Standing Up, Speaking Out

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Summary

Following the devastation of Civil War, Peter's falling apart and Coulson is there, trying to keep him together. They've got the entire nation to deal with, fugitives to catch, and all Peter really wants to do is hold his dad's hand, because he's the only one he's got now.

Notes

This... will probably remain incomplete for a while. Like several other of my fanfics. I'm supposed to be working on an event week, but this one really just snuck up on me, and oh my gosh, I just couldn't not start it. It came out of nowhere.
Chapter 1

Coulson was the one who found him when SHIELD brought his dad in, beaten bloody and wheezing as they pried the armor off of his body in order to treat him. Peter should've been surprised, having been to his funeral, but with everything going on… He couldn't bring himself to feel.

It was Coulson who held his hand while they worked on his dad and uncle. It was Coulson who swore to him that everything was going to be okay. He was the lifeline that Peter clung to in the midst of all the uncertainty.

The only time he let go of Coulson's hand was when Pepper finally arrived so that she could pull him into her arms and cry silently, body shaking. Peter couldn't bring himself to hug her back. It was too much. “I'm sorry, Peter,” Pepper said, finally releasing him and kneeling to look into his eyes. “It's going to be okay. Tony's going to make it.”

Peter tried to believe her, but when the doctor asked to see her, his hand found Coulson's again. He couldn't tell if he was using his super strength or not, but Coulson wasn't batting an eye.

“What's going to happen now, Uncle Phil?” Peter spoke softly, as if speaking louder would somehow cause even more of his world to break.

Coulson squeezed Peter's hand gently. “I'm going to take care of you,” he told him. “I'm going to take care of everything. It's going to be okay.”

Peter looked up at him, his sad eyes meeting Coulson's. “I don't want to be alone,” he admitted, voice cracking.

Eyes softening, Coulson used his free hand and ran his fingers through Peter's hair. “You won't. You'll never be alone, because I'm always going to be here for you.”

Peter clung to those words, leaning into his Uncle Phil's hand. Coulson would protect him. He never lied. He might've been a super spy, but he wouldn't make promises he wouldn't keep. That was him.

“What about Steve?” Peter couldn't stop himself from asking. He wanted to know what Coulson thought of the former Captain America now. He couldn't even bring himself to think of the man as his papa anymore. He'd thrown that title away when he'd almost killed his dad with the help of his friend, thrown it away when he'd abandoned his own child.

“I'll deal with him,” Coulson's eyes went cold, pulling Peter into his chest. “I swear it.”

Peter closed his eyes, burying his face in Coulson's suit that smelled like something clean, something safe. He'd already lost one parent, he didn't want to lose another. “It'll be okay, Peter…” Coulson's voice murmured into his hair. “It'll be okay…” And Peter lost himself in Coulson's words, because that's what he needed to hear, what he needed to believe.

“Thank you,” he mumbled into the agent's chest.

Coulson held him tightly until he calmed down. He convinced Peter to get something to eat and to sit down while they waited for whatever news would come of his dad's condition. It was a struggle, but Peter ate a little bit and then returned to wait.

Hours passed and Peter slipped into an exhausted sleep against Coulson’s shoulder. The agent shifted so that Peter was stretched out on the chairs, head in his lap. He brushed Peter's hair from
his face gently. Never before had Peter been so broken.

He understood. Coulson had never expected this to happen. He'd heard of growing unease about the Accords, but he knew that Tony was trying to compromise, was calling in favors and paying some very pricey lawyers to try and get it to be more equal. He thought Tony would make it better, like he always did, pulling off some incredible feat to solve even the most difficult of problems, but then Steve Rogers happened.

'What Captain America,' Coulson bitterly thought. The man had taken some of his closest agents and turned them against Tony. He blamed himself for not showing himself earlier, for not teaching them how to determine what was the best plan of action when governments got involved, but mostly, he blamed them. All of them.

'This wasn't supposed to happen.' His throat closed up as he shook with anger and guilt. The last thing he could ever imagine was Rogers abandoning his family, hurting them.

Sure, he left behind his country, but his family? That was a betrayal that cut him all too deeply. Peter should never have to suffer the way he was now. Coulson was decidedly very pissed at the so-called Avengers who betrayed them. Somehow, he was going to make sure they knew that.
It was several hours before Pepper came back, slumping down in a free chair across from them. She looked worn out, hair wild and hands trembling. Her eyes met Coulson's and it was easy to see that the news wasn't good.

“Peter,” Coulson murmured softly, shaking the boy's shoulders. He'd never be forgiven if Peter weren't awake to know what was going on.

Peter woke slowly at first, but when he realized what was going on, he shot up, head whipping about as if he could see the life he used to have. Realizing Pepper had returned, he scrambled up and over to her. “Is -” Peter swallowed, fear making his throat close up. “Is he going to be okay?” he asked, biting his lip.

Pepper rubbed her eyes, wiping tears from her cheeks. “He's.. They put him in a medically induced coma.” Peter's hands balled up into fists. “Peter, sweetie,” Pepper reached out and wrapped her hands around his, “they did it to give him more time to heal. His body… He's been through a lot, and right now he needs to rest and recover. He'll be okay, though. He's your father after all.”

Peter nodded, biting into his lip hard. All he could hear was 'coma, coma, coma'… He shook his head, ears ringing as he pulled away from her carefully and looked at Coulson. “How's Uncle Rhodey?” he questioned. He needed to know what was happening with him. It had looked so terrible, to see him fall, to hear his dad's scream of anguish. Peter was never going to stop having nightmares.

Coulson hesitated. “He's been in surgery. The doctors are hoping the spinal damage won't be permanent, but.. it doesn't look good.”

“So they paralyzed him?” Peter bitterly bit out. “It wasn't enough to betray us, they did this” he waved his hands in the air, “to us?” He was seething.

“Hey.” Coulson put his hand on Peter's shoulder, trying to calm the boy down. “It's not for certain. Technology is far more advanced than it used to be, and he's going to get the best care.”

Peter took a shuddering breath and steadied himself, anger leaving him. “I know, Uncle Phil… I know. It's just.. a week ago, I thought everything was going to be okay. Sure, they needed to talk, but.. I thought they could work through it.” He looked down as he continued, “I thought… we were a family…”

Coulson hugged Peter tightly. “We are, Peter. Maybe things have changed for them, but we're here, and we're never going to leave you. Not Ms. Potts, not your dad, not your uncle, and certainly, never me.”

Without speaking, he hugged Coulson, desperate once again for the stability that was his Uncle Phil. “I never knew you were such an inspirational speaker,” Peter tried to joke.

“He is, isn't he?” Pepper smiled a little.

“Well, I'm full of surprises after all,” Coulson huffed out, willing to do whatever it took to make things better, easier.
“Speaking of surprises… We went to your funeral,” Pepper started.

Well… That turned into a conversation long enough to distract them from their current troubles. Director Fury would probably have words if he knew Coulson was revealing what happened to him, but he honestly could care less right now. Right now, there was no SHIELD to him, just Peter and the family Rogers and his crew had broken.

He'd just gotten done telling them everything when the doctor had come back. He looked ragged, tired, but then again Coulson wouldn't trust a doctor that hadn't looked like he'd done his best to save his patient.

“How is he?” Pepper questioned for Peter, because last she'd heard they were finishing fixing Tony up and going to move him to an ICU with very secure facilities.

“He's sleeping,” the doctor told them. “Mr. Stark has had some serious damage, but we believe he'll be able to recover faster in the coma. There are some new ways to speed up healing, but we want him to do what he can on his own for now. Once he's had a week to heal, we'll wake him up and begin treatment.”

Peter shivered with relief. Sure, his dad was in a coma, but at least it wasn't permanent. It would help him heal, he knew that for a fact. “Can I see him?”

The doctor nodded. “He's in the ICU block 1. We've put Colonel Rhodes in there with him.”

“Thank you,” Peter mumbled, giving a tug on Coulson's hand. He needed to go there, now.

“Thank you, Dr. Angie,” Coulson spoke as he let himself be tugged by Peter. “Are you coming, Ms. Potts?”

Pepper smiled at him, worn out. “I'll be there in a moment. I need to make a few arrangements and see how the company is doing.”

Coulson nodded, knowing she'd be there when she could. The whole nation was about to fold in on itself with the betrayal. It was just a matter of time before the world would find out just how badly the former Avengers had hurt their family.

He could only hope that they'd pay for what they did. Actually, he'd make sure they did.

Chapter End Notes

...Yeah, short chapters, but have a second one?
Chapter 3

Peter's breath caught in his throat as he walked into the ICU room. It wasn't as spacious as it could've been, but Uncle Rhodey was there too. If he knew them, and he did, both of them would fight to be with each other, so it was a good thing the doctors had decided to put them together. Although, they probably hoped Uncle Rhodey would be able to cheer up his dad and vice versa. Peter didn't know if they were right, but he knew that as good of friends as they were, they'd want to be there for each other.

They both looked seriously injured with bandages and casts splaying across their bodies. His dad had more tubes sticking out of him than his uncle, but that was to be expected with someone who was in a coma. 'Medically induced,' Peter forced himself to remember. It wouldn't be permanent. It couldn't be.

The sight of both of them made him want to cry, to throw things, to blame Steve so much. He should've fought harder when he'd snuck out and became Spider-Man behind all their backs. He should've treated it more seriously when Iron Man asked Spider-Man to join him in Germany, but he'd thought it'd be okay. Even if they didn't know he was Spider-Man, surely they'd chose family over anything else.

He's never regretted being so wrong this much before. It's a new feeling that makes him want to beg his dad for forgiveness, for not being able to protect him. He feels so helpless and weak.

“You can hold his hand, Peter,” Coulson tells him, voice barely above a whisper.

Peter looks at him, nervously. “Don't leave?”

“Never.”

Reassured, Peter slowly lets go of Coulson's hand and walks over to his dad's side. “Dad?” his voice cracks with emotion. “I'm so sorry…” Hot tears run down his cheeks as he slips his hand into his dad's uninjured one. “I should've been there… I'm so...so sorry, Dad…”

He chokes on a sob and quickly, Coulson is at his back, rubbing it with soft soothing circles, murmuring gentle words of comfort.

They don't speak, not even when Coulson directs him into a chair to sit by his dad's side. Peter gives him a small grateful smile. Patiently, intently, he sits there beside his dad, hoping that he'll get better. That they'll both get better.

Coulson suggests the nurse find a cot and set it up in the room, out of the way. He knows that Peter won't leave his dad unless he's forced to, so he's preparing a place for Peter to get some rest without leaving him.

Back at the Tower, Pepper is going through contacts, trying to get the reporters off of her tail, fending over government officials. It's an all out nightmare. She really doesn't want to deal with it, so she isn't. She's checking in with FRIDAY to make sure that everything's okay.

“Are the comms secure?” she questions, looking through a check-list that she's haphazardly made.

“Yes, Ms. Potts,” FRIDAY replies.
“How about the Avengers technology?”

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“Also secure, Ms. Potts,” FRIDAY says.

It's not a long list, because there are spaces where she knows things should be, but she can't think of what should be there. She sighs, heavily. She's going at this without knowing what she's supposed to be doing. How does she recover and try to rebuild when they were all so recently betrayed by people they'd trusted most.

“How about the Avengers technology?”

“Have you alerted Vision of the situation?”

“Vision is aware. He's currently securing the compound and will await your orders once completed,” FRIDAY tells her.

Pepper nodded, heart clenching as she thought of everything she had to do, people she needed to talk to, those she was going to hunt down. “Any calls from Rogers and his group get fielded to me, and me alone, understand, FRIDAY?” She wasn't going to let any of those fuckers torment her family anymore. This time, they'd have to deal with her.

“Understood, Ms. Potts.” There was a pause. “May I suggest taking a break to check up on Boss?”

She looked up at the clock, numbers blaring out how late it had become. Her stomach felt an odd mixture of hunger and nausea. “Yeah, but first, order Peter and my favorite foods from that country restaurant we love so much. I can't imagine Peter having eaten much.”

“Order placed,” FRIDAY reported. “Have a safe trip there, Ms. Potts.”

“Thanks, FRIDAY,” Pepper said, flats stepping silently onto the elevator as she messaged Happy to drive her back. She knew he was going to want to see Tony and Peter too. As the elevator began to move, she leaned against it, back on the cold metal. ‘It's still so hard to believe…’ They're traitors.
Chapter 4

Peter was… exhausted. His eyes kept falling shut, but they would water up and he'd have to blink away the tears. It was exhaustion, pure and simple. He was tired. The steady beeps of heart monitors for both his dad and uncle were haunting sounds that kept taunting him.

*Will they wake up? Will they not? Will they wake up?*

He knew he should be grateful for the fact that they were recovering, but it was just so hard to sit still and wait to hear their voices. He was selfish, because he wanted them to wake up and be better *now*.

But.. reality doesn't work like that.

Three days into Tony's medically induced coma, his Uncle Rhodey wakes up. Peter almost trips over the chair, barely managing not to fall with Coulson's help, and rushes over to his uncle's side.

“W..what happened?” Rhodey asks weakly, his mouth dry and stiff.

Peter tries to not cry, because he can't. He just needs to be strong. He needs to be there for his uncle. “You're okay, Uncle Rhodey… Everything's okay now. You're going to get better...” He squeezes his uncle's hand gently, too ashamed of his failure to protect him to rest against his side.

Rhodey wakes up faster with the teary look on his nephew's face. “Hey, hey.. It's okay.”

Reassurance only makes Peter cry more, and Coulson takes it upon himself to step in. “Colonel, it's good to see you back with us,” Coulson tells him gently, a hand reaching out and squeezing Peter's shoulder gently.

“Thought you were dead,” Rhodey frowns, confused. “Thought I was too...” he admits.

“You're very much alive, Colonel,” Coulson explains. “You've been badly injured, but you're going to recover.”

Rhodey reaches out, hand shaking and pets Peter's hair, trying to soothe them both. “How badly?” He's afraid to know the answer, especially when Coulson hesitates. He's never known that to happen.

“You're spinal cord was.. too mangled to realign properly,” Coulson sadly tells him. “You've been paralyzed...”

Peter hears his uncle gasp and he clings to him harder. “I'm sorry… I'm so sorry..”

Rhodey doesn't understand, even as the words sink in, even as the explanation allows him to understand why his lower half isn't moving quite right. He feels like it is, but the sheets don't rustle, he can't kick them off. “I'm okay,” he tells Peter, voice hollow. “It's okay...”

Coulson knows he's not. It's not hard to see that the Colonel's life is shattering like pieces of a mirror. He's putting out a strong appearance for Peter, because he loves Peter. “How's Tony?” The question makes Peter freeze and draws Coulson's thoughts back to the present.
Peter looks away from Rhodey, and Coulson's heart wants to break for him. He needs to do this though. He's the adult. Peter's under his care now. “He was badly injured.” Coulson steps aside so Rhodey can see the other person sharing the room, can see Tony all laid up, unconscious and bandaged.

Rhodey sucks in a breath as his heart rate increases. “He's in a medically induced coma to help him heal,” Coulson's voice rings in his ears. “A few more days and they'll wake him to continue treatment… Hopefully, everything will turn out okay.”

The Colonel's eyes close as his face is drawn tight with emotion. “How did it happen?”

There's no question that Coulson knows, but even as Peter looks up with curiosity, he plays it off. Peter shouldn't have to find out like this, not yet at least. “They're still looking into the culprits, but whenever we know more, we'll have a better answer. For now,” Coulson looks over at Tony's unconscious form, “we just need to be here for him.”

Peter wants to argue, wants to know what they do know, but Coulson's right. Nothing's more important than his dad right now. He just needs to be there for him. New York City can… handle itself. The world can deal without him for now. He wants to be beside his dad.

