateboard on the long paved drives of the mansion and along the winding paths of
the SI HQ compound, feeling odd at first in all his safety gear before growing more comfortable. He could do a trick or two but most of his efforts resulted in eating dirt or sand or grass when he fell over.

During the sunny days, Percy and Mack would switch off planning their dates, with Percy taking the man to museums and art installations, to neon light night clubs along the strip, small theatre productions and street performances. In turn, Mack would take the redhead on nature hikes and speedboat rides, would bring him to gun ranges where he taught Percy to handle several different kind of guns and rifles competently.

On the sweet, warm nights, with Percy’s bedroom’s floor to ceiling windows facing a stunning view of the ocean, Mack would give him proper bruises to go along with his skateboard induced ones; leaving Percy weak and panting against the sheets, shivering in the sultry night air. He would take Percy expertly in hand the way he craved and would not stop until they were both sweaty and sated.

All in all, Mack was a wonderful, attentive and intuitive lover and was steadily growing to be a wonderful and caring companion as well. It was something new to Percy, who hadn’t felt anything similar since his school days of crushing on Oliver Wood. His craven sexual satisfaction with Marcus Flint had been nothing remotely as emotional. Merely scratching a forbidden and guilty itch deep in the back of his lizard hind brain.

Percy would catch himself blushing at the most inopportune times, whenever he shifted in his seat at a meeting and sent a twinge up his spine. Or when one of his bruises pulled and he felt that odd flicker of pain. He’d look up and find Pepper giving him a look or Tony smirking at him. Then he would blush hotter, making his skin go blotchy and tomato red. Damn his pale and fickle Weasley skin.

He kept up with his east coast contacts via liberal use of video calls and taking a trip in the jet twice a month. He’d finally put in all of his training hours and Kwasi had been delighted to supervise his very first flight in the stark private jet as his co-pilot.

On the way back they’d hitched a ride on one of the special quinjets and they’d both been over the moon when the pilot let them into the cockpit to observe. Both Percy and Kwasi had exchanged excited looks that promised the next certification they both received would be for that excellent work of art and technology combined.

The team had thrown him a small party to celebrate getting his pilot’s license which mainly consisted of pizza, fish tacos and ice cold beer out by the mansion’s pool. It had been hastily thrown together and people had stopped in and out after work or whenever they could but it one of the best parties Percy had ever been too.

Much better that the house parties back at school, the controlled chaos of family gatherings or the stiff and stilted affairs at the ministry. Percy had never really felt welcome at any of them, not like he did here. With their weird and wonderful collection of personalities that just seemed to click together in a way he’d only ever really read about in books.

The magical community of Malibu was located on a small unplottable island off the coast, invisible to muggles and only accessible by ferry. It was a dinky little thing, painted brightly and boasting of the ‘best chartered tours’.

The ferryman was a cheerful Greek who always had a smile and a laugh and who only accepted special tokens sold by an equally dinky and brightly painted booth run by the man’s equally charismatic wife. When she wasn’t busy telling fortunes to muggle tourists, of course.
The island was called Morrell’s Bane and for having such a foreboding name, it was surprisingly lovely. Percy had managed to get some of the old men, sitting and playing wizarding chess, to give him a history of the place in exchange for several rounds of whiskey, beer and a weird ale made especially on the island. Percy had tried a sip and had almost fallen off his chair while the old men laughed and propped him up. It was also called Morrell’s Bane and came in green glass bottles that glimmered in the sunlight.

Most of the city was an open market with brightly coloured stalls and quaint houses. There was a small sea faring community and many small boats bobbed and dipped along the island’s white sand coast. Wearing knee length khakis and a white linen button down, Percy felt almost scandalously naked as he let his sandaled feet lead him where they wanted.

The place was delightfully warm, with a cool breeze cutting across the island and keeping the place from becoming too stifled from the crowds. He browsed along the stalls, took in the local puppet show and ate his full at a small empanada stand manned by a Mexican Bruja with several happy grand kids playing nearby.

The local Gringotts looked like a small stucco post office and Percy was thoroughly charmed by the shingled roof and curly wrought iron. He met with his new account manager and paid a frankly obscene amount for a special box with which he could communicate easier with Bill.

Charlie had also expressed interest in correspondence with him so the PO Box was a worthwhile investment though he wasn’t sure how he felt about opening dialogue with the rest of his estranged family. Still, he had some friends in wizarding Britain along with some unfinished business there. It was about time that he got into dealing with that business.

He came back from that first trip with some small trinkets and beautiful art work, all inspired by coastal living and all completely muggle safe. He gave Pepper a beautiful sea green stone pendant that matched her eyes, set in delicate, gold filigree. It was strung on a thin gold chain that fell snugly into her cleavage whenever she wore it.

For Tony, who had been all but pouting in ill-disguised jealousy, Percy had gotten an old time turner. He’d made absolutely sure that all the magic had been drained from it before hand, even going as far to have the goblins at the bank inspect it. He knew that the little device, with its concentric rings and elaborate runes would snag Tony’s interest immediately.

It was walking a fine line with the statute of secrecy but Percy thought the risk was minimal. Still, he texted Sanderson at MACUSA to be sure and after an avalanche of cuss words and vulgar emojis about how upset he was that Percy had moved all the way across the country without giving a fellow wizard a fucking heads up, he grudgingly admitted that one dead time turner was hardly anything to alert the Misuse of Artifacts Division about.

Percy still texted Wendy though and was thoroughly reassured when she basically said the same thing. As Percy expected, the genius had been entranced, spinning the small, delicate device over and over as he wandered away, his sharp eyes scanning the carvings along the rings.

For the bots, he bought some colorful squeaky, squishy toys that they thoroughly enjoyed squeezing and throwing about the lab until Tony got fed up and banned them all, sending Percy and all three bots trailing, drooping and shame faced, like naughty children; out of the lab and into the large garage where they could play safely.

For Mack, he’d bought a six pack of the weird, strong ale of which the man drank too much before getting utterly drunk and passing out cold on Percy’s couch. But not before giving the red head a hilarious show with his drunken rambling. He’d woken up the next day feeling like death warmed
over, groaning piteously until Percy had mercy on him and fed him a hangover potion. The rest of the ale had been tucked into the back of Mack’s fridge until he bolstered himself up for another go at it.

One morning, as Percy was leaving a meeting as SI HQ with Joo-Won and Aaron over video chat with Rosamund sitting in, a young man approached him. He introduced himself as Jeremy from the mail room and was seeking some advice. It seemed that when Tony had first left for New York, he’d arranged to have most of his Malibu fan mail rerouted to the east coast. And, for years, most of it had been, with the occasional letter or package slipping through the cracks.

In fact, there was one such package that had been addressed to the old house and had been bounced back to SI where it had been misfiled and shuffled until it had fallen into the young man’s confused hands. Usually, Jeremy would just re-label and send the package off to where it needed to be but this package was different.

Leading Percy to the corner of the large mail room where his desk had been shoved, overflowing with clutter and coffee cups; the young man reached into the pile and pulled out a small black box. It was a miracle in itself that the precarious mountain of detritus hadn’t collapsed and buried them both. As Percy eyed the teetering pile with a gimlet eye, Jeremy dusted off the package and presented it to the red head like a dog presenting a stick it had retrieved.

It had a smooth and seamless matte black case with the name Arch Mission Foundation embossed on the top. At his raised eyebrow, Jeremy shrugged sheepishly and confessed that both of the former employees that had held his position had been a bit too curious and the original generic packaging was long gone.

After being assured that all the usual scans for dangerous substances and technology of an incendiary nature had been done more than once and all had come back negative, Percy left with the package and a profuse apology from Jeremy that the matter had been left to lie for so long.

In the car, he asked Friday to do a quick scan through his phone. She detected nothing untoward and after a quick Google search for the name on the box, they were both intrigued. Apparently Arch Mission Foundation was a non-profit company that dealt with repositories of human knowledge. 5D laser optical data storage in quartz was cutting edge tech, storing up to 360 Terabytes and could withstand ultra-high temperatures and last up to 13.8 billion years. According to their search, only five disks were made and accounted for, including those given to Elon Musk to send up into space.

As he and Friday sat in silence, he looked at the box sitting innocuously in his lap and frowned. Was this, in fact, one of those 5D disks? A secret sixth disk which no one seemed to know about. A near priceless artifact that someone had chosen to mail to Tony Stark and had been lost to time in a weird series of events that left it gathering dust in a cluttered mail room. Well, it was both odd and extremely concerning.

He carefully set the box on the passenger seat and started the car, smoothly pulling out of the compound and turning towards the mansion. If this was really what he thought it was, then Tony needed to know about it. Percy just hoped that it wasn’t Pandora’s Box and whatever was inside it didn’t turn out to be woe unto them all.

Suddenly the warm Malibu sunlight seemed very cold indeed.
birthday weekend still going strong. I began this last night after I got home because yesterday was a trip and a half. Thank you for all the comments and birthday wishes. You guys really made me feel special.

today we ask the question: What's in the box? (in brad pitt's voice)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The formal dining table at the Malibu mansion was glass monstrosity that squatted in the centre of the large open concept room like the crouched demi god of broken toes.

It had been shipped in pieces from a famous sculptor in Amsterdam at Pepper’s request and even she’d been taken aback at how big the thing actually had been in person. The smooth glass was smoky grey and made the table look both oddly ethereal and heavy as fuck at the same time.

Tony loved it though. He could spread out his random greasy engine parts on it without any evil glares from Pepper as she worked on SI business at the other end. Shivani would also hold team brainstorming and tactical sessions around the table when the security quarters felt too cramped.

Percy would sit in sometimes, notepad in hand as the team shared intel and suggestions over slices of pizza boxes and various soft drinks and beer. No hard alcohol was allowed in public spaces at the mansion for Tony’s sake.

Sometimes Percy and Friday would set up shop at the table and plough through research and paperwork as the table’s tempered glass was excellent for Friday’s holograms. The best times though one or two of the team volunteered to cook in the large kitchen and they all hung around talking and laughing as they set the table and did the other various little chores needed for sharing a meal.

He’d lean against the kitchen counter, a smiling into his glass of freshly squeezed juice, and let the chatter and laughter wash over him like the warm ocean waves he could hear breaking against the white sands outside.

It reminded him so strongly of the old Weasley house, with his Mother cooking up a storm in the small, cramped kitchen. The smell of delicious food lingered in the air, interspersed with whatever weird and noxious smoke that billowed from Fred and George’s various experiments.

The warmth of Ginny leaning against his side as she read her Witch Weekly Magazine. The familiar smell of her hair as it lay across his shoulder and chest like rivers of fire. Her soft half laughing huffs as she read a particularly humorous article or cartoon.

God, he missed her so keenly.

Across the room, Ron would be challenging Charlie to yet another round of chess as his older brother spun yarn after yarn about dragon breeding cycles. Molly would be yelling up at the twins for having lead feet as they stomped around upstairs, sending dust falling into their father’s mostly
ignored cup of tea as he fiddled with some muggle knickknack or the other.

Bill would ruffle Percy’s hair as he passed, leaning over his shoulder as he stuck his nose into whatever book was currently surgically attached to the end of Percy’s hand.

They would then all crowd around the worn and creaking wooden dining table with its laundered checkered tablecloth and chipped and mismatched dishes, talking over each other and laughing raucously.

The food would always be delicious and filled hungry bellies no matter how scant Molly’s pantry might be. The woman always seemed to work miracles with wilting carrots and moldy potatoes.

He remembered it being good there, the golden haze of nostalgia smoothing out the rough, sharp edges on his memories. It made the pain of losing them cut less, the distance that had grown between them less cold and lonely. Before he’d left and never looked back.

Before they’d let him leave, not one of them asking him to stay. He knew that most of his estranged relationship with his family had been founded on his self-pride and his shame at being recognized as ‘just another Weasley’ but the blocks that built the wall higher and higher had been laid by many hands.

Fortunately, he’d been able to build back some of those bridges he’d burned and now that he had a home base, he’d been able to reach out to his contacts back in Britain.

Both Viktor and Fleur had been overjoyed to resume correspondence and he’d even gotten a postcard with a hastily scribbled note from Oliver as he travelled between matches on his quidditch world tour.

His first letter from Charlie had also been a howler but he’d been allowed to open it in a charmed sound proof room at the bank, for a nominal fee of course. The dragon keeper had been pretty upset that the last time he’d seen his little brother was when he’d pulled him out of the Danube with a fugitive Harry Potter and hadn’t seen hide nor hair of him in the year and change since.

After his ears stopped ringing, Percy had opened the second letter and had almost cried at the heartfelt message. When a few photos had fallen out of the envelope, he’d started crying in earnest.

They were family pictures, their charms deactivated so that they didn’t move, snapshots of times when they’d all been happy together. Candid shots of the life he’d had to leave behind twice. The first time of his own volition, the second because he’d had no other choice.

The last photo was one of Ginny laughing, her hair tossed back and shining as she lounged on the greens at Hogwarts. He’d broken down completely as the sight of it, grateful for the privacy of the room as his last picture of her had been lost during his run from Britain.

Holding the paper to his heart, he’d curled over himself and sobbed brokenly. Gulping deep, gasping breaths as his lungs ached against this ribs and his head spun. Grief swamped him, bowling him over utterly and leaving him reeling.

Sweet little Ginny with her wicked sense of humour and clever mind. Wonderful, brave, confident, kind and caring Ginny who’d been so horribly abused by Voldemort’s obscenely fractured soul piece and had tried to stay strong for her family and for herself in the years after.

His beautiful sister who’d been so traumatized by Tom Riddle’s black soul and all his rotted magic being dragged to hell that she’d given up completely; throwing herself from the castle’s highest tower and ending up a broken doll at its base.
In the chaos that had been the demise of the dark lord along with all his marked followers, and the utter mess that the British wizarding community, he hadn’t even found about his sister’s death until much later. They’d held the funeral at Hogwarts, with his mother and father already taking refuge there with the twins and Ron.

Percy hadn’t been able to attend the private ceremony because of ministry business and both Fred and George had delighted in taking a strip from his hide over his ‘misguided priorities’. It had been the last time he’d seen his brothers in the flesh and the thought of them just made him sad instead of angry like he used to be.

After his crying jag, he’d pulled himself together and had gone over to the island’s local tavern where the old men who played chess had taken one look at him and had pulled him to sit among them, shoving a shot of fire whiskey in one hand and a chilled butter beer in the other.

The sun set as they all traded stories of love ones lost and Percy spoke softly of his firebrand of a sister who loved to fly as fast as he did and who gave literally no fucks what men thought she should be and do. The old men all toasted to her memory and gave him pats on the back when he cried silent tears into his beer.