“Why don't you get some rest, Peter?” Rhodey suggests, continuing to speak as Peter opens his mouth to protest. “You look like crap, kid. I'm sure if Tony could see you, he'd want you to get some rest.”

It's a low blow, but Peter surrenders. Tony would be the first person to tell him to get some rest. There's no pressing matters right now. His dad's in stable condition. He really would tell Peter to get some rest.

So with a sigh, Peter gets up and makes his way to the cot in the room, laying down and turning his back away from them. He doesn't want them to see him cry from happiness, from fear, from exhaustion.

They watch him pull a blanket over his head, unaware that Peter falls asleep, wishing that everything would go back to the way it was before. Hoping that everything would all be okay.

Chapter End Notes

Totally forgot I started this chapter last night and was planning a new chapter... Until I saw the incomplete chapter and was like.. "Well, okay then." At least I have an idea for what's to come now!
-Drip, drip, drip!-

It smelled like water. It felt cold and his body, stiff. The smell of moisture overwhelmed his senses, and he opened his eyes with fear curdling in his stomach. He knew this place. It was burned too deeply in his memories to forget.

Peter tried to move, but his body was heavy, something solid weighing him down. He was back there. In that place. Adrenaline coursed through his veins as it did during that time, he cried out for help under the building rubble, but there was no one there.

Something red caught his attention and his gaze shifted, sending pain up his back. “D-dad?” He reached out with the one arm that didn't feel like it was about to fall off, trying to grasp at his dad's body. But he couldn't reach. “Dad, wake up! Please!” he begged, tears streaming down his cheeks.

There was no response to his call.

“Someone, help us! Please!” he cried.

“Don't worry, Peter. Everything's okay,” the voice of his Papa came, sounding distant.

“Papa?” Peter choked on the word. “Papa, help dad. You have to help him!”

“Don't worry, Peter. Everything's okay. It's all okay,” Steve's voice repeated, not seeming any closer.

“No! It's not okay!” Peter shrieked, desperate. “He's hurt bad! Help him!”

“It's all okay, Peter,” was the response he got. “Everything’s fine.”

Peter couldn't understand as he tasted salt on his lips. It wasn't fine! It was the furthest thing from fine! His dad needed help, why wouldn't his papa help him? Why was he trying to make him believe that everything’s okay?

“No, please!” he begged. “Please, help him!”

There was silence that it felt like his heartbeat echoed in the area before he got a response.

“I already have.”

With a gasp, Peter jerked away on the cot, cold sweat running down his cheeks. His body was shaking as he reached up and ran a hand through his damp hair. Peter tried to slow down the hammering of his heart, but after that dream, it was hard not to.

Looking over, he saw that his dad was still in bed, no changes to his condition. Rhodey was gone, presumably taken for some tests. Coulson was gone as well, but Peter really had no idea where he could've gone to.

He slung his feet over the cot, getting up and made his way over to his dad's side. It was a huge relief to see his chest rising and falling steadily. In his nightmare, he couldn't tell if his dad was alive or... At least this was real. 'This is reality.' Peter reminded himself firmly. It would do no good to dwell on a nightmare. 'Focus on the now.'
He heard voices outside the door, someone hushing someone else. Peter couldn't quite understand from where he was, so he decided to slip a little bit closer. In hindsight... He wishes he hadn't.

“I'm going to kill Rogers for doing that to Tony,” Rhodey hissed out in the hall.

Coulson agreed more than he thought he ever would. “Agreed. We're currently trying to track Rogers and the others down.” He wouldn't call them 'Avengers'. They lost that title.

“This is going to kill Peter...” Rhodey murmured.

And Rhodey couldn't have spoken truer words, because the moment Peter heard that, his heart breaks. Peter's breath catches in his throat and he loses track of whether he's actually breathing. Sure, he'd wondered where Steve was, though, obviously he wasn't certain that his papa would return to take care of Tony, but... He'd never imagined that the one who did this to his dad... was his papa.

Peter closes his eyes as he remembers the look on their faces years ago when they'd first adopted him. His aunt was dying, and he'd have had no one after she was gone, but somehow he'd gotten lucky and drawn the attention of two very famous people. He hadn't been able to imagine getting used to see his heroes in person, but eventually he had. He'd even managed to call them 'papa' and 'dad'.

They'd treated him so kindly, being there for him when his Aunt May had finally passed away from cancer. It hadn't been the most ideal way to get parents, but Peter is grateful for them, however the circumstance.

Befriending the rest of Avengers was just as nerve-wracking as being adopted by Iron Man and Captain America, but he'd ended up bonding with them over trivial things like video games and science experiments (or pranks, in Clint's case). They'd become a family, and Peter couldn't have asked for better.

Until now.

Now? Now, it was all falling apart. His papa – 'No, Steve.' Steve had done this to Tony, had taken his trust and betrayed it, had stomped on his heart. Tony had honestly hoped to resolve things peacefully between the two groups, Peter knew. He'd listened as his dad had patiently explained the Accords to Spider-Man (as he wasn't aware it was Peter) and how it wasn't ideal, but he was doing his best to try and find a compromise, “just need to get Steve to understand.” The fight at the airport wasn't supposed to happen.

Neither, Peter was certain, was this.

The steady beeping of the heart monitor filled the silence as Rhodey and Coulson left with a nurse to do more tests. Peter was more aware than ever that he'd been so close to losing his dad.

And it was all Steve's fault.

Peter slipped back to Tony's side and gave his hand a squeeze. “I'll be back, Dad. I promise,” he swore, before he let go and walked out the door. He refused to stand by and do nothing, not when he could do something. Peter left the SHIELD base, intent on putting some budding plans into action.
Pepper startled when a door slammed shut, almost dropping her StarkPad. “FRIDAY? What was that?”

There was a moment of hesitation before FRIDAY gave in and replied, “It would appear Peter has returned.”

She couldn't believe it. Why would Peter be here? It was unthinkable that Peter would leave his dad alone for even an instant, not when he was so wounded. So, why was he here?

Walking silently with concern, Pepper made her way to the rooms. Instead of going to Peter's room, a loud sound drew her attention to Steve and Tony's room. It wasn't... She wasn't sure why Peter would be in their room. Unless... he'd found out.

Pepper herself had torn down any old propaganda that was set up about the Tower regarding Captain America as soon as Coulson had called and told her what transpired. She could hardly bring himself to look at them, let alone hold back from burning them all. It had taken all of her willpower not to go out there and declare Rogers more of a target than he'd already made himself.

But Peter...

“Peter?” Pepper questioned as she stepped into the open room. It was large, spacious, just the kind of room that Tony loved. Way too luxurious for her liking, but who was she to question it?

And there was Peter, tearing the room apart and throwing things about. Clothes, Captain America gag gifts... It was when he torn a picture of the three of them, so that only himself and Tony were left, and threw the rest of it away, that she realized he was getting rid of everything that reminded him of Steve Rogers.

It made her heart ache. She wanted to wipe away his pain as easily as she could take a tissue and wipe away his tears, but it wasn't possible. Not when he'd been hurt this badly.

“Peter,” Pepper spoke, voice catching in her throat a moment. “Peter, please stop and look at me.”

Peter paused in his attempts to oust everything Steve Rogers related. He looked up at her with eyes that glittered with unshed tears, lip red from being bitten.

“Talk to me, Sweetie,” Pepper begged.

Peter took a shuddering breath. “He did this.”

His body trembled with emotion in front of her, and God, the only thing Pepper wanted was to find Captain America and his rag-tag gang of followers and rip them a new one. They'd torn apart the warm family that she'd watched bud with Peter's adoption.

“Oh, Peter,” Pepper sighed, sadly. She was heartbroken for him, for Tony. She was angry with herself for accepting those two as a couple. She should've looked closer at Steve, should've seen the signs... The man was obsessive in his search for his past, and ever since the re-emergence of Bucky Barnes, he was relentless in trying to return to that time.
But no one can turn time back. No gods, no mortal. Maybe he was a lost cause from the moment he had woken up.

“I'm so sorry, Peter...” she whispered, afraid to speak any louder, as if it would break Peter.

Peter shook his head, nails digging into his palms as he tightened his hands into fists. “It's not your fault. I should've... I should've been there. I should've stopped them. I knew Steve was becoming obsessed, but I thought...” His voice breaks. “I thought he still loved us...”

Her heart shatters, and she can't just stand by. Pepper rushes over to Peter and pulls him closely into her, hugging him tight. “Oh, Sweetie... I'm sure he loves you both still...”

Peter clings to her, crying softly against her blouse. “He doesn't,” Peter sniffs. “He left us behind... he almost killed Dad... I- I'm not even sure he ever really loved us.” She squeezes him.

“I hate him.”

Pepper's heart froze. She'd never heard Peter say that before. The boy she knew hadn't ever hated anyone, not truly. Peter always forgave those who wronged him. Always. To hear that he hated Steve... Pepper's imagination blossomed with violent images of blood red and torn limbs of one Steve Rogers.

“It's okay to hate him, Peter,” Pepper reassured him. “It's okay.” Because it was. Peter had more than enough reason to hate his former Papa at this moment. She can't imagine how it feels to have his Papa almost kill his Dad.

“We'll get them, right, Pepper?” Peter questioned. It sounded lost to her, desperate for hope and consolation.

“Yes, Sweetie.”

“And... and Dad's going to be okay?”

Pepper smoothed his hair with her hair, trying to calm him down. “Yes. Your dad's going to be just fine,” she said. “I promise.” She leaned away from him to look him in the eyes. “He's pretty stubborn after all.”

Peter snorts, wetly as he wipes his eyes. “Yeah,” he responded, dabbing at his wet eyelashes. “The stubbornist.”

She lets herself grin at him. It feels better to think about Tony being strong, lively and stubborn. The face of Tony Stark, smiling all smug at them as if he'd just pulled a great prank. That face was much more preferable to that than the bruises and cuts, swollen cheek bones on his face with tubes coming from his body...

'Soon,' Pepper swears to herself. He'd recover. He had to.

Chapter End Notes

I need more Peter & Coulson soon...
He wakes up feeling exhausted, wondering what criminals he'd had to take out to feel this horrible, but soon everything comes rushing back to the surface. Peter closes his eyes tightly, curling his arms around his dad's pillow. He doesn't want to wake up.

“Peter?” FRIDAY questions. “Sorry to wake you, but Ms. Potts has made breakfast in the kitchen and is awaiting your arrival.”

The idea of the CEO of Stark Industries making breakfast causes Peter to crack an eye open. It's not normally this way. Normal is waking up in his own room and going into the kitchen to see his papa cooking breakfast while his dad nurses his third cup of coffee, looking exhausted and strung out from his late night fiddling.

Normal is not sitting up and seeing how wrecked one half of the bedroom is. He'd taken extra care not to damage anything he knew as his dad's.

Blearily, Peter kicks a plush of Captain America out of the way as he stumbles out of the bedroom and down the hall. Something smells somewhat good? A little burnt, maybe, but it can't be worse than his dad's cooking.

“Peter, how are you feeling?” Peter's head swivels to see Coulson standing there, cup of coffee in his hand like his dad.

He looks utterly worn out to Coulson, like his heart's been crushed, and he supposes it has. Coulson wants to go out there with all the power of SHIELD and rip the former Avengers a new one for doing this to them.

Peter shrugs as he makes his way to the counter and plops down onto a stool.

“I made your favorites,” Pepper smiled at him. She hated to see how Peter forced a smile for her. She wanted the old Peter back, wanted the old life back. Minus a few… unfortunate pieces of trash.

Simply looking at his food and taking a few nibbles, Pepper exchanged a look with Coulson. “Peter,” she began. “We were thinking that perhaps it might be a good idea to move Avengers headquarters to the Compound.” Peter looks up, startled. “Just for a few weeks,” Pepper promises. “There are going to be a lot of reporters and legal issues to deal with, and we don't think you'd enjoy being mugged by any of them.”

Coulson raises his eyebrow at the wording, but what shocks him is what happens next.

“No.”

They stare at Peter, confounded. Did he just refuse to move to the Compound?

“I mean,” Peter corrected, “I'll go, but I want to meet with the reporters.”

Coulson is now officially concerned and by the look on Pepper's face, so is she.

“I need to tell them what I can.” Pepper opens her mouth, but Peter races on. “You know, I need
to, Ms. Potts. They're going to want to see how I'm 'dealing' with everything and what my take on the whole thing is.” Peter shrugs, helpless. “If I don't do this, there are going to be so many rumors flying around...” He swallows and looks her straight in the eyes. “I don't want them to blame Tony.”

“Oh, Sweetie,” Pepper bites her lip with tears in her eyes as she abandons her coffee and moves around the counter to hug Peter. He hugs her back fiercely. She wants to protect him from everything and everyone. With Tony out of commission, it's up to her and Coulson. She knows Peter's right, but... It's Peter.

When Pepper leans away, Coulson rests a hand on Peter's shoulder, gaining his attention. “Are you positive?” he questions, concern making his forehead wrinkle.

Peter takes a deep breath and nods. “I'm positive. I have to do this. They need to know that-that it's not Tony's fault.” His lips twist into something painful. “It's theirs.”

Coulson and Pepper know exactly who he's talking about. They feel the same way. He squeezes Peter's shoulder, gently, trying to soothe him. “Okay,” he replies. “We'll work something out.”

Pepper nods, agreeing. “I'll arrange for a press release.” She pauses before adding in, “Fix News is not invited.”

After hearing about how utterly addicted and deluded Fix News was about the struggle between the two sides over the Accords, it was no wonder why she didn't want them there. They were obsessed with the idea that it was all Tony's fault, that Captain America could do no wrong. (“It's in the guy's name. 'Captain America'. What's in Iron Man's? Tony-I'm-too-rich-for-the-law-Stark.”) Jerks, the lot of 'em.

“Agreed,” Coulson supported.

Pepper hesitated before reaching out and threading her fingers through Peter's hair. “Tomorrow. I'll arrange it for tomorrow,” she told him.

Soothed, Peter nodded, closing his eyes. 'Tomorrow' – he could do it. Somehow. All he had to do was get out there and defend his dad. And if that meant allowing them to see how broken he was... He'd do it.

“Eat,” Coulson softly urged. “We can go see how Tony's doing after breakfast.”

Anticipation flowing through him, Peter gobbled down his food, ignoring the crunch of slightly burned toast. He was eager to see his dad again. To hear how he was doing. Maybe he was doing better? The week would be up in the next few days.

“Do you want to take a few things to stay the night?” Pepper asked after breakfast was finished.

Peter tilted his head, thinking. There was something... unusual about that look on his face, secret. Coulson couldn't figure out what though.

“Not tonight,” Peter replied. “I have a few things I need to do before tomorrow.”

Coulson looked at Pepper curiously, but she had no idea what he was talking about. Still, neither had the guts to ask. If this was something Peter had to do, then they were going to let him do it.

“Okay,” Pepper said, brushing hair from Peter's forehead. “Just call us if you need us.”

Peter smiled at them, still looking tired, but he seemed better. “I will,” he promised. He just needed
to pay a visit to an old friend…

Chapter End Notes

Who could that be, I wonder...
Tony didn't look any better to him, but at least his uncle was trying his best to cheer Peter up. He knew it was just a front though. Rhodey was pushing himself, Peter was aware.

With a sigh, Peter rubbed his eyes and looked at the clock. 8PM. It wasn't long ago that he'd bid Pepper and Coulson a goodnight. Since that time, he'd locked himself in the lab, eyes viciously going over the Accords.

He was more than well aware that the original Accords were shit – made to control people like him, tag them like cattle. Peter had understood why his papa wasn't against it, but he still… He hadn't seen this.