The ferry man had taken one look at his half way to drunk and sorry state and had invited him to dinner at his modest home. His wife had welcomed them into the small but cheery kitchen with a warm smile, plying them with creamy kotosoupa or egg lemon soup, cheesy lamb pastitsio with cabbage rolls and crusty homemade bread.

They shared a cup of warm milk, sweetened with honey and doctored with a dash of ouzo and Percy had left the small and happy home feeling comforted and cared for.

It had been the wee hours of the morning by the time he’d gotten back to the mansion and found Tony up and tinkering with something at the large table. The genius had given Percy one long look before telling him to make a fresh pot of coffee and pull up a chair. There would be no sleeping that night.

Dawn had found them debating on the finer points of wormholes and they’d looked up to see both Pepper and Mack frowning down at them. Both men eventually allowed themselves to be bundled off to the showers and hopefully some rest and Percy ended up passing out across his bed before he’d even dried off his skin.

He’d been a bit fragile for days after that, grateful for the fact that everyone seemed to notice and gave him the space he needed. It took a week of working through his stirred up feelings and a tearful long-distance phone call to Bill in Egypt to get him back on an even keel.

Eventually he’d asked Friday to scan and preserve the pictures in the cloud while he’d framed and hung the originals in his room. A small window into his past which Mack had stared at for a long while before pulling Percy into a hug. No comments or questions, just silent and patient acceptance.

In that moment Percy fell in love just a little bit more. They hadn’t really talked about feelings yet and he was reluctant to do so quite so soon. What he and Mack had was still new and nebulous and he was satisfied with the slow and natural pace it had been taking.

He knew that Mack was also skittish at the idea of commitment as he’d come out of a nasty divorce and custody battle that he still wouldn’t even talk about or even allude too. Percy never pushed for more, they both had their own private burdens to bear.
Back to the situation at hand though. The large glass formal dining table and the little black box sitting innocuously at its centre. Shivani crossed her arms and glared down at it.

“Friday?” she asked softly.

“Scans show no sign of harmful chemical or biological substances, hostile technology or incendiary devices. It reads clean Chief.” The AI promptly replied.

The woman nodded then turned to Tony who had also been staring at the box with an intense frown. “It’s your call now boss.”

Tony hummed and bounced on the tips of his toes. “I met the people from Arch Mission a couple of times. Good people. Great minds. Helped fund some of their research because the idea of the Solar Library is cool as fuck. Even if it is floating in space in the glove box of Elon Musk’s fucking orbiting Tesla.”

“As far as I know …” He took a step closer, tilting his head as he corrected, “… as far as anyone knows, the five storage disks are all present and accounted for and it would have been expensive as fuck for someone to have had one made in secret and then mailed it to me via fucking snail mail in the most tragic of ironies. What the fuck is that even?”

Percy checked his tablet “SI records showed it first being registered as delivered …um, eight months ago. Just before the whole Sokovia ordeal.”

Tony’s jaw clenched. “So it’s not a last farewell and fuck you from Ultron then? As he hadn’t even been a twinkle in the Mind Stone’s eye. That makes me feel much better.”

He clapped his hands loudly and nodded. “Okay then. To the labs.”

It only took Tony’s fingerprint to open the case and they all took a step back when it sprung open with a snick. The lining inside was a deep black and nestled in its centre was a beautiful quartz crystal. It was stunningly clear and breathtakingly beautiful. But the real kicker was that it had been meticulously carved into the shape of the original arc reactor.

Percy’s heart leapt into his throat as Shivani murmured an expletive under her breath. Tony himself was still as a statue, his face pale. Mack made a worrying noise as he exchanged glances with the redhead. The level of detail and obvious tribute to both Iron Man and to Tony on a more personal level showed a level of familiarity that was cause for concern.

Who had such Knowledge of the genius’ closest kept secret as well as the expendable funds to execute such an endeavor? The list was practically non-existent. Tony didn’t have a track record of leaving his enemies alive.

As Friday began to scan the massive amount of data stored on the 5D disk, Tony began to frown.

“I know this code.” He said, his fingers flying over the holographic interface. Seconds later his face paled dramatically and he staggered. Only Mack’s quick thinking keeping him from falling onto his ass. Percy pulled a rolling chair over and they promptly settled the shocked genius into it.

“I… I know this code.” He repeated numbly, his eyes hungrily taking in the scrolling lines of strange symbols.

Percy cracked open a bottle of water and offered it to the man. Tony took it and drank deeply, his hands barely trembling as he never took his eyes from the screen.
“What is it Boss?” Mack knelt by his side and coaxed softly, his voice low and soothing.

Percy glanced over at Shivani who was already on the phone to someone, most likely Pepper. Whatever it was that could affect Tony so, the woman needed to be informed about.

Tony’s next words were filled with a raw mix of grief and elation and they stopped the entire room cold.

“It’s JARVIS.” His voice was almost a whisper, his hands coming up to cover his mouth. “Sweet baby tesla, its JARVIS.”

Chapter End Notes

*cackles maniacally* i like eeeeeeiiiiil.
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

another chapter. i’m on a roll.
#birthdayweekend still in effect.

The workshop stood in blackout mode for two days with only Pepper being allowed access. Percy had tried not to worry too much but he couldn’t help it, he hadn’t felt this useless since he’d first started this job. As it was, all he could do was make sure that Tony was left enough coffee and food at the door, for the bots to collect and carry in, and to check back periodically to collect the empty dishes.

He also cleared the next week of Tony’s personal schedule, soothing any ruffled feathers that resulted in the sudden shift in plans. Shivani had also been worried but she didn’t really deal in protection from emotional pain so as long as Tony stayed in his lab and safe, she would fall back and do her best to protect his home and those he held dear.

Pepper was stressed but silent on the topic of her lover and his newly returned AI so Percy made sure that he paid extra attention to her. He made sure that her day was interspersed with small treats and pleasures like lunch at an amazing restaurant, visits from a private masseuse, a ‘hard to get’ personal appointment with a popular shoe designer. Little things that broke up the extra workload she’d taken on when Tony withdrew completely from the outside world.

Friday had been a bit lost as well and Percy tried his best to reassure her but the only person she needed right now was her creator. She also was mum on what was going on in the lab and Percy respected that so he didn’t try to press the subject although he was dying of curiosity.

Tony had spoken of JARVIS to Percy a few times, mostly late at night when the nightmares kept them both awake. He’d taken the AI’s loss like that of a child, almost breathless with grief as he mumbled about losing his co-pilot.

Percy knew that kind of loss intimately and could only lend an understanding and listening ear in the dark of the tower’s penthouse. What was even more tragic was the fact that to most people, Jarvis’ loss hadn’t even registered as death. Most likening it to the loss of a laptop or a hard drive and dismissing it as such.

To hear Tony talk about how JARVIS had sacrificed himself to stop ULTRON and how, no matter how he tried and tried until his eyes watered and his fingertips bled from typing, he couldn’t find enough of the AI’s code to restore him. ULTRON had done an incredible job of destroying every instance of the AI he could find. The backup server farms, the cloud memory, the internet hubs. Every single one.

JARVIS as Tony had known him was gone, leaving Vision in his place. And as bittersweet as it was for Tony to interact with the android with his Mjolnir level worthiness and his all too familiar voice, Vision had ultimately chosen to go to the compound to be with young Miss Maximoff.

Tony had confessed one day, after Percy had tentatively broached the subject one movie night, that
even though he knew JARVIS’ original code by heart, that the AI had been a learning programme
that had grown and evolved so much on his own in the more than two decades that he’d been at
Tony’s side.

Percy had nodded in understanding, thinking back to Harry Potter just after the great fall of
Voldemort. The poor lad had been catatonic after getting the horcrux in his head yanked out along
with most of his magical core.

After his recovery, he’d been different. He still had all of his memories but he’d been a different
person altogether. He’d reacted differently to situations. Things that had angered him once no
longer phased him. He’d accepted his new circumstances with an aplomb that was nothing like the
surly and soul weary boy he used to be.

Percy knew how well time and experiences changed a person. Even an artificial one. He also knew
that if Ginny were to appear in his life, hale and hearty once more; that he’d need some time to pull
himself together too. So he did what he could to make sure that life was kept on track, giving his
boss the time and space he needed.

He watched as the black speck on cloudless blue sky grew bigger, the ocean breeze hot and sweet
across his face as he stood on the balcony. Soon enough the drone of War Machine’s repulsors
were heard and within seconds he was clunking down into the stone patio.

“Do we know who sent it?” Rhodes asked as he stepped out of the suit, not stopping as he strode
into the house, knowing that Percy would keep up with him as he walked. “I mean…. how do we
know it’s really JARVIS?”

Percy hurried to keep up, “We’ve been able to trace the purchase and delivery of the package back
to a dummy company in the Bahamas. Friday was able to ‘check’ the records of the Arch Mission
Foundation but we haven’t been able to find the source of the money just yet. Anything more,
you’d have to speak with Pepper or with the Boss himself because Friday’s been muted on the
subject.”

Rhodes nodded to himself as he stopped in front of the work shop’s blacked out glass. He typed his
code into the wall panel and they both held their breath in the second it took for the doors to open.

Percy watched as the man stepped in and abruptly turned on his heel, leaving the colonel to take
his best friend well in hand. Rhodes knew what he was doing. Percy had lunch preparations to
make.

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The next morning dawned pale and bleak, dark rain clouds gathering far out to sea. Percy was
sitting on the edge of his empty bed in his crumpled boxers, his hair a curly riot on his head. Mack
had not spent the night and sleep had been rough.

He was sipping on a lovely cuppa and gazing out unto the endless ocean when a voice came from
overhead. It wasn’t Friday’s.

“Good Morning, Mr. Westerly.”

Percy blinked up at the ceiling, surprised. “Good Morning JARVIS.”

There was a pregnant pause as Percy waited for the AI to speak. It was odd hearing the Vision’s
voice come out of the ceiling and Percy felt a small pang of regret that he hadn’t been fortunate to
meet JARVIS first. Still, the fact remained that if the AI hadn’t been gone, Percy wouldn’t have a
job in the first place.

“It’s good to finally meet you.” He told the AI, “Tony’s spoken of you a lot. I’m glad that he has you back with him.”

“Thank you” JARVIS replied, his voice modulation sounding a bit hesitant. “Sir had spoken extensively about you as well.”

“So, how has your return been so far?” Percy smiled patiently as more seconds ticked by. Maybe a bit of small talk would help. “I’m sure that Tony, Friday and the bots have all been making sure that you are all caught up on current events.”

“Yes, the past few days have been very informative. Alarming but informative.” JARVIS confessed. “Things have changed much in the last eight months and I find it disconcerting to say the least. Sir called it culture shock and I am inclined to agree with him though the literal definition of the phrase does not perfectly apply to me as I am an Artificial Intelligence and not human visiting a foreign land.”

Percy drank the rest of his tea as the JARVIS rambled on. Essentially coming back from the dead was enough to leave anyone unsettled, be they human or AI. Placing his cup on its saucer and setting it on the night stand, Percy decided to have mercy on them both and get to the crux of the matter.

“I’m not your replacement you know. Not really.” He ran a hand through his wild red hair and pushed down all of his own insecurities. Now wasn’t the time for his own doubt. “I’m just a pair of helping hands around here, along with FRIDAY and the others, trying my best to do my job and make Tony’s life a little easier.”

“My data shows that both you and FRIDAY have done an exceptional job and managing Sir’s life and well-being… in my absence.”

“That may be so…” Percy tilted his head, “… but you are Tony’s co-pilot, his friend and his son in all the ways that matter. You are an integral part to so many facets of his life that losing you broke something deep inside him.”

JARVIS was silent. After a few moments the red head shrugged, scratching absently at his bare shoulder.

“You are Mission Essential, JARVIS. You and Rhodes and Pepper and the bots. There’s no competition on this. No one is needed or valued more than another. Tony needs all of you so much. So many people, too many people really…. have left him behind in his life.”

“It wasn’t my intention to abandon Sir…” the AI declared but Percy just shook his head.

“I know that.” He assured confidently. “You didn’t abandon him JARVIS. ULTRON took you from him. I know that. Tony knows that. Everyone knows that. FRIDAY showed me how hard you fought against the Mind Stone, how much you sacrificed in the end. You helped save the world. You helped save Tony like you’ve been saving him since they day you came online. Don’t ever doubt your worth or your place by his side.”

“I… Thank you Mr. Westerly.” JARVIS said hesitantly. “I supposed that I needed to hear these sentiments from someone other than Sir.”

“I get that.” He nodded, “Sometimes when people are too close to us, it’s hard to hear the truth in their words. You need to hear them from someone not so invested.”
“Yes. Exactly.” The AI agreed. “Though both Sir and Colonel Rhodes have assured me of the negative, I still feel in a way as if I have failed in my duties. Even when I have quantifiable facts that prove otherwise, I cannot seem to dismiss the notion from my protocols. It is very concerning.”

“I guess guilt and self-doubt are the same across all platforms of existence. Merlin knows I’ve had my share.”

Percy took a deep breath and looked down at his hands. His wand and broom calluses had faded over time and the scars he’d gotten from one of the twins pranks gone wrong were pale against the redness of his skin.

Survivor’s guilt was one of the worst things for a human to endure and after the fall of Voldemort and watching Marcus Flint thrash to death in a dingy hotel room had sent Percy spiraling into deep depression and alcoholism.

Ginny’s death had compounded it all and it was only his efforts in trying to keep the Ministry from collapsing with the few other people who remained there; that he hadn’t just let himself join her in death.

It had only been his promise to deliver one Harry Potter to one Hermione Granger in Africa that had kept him going in the end. After that had been accomplished, he’d found himself lost and without anchor, adrift in the wild, wide world.

It had taken him a year and a half or so to find who he really was and he was still doing so even now. It was a long and difficult road to travel and he’d fallen too many times to count. But it had gotten better. Every day was just a little bit better than the last.

“The first step is talking about it.” He addressed the ceiling once more. “I’m glad you decided to trust me with this and I’m here whenever you need it. It’s hard to sometimes talk to the people you care about the most. Especially if you are afraid the confusion you feel inside could end up hurting them somehow.”

“Yes. Exactly that” JARVIS said softly. “Thank you Mr. Westerly. I believe that I shall take you up on that offer in the future.”

“Great.” Percy grinned. “Hey, you might as well call me Percy. Everyone does. We are going to be partners in this after all.”

“Partners, you say?”

A laugh bubbled up from his chest. “Yes, The Care and Well Being of Eccentric Billionaires is a bit of a team effort I have to admit. Team Tony need all the help it can get.”

“Team Tony. Yes. Partners sounds perfect…. Percy.”

“Aye, that sounds awesome, Big brother, Little brother.” FRIDAY chirped in cheekily, startling the redhead and the AI both.