Handwritten notes, scribbled all over a printed out version of the Accords. The words practically covered the original work, angry red blaring on the white in many places. It was Tony's handwriting. Tony – who was the most technologically attached. Tony – who had billions of dollars and millions of people working beneath him who he could've told to do this.

But it wasn't anyone else. It was Tony Stark.

Steve hadn't listened closely enough, or maybe he hadn't been listening at all when they met in Germany at that airport where Peter was almost crushed by a bridge. Why hadn't he trusted Tony? Wasn't he in love with him?

Or did Bucky change what Steve had felt for Tony, because it'd been plenty obvious to Peter that he clearly favored one over the other. In the battle for trust and affection, Peter can't help but feel that he'd lost to that man.

If Peter hadn't have heard of Bucky before, tales of his deeds beside Steve, perhaps he would've been able to hate him more. The Winter Soldier was the reason his family had been torn apart (it was illogical, because he knew the Accords were a big deal, yet he couldn't help it), but it wasn't the man himself. It was Steve. It was Clint. It was Wanda. It was Natasha. It was the people he'd once trusted his life with.

And now? ...He felt abandoned. How was he supposed to handle this? How did one handle their loved ones leaving them behind without a word?

Of course, it wasn't just heartbreak and a feeling of abandonment that accompanied him as he read through all of Tony's notes. There was an unmistakable feeling of rage. Because this? Tony had done this. They'd fought and run, but Tony'd had the intention to stay and fight it in the least violent way possible.

And they'd beat him. Destroyed him to near death.
Peter was beyond angry when he finally got done reading through the notes. “I'm going out, Fri.
Security measures: Web-XZKR92.”

“Security measure: Web-XZKR92 active. Have a safe night, Peter,” FRIDAY told him as he
donned his suit and stepped up to the open window.

“Always try to, Fri. Always try to,” Peter replied before he leaped out into the open air.

Shooting webs from his wrists, Peter tried to lose himself in the feeling of flying through the air. It
made him feel weightless, normally. Unfortunately, he couldn't rid himself completely of the
weight that threatened to crush him.

Groaning, he continued on, stopping any crimes in his path. (Childishly, he almost stopped to kick
a cardboard cut out of Captain America over. He restrained. He could be an adult, no matter what
Tony said.)

With a final spinning fall, he landed on a familiar rooftop in one of the darker parts of the city,
where it smelled like alcohol and tears.

“You didn't call,” a familiar voice said from the shadows.

“Didn't feel up to it tonight, DD,” Peter said, not even attempting to convince his companion of
his sour mood.

“I understand,” Daredevil replied, settling next to Peter's side and overlooking Hell's Kitchen.
“Are you doing okay?”

Peter closed his eyes and took a breath. “No.”

Matt wasn't surprised. He's not sure how he felt either, and he was in no way, shape or form,
related to that whole debacle. Unlike Peter. He felt for the kid. He truly did.

As much as he'd wanted to ream Peter's ass for going along with Stark to Germany, he couldn't
bring himself to say a harsh word to him. Peter's body practically oozed misery. Matt would really
be a devil if he kicked Peter while he was down.

Besides, there was Rogers. Matt wanted to let the devil inside of him lash out at the former hero.
He wanted to feel the man's bones break under his. Anything to make him feel a piece of what
Peter was feeling.

“Do you need anything?” Matt questions, gentle.

Peter couldn't help but be grateful he hadn't said “I'm sorry”. He'd heard those words a lot lately
and knew that it wasn't about to stop any time soon. Despite knowing how Matt's offer is genuine,
he can't help but hesitate.

“ Anything at all, Peter,” Mat murmurs, noticing the uptick in Peter's heartbeat.

He listens to Peter take a big breath and then sigh. “A friend…”

Matt reaches over and put his hand on Peter's shoulder, feeling the textured material beneath his
fingertips, and squeezes. “You have me.”

Peter smiled a little, reaching up and holding Matt's hand on his shoulder. For someone who was
called “The Devil of Hell's Kitchen” the man was surprisingly soft and kind. “There's going to be
a meeting with the press tomorrow. Will...” Peter swallowed, feeling anxious. “Will you be with
Matt's lips curled, fond. “Of course. Whatever you need, Peter.” And he meant it. He'd become so attached to the young vigilante that the devil inside of him would stop at nothing to protect Peter. If that meant standing by Peter's side throughout the ordeal tomorrow, he'd be there.

“Just to clarify, you mean without masks, right?”

Peter snorted, amused. “No, I want the Devil to stand by me when I talk to the press. Of course, I mean without masks.”

Well, Matt just had to be sure.

Chapter End Notes

Anyone see that coming? Just curious. Haha~
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Peter stands in front of the media.

Chapter Notes

Pretty long speech of Peter's... Sorry?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Calm down, Peter,” Matt murmured softly. “Everything's going to be okay.”

Pepper and Coulson had no idea who this Matt character was, but with as gentle as he was being with Peter… They could deal with it.

“I am calm,” Peter fibbed. Nobody believed him, but then again, he didn't even believe himself. He was a complete and total wreck on the inside. It was mostly because his papa had almost killed his dad and abandoned them, but he was never good with the press. Even as Spider-Man, he found himself stumbling over his words to them.

Matt put his hand on Peter's shoulder and rubbed it. “It's going to be okay, Peter. Just take a deep breath.”

Peter took a deep breath, closing his eyes and then released it. As he did, his breathing evened out and his muscles relaxed. They were relieved to see the tense coils of anxiety unwind from him.

“Okay,” Peter spoke, opening his eyes and looking at them. “I'm ready. I'm good. Let's go.” Determination glinted in his eyes and they weren't about to discourage him. If anything, they were ready to support him and keep their eyes on him (Pepper wasn't sure Matt was capable of that, but still). They'd be there for him.

Peter quietly thanked Matt, low enough that no one else but he heard, and then he followed Pepper out into the hall, where lights flashed and loud voices yelled for answers. Some of them even yelled accusations, asking whether they were true or not. Peter wanted to punch their cameras in.

“Be quiet!” Pepper scolded, her eyes narrowing down on the vultures that were the media. She wasn't about to let them run over Tony’s son. Not while she was around, ever. It pleased her when they all settled down, murmuring amongst themselves in hushed tones. “Good,” her gaze swept over the fray.

“As you all know, recent events that stemmed from the Accords and the terrorist attack that killed many have lead to a much more chaotic result. The Accords, spurned from the destruction caused by several Avengers operating in a foreign country, were meant to bring things under control, but underneath it all, they had a different meaning. Control.” Pepper's eyes slid over to Peter briefly before returning back to the crowd.
“They weren't perfect. Not by a longshot, contrary to what the government powers will tell you, but they were a work in progress. A work that never quite got to a point of debate before Steve Rogers and several other Avengers went rogue, deciding that they knew better than people more well versed in the political world.” Someone objected to “Captain America” being in the wrong in the crowd, and Peter tensed up.

Pepper glared in the direction of the objector. “Make no mistake, Tony Stark attempted to explain the situation to Steve Rogers, but he wasn't open to listen. This falls no on Tony Stark but on Steve Rogers, and Captain America or not, he's still human and very much capable of overestimating himself. Everyone fucks up, and this time? He hit the jackpot.”

“How do you know!?” Someone cried.

“Because,” Peter felt it time to step forward, “he almost killed my dad, and abandoned us—abandoned me.” Pepper looked at him with concern, but Peter forced himself to continue, voice wavering. “He could've stayed, listened, tried to right the wrongs in the Accords, but no. He forgot what it was like to have responsibilities. To his country, to his friends… to his family.” Peter's voice broke and he closed his eyes to ground himself. He refused to cry in front of all these people.

Steadying himself, Peter pressed on. “You might not know me all that well, but I'm sure you've heard the rumors that flooded the media when word slipped when they first adopted me. They took me in when I had no one, showed me love and kindness.” He tried to ignore the memories of watching TV together, teasing each other.

"We were a family...” A solitary tear ran down his cheek before he reached up and swiped it away with anger. “And now we're not, because what family turns against the other half and nearly kills one of them? Steve Rogers almost killed my dad. He left us behind, like some street trash.”

Matt wanted to go out there and pull Peter away from those vultures who were eating up the news. He also wanted to find Captain America and show him why he's called 'The Devil of Hell's Kitchen'. Surely, Foggy would understand.

“I can't have a papa who almost kills my dad,” Peter affirmed. “I know that there are those of you who won't believe the stories of how my dad – Tony Stark, tried to negotiate, tried to settle things peacefully. He's not exactly the War Hero that Captain America was bred to be, but to me? He's my dad – the only one I have left, and I want you to know that I'd rather have a hero who refuses to leave his family behind than one who turns his back without a second thought.”

“He may be called Captain America, but a title doesn't make a hero. As a great man once said, 'Actions speak louder than words', and I'd like for everyone to look around and see for themselves.” Peter took another breath, because there were still some words that he needed to say, for Tony.

“In all of the battles that the Avengers took part in, lives were lost. We lost our loved ones, those we cared for, those were never got the chance to truly know, and some of you may have heard of the ongoing efforts Stark Industries is supporting to rebuild. My dad hasn't stopped trying to do everything he can do ensure that we never suffer the losses that we did then, but, like everything, it takes time and hard work. The Avengers may not be what they were, but I deeply believe that powers don't make a hero. The desire to protect and save others is what makes a hero.”

Peter looks over the crowd, eyes trying to look at every single person in the room. “So I'm asking you, all of you, to be heroes now. The Avengers may be no more, but that doesn't mean heroes are too. Thank you.”
There was a rush of flashes as cameras went off, questioning murmurs that arose throughout the room, but Peter couldn't stand still. He remained calm as he walked out of view, and then he crumbled. His heart constricted in his chest and his breath came out in gasps.

“Ssh, Peter,” Coulson gently whispered as he wrapped his arms around the trembling, hyperventilating boy. “It's okay. Everything's okay now.” He ran his fingers through Peter's slightly damp hair. “You did good. We're so proud of you...”

Peter could only hope so as he heard Pepper back in the limelight.

Chapter End Notes

Not a clue how this chapter turned out, but I'm pretty tired and my condition isn't the best at the moment. Hopefully, it passes?
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Someone's watching the news.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“...in recent news, Tony Stark's whereabouts are still unknown, and there's been some speculation as to whether he's still alive or not.”

T’Challa sighed, rubbing his eyes as he tried to focus on the TV screen. He’d turned on the news for the United States to see how things were going, but it seemed like it was only getting worse. It's not the first time he's regretted allowing Rogers and his companions to come along with Barnes. The group seemed to think that since he allowed them into his country, they were free to do as they pleased. That most certainly was not the case. He had a duty to his country, to his people not to bring them harm, to protect them.

How protected would they be if the world found out the fugitives were in Wakanda?

The door creaked open to the lounge, but T’Challa didn't even look back, having already been alerted as to who it was.

“How has the testing been? I hear the scientists are making speculations enough to fill the nightsky,” T’Challa noted, eyes slipping away from the TV to meet Bucky's.

“You may join me, Barnes,” T’Challa replied to the unanswered question. He didn't mind the former Winter Soldier's company when the labs woke him for neuropathic testing. The man was quiet and wise. He was more open to mediation that it seemed Rogers was.

Bucky silently padded over to the couch where T’Challa was sitting, sprawled out in a very leisurely manner. He did own the place, and it looked comfy enough, so Bucky simply plopped down beside him and crossed his legs.

“How has the testing been? I hear the scientists are making speculations enough to fill the nightsky,” T’Challa noted, eyes slipping away from the TV to meet Bucky's.

“It feels like it,” Bucky admitted out loud. He couldn't keep up with all the scientific talk that went on in the labs. It all went sailing over his head. “What are you watching?”

Any amusement T’Challa had been feeling dimmed, and with a grimace, he turned his attention back to the TV. “Wakanda may be a secluded country, but I find it helps to keep in touch with what is going on with the outside world.”

“...And now we go to a live press conference in the press hall at Stark Industries.”

Bucky felt his muscles tense and his heart grow cold at the news, but he forced himself to watch. He wanted to hear this. Ever since he'd arrived in Wakana, he'd felt something akin to grief and regret squeeze at his insides. He'd even been avoiding Steve for some reason that he wasn't quite fully aware of.
He was free. Steve was here. T'Challa's scientists were working on removing any linger effects from Hydra. Yet why did it feel so wrong?

And when that boy - Peter Parker, his mind supplied – began to talk, Bucky's heart dropped.

"Because he almost killed my dad, and abandoned us- abandoned me...He could've stayed, listened, tried to right the wrongs in the Accords, but no. He forgot what it was like to have responsibilities. To his country, to his friends... to his family."

'Jesus, fuck! This is Steve and Stark's son!?' Bucky closes his eyes, in pain. He hadn't realized… He'd known they had a son, but he'd never gotten a picture of the boy or even learned his name until now. Now Peter Parker stood out more than everyone else. Now Bucky could see how much pain he's in.

"...what family turns against the other half and nearly kills one of them? Steve Rogers almost killed my dad. He left us behind, like some street trash."

What family indeed… T'Challa's eyes were trained on the screen, his stomach turning in ways it hasn't since he'd first begun training to take over his father's mantle.

They watched Peter practically flee from the stage, trained eyes noting how he was shaking. It couldn't have been easy for him, not by a longshot. He was brave; the speech proved that, but what child should have to take a stand in front of everyone and beg them to understand, to see that his papa almost killed his dad… to see that he's been abandoned.

"..I don't know about anyone else, Chris, but I think Peter has made us all re-think who deserves support and who doesn't. I think I speak for all the staff here when I say that our hearts go out to him and Tony Stark. We can only hope they can recover from this tragic event."

The news switches over to the weather, while reports run along the bottom of how the governments are investigating Peter's words, trying to hunt down leads to the former Avengers. One line even reads, “Governor of NY vows to protect the city.”

At first.. Bucky wasn't quite sure how to feel, watching the news with Steve's son's words ringing in his ears. He didn't mean to hurt Stark. Well, okay. He might've hurt him, but it wasn't because he wanted to hurt him. He thought... He thought Steve needed saving again. Just like old times.

'Boy, what a fucking idiot I am,' Bucky couldn't help but bitterly think as Peter's face appeared in front of his eyes. The boy's face looked different than he saw on screen, puffy eyed and tear stained cheeks as he cried for his dad, as his heart broke from what Steve had done to them.

He should've known by now that Steve didn't need saving anymore, in fact – the one who'd needed saving at the time was Stark. Regret bubbled up in his chest, anger worse than anything he'd ever experienced. Anger at himself, at the Avengers... At Steve.

“I imagine we both have had a 'change of heart', so to speak,” T'Challa spoke, noticing the emotions flickering in the former assassin's eyes. Honestly, he felt very much the same way. He should've been there to help Tony Stark, but he hadn't. He mourned the loss of the family that had shattered under the recent events, and less than secretly, he wanted to punch Rogers.

“..Is Stark going to be okay?” Bucky whispered softly, concerned and overwhelmed by this new information.

T'Challa eyed him for a moment, wondering whether or not the concern was real. “I shall put in a request for the information.” He stood, Bucky standing after him. “I will keep you informed… You may use my private room if you desire to have a word with Rogers.”
Bucky's cold, metallic hand squeezed as his jaw clenched at the idea. “I think I just might. Thanks, Your Majesty.”

“Of course,” T’Challa nodded and exited the room, intent on finding out just what was going on in the United States now, hoping that some innocent boy wasn't about to lose the last parent he had left.

Chapter End Notes

I almost didn't finish this chapter tonight, because I'm working overtime in the morning. I figured that since I'm awake now and I'll probably be exhausted tomorrow night, why not?

Let me know what you think of the two new characters?
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Bucky has some choice words for a certain someone.

Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry for all the swearing. I'm not sure how it happened.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was clear to Steve that when Bucky walked into the Avengers' living space in the palace, that he wasn't happy. It instantly concerned him, because when Bucky wasn't happy bad things happened. Like that time someone made fun of how Steve couldn't budge a punching bag. That very same someone had ended up in the garbage bin with a banana peel on their rear.

So, yeah. Steve was a little ill at ease at the wildly unconstrained expression of outrage on Bucky's face.

“H-hey, Bucky? Are you okay?” Steve questioned, trying to calm Bucky down, but the look on his face only seemed to get darker when his eyes met Steve's.

“You...” Bucky growled, eyes narrowing as they found Steve's. The man looked so confused and concerned, but all Bucky could remember was that boy's face on the screen with heartbreak in his eyes. He found his fists clutching Steve's shirt as he banged the man into the wall. “You didn't tell me you had a family.”

Eyes wide and throat constricted, Steve looked down at his friend, any other Avengers in the vicinity gaping. “I-I – You know that I married Tony!” How couldn't he have known when the media had a field day with that news.

“You didn't tell me you have a son,” Bucky hissed, angry.

Steve's face paled, blood roaring in his ears. “I- I- How do you know about Peter?” he questioned, trying to ignore Bucky's words.

Bucky's teeth ground almost audibly. “Turn on the TV, Barton,” Bucky commanded, eyes not looking away from Steve.

Clint, who'd watched the exchange with horror, carefully slid over and flipped the TV on. It was the News channel.

“In recent news, Peter Parker, son of Tony Stark and Steve Rogers, has come out to give us his take on what happened that broke up the Avengers. It's safe to say that his story of heartbreak and loss has taken hold of the nation as reporters scramble to find the truth,” a newswoman was reporting. “What do we know so far, Chris?”
“Well, Sharon, it seems that Captain America isn't as great as his legacy, in my opinion. I actually called my son after hearing Peter's speech to tell him how much I love him. From one father to another, I think Rogers is insane to have abandoned his son. I have no idea what he's thinking leaving his son and doing what he did to Tony Stark,” a newsmen said.

“Honestly, Chris, I feel the same way. My heart goes out to Tony and his son,” Sharon replied. “Let's watch play part of that speech again for those of you who are just tuning in with us.”

“Steve Rogers almost killed my dad. He left us behind, like some street trash… I know that there are those of you who won't believe the stories of how my dad – Tony Stark, tried to negotiate, tried to settle things peacefully. He's not exactly the War Hero that Captain America was bred to be, but to me? He's my dad – the only one I have left, and I want you to know that I'd rather have a hero who refuses to leave his family behind than one who turns his back without a second thought.”

Peter. Steve's heart dropped. It's not like he'd forgotten about his son… He hadn't! It's just… He thought he could wait. God, thinking about it makes him feel queasy and like such an dumbass. He thought his son could wait?

“I-I…” Steve's throat closed up. He wasn't sure he could remember how to breathe, but it didn't matter. Bucky pulled him forward and slammed him into the wall again.

“This is your fuckin' fault, Steve,” Bucky bit out. 'And mine…’ “I knew you and Tony were having issues, but fuck! I'm such a fucking idiot for following you like that! All of you! I thought we swore never to abandon our family again when we went to war, Steve. But you just leave them like that? And your husband might be fucking dead and you don't seem to care!” Rage and guilt were warring inside of him, but he focused it all on Steve right now, because it was too much for just himself.

“I fought by your side, because I thought that he could hurt you, but I was so damn wrong. You hurt him!” ‘We hurt him.’ “You told me he'd be okay. That SHIELD would take good care of him, that we had only really damaged the suit.” Bucky closed his eyes for a moment, remembering the appearance and wondering how stupid he'd been. Surely, it was the stupidest thing he'd ever done. “I trusted you, let you convince me, but you lied to me.”

Clint, Wanda, Scott, and Sam were staring, fixated on the scene in front of them. The man who Steve had been over the moon to see was now standing in front of him, looking like he'd rather be around anyone but Steve.

“I don't think you understand, Barnes,” Clint said, stepping up like an idiot. He wanted to right a wrong, tell Bucky that Steve had been right.

And then Bucky's gaze fell on him and the archer froze. “I don't understand?” the words left Bucky's tongue like something sticky. “What the fuck don't I understand, Barton? Huh!? He abandoned his kid, made me believe that everything would be okay with Stark, but it's not! He lied to me!” Bucky’s eyes narrowed on Clint. “You all lied to me.”

Scott raised his hand. “I didn't?” No one looked at him.

“Bucky, please,” Steve begged, wanting to quell his best friend's anger. “It's not what you think...”

“Not what I think!? I think you're sitting here, protected by T'Challa like some damn coward,
running away from your family – the family you destroyed! Tell me, Steve..” Bucky reached out and turned Steve's head towards the TV where an image of Peter, a solitary tear running down his broken face, was displayed. “If not you, then who the fuck did that?”

Steve didn't have any words. Not with Peter's teary eyes, prominently highlighted by the screen. Had he really caused that?… Something akin to guilt and self-hate began to fester in his stomach.

Bucky snorted, noticing Steve wasn't even trying to defend himself. “That's what I thought,” he bitterly ground out. Taking a breath, he stepped away, letting Steve go.

And then without warning, metal met flesh, cracking bone, and Steve fell back against the wall. Bucky hadn't ever hit Steve like that before, hadn't seen the man stare up at him with wide eyes as he clutched his broken cheek. It felt good though. All too good.

Looking down at Steve, Bucky glared. “You've disappointed me. Stay the fuck away unless you want another broken cheek.” He clenched his fist, metal creaking. “If you do, feel free, but you better keep your distance, Rogers.”

Then Bucky left without another word, without looking at anyone else.

“Seriously, guys. I didn't lie to him, did I?” Scott questioned. No one answered, shock lingering in the room. Everyone was left wondering, 'How did things go so wrong?'

Chapter End Notes

First off, thanks to everyone who left me comments on the last chapter! I didn't expect to get so many! They really cheered me up and helped me get through some hard times recently.

I hope you all enjoyed this chapter!

Thank you~
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Awake.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Some people say that waking up is like a blur, but to Tony, waking up is more like blotches. To him, pieces are missing, but he can't identify them. His limbs tingle and an annoying beeping sound makes him want to get up and hit whatever's making it with a baseball bat. Unfortunately, when he tries, he can't move.

Tony whines, a sort of gargled, drugged up whine.

“Tony!”

Bruce's heart soars with hope and relief as he sees Tony's eyes narrow and flicker about. He's awake. That's all that matters to him. Gosh, Bruce hadn't expected any of this to happen. He hadn't expected to wake up one day and realize just how badly things had gotten while he was away.

It must have been hard, but Tony had always assured him that he had everything well in hand… Bruce is sad to realize that Tony's a better liar than he'd previously thought. He's going to have to watch out for that now.

Or maybe it was the distance that allowed it. So far apart and unable to lay eyes on the man, Bruce had only his voice and words to listen to, to judge true or false. If that's the case, then it's his fault that this happened, that Tony's just now waking up from a coma, beaten and abandoned by part of his family.

But now that Bruce is back, he's going to get to the bottom of this. He's going to be by Tony and Peter's side to protect them. He sure as Hell won't let Rogers or his cronies near them. With Hulk as his witness, he promises it.

“Brucie, Baby, is that your lovely voice calling my name?~” Tony's voice cracks, dry from disuse. It makes him wince. He never did like waking up in medical… Who likes hospitals anyways? Besides, vampires and nurses, but to Tony, they were kinda the same thing anyways.

Bruce doesn't hesitate to shift the pillow enough to prop Tony's head up a bit and gets a cup of ice water with a straw. “Drink, slowly.” Tony goes to take a drink and Bruce feels the need to repeat himself. “Slowly.”

Tony gives him a pointed look. He knows what 'slowly' means. It just so happens that going slow sucks most of the time, but he'll listen to Bruce. His lab buddy always knew best. (Except for when it came to relationships. Who thought a walk in the park was a date?)

Taking slow sips, Tony feels the cool water wash down his throat, giving him instant relief. He frowns, forcing his unbroken arm up so he can rub at his eyes. It feels like someone tried to
superglue them shut. “Wh-what happened?” And then he realizes who isn't there. “Where's
Peter?” He starts to panic.

“He's on his way,” Bruce hurried to assure him. “Agent Coulson called him as soon as the doctors
said you'd be awake soon.”

Tony tries to calm down, but after the rush of memories… After… Rogers… He just can't seem to
stop thinking. What if Peter hates him? What if he doesn't want to live with him? Does he think it's
his fault? “Is he okay?” the words slip from his lips.

Bruce brushes a strand of hair from Tony's forehead. “Yes. He didn't leave your side for the first
little bit until… he had to do some things.” He didn't quite know what, but the press conference
was probably part of the reason. “Pepper convinced him to take some time to rest at the Tower. It's
not like SHIELD is the easiest place to relax.”

Far be it for Tony to disagree on that issue. He's quite ready to leave SHIELD himself, and him,
just having woken up. “What do you know?” He's almost afraid to get the answer, but he has to
ask. A scientist always knows that if you don't question, don't research, you'll never get an
answer.

“All right.”

Their heads swivel towards the door where a nurse wheels Rhodey in through the open door. The
man's eyes are burning with fire, but it's not directed at any of those present. It's for someone who
he'll never feel respect for again, for someone he'd like to drop in a volcano.

“Fuck, Rhodey…” Tony swallows, taking in everything.

Rhodey snorts. “Yeah. Same to you, Tones.” The nurse places his wheelchair beside Tony's bed,
allowing him to reach out and hold Tony's bandaged hand. “I'm glad to see you're awake. It's
been too damn long.”

Tony chuckles, watery. It's not hard to see how concerned and relieved his friend is. His face is so
distraught that Tony feels guilty for putting him through all of this. “I missed you too, Teddy
Bear.”

“Yeah~ Just because I can't kick your ass doesn't mean I can't kick your ass for calling me that,”
Rhodey warns, light-hearted. There's a twinge of pain about his lower half, about never being able
to walk like he once did again, but he's going to deal with it. That's what he has to do, so he will.

The door slams open, startling Bruce into almost dropping the cup of ice water. It's Peter. His face
is damp with sweat, cheeks tinted red like he'd been out in the cold, and there's a distinct blueish
bruise on his right temple. “Dad!” Peter races over to take Tony's free side, throwing his arms
around his dad as carefully as he could and clinging to him.

“I missed you! I was so worried! I-I- I don't know what I would done without you,” Peter begins
to sob, and fuck, if that doesn't make Tony's heart break. He'd never liked seeing Peter cry since
he'd been adopted, and he hated being the reason.

“Hey, hey.. I'm okay, I'm here,” Tony soothed, petting Peter's cool, damp hair with the hand that
Rhodey had graciously freed. “It's okay. Everything's going to be okay...” He ran his fingers
through Peter's hair, desperately wishing he could pull Peter in bed with him and cling to his son.

Bruce and Rhodey watched the scene in silence, emotions fraying. They're not sure how long it
took, but eventually the two separated to get a better look at each other. Maybe also because Tony
was starting to cough again a bit. Bruce hurried to give him some more water.
After he'd drank enough to soothe his throat, Tony turned to Peter and gestured towards his face. “What happened there, Buttercup?”

Peter reached up, confused for a second before his fingertips connected with the bruise, making him wince. “I.. um...” he stumbled over his words, “I had a small accident on my way here. I was in such a hurry, I wasn't paying attention to where I was going and, well.. wham!” He chuckled, embarrassed.

The three adults couldn't help but laugh a bit. That was their Peter. Two steps forward and not thinking things through entirely. “Make sure he ices that, Brucie Bear,” Tony directed.

Bruce was definitely going to make sure that happened. The boy always seemed to be coming back with injuries. After the doctors checked Tony out. “First, we have to let the doctors know you're awake so they can check up on you, and then we'll get Peter some ice, okay?”

Tony whined. “But – But… I hate vampires!” Bruce set the cup down and walked out of the room. “Brucie Bear! Lab buddy!” Well… fine. He'd get checked out. Maybe he could sway the doctor to release him for good behavior…

It was a good distracting thought from what was to come.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, now I seriously have to get to finishing my fic for Flashwave. I'm so behind, and Coldflash starts next month, and then I have the fic exchange... And yet I have a feeling I won't be able to leave this fic for long. Haha~ Well, I'll just do my best, eh?

Thanks for all the wonderful comments!

tumblr: tabihe
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Tony tells them about what happened.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Well?”

If there was ever a time to run and hide, Tony thinks now is definitely it. “Well, what?” He shifts, uneasy as Pepper looms over his hospital bed, foot tapping the ground impatiently with her hands on her hips.

“Don't you play that game with me, Mister,” Pepper said, glaring at Tony. “I've had news reporters and politicians down my throat about what happened.”

Tony felt bad about that, and from the looks of it, Peter was so close to slipping out of the room. “It's fine, Pep,” he tried to tell her, but that was obviously the wrong thing to say.

“It's not fine!” Peter stood up, taking on a similar posture to Pepper's. He's starting to think Clint was right when he said he was becoming a lot like Pepper. Well, he can't afford to care right now. He sees how brittle is dad is in bed, so he sighs. “Please, Dad,” Peter begs, hand finding Tony's. “We need to know what exactly happened, so we can go after them.”

It makes Rhodey want to throw up by how similar this feels to a rape case. Begging the victim to speak up, to speak out against the attacker… He imagines more than one way to tear Rogers and his gang apart with his bare hands. He can do it. He was trained to be a soldier.

Tony gives Peter a pained look. He doesn't want to tell him about what happened, about how Rogers and Barnes nearly beat him to death with little care of his life. “Peter... Are you sure you want to know?”

Peter reaches out with his free hand and fixes Tony's pillow a little, looking into his eyes with determination. “I need to know, Dad... We need to know what happened in order to help you.”

“Even if it makes you hate Steve?” The very name tastes sour on his tongue as it slips out.

“It can't make me hate, Dad,” Peter soothes. “I get to decide who to hate and why. It'll be okay. Please?”

So Tony spills everything, ignoring the tightening of Peter's hand in his, the way Coulson steadies Bruce, who's turning more than a little green. He tries to ignore the looks of rage on Pepper and Rhodey's faces. It's so hard not to remember the sounds of footsteps, Captain America and the Winter Soldier leaving him laying on the cold, hard floor. Leaving him for dead...

“I-I'm sorry...”

Tony's head shoots up to look at Peter, shocked at his words. “What?” he questions, dumbly.
Peter forgets everything and crawls into bed with his dad, wrapping his arms around him and hiding his teary face against Tony's neck. “I should've- should've been there… I should've been there to protect you...” He sobs, feeling guilt and helplessness overwhelm him. He should've fought harder in Germany. He regrets not punching Cap in the nose, not being able to make him listen.

“If only I'd done more...” Peter's voice is muffled against his neck, but Tony wraps his arms around him as best as he can with the one broken. It doesn't matter to him how much it hurts. Right now, he just needs to hold his son, to reassure him that it's okay.

“Sssh.. Petey...” Tony shushes gently. “It's not your fault. There's nothing you could've done...”

Peter shakes his head, but can't bring himself to say more. He can't bring himself to tell him why he feels bad. He's angry at himself, but most of all he's angry at the people he once thought of as family.

Pepper, Rhodey, Bruce, and Coulson watch on with sorrow. They wish they could help, but it's hard to help when the mess is bigger than their own country even. Coulson wanders closer, unable to stop himself from reaching out and running his fingers through Peter's hair. He wanted to be able to comfort him, but for once he wasn't quite sure what to say.