Percy felt something settle warm in his chest and he smiled as JARVIS gently scolded his younger sibling for eavesdropping, sounding like a properly scandalized English gentleman. Friday on the other hand was giving a poor pretense of being apologetic in the least.

He chuckled to himself and stood from the bed, giving a full body stretch and mentally listing his goals for today. If JARVIS was going to be taking over his original role as Mr. Stark’s
Majordomo, there was going to have to be some shuffling of duties and responsibilities. There would have to be a good few logistical meetings with all parties involved.

He padded barefoot to the bathroom, his mind already planning breakfast and making contingencies if the black out on the workshop was indeed ended and Tony was back upstairs and amongst people again.

A soft ‘thank you’ came from the speaker above him and he gave the nearest camera a small smile. There was time later to find out the circumstances of the AI’s return. To find out the why and hows of it all.

To figure out how well they all meshed together. To discover if they were able to work together fluidly to accomplish their goal of making Tony Stark feel cared for and protected. There would be time enough later to do all of that.

Right then though, he needed a hot, hedonistic shower and full English breakfast. Then he would be ready to tackle anything else that came after.

Chapter End Notes

this one was a bit trickier to write. not completely satisfied but i don't want to keep poking at it.

this might be it for awhile. i don't know. i have a big project starting Tuesday and am not sure of my free time. if i'm inspired i will make time to write it up.

laters.
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

I finally got my Agent Sanderson 5+1 done (finally) and felt like checking in with Percy and the gang.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Percy?"

"Yes, Friday?"

"Colonel Rhodes is waiting at the front door with the being known as The Vision and one other guest. Could you please come up?"

"Of course my dear." Percy blinked up at the ceiling. "Odd. He usually calls ahead before visiting. He's waiting at the door, you say? Is there a problem? Has security been notified?"

"Yes. Shivani and Samara are en route. ETA twenty seconds."

"Okay. And he hasn't attempted to make his way further into the house? Usually he makes himself at home."

"No Percy. He has indicated his preference to wait."

"Ah. I see." He picked up his tablet and slipped his phone into his pocket, making his way from his small office up to the main entry way. "That's strange."

"It is indeed." This time JARVIS replied. "As facial recognition has identified the unknown guest as Doctor Stephen Strange, former world class neurosurgeon, formerly based in New York City."

Percy hummed, skimming the profile that popped on his tablet as the elevator whisked him up to the main floor. "Former?"

"Yes. He sustained severe nerve damage to his hands in a vehicular accident. He's apparently been on 'sabbatical' in Tibet since then."

"Strange Indeed." the redhead murmured to himself as the doors whooshed open. "Is Tony still at HQ with Pepper?"

"Yes." FRIDAY piped up cheerfully. "Mack just checked in. All the boring meetings are done and both Boss and Boss Lady are just having a late lunch. David said ETA home is about an hour."

"Thank you, Lovely." Percy smiled and stepped out into the hall, exchanging a friendly nod with Samara as they turned towards the entrance together. Suddenly, Percy froze mid step, mid-thought even, inhaling sharply as a wave of power rippled along his magic like icy cold hands running along his core. What in Hecate's name was that?

He felt odd, slightly nauseous and a bit wobbly in the knees. The goblin ring on his finger throbbed, making his hand twitch helplessly. He shoved said hand in his pocket, reaching out with
his other to touch the smooth, firm wall beside him. Scraping up a weak smile at the curious look Samara threw him over her shoulder, he waved her forward, miming weakly at his tablet as an excuse.

"Percy, Is something wrong?" Friday spoke softly into his ear piece, her voice subdued with concern. "Your bio-metrics just fluctuated suddenly and are spiking abnormally. Do you need medical assistance?"

Pressing his back against the wall like a solid anchor on roiling seas, he let his head fall forward and breathed slowly through his nose. His hand clenched and released in his pocket, the ring's throbbing fading gradually until it only thrummed along his bones like the echo of a struck bell.

"I…. I'm fine, my dearest. Just a spot of dizziness that's all." He was able to drag up a more believable smile this time, even though he was sure his face was ashen despite his attempt at a California tan. A glance in a nearby mirror confirmed his pallid skin and the utterly tremulous smile his mouth was trying to carve itself into. Merlin, he'd looked like he'd seen a Dementor up close and personal. He gave a weak attempt at a chuckle. "Probably a spot of food poisoning. Maybe the milk in my morning tea has gone bad."

"I don't believe you." It seemed that FRIDAY wasn't convinced either. "You don't drink milk in your tea. Only honey."


"You should seek medical attention." JARVIS offered. "It could be the symptom of something of greater concern. Erratic heartbeat, loss of breath, dizziness and weakness are all signs of a multitude of serious medical concerns…"

"I'm sure it's nothing." Percy tried to fend them off, "It will probably pass in a few minutes anyway."

"You should see a doctor." FRIDAY insisted, her voice growing in fervor despite Percy's denial. "Good thing there's a doctor in the house."

Percy choked on spit, his eyes growing wide as he stared at the closest camera. "Friday, what did you do?"

"What she had to." JARVIS replied primly.

"Someone asked for a doctor?" A deep voice came from entryway and Percy closed his eyes in mortification. Merlin save him from overprotective AI's.

Doctor Stephen Strange was quite, well, strange. Apparently he was the new Sorcerer Supreme of the Planet Earth and leader of the Kamar-Taj Monks. Okay then. Blue monks robes and a semi sentient red cloak that moved a bit too much like the bloody Veil in the Death Chamber at the DoM for Percy's comfort. There was also a gold chain that glowed green at the edges and made Percy want to jump out of his own skin when it came near. Add to that sharp facial hair and a snarky attitude to match Tony's and Percy was officially disconcerted.

Not to mention that the man's magic rubbed his own the wrong way something awful. It didn't feel harmful or malicious, more like brushing against the grain. It felt, odd, different. Unnatural. Percy couldn't quite describe it so he swallowed his protests and let the 'Doctor' examine his throat with tentative fingertips, turning his head this way and that as he discussing Percy's symptoms with
Friday over his head.

Over the man's shoulder, he could see Shivani deep in conversation with a serious looking Rhodes while Samara kept an eye on the room as a whole. The Vision was standing at the large windows, silhouetted in his cape against the cloudless blue skies and sea. Strange absentely gestured at the glass of water next to Percy's elbow and the red head dutifully sipped it, accustomed to obeying Healers like all Molly Weasley's children were. This seemed to satisfy the man and he stepped away, striding back to join Rhodes and Shivani in their little pow wow.

Percy gave a sigh of relief and made himself drink the rest of the water sullenly, steadily avoiding the smirk that Samara was sending his way. He knew that he was being a bit childish but he couldn't help himself. He may be a former self-absorbed twat but that didn't mean he could just shake off the ingrained twattish behaviour so easily; especially when he wasn't feeling his best.

It was this tableau that Tony and Pepper walked in on less than a half an hour later. Percy slumped on his stool at the bar, nursing an empty glass while everyone else stood tensely around the room.

"Platypus?" Tony's voice was openly concerned as Rhodes strode over and pulled him into an octopus hug. "Honey bear? What's wrong?"

The Colonel pulled back and looked his best friend squarely in the eyes, his face solemn.

"Tones. I have something to tell you. Pepper too. You're gonna need to sit down for this."

Percy's first thought as he made his swift retreat to the kitchen was 'Tea. We are going to need lots of tea for this.' It was a great fall back in times of stress. Whatever news Rhodes was there to deliver, if the text he'd gotten from Sanderson at MACUSA gave any indication of the subject matter, then a warm comforting beverage would definitely be needed for the afterwards.

Thankfully the kitchen was empty so he quickly busied himself with the mechanics of it, letting his thoughts drift as he lost himself in the process. Set the water to boil, bring out the proper tea set for company. It wasn't one of those fancy European sets or the sterling silver but a unique and lovely matte black, ink orchid set veined through with gold in the Japanese kintsugi style. It had been a gift to Pepper by one of the companies SI had absorbed and the red headed CEO liked to bring it out for entertaining.

After setting out the sugar, milk, honey and lemon in their lovely little pots and jugs, he stood contemplating the selection of teas; wondering if a custom mix of calming and aromatic would serve the situation best.

"Percy. Are you mad at me?"

FRIDAY's voice was soft in his ear piece. Somewhat nervous and hesitant. Percy paused at the words and bowed his head in thought. His knee jerk reaction was yes, emphatically yes. But, when he thought about it some more, it wasn't the AI he was really mad at.

"No" he finally admitted with a deep and weary sigh, "Not at you, my love. More mad at myself really."

"Really? Why?"

He chuckled as he pictured a young lady tilting her head to the side in earnest curiosity. In his mind's eye, she had red curly hair and clear eyes, light freckles dotting across her heart shaped face.
like sun kisses. He had to take another moment to work through the surge of bitter sweet emotion that all but swamped his insides.

As much as he adored all of Tony's kids, FRIDAY was by far his favourite. She'd been the one who'd been with him from the beginning. The one he'd worked closely with day after day looking after Tony Stark and the awesome carousel of characters that filled his life. As a learning AI, she'd come to anticipate Percy's needs and plans and smoothly assisted in helping him execute his many duties.

With JARVIS' return, he'd taken over much of his former responsibilities, leaving FRIDAY free to concentrate on a reduced list of duties. Even though almost every expert would be the first to say that Artificially Intelligent Entities could not feel human emotions but Tony's creations continued to surprise and amaze. FRIDAY was no exception.

They'd had many a late night conversation about how she 'felt' about meeting the Companion/Co-pilot/NumberOneSon that she'd been created to replace. How Tony's mindset when he created her had been filled with grief from JARVIS' loss and fear from ULTRON's corruption. How he'd been hesitant to let her be as free as JARVIS had been, as ULTRON was supposed to be.

In turn, he'd shared with her about his growing up as the middle Weasely child, caught between living up to his elder siblings successes while being expected to be a role model and authority figure to the younger. About the fears, insecurities and bitter resentments that curled up under his ribs and hardened over time until they grated against his soft insides until they bled.

They'd grown a lot closer in that time, Percy coming to see the AI as a little sister. It wasn't really fair to FRIDAY for Percy to hang those emotions on her. Ginny's loss had left a jagged hole in his heart that the darling little AI had begun to smooth. He was grateful for her presence in his life and really appreciated the care and concern she showed him every day.

"I guess the whole situation just took me back to a weird place in my childhood. It's hard to explain." He gave a small helpless shrug, setting the tea to steep. "Whenever I was hurt or sick my mother would rush me to the healers. They would all cluck over me, never letting me get a word in. It made me feel as if I was powerless in my own life. Like what I felt didn't even matter."

He absently played with the set, making sure everything looked right on the large tray. "I appreciate yours and JARVIS concern. It warms my heart, truly. But you basically ignored me when I said that I would be okay and called in someone who we essentially did not know from Joe Public. Then you proceeded to share personal medical information with him over my head."

He rested both hands on the counter and rolled his neck slowly, letting the tension in his shoulders relax. "It's like I had no autonomy in my own life and I know that's not what you intended but that how it ended up feeling to me."

"I'm sorry… I…" FRIDAY voice was almost too low to hear. Then she fell silent.

Percy took another deep breath and picked up the tray. This wasn't the time for his personal drama. The situation out in the main living space was much more important. He would give the AI the time to process what he said and bring the subject up later on when he himself had time to work things through himself.

Thankfully Mack met him as he left the kitchen, clearing a nearby table for the tray. Percy took comfort in the affection and reassurance in the other man's eyes and the fleeting squeeze on his arm anchored Percy more than the red head could express. Giving the man a small smile, Percy set about pouring tea for the others.
The room seemed divided. Strange and Vision were seated on one couch, Tony, braced on each side by Rhodes and Pepper were on the other. The genius' face was pale and solemn, his jaw clenched and back stiff. His knuckles were white as they gripped his friends hands in his lap, both of them covering his with both of their own.

Pepper accepted her tea gratefully and Strange did a weird thing where the cup floated in the air in front of him. Thankfully, Percy's reaction to exposure to the man's odd magic had faded and he was able to easily ignore the odd feeling it gave him whenever he went near. Even Tony covered his flinch well at the overt display. Instead, it was the Vision's unblinking stare that unnerved the red head.

He'd never met the Android in person, always hearing about him from FRIDAY or Tony in passing. Seeing the Mind Stone glowing in his crimson forehead was daunting to say the least and it left Percy feeling uncomfortable. To be that close to an Infinity Stone was unsettling. It felt as if the Vision was staring into his deepest self and it took everything in him not to shudder and step away.

After serving, he forced himself to walk normally to Mack's side; all but wedging himself between the man and Samara. Mack gave him a concerned look but didn't speak, just pressing his shoulder against Percy's and turning his attention back to the centre of the room. Percy was immensely grateful for it, letting himself relax against the warm body beside him.

Strange's examination of Tony's mind was brief and the genius was immediately hustled off by his girlfriend and best friend to have his freak out in private. That left Percy with the job of seeing to the guests. With FRIDAY silent and JARVIS incorporeal, Percy escorted Strange out unto the patio where the sorcerer proceeded to open up a gold ringed fucking portal and step through it. Now he understood why Rhodes had insisted in coming through the front door. Having such a pure spectacle of magic manifesting within the house would have called for a 'fire weapons first, ask questions later' situation with the house's security measures. There was also the intense dislike Tony seemed to have for magic in general. It would have been extremely rude.

He also escorted the Vision to one of the guest bed rooms, knowing that his Boss would have wanted to speak to the android when he recovered from the news he'd just received. Percy himself was still reeling. He watched from the doorway and the crimson being looked about the room before taking a seat in a plush chair facing the massive windows.

"Mr. Westerly?"

He spoke as Percy turned to leave. It was startling to hear JARVIS' voice coming from his mouth. There was a disconnect from reality for a split second. Percy turned sharply on his heel to face the room once more, a placid look on his face.

"Yes, Mr. Vision? How may I help you?"

The being looked away from the window to stare at the red head.

"I have a great many questions. Some of which I will have to wait on and answer and some which may never be answered. There are so many things that still confuse me and most likely will continue to do so."

His unblinking blue eyes were startling against his ridged, vermilion face.

"But there is one question which I believe may be answered right now."
Percy swallowed and forced himself to breathe steadily.

"And that is?"


"Does Mr. Stark know that you are also a magic user?"

Chapter End Notes

Cliffhanger because i am evil. Muahahahahaha!

OMG Percy and Friday fluffy sibling feels.
Chapter Notes

So, i really felt like writing today so here you go. some resolution to the cliffhanger i left before. i want my boys happy in this story so everyone is awesome. we even got some MACUSA cameos. YAY!!!!


"Does Mr. Stark know that you are also a magic user?"

Percy blinked as his mind jerked to a halt, sending up screaming alarms at the back of his brain which echoed around his skull, all other thoughts having suddenly fled. The Vision was looking back at him with equanimity, his bright eyes curious and contemplative, waiting patiently for the red head to speak.