Peter's stomach growls making everyone chuckle. It's also what makes Peter pull away, wiping his eyes. It feels good that his dad doesn't hesitate to reach up and wipe away the tears on his cheeks. “Thanks,” he mutters, embarrassed.

“Surely, they fed you while I was out?” Tony joked.

Blushing, Peter nodded. “I just… didn't get a chance to eat dinner.” He didn't look at Pepper. She had left some food for him for dinner, but… He'd forgotten about it and went swinging.

“Peter...” Pepper warned.

“Sorry, Ms. Potts,” Peter apologized, dutifully.

It sounded so much like Tony's apologies to her that the man himself had snorted, subsequently wincing due to the pain it caused him. “Damn, kid. You're way too much like me.”

“Better to be like you than Cap,” Peter couldn't help, but point out.

No one could disagree with that right now. “I'm sorry, Peter,” Tony said. What happened isn't his fault, but he still feels like he could've done more. There's a big gaping hole where Steve used to be and it hurts, but while he lost a husband, Peter lost his papa. The kid has lost too many people already; first his parents, then his aunt and uncle... Now Steve.

Viciously, Peter shook his head, ignoring the way his head throbbed at the action. “It's not your fault, Dad. You did everything you could.” Peter held Tony's hand. “Thank you for staying...”

Tony squeezed his hand back. God, he never wanted to let go. He might never let go again. He let go of Steve once and lost him. Never did he want to lose Peter like that. “I'm not going anywhere,” he promised.

Bruce cleared his throat. “I think Peter could use some food.” The scientist looked Peter over, noting the way the boy held himself a little gingerly. He looked exhausted. “Some rest too, I believe.”

“You know best, Brucie Bear!” Tony let Peter's hand go with great effort. “Go get him some food
and put him to bed.”

Peter sputtered.

“And a bedtime story!”

“I’m not a baby, Dad!” Peter exclaimed as Bruce gently took his arm and began to tug him to the door.

“You'll always be my baby!” Tony called out after them as Bruce pulled Peter out of the door, face red as a beet.

Coulson, Pepper, and Rhodye shook their heads fondly. “You should be getting some rest too, Tones,” Rhodye insinuated.

Raising his eyebrows, Coulson couldn’t help but tack on. “I believe that goes for you too, Colonel.”

Tony cackled as Pepper rolled Rhodye to his bed across the room. It was hilarious to see him chastised like that. Only Coulson.

Muttering swear at Tony, Rhodye let Pepper help him into his bed and get him comfy. “Rest,” Pepper said kindly. Her eyes went to Tony. “Both of you. Everything can wait until tomorrow.”

Coulson nodded in support. Tony wanted to argue that there was work to be done, but he really didn’t want to think about dealing with the government and the media. Sleep sounded like a good idea… And he faded off, sinking into his drugged sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Couldn't help but think of Tony & Steve when I was listening to this song:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYCKHNINwVA&index=27&list=RDIG3ZmJKm8aM

(I swear, I'm going to actually update my other works.... sometime soon... Haha~)
“Peter did what!?” Tony groaned, falling back into the bed with a pained grunt. He can't believe his kid said that. He's not upset... not really. I mean, he hates that Peter put himself in front of those vultures, but at the same time, he feels all warm and tingly inside. It feels good to be picked over Steve, to be visibly loved like that. It's more than his family ever did for him.

Coulson raises an eyebrow. “He did a good job. Very moving. There are people out there who are rethinking everything they've thought about the situation.” And yet... he's sure that there's something more... Peter's hiding something from them, and it makes him worry.

“Peter's friend, Matthew Murdock, is very kind. He showed up to support Peter during the press release,” Pepper remarked.

“Who?” Tony frowned, trying to remember if Peter's ever mentioned someone by that name. He's not sure, but he has a feeling he's never heard of this guy. “Who's this 'Matt' kid?”

Pepper bit her lip and exchanged a look with Rhodey. “Well, he's not exactly a 'kid', Tony,” she admitted.

“He's an adult,” Rhodey bluntly said. “Maybe 30 something?” He's not exactly sure. The man may have been blind and appeared older, but he moved oddly. It was almost like he was more capable than he appeared. 'Suspicious...'

Tony looks at Coulson, narrowing his eyes at him. “Tell me you've already started looking into this 'Matt' character.”

“Of course,” Coulson replied. He'd already put in a request for the information as well as... some agents to keep an eye on the man. It was disappointing that they'd already lost him several times. He seemed so normal, but there was just something off...

Not just with him, but with Peter too. Coulson didn't want to tell Tony that, not yet. Not until he had proof and the man was a bit more stable. His hunches could wait.

“He seemed like a nice man,” Pepper noted, trying to appease Tony's curiosity and concern.

“Yeah, well...” Tony said, slowly. “Can't judge a computer by it's hardware.” He thought Steve was nice too... Now, he wasn't quite as sure.

He wondered what Peter is doing...

Peter isn't having fun. He should've known better than to access the news sites, but he just couldn't
help himself. The things people were saying made him want to go out there and web them up. He could find them with FRIDAY’s help and Spider-Man could pay them a visit.

As if the Bugle didn't say enough bad things about him already though…

Peter groans. He doesn't want to read about how people are arguing 'how could Captain America be wrong? If anyone's wrong, isn't it always Stark?' It was ridiculous how they made it out to be a matter of who had done more for the country.

Captain America was a war hero that they all grew up learning about, being taught about how amazing he was, how heroic… Tony didn't have that history. There wasn't years upon years of people being told about how amazing he was. Tony was and is amazing, but the media… the citizens haven't had a chance to learn just how amazing he is. After all, only one person was practically worshiped for years, and it certainly wasn't him.

“Bruce~” Peter complains, tossing his phone aside. “Did we have to come back to the Tower? I couldn't slept in Tony's room?”

Bruce looks up from the take-out menu, raising an eyebrow. “Tony's room is currently in SHIELD's Medbay, Peter. I highly doubt that you'd be as comfortable there as you are here. Plus, Tony told me to bring you back. Something about 'needing his beauty sleep',” Bruce explained. They both knew it was a lie, but it was still funny.

“He's going to need a lot of sleep then, isn't he?” Peter questions, lips quirking in a smile.

Bruce couldn't help but grin back. “I think you might be right.” He held up the menu. “Pizza sound good?”

Peter sat up straight. “Pizza is always good,” he seriously replied. It most certainly was. And he was starting to get hungrier.

“FRIDAY, can you place Peter and mine's usual orders?” Bruce asks. Peter's stomach growls loudly. “Better make that double for Peter's.” He saw Peter blush a bit.

“Of course, Dr. Banner,” FRIDAY affirmed. “Order placed.”

After a moment's silence, FRIDAY continued, hesitantly. “There's a package for you, Peter.”

A package? Peter eyed the ceiling curiously. As if FRIDAY was in the ceiling, pft. Still… It made him feel as if he could get some answers, as if he could, pft. The only thing to do was to open it up and see what it was. “Send it on up, FRIDAY,” Peter said with a shrug.

“Are you sure that's wise? It could be dangerous,” Bruce mentioned. With all the public attention on Peter and his family, it didn't hurt to be extra careful. He needed to keep him safe, to keep the two of them safe.

“It has passed inspection, and possesses no threat,” FRIDAY noted.

Peter hopped up and over to the elevator as it opened. One of the security guards had set it inside. He picked it up. It was small, not really heavy at all. His spider-sense wasn't going off, so it didn't seem like a threat to him. He shook it a bit.

Something shifted inside. It sounded kind of hard. He frowned and checked the address, but there was no return address. It did look like it'd traveled a long ways with all the stamps on it. But from where?
With a shrug, Peter plopped back down onto the couch and subtly used his strength to tear the tape apart. He heard Bruce get up and move towards him, wanting to see what it was.

Inside… is a phone. Peter's brows furrow. It looks *old*. Who even uses these ancient things anyways? He picks it up and flips it open, turning it on. It takes wayyyy longer than any StarkPhone does to turn on, but when it finally does, there's only one phone number.

*Papa.*

Peter almost crushes it in his hand before Bruce reaches out and takes it, anxious to see what's upset Peter so much. An angry growl leaves the scientist's throat as he sees what's on the screen.

There's an envelope inside… Peter stares at it. He wants to just throw it away. He wants to burn it in a volcano without even looking at it.

'Be brave, Spidey…' Peter encourages himself. 'You can do this…' Swallowing, he reaches down with shaking hands and pulls it out. He can do this.

Chapter End Notes

Had this random idea that Peter gets the phone from Steve instead of Tony so… Yikes. That's going to be fun.
“The pizza has arrived,” FRIDAY announces, making both Peter and Bruce startle. Peter takes the phone from Bruce and slips it into his hoodie pocket, less than subtly crushing the letter and shoving it in after the phone.

“Well, time to eat!” Peter says with a forced smile. He makes a show of jumping up and going over to the elevator to get the pizza from one of the security guards. Delicious bounty in his arms, he brings the pizzas back to the counter and set them down. “You got the spinach and black olive, didn't you, Bruce?” he question as he opens the boxes, searching for his own.

Bruce doesn't answer, too busy thinking about Peter, about Tony, about Steve. The Hulk inside of him wants to flatten the man.

“Bruce?”

Brought back to reality, Bruce clears his throat and nods. “Yes, of course.” He doesn't bother asking Peter what's written in the letter, or whether he's okay or not. Already, he knows that Peter wouldn't answer him truthfully. Time is what he needs…

“I can never understand how you eat pizza without any meat,” Peter remarks, focusing on getting his pizza. He slides several cheesey slices onto his plate without hesitation. 'Just think about the pizza…' Except his stomach is turning. He feels kind of sick. The words won't leave his mind as he starts to eat.

“Dear Peter,

I hope this package reaches you safely, and that you're doing okay. First off, I want to apologize for what happened to your dad. I didn't mean for him to be so injured. I would never hurt him under normal circumstances, you know that right? Just like I would never hurt you.

This thing between your dad and I... I know you don't quite understand it, but maybe when you're older you will. The Accords are a mess, and I couldn't leave Bucky to the law. Not when I've finally got him back. They wouldn't accept that he's been used, not able to control his own actions.

Bucky's not a killer, Peter. He protected me before I became Captain America. I told you about those times, you remember? Tony was going to hurt him, to lock him away, and I just couldn't let that happen. Bucky... he's all I have.

Your dad doesn't understand, but I hope you do. I want you to know that no matter's happened, I still love you and your dad very much.

I plan to find a way to talk to Tony again. Maybe he'll listen this time. As soon as it's all over with,
I'll come home. I can't tell you where I am now, of course, but just know that you are both in my thoughts.

With love,

Papa

P.S. If you ever need me, just call.”

It was a pathetically short letter. Steve wrote as if he just the only thing he could do. Which was saying a shit ton considering if beating Tony to a pulp was the only thing he could've done, Peter was going to be using that excuse the next time he punched someone in the face. 'Nah… Too lame sounding.'

Steve wrote as if it was all a big misunderstanding on his dad's part. He wanted to apologize for beating him half to death? Bullshit. He'd be home after Tony listened and understood? Hell no. He wanted to talk to Tony again? Fuck if Peter was going to allow that.

'If you ever need me, just call'? Peter isn't going to be doing that. Yet the phone hangs heavy in his pocket, undamaged and clearly still functional. He should really throw it away, but for some reason.. He can't bring himself to.

He goes to bed that night and stares at it, his lamp softly glowing in the dark. Peter's eyes water as he opens it up and sees the only contact in it. "Stupid…” he chides.

After several more minutes, he gives up and throws the phone into a pile of dirty laundry on the floor. It's close to where it belongs, but not completely there.

Peter's too keyed up to sleep, his mind won't forget that letter, so he sits up with a sigh of surrender. He activates his Spidey code and pulls on his suit. Maybe a swing around the city is just what he needs. Beat up some bad guys… Get some fresh (ish) air.

He leaps from the window, instantly feeling the freedom of falling. As he gets closer down… He aims, and he shoots. 'Score~' Peter grins as he swings through the air, doing flips and spins to try and burn off the excess energy.

Spider-Man's first catch of the night is an abuser. The man clearly has issues with understanding that when women say 'get out', they're supposed to get out. He obviously didn't believe her when she said she'd call the cops. Luckily, Spider-Man was there to step in and hang the dick from a stoplight with a bruised eye. She thanks him and calls the cops, afterwards throwing a bottle at the man and hitting him. He deserved it anyways.

Spider-Man's second catch is a would-be arsonist. Peter didn't understand why anyone would try to burn down a pizzeria. Like… they make pizzas there, dude. What do you have against pizzas? He leaves that one wrapped in a cocoon with a note on it. The cops can finger out what's with him, hopefully keep him from getting his grubby fingers on any more flammables.

And just after his third catch of an ATM robber… Light flashes in an alley.

Peter's senses blared in his ears, ringing. “Well, that doesn't look good.” He leaps into the air. “I think I'll take a look see.”

Webbing over to the area, Peter saw a sight that he still hasn't been able to forget. There's a group of seven men all with weapons. Weapons he'd seen Toomes use. “Alien weapons,” Peter hisses
with distaste.

Of all the rotten luck… He just hopes this time goes better than the last time he went up against these things.

Chapter End Notes

It's a little short this time, because I'm exhausted and aching from a long day.

I'm not sure how writing the letter turned out, but hopefully it's okay? Haha, sorry if it doesn't meet your expectations. I had to change my train of thought to think about what Steve could possibly write to Peter (not much it seems).

Anyways! Hope you all are doing well!
“Are you sure you want to do it this way?” Pepper questions, eyes serious as he looks at Tony. His expression is unwavering, but Pepper can see a bit of how hurt he is inside.

“I'm sure, Pep,” Tony replies, muscles tenser than he's letting on. “If we don't go about this the first route, it could blow up in our faces. You know that better than anyone.”

She did.

“If.. Rogers...” He couldn't even say his first name at this point. Tony took a breath as he continued, “If he doesn't sign the divorce papers, then and only then, we can take this to Judge Mackle. We've got to play this by the book since everyone's watching us right now. Show them that we tried, at least.”

Rhodey doesn't look too convinced that it'll be easy. He's willing to bet that Rogers won't except the papers, refuse to even communicate about divorce, but that's okay. Rhodey's good friends with Judge Jeff Mackle. Tony will win the divorce and get full custody of Peter, no matter what.

Pepper sighs, rubbing her temples. “Alright. We'll try it the fair way this time, but make no mistake, if he doesn't sign, I will be putting my foot down.”

Tony nods. He understands. Honestly, he's more than grateful for the support and protectiveness that Pepper and Rhodey are displaying. “Thanks, Pep. Sorry to keep you guys up so late with all of this. I thought that maybe it couldn't wait any longer.” He felt bad about keeping them up so late for his problem. He just didn't want to waste any more time without doing something to protect Peter.

“It's alright, Tones,” Rhodey says gently from the other side of the room, sitting up in his bed as he sips at his water. “We're here for you. Whatever you need.”

Never being good at this mushy stuff, Tony shifts. “Yeah, well... In that case, I'd like to check up on Peter. Can someone find a damn phone in this Hell hole?”

Pepper rolls her eyes, fondly, and takes out her phone. She presses the number for Bruce and carefully puts it in Tony's good hand. “If he's even awake...”

Tony waves off her insinuation with his fingers. As if Bruce would be asleep right now. It may not be well known, but Bruce was quite a night owl himself. Of course, not as bad as Tony, but still.

The phone ringing startled Bruce for a moment. It had been silent, the Tower walls blocking out
the noise of the loud city outside. He set his book aside and picked up the phone. “Hello?”