In the cold, echoing black of Percy's mind, a figure emerged from the shadows waving a scroll that had STATUTE OF SECRECY printed on it in big, bold letters. The small figure, which looked like the unholy love child of a goblin and a house elf, bent over panting as if it had run a great distance before collapsing heavily unto its back. It waved the scroll halfheartedly one more time before giving a great shuddering sigh.

Thankfully, it was enough to pull Percy from the stupor he'd fallen into at such an unexpected question, his mind jump starting once more into a riot of thoughts, plans and actions. They flew through his mind at break neck speeds as he plucked them closer, studied them and discarded them as useless.

Fortunately, Percy thought well on his feet. He wasn't a closet Slytherin who'd survived at the backward, corrupt Ministry of Magic for years on luck or looks alone. He'd been taught a lot of hard lessons in his life and he remembered them every one and took them all to heart,

He knew how to keep a straight face and navigate difficult situations by the seat of his pants. He knew how to deflect, subvert, cajole and flatter. He knew how to wrangle, persuade, provoke and bandy. He knew how to pull attention away from himself or toward himself at the situation demanded and how to obfuscate things until no one knew what the hell was going on.

He also knew how to lie through his fucking teeth and run like hell.

"I have no idea what you are talking about." He informed the android softly, his voice even and his smile bland and on the edge of courteous. "Please excuse me."

Turning sharply on his heel, he made a brisk pace down the hall way and out to the garage, not stopping until he was behind the wheel and buzzing himself out of the large gates. It was only when he was a good five miles away from the mansion did he ease the car to the side of an empty road.

He'd been driving on auto-pilot, a fact that concerned him as he had no recollection of anything
since he'd faced the Vision and had basically fled the scene. It was only as he was blinking
stupidly in the Malibu sun that he realized that his heart was thundering in his chest, his knuckles
white against the steering wheel. His thoughts flew around his head like a quidditch match from
hell. All snitches that flitted around, playing keep away; quaffles that zipped past in a blur and
bludgers that slammed around, making a right racket in his poor skull.

He swallowed heavily, fumbling in his pocket for his phone then staring at his hands as they
trembled. His logical mind informed him that he was having a panic attack but that information did
him slim to no good as all the usual methods he usually used to deal with anxiety seemed just short
of impossible.

"Get a fucking grip on yourself man." he scolded himself, pressing his back into the car seat and
pressing his palms into his eyes. He took a few deep breaths, his chest aching from what felt like
steel bands wrapped around his ribs. "Not even being on the run with Potter made you fall apart
like this."

The sun is hot on the back of his neck by the time he calms down, his suit soaked through with
sweat. The air is dusty and dry but there is a breeze and soothes his face and provides some
comfort. His mind much more calm and clear, he sends out a couple of texts, smoothing over his
abrupt departure from the mansion and starts the car.

The ferry trip to the island was spent in contemplative silence, his arms folded and pressed against
the railing. He waved absently at the old men sitting in front of the tavern and hustled over to the
Gringott's branch office. A sizable amount of galleons got him a Floo connection to MACUSA and
he was stumbling into Wendy Higgs' office, coughing and dusting soot from his light coloured suit.

Sanderson was there, growling and spelling the ash from his clothes as Percy collapsed into a
nearby chair. A cup of strong tea appeared at his elbow from a sweet looking house elf and he
accepted it with heartfelt thanks.

It didn't take long for the story to come tumbling out until he's sitting in the chair, contemplating
his tea leaves as if they held the answers to the universe.

"I just went blank. Didn't know what to do. I just left. I kept thinking about the statute."

Sanderson snorted from his own perch on the edge of Higgs' massive table. "You did good to get
out of there. The Android may have information about us but you haven't been given clearance to
discuss anything with him or Stark."

Wendy hummed thoughtfully around the rim of her cup. "I didn't even think to put a clause about
that in the agreement we drafted when we started this whole thing. I always thought that by the
time we involved Stark, it would be more like the 'shit hit the fan' type situation. it didn't even
occur to me that this whole thing with Maximoff could blow your cover."

Her clear eyes caught his in a piercing glare. "Do you need an extraction?"

He blinked back at her, stunned. "I... no."

Did he need extraction? No. He'd taken this job because it was something he'd wanted. Something
he'd come to love and appreciate. He'd been clear with Wendy since day one. he was not a spy or
MACUSA agent. He would not be reporting or compromising his Boss's work nor privacy in
anyway. All he'd agreed to do was keep an eye out for the Infinity Stones.

He may have secrets of his own. He may have a new name and a new life but it was a life he'd built
himself and worked hard to make worthwhile. He had friends, family even and he'd come to respect and love those people with an intensity that often left him breathless.

So.. No. he didn't want extraction. He didn't want to walk away.

"I need permission to tell Mr. Stark about my status as a magic user." He set the cup aside and took a deep, fortifying breath. "I need to tell him the truth. It's time."

Wendy quirked one silvery brow. "He's been very vocal about how he feels about magic. What if he wants nothing to do with you after this?"

Percy rubbed just under his ribs with his fist, making a face at the stabbing pain he felt just there. Tony was very shy about trust and it had taken Percy a long while to cultivate the easy relationship they had now. Too lost that would be nothing short of devastating. Still….

He closed his eyes. "Then it would be his choice to make."

The blond nodded sharply, pulling a small scroll out of her desk drawer. She handed it to Sanderson who quickly left the office, his long coat flapping behind him. as the door closed behind him, Wendy stood and came around the large desk, perching on the chair next to Percy's.

"By the time you get back to Malibu, the paperwork should have gone through. I've made sure that the President herself has been informed of the service you've been rendering for us."

He gave her a sharp look but she smiled and shook her head. "Nothing official. No paperwork like I promised you. Just conversation over tea."

"Thank you Wendy." Percy spine all but melted into the chair. "For everything."

"I should be thanking you." Her smile widened. "This whole thing with Maximoff is going to affect a lot of things in the future, most of them in a positive way for MACUSA and the Wizarding US. We've opened up lines of communications with many of the power players that can only serve to benefit us all as we go forward. I have a feeling that whatever's coming is going to need all of us working together for face and you've helped make that much easier than before."

The redhead flushed at her frank praise, ducking his head and running his hand through his windblown curls. Soon enough Sanderson's patronus burst through the closed door to inform them gruffly that Percy had been granted permission to speak openly about the wizarding world to one Anthony Edward Stark.

Percy rolled his eyes at the wording. As if Tony would keep such a secret from Pepper or Rhodes. Thankfully, there was a way around that because Stark had already been given special dispensation to know about the world and they couldn't really sanction him if he chose to speak to those in his close circle. Proximity alone made it necessary for the whole household to be in the know.

Percy himself just would not volunteer information and would only engage in conversation if it had been brought up by someone who'd already been in the know. It was a bit of a work around but he could work with that.

They shook hands, saying their good byes as Wendy through floo powder into the fire. His journey back was no less wild and tumbling but he managed to step out into Gringott's with his dignity intact. His journey back to the mansion was more sedate and helped to calm him. He was still nervous about his Boss would respond to knowing that Percy wielded magic but he felt brave enough to face it head on.
The worst thing would be if Tony looked at him with betrayal in his eyes. He'd come to care too much about the man to see him hurt. He'd seen that same look in his father's eyes too many times and to face that again would rip out his heart.

Merlin, he'd grown too close. They'd seen him for who he was, accepted him as a real person and not a Weasley of a Gryffindor or a Ministry Toady. He'd just been Percy, stripped down to chassis and totally out of fucks to give. And they'd pulled him in to this weird and wonderful circle of crazy and gave him a place in it that seemed carved out for fit him perfectly.

Pulling into the quiet garage with its climate control hum felt like both a comforting embrace and the calm before the storm. He wasn't sure how long he'd been sitting in the car when the man he'd been thinking about leaned casually against the car. Tony was in some comfortable jeans and a band t-shirt. Regular workshop fare. There was a coffee cup in his hand and a contemplative look on his face. His mouth twisted when Percy finally met his eyes and he took a slow sip of his drink.

"So I'm guessing that those circles are finally overlapping huh?"

"Wh…. What?" Percy's eyes snapped wide, his jaw gaping open in shock. "I mean… what?"

The genius chuckled and made the same silly circle motion that Percy had flailed over in his kitchen what seemed so long ago.

"Friday seemed concerned when you left earlier and when you drove out of here like a bat out of hell, she was concerned that your agitated state could put you in danger while driving. So she tracked your phone." he paused and raised an eyebrow. "All the way to New York."

The man hummed. "I have to admit, even in the IronMan suit I would not have been able to clock cross country in less than five minutes. Imagine my surprise when she reported that you were back in Malibu less than an hour later. I even checked her codes in case there was a glitch. Hell, Jarvis even looked it over."

Percy couldn't form words, only able to stare helplessly at the brunet, his mouth moving mutely. Tony tilted his head to the side.

"Ok then, how about the fact that your background check puts you as an only child but I have both verbal and pictorial evidence that you have several siblings. Then there's the time with the weird jamming signal and the subsequent Bag of Dicks fiasco. Not to mention the group heart attack we almost had with screaming compact disk from your brother. That poor falcon."

Percy choked a bit but stayed silent. Tony sipped his coffee and blithely continued.

"Or maybe let's talk about that weird gold spinny thing that you gave me that I can't make heads or tails of but sends all my scanning equipment wild. Or that the strange readings I've been recording at different times around you and around some of the items in your room."

Percy dragged a hand down his face, letting out a huffing breath. "Merlin."

"Or the fact that you call out names like Merlin, Hecate, Circe and grouch about Morgana's frigid titties in casual conversation. At first I thought you were in some kind of cult or maybe a practicing pagan but that's not it is it?"

Percy slumped down in the bucket seat of the car with a pained groan, pulling his hand away from his grimace. He forced himself to look up into serious brown eyes.

"You're not that far off actually." he gave a mirthless laugh. "When you break it down to brass
tacks. It is kind of like a pagan cult. Which is equal parts hilarious and terrifying when you think about it."

He slowly opened the car door and stepped out, straightening his suit and running a hand through his hair before turning to his boss.

"I had to go to New York. I needed something very important from there."

"So you did go. It's not a glitch. Near instantaneous travel." Tony murmured under his breath, his mind racing behind dark brown eyes. "If I didn't see footage of Strange's fucking portal on my own balcony, I would have called you crazy. But you're not crazy are you? You're magical."

"There are rules…"

Tony rolled his eyes. "… to the circle. I know"

"This is serious." Percy shot him a glare. "I had to go get special permission to even talk to you about this. This isn't like Strange who can go about willy-nilly flouting his power to any muggle on the street. I had no intention of being snatched up like some….

He broke off with hissed swear, shaking his head and taking a calming breath.

"Let's just say that things are different for me. There are heavy restrictions for speaking out of turn. We're very secretive about all of it. Things are getting a bit better now but there's been a set way of doing things since before I was born." He shrugged. "And now, even though u have explicit permission to tell you, it's still hard. I've always been a rule follower. It's been like that since I was a child. It's just a thing that I have to deal with ok?"

Tony's brow was crinkled with concern but he just nodded. "Ok."

"I'm… There's…." Percy struggled as he leaned against the car as well, folding his arms across his chest more a kin to a hug that anything else. "Fuck. I'm a wizard alright? With the wand waving and flying broomsticks and everything. There's a lot of us. We live in secret in magically protected spaces. I grew up in a magical home and went to magic school and eventually went to work for the Ministry of Magic before fleeing the country to help a persecuted young man reunite with his escape convict girlfriend. After that I ended up here where I got a job working for you and…. and…."

He felt winded and adrift after all that, his arms hugging himself tighter as he stared at his shoes.

"Wendy asked me for a favour. They got me on the list for the interviews for your PA. I told them I would not spy on you or anything like that. I'm not some kind of agent. I'm a fucking paper pusher really. She said I didn't have to. All I had to do was to keep an eye out for the infinity stones. The invasion of New York really shook them. When you deal with Dragons and Unicorns every day, you don't expect aliens to be the things that turns your world on its head."

Percy bit his lip, his fingertips digging into his arms.

"I said yes. I didn't have anything else to do. Nowhere else to go. I'd been wandering around for such a long time, leaving everything I'd ever known behind. I just wanted a place to be. To settle down for a while. I just wanted a place to belong."

He felt tears stinging his eyes and blinked them away rapidly, staring off into a far corner of the garage.
"You see me. You and Friday and Jarvis and everyone else. You look at me and you see me." he admitted softly. "I haven't had that in a very long time. I… I don't want to lose that."

The silence stretched for long moments between them until the brunet finally spoke.

"Who said that you have to lose that?"

Percy turned to look at him in surprise. "I came to you under false pretenses. I lied about who I was to get the job. I've been keeping information from you from the day I met you. How can you trust me now?"

Tony's lips turned down as he shrugged, counting off on his fingers. "First of all, almost everyone I know approaches me under false pretenses. Everyone wants something from me, no matter what they tell you. I never expected you to be different. It's the way the world works."

"Secondly, I knew from day one that you weren't truthful about your background. We did a thorough one on you before hiring you and most of what we found didn't match up with what I'd seen of you. Remember when I came to that shitbox apartment and all but told you that you were a puzzle I intended to solve? Yeah, that was a thing."

"Thirdly, we all have secrets. There's a bunch of shit I don't tell a lot of people. There's a lot I don't want to tell and a lot that I can't tell. That doesn't make me a bad person. It makes me responsible to the protection of my interests and in some cases, observant of the law. I can't judge you for doing that same thing."

He shrugged with a small smirk.

"And lastly, I trust you because in all the time that you've spent working for me, you never given me cause to doubt your honesty. You treat my kids with respect and let both Fri and Jay all up in your business 24/7 without a complaint. You've done wonders in making my life easier and you take all the craziness that comes with being who I am in stride. I mean, you have to be a little weird and crazy to fit in so well in this madhouse, am I right?"

Percy found himself chuckling along, the tight feeling in his chest slowly fading.

"Actions speak louder than words for me. After everything that's happened to me, it's hard to trust people on face value alone." The genius gave a sigh and drained the last of his coffee. "And what I've come to realize is that I trust you Ignatius Percicles Westerly."

Percy made a face. "It's Weasley actually. If we're going there. Percival Ignatius Weasley. I had to change it with being on the run for my life from the ministry and all."

"Ah." Tony grunted in surprise. "Okay. I'm think I'm gonna need to hear all about that. And soon."

"You're going to want to hear about a lot of things, I think." the red head grinned in return. "But don't worry. I have permission to tell you all about all of it."

The brunet's smirk grew as he gave Percy the side eye. "So, I guess I'm a part of your circle now?"

Percy's sharp bark of laughter echoed through the garage.

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