“Brucie~ Knew you'd be up! Told Pep you would, but ehhh... She didn't quite believe me,”
Tony's voice came over the speaker.

His lips twitched, amused. “Tony? You're up awfully late yourself.”

“Yeah, well... Aren't I always?”

“True. What do you need?” Bruce questioned. There is always a reason for when Tony calls, even if it's just because he's lonely.

“How's Peter doing?”

It sounded to Bruce like Tony was concerned for him, just the way a father should be. “He's doing okay. Went to bed several hours ago.” He wasn't sure whether or not he wanted to mention the package... the phone... the letter... He probably should though. It wasn't right to keep Tony in the dark, not after how Steve had done so.

“Listen... Tony... There was a package earlier that arrived. For Peter,” Bruce speaks slowly. “It didn't have a return address, but... it was from Steve.”

There's silence on the other end of the line for a moment as Bruce gets up and walks over to Peter's door.

“What was in it?” Tony asks, voice low and deadly serious.

“A phone with a number under 'Papa' and... a letter,” Bruce admits. “I'm not sure what was in the letter. Peter didn't give me a chance to see it.”

“Fuck, Rogers... Is he okay?”

“He's fine, Tony,” Bruce says as he opens the door to peek in on Peter. “He's asleep, he's-” Bruce blinks as his eyes land on a messy bed, empty. His stomach turns with worry and concern.

“Bruce?”

Bruce closes his eyes, knowing that things have just gone downhill. He wants to kick himself for thinking that Peter could sleep after whatever was in that letter... “He's not here, Tony.” His stomach does a flip. “He's gone.”

“...He's what!!?”

“You're still bleeding,” Matt remarks as he helps situate Peter on his couch. It's a good thing he doesn't have company very often, because he's sure that the couch is covered in blood and sweat. ...He's actually going to need to throw it out after this. Peter's lost a lot of blood.

“I'm fine, Matt,” Peter insists, hissing when the man presses a wad of gauze against his wounded side. Fuck, it hurts. It hadn't hurt that badly when one of the alien weapons had managed to hit him, but now it did.

“Of course,” Matt blandly says, pressing harder. Peter moans in pain. “I thought you said you were 'fine'?”

Peter has half a mind left that isn't in agony to flip Matt off, but he doesn't. He knows the man is
just being concerned about him. “I didn’t expect to get a chunk of my side blown off.”

Matt bites his lip, worry buzzing in his head. He wishes he’d gotten there faster, done more to protect Peter. The painful scream Peter had let out when the weapon's beam hit him was one that is going to haunt his nightmares. “I’m sorry,” he apologizes.

’Yeah, no,’” Peter snorts, grimacing. “Completely that squinty eyed dude’s fault. You didn't hurt me, Matt.”

Then how come it feels like he did?

“You're usually faster,” Matt can't help but ask as he attempts to bandage Peter up, getting sticky blood on his hands. “Did something happen?”

“A lot of things happened, Matt,” Peter says, looking away. But he can't hide this from him. He just.. needs someone to talk to. With a sigh, he reveals it. “Steve sent me a package...”

Matt doesn't say anything, letting Peter continue to talk at his own pace as he continues his work, stitching and bandaging, disinfecting...

“He sent me a phone with his number on it.” Peter makes a choked sound. “He put his contact in it under 'Papa'. What the fuck does he think he's doing? A-and.. he sent me a letter. Telling me how 'sorry' he is and how 'Bucky's all he has',” Peter spits out, bitter and hurt, angry beyond belief at Steve.

“He doesn't get to say that to me! Not after all he's done! Not after making me believe we were a family,” Peter's voice cracks. “I can't believe him, Matt... He's just such a... such an idiot....”

Matt can practically taste the tears in the air. He hears Peter's heart stutter with emotion.

“He hurt us, Matt,” his voice breaks, sadness filling it. “He hurt us, almost killed my dad... How can he think I'll forgive him after all that? How can he be so stupid to think I might choose him still?”

It takes a few minutes for Matt to think of an adequate reply, long enough for him to finish the bandaging. Peter will definitely need to be watched closely, taken care of until it heals. There's no way he’s going to be moving anytime soon. “Sometimes people are blind to the mistakes they made, Peter. You don't have to listen to him or forgive him. What you feel... what you want.. He has no right to demand anything of you.” He reaches out and brushes Peter's cheeks of tea rs with a clean towel. “You come first. Not him.”

Peter laughs, a small broken laugh, but it makes him feel better to hear those words. He feels relieved to have talked to Matt about it. He always had a way of making Peter feel stronger. “Thanks, Matt,” he whispers, pain leading him to an exhausted sort of doze.

There's a loud knock at the door.

“..Were you expecting anyone, Matt?” Peter questions, eyebrows furrowing.

Matt stands, glad he'd taken a few spare seconds to strip from his suit and throw on some sweat pants. “No.” He picks up his cane, fingers curling around it as he moves towards the door with caution. If it's an intruder.. they're going to be in for a rude awakening.

He hears something familiar that makes him frown. 'This can't be good...' He cracks the door open, keeping his bloodied hands out of sight. “Hello, Agent Coulson.”
Peter's heart skips a beat in the living room. 'Uh-oh...'

Chapter End Notes

A little bit of a longer chapter, but I just couldn't cut myself off in the middle, so... here you go?
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Revelations.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Honestly, it had taken Coulson far too long to find the missing link, to dig up what Peter's lawyer friend was hiding. In his defense, he was exhausted and emotionally frayed from all the recent events. His coffees are bitter, reminding him that there's no one here to subtly sweeten it when he's not looking. And he hates.

It's when he finds the end of his third coffee cup, hours into digging through all the information he'd had his agents compile for him, that he realizes who Matt Murdock is.

One of the newer agents comes barging into the door moments after, eyes wide. "S-Sir! I'm sorry, Sir, but Peter Parker seems to be missing."

Coulson's heart constricts. "When?"

"Dr. Banner isn't sure, Sir," the agent explains, nervously. "He just found out several minutes ago. Mr. Stark is ready to climb out of bed to find his son."

"Of course, he is." Coulson rubs his eyes, the taste of caffeine lingering in his mouth. "Tell him he can't leave yet. He's still injured. If he doesn't listen, tell him I'll personally tie him down." He eyes the agent seriously. "And tell him, I'll find his son at all costs."

The agent nods, bounding out to deliver his words. He hopes someone's going to teach that agent how not to be so easily agitated. With his luck, that someone will probably be him though, but it's a problem for another time.

He opens his laptop and searches…

"Daredevil and Spider-Man seen in battle downtown!"

And that's how Coulson ends up in front of Matt Murdock's door as the sun spills over the city. He reaches up… and knocks.

Matt's eye twitches as he hears Peter swear up and down, trying not to make a loud noise. He can still hear it, though. Makes for a bad distraction.

"How can I help you, Agent Coulson?" Matt grinds out, trying not to wince as he hears Peter thud against some furniture, groaning with audible pain.

Coulson's eyes meet his. He's not sure how, but they do and then he's talking. It comes out more like threatening, but Matt can hold his own.
“Murdock, I don't care about your secret or your nightly activities. The only thing I care about right now is finding Peter and if I'm not mistaken, he's with you.” Coulson sees Matt twitch minutely. The man's good, but Coulson has experience.

Matt's heart momentarily pauses. It's obvious that Coulson knows about him. Peter told him just how smart and clever the man was, so it wasn't hard to believe he'd figured it out. The main question is… Does he know about Peter?

Something falls behind him, and this time he can't hold back a wince. It's all too clear to him that it's Peter who's fallen on the floor.

“I think I'll take that as a 'yes','” Coulson decides and buds past Matt and into his apartment.

“Why, yes...” Matt grinds out, following Coulson towards Peter. “By all means, come in.” He can only hope this goes smoothly… Or somewhat smoothly at least.

Peter stares up at Coulson as he walks in. He's tangled up in some of Matt's clothing, suit haphazardly thrown under Matt's blankets. Face flushing as he fights to keep himself from freaking out, he waves at Coulson a little. “Um… hi?”

Which is obviously the wrong thing to say, because the next thing Peter knows is there are arms around him. He smells coffee and something like printed paper as he leans into Coulson's arms, uncaring of his injuries that were most likely seeping by this point.

“You worried us, kid,” Coulson murmurs, clinging to Peter. He had been afraid. Had Peter been caught in some kind of trouble? Was he hurt? After everything they've been through.. the last thing he wants is to lose Peter.

“I'm sorry,” Peter's voice cracks. He really is. He hadn't meant to make anyone worry about him. “I-I couldn't sleep,” he admits, pathetically. “Pa- Cap sent me a package, and I just...” He shakes his head. “I didn't want to keep thinking about it but I couldn't get it off my mind. I thought – I thought maybe some fresh air would help.”

Matt quirks a brow. 'Fresh air'? A lull in Agent Coulson's heartbeat alerts him that the man doesn't quite believe what Peter's said. Sure, he believes the main part, but… he's got his teeth in something. 'Most likely in a web…'

“Sshhh.. It's okay,” Coulson says, running his fingers through Peter's hair. He can't help but notice the way it's messed up, a bit damp like he's been exercising. He can feel the winces through Peter's shirt whenever he hits certain spots – 'Bruises.' And there's something a bit like...

And then Peter pulls away.

“I-I'm really sorry, Uncle Phil.” Peter stutters, feeling his throat clog up a bit. “Is dad mad at me?” he questions, broken. He probably is. He disappeared. He just...

“He's.. worried about you,” Coulson replies. And a little mad. But that doesn't need to be said. It's Tony's way. A lot of times when he gets mad, he's worried. He wants to bite his lip as he looks at how wrecked Peter looks. It's not just emotionally, but also physically. He holds himself delicately, as if the tender spots Coulson identified as bruises weren't enough...

“I'm sorry,” Peter repeats, sullenly.

“As long as you're okay, Peter,” Coulson tells him, hugging him again, but his eyes are glued to Matt. He's going to have to have a talk with a certain devil.
Coulson helps Peter lay back down on the couch and pulls a blanket over him. He stays there until Peter falls asleep, subtly messaging Pepper that he's found Peter and that he'll be okay. “He's just exhausted. He went out for some air and got lost.”

It's a lie, but maybe it's enough.

“So,” Coulson says, joining Matt in the kitchen. “Daredevil, huh?”

Matt inclines his head slightly. There's the confirmation.

“And Peter's… Spider-Man…”

There's no questioning tone about it. It's just hesitant, as if he can't quite believe it himself. Matt understands. Finding out that Spider-Man's a kid was quite a kick to his own head. How he hadn't realized it sooner, he'll never know.

“Fuck,” Coulson swears, uncharacteristically. “How bad is it? And don't try to play this off, Murdock. I saw your hands.” He didn't want to say anything in front of Peter in case he upset the boy more.

“It's not so good,” Matt admits, “but he's got enhanced healing. He needs to take it easy for a while. One of my friends is a nurse and will be here after her shift to take a look at him.”

Coulson would feel better if he could take Peter to SHIELD so that professionals could look him over, get him better. At this point though, it would end up being a complete and utter disaster. If Tony found out while he wasn't ready for it, the man would hurt himself even more, not to mention the guilt of having taken his own son to fight his husband and the rest of the Avengers in Germany. It would also hurt Peter more than it would help him at this point, so he feels like he has no choice but to stay here and keep an eye on him.

It's certainly going to be a handful, and the only thing that Coulson can say when he thinks about what this is going to do when it comes to light… is a soft “Fuck.”

Chapter End Notes

I was hoping to do Coldflash Wave this week, but... I don't think I'll end up doing it. Having a bit of trouble (etc.) Anyways! Hope you enjoy this little bit.

Have a good Monday~
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Some things can wait.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Peter doesn't even wake up when Claire comes, looking exhausted as she checks Peter's injuries over. The boy looks like Hell, and that's putting it politely, but he's going to be okay. As long as the alien weapon doesn't have any side effects, he'll be fine.

“I swear that I will kick your ass if you let that boy roam around before he's healed up, Matt,” Claire threatens, arms crossed. She's tired, but she's still got enough fire to put behind her words.

“He won't be,” Matt promises, hoping he'll be able to stop Peter from doing anything stupid. ...The chance of stopping him is unfortunately low, but he's got Coulson on his side this time.

“I'll make sure he gets rest,” Coulson assures her, shaking her hand. “Thank you for everything you've done for him.”

Claire shakes his hand, eying him with caution. “Yeah, well. No one else was going to be there to help.” She doesn't want to be the only one that boy has. She doesn't want to not be able to save him. He needs more help than she can offer sometimes.

“We'll be more attentive this time,” Coulson says. “I promise, we'll look after him.”

Claire raises an eyebrow. “Just remember that if I can kick his ass,” she jerks her thumb at Matt, “I can kick yours too.”

“Noted,” Coulson replies. He may be an agent of SHIELD, but he knows that there are things out there that not even his training can protect him from. Far be it for him to assume Claire can't follow through on her threats.

“Take care of him, and call me if you need me,” Claire tells them before leave, throwing one last look at the boy on the couch. She feels for him, knows who he is and what's happened with his family. 'No one deserves that…'

“Well.. that was mildly interesting,” Coulson remarks after she's left. He's made note of her for later. It never hurts to have a nurse on hand who doesn't take any BS.

“That's Claire for you,” Matt explains, running a hand through his hair. He's tired. The night's more than catching up with him. He can still smell blood on his hands, can almost hear the sound of the weapons' discharge and Peter's scream of pain.

“You should get some rest,” Coulson suggests, settling down in a chair next to the couch. “I'll keep an eye on Peter.”
Matt hesitates for a moment. He's never really had anyone there to watch Peter before. It's always been him, sitting beside Peter's unconscious form and holding his hand while he waits for the nightmares. “Are you sure?”

“Positive.”

Assuring himself that he'd hear if they needed him, Matt slipped away to his room. The sheets felt smooth while the air felt rough on his skin. Exhaustion does thing to a person with supersenses, but at least he was really too tired to focus much on it and let himself fall asleep.

Coulson didn't leave Peter for two hours. The light from the sun was almost unbearable as it seeped in. Murdock really needed to invest in some black out curtains. His stomach churned. He reached out and brushed his hand against Peter's cheek, smiling a little when he leaned into it for warmth. “I'll be right back,” Coulson murmured before getting up.

He just needed some coffee. Surely Murdock wouldn't mind.

A small whimper catches his attention. Coulson pauses mid-sip, cocking his head as he wondered what he heard. And then there's another whimper, except this time it's louder, and he knows that sound.

The coffee cup clanks loudly on the counter as Coulson rushes out into the living room. Peter's all tangled up in the blankets Matt had lent him, sweat drenching his face and matting his hair. The boy whines again.

A nightmare.

Quickly, Coulson kneels in front of the couch, putting a hand on Peter's hair. “Sssh.. Peter, you're okay,” he tries to calm the boy down.

Still, Peter whimpers. It's a little quieter, but the nightmare hasn't gone away.

“You should wake him,” Matt speaks up, instantly awake from the ruckus. “He doesn't calm down easily from nightmares.”

Coulson really doesn't want to know the reason behind what Matt knows and why, but he'll find out. He needs to know. He follows Matt's advice and shakes Peter awake, startled when Peter wakes up disorientated and afraid. “Pe-”

And then Peter's on the ceiling, staring down at them with wide eyes as his chest heaves. It's hard to breathe when he's panicking.

'Well… that answers a lot of questions.' Coulson's read the reports on Spider-Man, as vague as they were. Spider-Man's done a lot of good work, protecting people, sacrificing himself. Sure, the vigilante had drawn the unwanted attention of the law and SHIELD, but he still did everything he could to help people. He knew that despite the arrest warrants and the way SHIELD wanted to bring him in to evaluate him.

But it's Peter.

“U-uncle Phil?” Peter's hesitant, scared voice draws their attention up. He hadn't meant to do this. God, why couldn't he control himself better. He'd hidden his secret from the Avengers, right under their noses, for so long. He'd hidden the blood and pain, the nightmares, but now? He'd gone and screwed it to Hell all in one night.

Peter blames Steve for this, even though it's not fully his fault. He's allowed, he thinks. Maybe it's
unfair, but there is hardly anything fair about his papa almost killing his dad. So, maybe he's allowed.

“Peter,” Matt begins to speak, voice low and gentle. “It's okay. Everything's okay. Coulson's not going to tell anyone until you're ready.” He better not, at least. This kid's been through so much. He doesn't need his entire world falling down around him. Matt winces. 'Falling down around him'.

He holds his arms out, up towards Peter. “You're okay, Peter. Come down, please?”

Peter thinks for a moment, looking at his Uncle Phil to see him agree, before he's dropping down into Matt's open arms. “I'm sorry,” Peter whispers, hugging Matt.

Matt hugs him back, as if he wouldn't. “Sssh, it's okay. Everything's okay.” They stay, locked together for a few more moments before Matt clears his throat and pulls away. “I think someone else would like a hug now.”

Peter rolls his eyes. Matt didn't show his love very often, but it was definitely there. Still, Uncle Phil holds his arms out, and Peter's suddenly there, hugging him and clinging to him. “I'm sorry, Uncle Phil..”

There's a part of him that's angry with Peter, with himself, but he doesn't allow that part to come through. What's done is done, and right now, he needs to be here. For Peter. “It's okay, Peter,” Coulson tells him, feeling his warm body in his arms. “It's okay.”

“But.. dad...”

Coulson leans back and looks Peter in the eyes. “I'll keep your secret until you're ready to tell him yourself.” His eyes flicker over to Matt and then back again. “Both of your secrets. However, you need to talk to me when something like this happens.” Peter flinches and he feels guilty for a moment. “I – we need to know that you're okay. Just, tell him when you're ready, okay?”

Peter nods, accepting, but tired. His heart's still come down from racing, but he feels a bit better. “I will, Uncle Phil. I promise.”

It's a question of how and when, but sometime. When he's ready...

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all your lovely comments! I'm sorry I didn't get to reply to them all before this chapter.

@ArtemisBastet - Added Claire in there, just for you. Hope you enjoyed her little bit.

Thanks again~

(Now onto write fluff...hopefully..)
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

So close, so broken, but we'll heal.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

To be honest? Peter meant to tell his dad that night when he'd shyly slunk back into the SHIELD Medbay with Uncle Phil and Matt following him. Even though Coulson had promised to keep it a secret, he felt guilty for having hidden this for so long. Especially after what Cap did.

He meant to tell him, but it doesn't quite happen.

“You're what?” Peter questions, staring at Pepper and Tony.

Tony shifts uneasily. He doesn't want Peter to hate him for this. He hadn't talked to Peter about the divorce before Pepper was mainstreaming it into the world, but he hopes Peter will understand. He can't bare the thought of losing Peter too.

“I'm.. leaving your papa, Pete,” Tony slowly says, eyes sharply watching his son's face for any signs of hatred or disgust. Yet all he sees, is relief.

“Good,” Peter affirms with a nod. He didn't want his dad to be tied to someone who almost killed him. It really tore at him inside to think about the past, about holding their hands and watching them smile at each other, but he shakes the memories from his head. The happy family that they once were is no more. They have each other though, so it'll be okay. It has to.

“You're not.. mad at me?” Tony questions. He needs to be sure. He can't bare the thought of Peter trying to hide any hurt from this.

Peter slips his hand in his dad's and holds onto it. “I'm glad you're doing this dad. It's..” the words feel bitter on his tongue, but no less true, “the right thing to do.”

Matt closes his eyes, wishing he could turn off his senses. He can tell that Peter's all messed up. So is Stark. It's a really screwed up situation. He can't help but be grateful for the way Stark held Peter close and asked him if he was okay when he got back. Coulson had fed Stark some excuse about getting lost and in trouble before Matt had found him.

It almost seemed like.. Peter was going to tell Stark about his silky secret. The instant the divorce was mentioned, Peter seemed to forget, and Matt understood.

He listens as they talk about how Pepper's going about making the changes, every now and then pipping up to ask questions. He doesn't specialize in divorces, but Matt definitely knows enough to get through it. He offers his help free of charge. Whatever he can do to help.

“Thank you, Matt,” Peter whispers, voice barely a breath of air. He's having a hard time, but he thinks his dad's doing the right thing, and he'll stick beside him through this no matter what.

Coulson listens as Peter and Tony talk about what's going to happen from here. He hears a casual
threat about bugging Peter so he doesn't get lost again, but everyone present there knows it's because he cares. It's a little bit painful when he has to pull Peter away from Tony so the doctors can take him for some exams to see how he's healing, but Tony swears he'll be back on his feet in "a few days". The man always did try to push things, but given the way Pepper, Rhodey, and Peter were looking at him… He'd be a guest in the MedBay until he was actually healed.

Tony lets the doctors poke and prod at him, take samples of his blood and whatever else they do. No matter that it was for his own good, he absolutely hates doctors. He hates the way they ask if he's sleeping alright, nightmares, what hurts, does he remember what happened clearer, are there gaps in his memory at all…

He can remember it all, and he wishes he couldn't. The last thing he saw was Steve's angry face, deadly with no regret as to what he had done to him. It was a thing of nightmares, something that sticks with him even now.

Tony shakes his head free of the image that loomed over him. All he needed is to be back with his son. He hadn't brought up Steve's package to Peter, but he doesn't want Peter to suffer over it alone. Peter almost lost him. He's already lost too many people already. Tony's going to have to make sure that Peter knows he's going to be there for him forever. There's no way Tony's leaving his boy behind.

He isn't Steve.

It takes decades for them to finish with him. The nurse smiles so brightly at him that Tony thinks she's going to pull out a lollipop and congratulate him for "being a good boy". Thank fuck, all she tells him is that he's healing up quite nicely. Her hand twitches though. Maybe she'd been considering that lollipop.

...Not that Tony wouldn't said no. He could use some sugar to cheer him up, but maybe not from a nurse that smiled that much. Okay, not from any nurse, doctor, medical practitioner that stabs him with a needle.

..Vampires.

He's returned to his room, exhausted and drained from all the tests. Yet he's determined to stay awake long enough to talk to Peter about the package.

“So… I heard you got something from St-Steve in the mail,” Tony mentions as nurses disperse back to their holes.

Peter bites his lip, that nervous gesture he's never quite been able to get rid of. “Yeah...” He looks away, ashamed that he opened it, that he read the letter…

“Hey, hey, kiddo,” Tony reaches out and ruffles his hair, wincing. “It's okay. Whatever he said in that letter, it's… you don't have to listen to any of his bullshit. He didn't appreciate you enough to tell you in person, and I'm sorry that he's such a godawful papa. You deserve way better than him.” Is this how he's supposed to cheer his kid up? God, he just doesn't know.

“Look… No matter what shit he's said, no matter how much he tries to apologize, I want you to know that you matter, Peter.” Tony looks his son in the eyes. “You are so much more important than Steve will ever know, and it's a shame he never got to see it, but I do. I won't ever leave you, and I can swear to you, that I'll never let anyone hurt you ever again. Not Steve, not his gang, no one.”
Peter's eyes watered, and he clung to his dad. He hadn't realized it until his dad spoke, but he was feeling.. like he wasn't worth much. His papa had just up and left him behind, like he didn't mean a thing to him.

Tony's hand cupped Peter's cheek and suddenly, he was sobbing outright. “I-I'm sorry, Dad,” Petter choked out. His hands curled up in his dad's blankets, sticking to them in his emotional state of chaos. “I-I can't... God, he just left me behind!” He tried not to sound like he was breaking, but it was so hard. “He-he said all he has is Bucky,” his lips curl in a bitter grimace. “Why did he do this, Dad? How could he do this to us?”

“Peter...”

“He hurt you! He almost took you from me! And he thinks it's okay!?” Peter gasped, chest tightening. “It's not okay! He can't that to you! He can't hurt you! I won't let him hurt you anymore, Dad...”

Tony's heart broke. “Oh, Peter...” He didn't give a shit about his wounds and pulled Peter into the bed beside him, holding him close and stroking his hair as his kid sobbed against him. “He's an idiot.. Don't you listen to him. We'll be okay.” He ran his fingers through Peter's hair. “I've got you. I'm so lucky to have you. I love you, kid, you know? I love you more than life.”

Peter cried, hugging his dad. “I love you too, Dad...”

Tony continued to comfort his son until Peter fell asleep, nestled up against his side. Continuing to run his fingers through Peter's hair, he looked up at Pepper, Coulson, Matt, and Rhodey. “He has to pay for this. He's going to pay for what he's done.”

No matter what. No one hurt his son and got away with it.

Chapter End Notes

Well.. That was a bit of a tear jerker to write.

So exhausted and my week is just beginning... I hope everyone's doing okay, and maybe, if possible, this cheers you up if you need it.

Thanks, as always~

tumblr: tabihe
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Back in Wakanda, Steve's getting some bad news.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Steve was watching the sun rise from a balcony at the palace when he got the word.

“Rogers,” T’Challa greeted, nodding at the man when he turned.

“Your Highness,” Steve nodded back. “What brings you here so early?”

It was a bit vicious of him to be feeling pleased with the paper in his hands, but the king couldn't help it. Stark's desire for a divorce made his heart calm. T’Challa couldn't help but think that Stark's doing what's best for him for once. 'He takes too much of the burden of others upon himself.' So, yes. He's glad that Stark is sticking up for himself. T’Challa will support this effort 100%.

“I thought I’d bring you news from your home country,” T’Challa said, delicately running his fingertips over the sheet of paper in his hands. He tried not to smile as he handed the paper to a curious Steve Rogers. Whether he succeeded or not, he cannot tell. Regardless…

Steve gasps, eyes widening in shock as he reads the public request for divorce.

'It's not as if Rogers is paying attention,' T'Challa purred.

Steve can't believe his eyes as they fall upon the paper. It's a printed version of official papers. Divorce papers. He can't believe it. Anger bubbles up inside of him. His eyes sharply catch the king's. “Is this some kind of joke!?” he snaps.

T'Challa raises an eyebrow, unfazed by the super soldier's anger. “It is not a joke, Rogers. This-” he gestures at the divorce papers, “-is something that has been distributed throughout the world. I believe they thought it best to post it everywhere so it would have a better chance of – ah, how they say, reach you?”

The papers crumble beneath Steve's hands. It feels like the words are burning him through the paper. It can't be possible. This isn't right. Someone must've forced Tony to do this. He wouldn't divorce him. Not without someone pushing him to do it.

“I have to speak to Tony,” Steve finds himself telling the king. Maybe he can stop it. He needs to be there. They can't divorce. Tony is his husband. And they've got a son. 'Peter...’ his heart clenches in sympathy for his son. How is he handling this? Is he okay? He must be hurting so much.

“I have to...” Steve struggles to find the words. His mind is reeling with this blow.

“Call him?” T’Challa suggests with a quirk of his brow. He's not quite keen on the idea of letting the man go back to the United States where he could possibly do more harm to his family.
Steve blinks, looking at him like he hadn't thought of that. “Call him. Yeah, yeah.” Determined, he turns and walks into the palace. “I've got to call him.”

T'Challa follows, steps silent as he pads after the man. He's not really expecting this call to go well. It might not even go at all, but it's something to stall. He's already had one of his guards send out a message to up security and make sure no one, Rogers, leaves Wakanda. He might've made a mistake leaving Stark with Rogers before, but he wasn't going to make the same mistake again.

Clint and Sam look up, curious as Steve walks into the room with his head in the clouds. They can see the worry and concern on his face as he almost stumbles over a chair. “Steve? Ya okay, buddy?” Clint asks, eying him.

T'Challa enters the room, and there's something about his expression that makes Clint feel ill at ease. It's like there's a wicked gleam of satisfaction? No. Clint shakes his head. That couldn't be.

“Lookin' for my phone,” Steve distractedly answers, moving papers on the counter and picking up a discarded hoodie.

Sam exchanges a worried look with Clint, but decides to intervene before Steve knocks anything over. “It's right here, on the coffee table, Steve,” Sam calls out. He thinks he sees Steve's hands trembling as the man picks up the phone and dials a number.

The phone almost seems to creak under Steve's strength as he listens to the dial tone. It rings. And rings, and rings, and rings. “I'm sorry, the person you are trying to reach has a voicemail box that has not been set up. Please try your call again later. Good-bye.” -beep! Beep! Beep!-

Steve's heart falls. Peter didn't answer. He can't even leave a goddamn message. What the fuck is he supposed to do now? It's not like he can just go see Peter… Right? Steve frowns, pensive. Couldn't he? It's not like there is anyone who could stop him. His lips twitch in a small smile.

“What's going on?” Clint asks, observing the event with concern. He wants to know why Steve seems… manic?

Sam doesn't like the way Steve's small smile falls, covered by something darker, something dangerous. Is this the same man he followed into battle before? He shakes his head. 'Nothing's wrong. Steve hasn't changed,' he tells himself.

But what if he has?

T'Challa's eyes narrow as he watches Rogers' face fall. Rogers looks heartbroken as he tells them that Stark is asking for a divorce. He listens as Rogers' voice breaks as he tells them that Stark's taking his son from him. And slowly… they seem to sympathize with him. T'Challa doesn't like that. not at all.

“Why don't you bring him here?”

Everyone's head swivels to find Wanda standing in the doorway. Her eyes are almost red with power as she walks in, repeating herself. “Why don't you bring Peter here? He's your son. You have a right to him.”

“A 'right'?” T'Challa can't help but question, jaw clenched.

Wanda's eyes look at him in a way that makes him want to withdraw. She makes his spine tingle with distaste and fear. He's trained for years and years to keep his mind tranquil and protected, but he can't help but feel like she's subtly pushing on his mental barrier.
“Yes, a right,” Wanda bites back. “Peter is his son! He belongs with his Papa! Stark is batshit crazy if he thinks he can take his son away from him!”

'He is,' Steve can't help but agree. He won't let Tony take Peter from him. He'll stick with Peter no matter what.

“And what of his Dad? Doesn't Peter have just as much right to stay with Stark?” T'Challa questions, eyebrow raised.

“Ehhh…” Clint waves his hand vaguely. “It's like a custody battle. Kid goes with whoever's the most competent parent.”

“And you believe that is Rogers?” T'Challa doggedly continues.

“He's my son, and no one's taking him away from me,” Steve speaks up, voice booming over the area. “I'm sure we can… work this out.” His mind's already trying to figure out the best way to get to Peter.

Scott can't help but think that there's something very wrong with all this, but he can't figure out what, and he certainly doesn't like the look in Captain America's eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Honestly? Not a clue. Remind me not to have gelato for dinner, yeah?

tumblr: tabihe
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Matt explains a few things to Peter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Peter spends hours with his dad before he finally gets kicked out. “Go do kid stuff,” Tony waves him off. “Go play with Ted-”

“Ned.”

“Yeah, Ted. Go play, have fun. Do kid stuff. I'll be back at the Tower soon,” Tony says.

Peter doesn't really believe him, but if there's one thing his dad is, it's stubborn. He likes to think he got it from him instead of his papa. He can't believe he used to idolize Captain America as a kid. That ended fast enough.

Sitting on the couch at the Tower, Peter stares at the cartoons FRIDAY has pulled up on the screen. Scooby Doo is being chased by ghost, and for once, Peter knows exactly how the character feels. This place had once been filled with laughter and light.

...Peter pulls a blanket around him, up over his head. He doesn't want to hear the faint laughter of the past. There will be no more pranks in this room, no more team breakfasts. He wants to be okay with that, but he doesn't quite know how.

“Peter?” Matt questions softly, listening to Peter's heart tremble and his body turn in on itself on the couch.

“What are you doing here?” He hadn't even heard the lawyer come in.

“FRIDAY let me up,” Matt said with a tilt of his head to listen closer. “Agent Coulson told me your dad sent you home to, ah- play? ..This doesn't exactly look like doing 'kid stuff', Peter.”

Peter scoffs. “Like you'd know what it looks like.”

Matt raised an eyebrow.

Peter's shoulders fell. “Not exactly my best work, huh?”

“No,” Matt agreed. “It's not.” Matt walks close enough to reach out and brush Peter's hair from his forehead. “How are you doing, Peter?”

“I don't know, Matt,” Peter couldn't stop the words tumbling from his mouth. “It's just... everything feels like it's falling apart. I-I can't stop thinking about what happened. My Dad almost died, because Captain America almost killed him.” Peter chokes up. “My Papa almost killed my Dad.”

Matt felt like his heart was breaking.
“I know he's going to be okay, but he's not. Not really! I can see it in his eyes whenever someone mentions Papa and- and it looks like he's being torn apart.”

The sounds of Peter's super strength was audible to Matt as the boy clenched the blankets.

“We were a family, Matt… I don't understand what happened. I mean, I know what happened, but I just… I thought we were closer than that. I.. I thought they were better than that...” He leans into Matt when the man sits down beside him. “Why do I keep losing people? Is it me? Is there something wrong with me..? I just.. I don't know…” Peter whispered, tears leaking from his eyes and falling onto Matt's clothes.

The arms around Peter tightened. “There's nothing wrong with you, Peter. What happened between Rogers and your dad – that's not your fault. There's no way that's your fault.” Peter hiccups. “You've lost a lot of people; I know, but it's nothing you did. Bad things happen to good people, and you, Peter, are one of the very best. You've struggled all by yourself through the events, the loss, and even when your whole life was flipped around, you've come out stronger.”

Matt continues, “A lot of people would've given up. A lot of people, who have powers – they use them to hurt others, to take what they want, but not you. Peter, you've given more than anyone else has to save others, to help them.” He pulls the blanket down with a soft hum and kisses Peter's forehead. “Rogers and them, they can't see how amazing you are. They must be completely blind.”

He hears Peter's mouth open, so he keeps going, “Not like me, but normally blind.” He hears Peter snort a little. It's watery, but it's there. “Spider-Man is incredible, but you're even more so. Spider-Man can only be so good, because it's you.”

Peter clings to Matt's words, and it somehow makes him feel stronger. It's like a gentle blanket that covers him with warmth, lifting him up. Matt's right. He always is (except about hotdogs, Peter's still adamant that they're an excellent meal). “Thank you, Matt,” Peter whispers, unable to raise his voice any louder, but it's Matt. He hears Peter. He always will.

“Just telling you the truth, Peter,” Matt says, running his fingers through Peter's hair. “I'll always tell you the truth.”

They sit like that for a while, Peter bathing in Matt's warmth, and Matt, soothing Peter with soft, caring touches. It's nice, and it makes the empty place feel like home again, even with no one else there.

Maybe he doesn't need them anymore. Maybe he and his dad will be okay after all.

“...Can we go out tonight?” Peter questions, feeling the need to fly through the air.

Matt chuckles. “You seem like you're feeling better.”

Peter grins. “I think I am.”

“Well, I guess we could go out,” Matt slowly approves. “But only a light night.”

Unwinding, Peter stands up and spins around in front of Matt before pulling him up. “Do we ever get light nights?”

'No,' Matt thought as they stepped out into the night with their suits, sirens blaring distantly. 'We don't.' He could only hope that it wouldn't be as bad as it could be.
A lungful of smoke later and a few burns, and Matt is seriously starting to think that the world just sucks.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it's a short chapter, all. Had to cut it off before I get into the next scene (which isn't quite set yet, but I'll try.)

Hope you enjoyed the fluff~
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

It's time for things to come to light.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Peter stumbles back into the apartment with his skin burning and eyes watering. He falls face first into his bed with a groan. Will he ever get the smell of smoke out of his hair? He has no idea at this point. It kind of makes him feel sick.

“Long night?” Coulson asks, leaning on the doorway at the boy who's practically his nephew. He'd been monitoring Peter's progress when he'd seen Spider-Man fling himself into the fire. His heart almost stopped. God, he can't believe Peter's been keeping this a secret.

Peter groans again. Caught again. Matt had mentioned that Uncle Phil most likely knew everything he was doing. “Too long,” he mumbled into his pillow.

“I can smell it – I mean, I can tell.”

Peter rolled over just enough to glare at him like an angry puppy. That face hasn't change since the first time Coulson saw him make it. Like the time when Stark had stolen one of his cookies… “Are you okay?” he can't help but question.

Shrugging, Peter sits up and looks at him with an exhausted look. “I'm okay,” he says with a sigh. “It was a long night.”

Coulson nods. He understands, not fully, but enough to know that Peter's going through a lot. And it's time to drop the news. “Your dad's home.”

Eyes widening, Peter blinks. “Wait- what? I thought it'd take longer?”

“Yes, well… Stark kept trying to pull up Netflix on the computers,” Coulson explained. He couldn't help but smile at the image of Director Fury trying to get rid of a screensaver on all the computers of Pikachu dancing. The man kept shouting for someone to “solve it”. Better luck becoming the next Captain America.

...Although at this point, it wouldn't take much for someone to step up and take Rogers' place.

“Netflix, huh?” Peter's eyes sparkled as he pictured it. It was definitely something his dad would do. Probably not the only thing, though, huh? “I don't want to know what else he did, do I?”

Coulson smiled. “I'll send you a video of it later.” He cleared his throat, concerned about what he'd be saying next. “He's been asking for you. Dr. Banner sedated him to make him rest, but he was worried when you weren't here when he came back.”

Yeah… Peter was afraid of that. He bites his lip, tasting the smoke on it. He's lucky his dad isn't awake to see him like this. He runs a hand through his damp hair, hissing when he brushes a burn. “I know. I have to tell him,” Peter said.

“Gee, thanks, Uncle Phil,” Peter says, blunt. “You really know how to make a vigilante feel good.”

Coulson shrugs. “I think you get it from your dad.”

Peter snorts. Well, his dad does look like crap after a long night in the lab, stumbling out to get coffee in the morning. “Firstly, he looks like a zombie, and secondly, I have powers.”

“Doesn't make you look any better, kid,” Coulson jokes lightly.

“Fine~” Peter surrenders. “I'll take a shower.” He gets up, wobbling as he strips his suit from his back. God, he hates fires. They're hot, they burn, they hurt…

“Don't forget to treat your burns properly, Peter,” Coulson calls after him, wondering if he should start putting a more.. in depth first aid kit in Peter's room. 'Probably.' He looks at the suit on the floor, charred and blackened in some places. 'Definitely,' he amends.

Peter feels much better after the shower. Okay, so hot water and burns did not mix. He could handle it, but he wishes he didn't have to. He's going to be more careful next time.

..Who's he kidding, he can't make a promise like that.

Taking a breath, he steps into the Medical Wing.

“Pete?” Tony questions, rubbing his eyes, tiredly. “You okay?” he questions, throat taking a little time to wake up. His son looks tired. 'Freshly showered,' he notes. 'Is that a limp?' His brows furrow.

Water drips from Peter's hair as he carefully sits down on the side of his dad's hospital bed. “Yeah, Dad,” he replies softly. “I'm okay.”

Tony quirks a brow. His son's doing that thing where he taps his fingers to his thumb when he's nervous. “You sure, kiddo?”

Peter looks up, confused, and then his dad nods to his hands. He bunches his hands up and stuffs them between his thighs to stop them from moving. “Actually, Dad,” he begins. He's not quite sure how to word this right, so, in normal Peter Parker fashion. He blurts it out. “I'm Spider-Man.”

Everything in Tony's head comes crashing to a halt. “Wait, what?” He reaches up and snaps his fingers near his ears. Maybe he's got some hearing problems. He must have, because he can't possibly have heard what he just thought he heard. “I'm sorry, can you repeat that please? I think I still have some lingering head trauma.”

“I-” Peter clears his throat, clenching his fists. “I'm Spider-Man?”

Tony blinks and looks in his eyes. “You don't sound serious. I hope you're not serious. Please, tell me you're not serious.”

Peter met his dad's eyes. “I'm serious, Dad… I- I'm sorry for keeping it a secret from you, but I thought… I thought you'd make me quit. I just… I want to help people. I want to be there for
people who need someone to save them. For Uncle Ben. For Aunt May… Like you save people.”

A breath caught in Tony’s chest. Like he saves people? “God, Peter…” He sits up, pulling whatever wires get in his way out, because there is nothing more important than his son, and he looks so afraid right now – afraid of him. But he shouldn't be. Tony's not mad. A bit upset, sure. Worried, hell yes, but also proud beyond belief. “Son,” he wraps his arms around Peter, “I'm not going to lie and tell you that I'm completely okay with this, because fuck I took you to Germany with you, endangered you, didn't even know you were out there all alone. But I'm proud of you, Peter…”

’Proud’? “Wh- what?” Peter croaks.

“Peter…’ Tony ran his fingers through his son's wet hair. It smelled like tea tree. For some reason his son was a sucker for the smell, and it'd grown on him. “I'm always going to be worried about you, because you're my only child. You got powers, somehow – we're going to talk about that later – but you're using them to save people. Iron Man may be a hero to some, but you're so much more. You're smart, brave. You always look out for those who can't stand up for themselves, and you're always fighting for what's right. You're the bravest hero I've ever known.”

It wasn't the first time that Peter felt tears trickle down his cheeks as he clung to his dad and cried. It shouldn't have been this easy, and, in actuality, it probably wasn't, but his dad is accepting him, is proud of him. He thinks he's a hero. “I love you, Dad,” he sobs into his dad's shirt. It smells sterile, but there's this smell of safety.

“I love you too, Peter,” Tony says, kissing his forehead. “I will always love you, and be here for you no matter what.”

No matter what.

Chapter End Notes

So... how was it? Gotta admit, I got lost in the emotions somewhere in there. Not sure if I'll get a new chapter out tomorrow. Work's going to be a bit crazy lately, and it's not looking like it'll get any better. Hope this tides you all over!

Stay safe, everyone~

Thanks~
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

You can't hide from the world forever.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Needless to say, Tony made sure everyone close to them and who truly cared for Peter knew about his “nightly activities”. Dr. Banner had dragged Peter from Tony's side to bandage his wounds and give him a good look over. He still hasn't quite managed to convince them of his healing factor.

Pepper and Uncle Rhodey gave him the stink eye as they hugged him, which he thought was quite contradictory. Why would you be angry with someone while you were hugging them with worry? One or the other, please. It's hard to know whether to feel bad for making them angry or feel grateful that they worry.

Rhodey was both horrified and proud of Peter's skills to get Tony to take Spider-Man (him) to Germany with them. He feels sad that Peter saw him fall, but grateful that he hadn't suffered any serious injuries there. (And he was twice as angry as ever with Rogers and his gang for attacking Peter there.)

Pepper was outraged that Peter had fought up against Rogers and his group. She would've been so upset with Tony if he'd brought Peter into it knowing who Spider-Man is and how old. As it was, he hadn't known. He clung to Peter whenever he came back from being bandaged up as if he'd disappear.

Coulson didn't step in, really. He'd already gotten passed this revelation and all of the nausea inducing concerns that went with it. Went passed GO and is already thinking about how best to help Spider-Man do what he wants to do safely.

“...so anyways, I got bit by a radioactive spider on a field trip to Oscorp.”

“You WHAT!? I'm going to kill Norman for that!”

“Dad, it wasn't his fault,” Peter objects. “Well, it kind of was, but it was an accident – me getting bitten anyways. So it's not really his fault? But I mean, he's still not a good guy. Kind of a dick, actually. But he's my friend's dad, so maybe no killing?”

“It's Osborne, Pete, come on~” Tony whined, partially teasing. Only partially though. He never did like the look of that man. His eyes are always full of ice and hate. Sometimes, Tony wonders if he's even human.

“Dad,” Peter gives him that look. That look that always means no.

Tony crosses his arms with a petulant look. “Fine.”

Spider-Man doesn't go out that night, or any other night that week. Matt is out there, protecting the
city. Him and the others. The city is in good hands. Tony needs him more.

The whole week is spent watching Netflix and talking about what's happened to him, what Spider-Man has done, and trying to avoid the painful conversation of losing half of their family in flames. It's light-hearted with a dark, somber undertone, but Peter lets himself get lost in his Dad's hugs, the way Coulson brushes the hair from his forehead, Bruce's gentle smiles, Uncle Rhodey's jokes, and Pepper's concern and worry for them.

But reality always comes crashing back in, and when Peter sees the face of a young girl listed as killed in an apartment fire. He can't keep hiding from the world. People need Spider-Man. Especially now that the Avengers are broken, unable to save themselves.

“You'll be safe?” Tony asks. He already knows that look in Peter's eyes. He hadn't recognized it before, but he's sure he's seen it. Somewhere in the vast amount of time when he's known Peter – he's seen that look of guilt and the strong desire to protect. It's the look of a hero. Not like Captain America, not even like Thor. His son is a hero no matter how much Peter denies it, but hero or not, Tony just wants him to be safe.

Peter gives Tony a guilty look. His dad knew exactly what he was thinking, what he wanted to do.

“Just…” Tony pulls Peter in for a hug. “Just be safe, okay, kid?”

Peter hugs his dad back just as tightly. “I will, Dad. I've got my suit. It's so much better since you helped me upgrade it.” He pulls back with a lopsided smile on his face. “Plus, I'm sure Hulk will come save me if I need it.”

Dr. Banner raises an eyebrow. “There is that.” Hulk and himself were all for protecting Peter. He just never hopes it comes to that. If it does, it means Peter's hurt and in danger. Hulk hates that idea.

“Don't forget the comms, Peter,” Coulson says, dropping one in Peter's hand. “It's linked directly to us. If anything goes wrong, if you need help at any point, just let us know.”

Peter nods, smiling at Coulson. “I will,” he promises. He starts stripping his clothes, almost embarrassed that he'd been wearing the suit underneath his regular clothes, but hey – it was quicker to change alright? (And he might've been super excited to wear it since his dad helped him upgrade it.)

Rhodey chuckles as he watches Peter almost trip over his pants in an effect to struggle free of his clothes. “I hope you're not this clumsy out there.”

Peter spins to look at him and almost does a nose dive as he trips, heading to the floor. Tony reaches out to catch him, but just before he does, Peter webs himself up onto the ceiling. His pants fell on Tony's face, free from his lower limbs.

“...Sorry, Dad~!” Peter called down to his dad, grinning as everyone broke down in laughter at the sight. He slipped the mask over his face, seeing his dad take the pants off of him with a look of mock anger.

“Yeah, yeah. Payback's a bitch, you know that, right?”

“Tony!” Pepper exclaims.

Peter gives a salute as the window opens. “If you can catch me, Old Man~” he teases. “See ya, later, slowpokes!” And then he's flying through the open air, cold wind rushing passed him.
“Woo~hoo~!” Peter screams as he catches himself on a web and catapults forward.

Spider-Man is back in the game.

Chapter End Notes

Going to go ahead and apologize for the delay and future delays. It looks like it's going to be a long week, crazy hours at work.

Hopefully, I'll get back to writing soon.
“...Phew! If you can't take the heat, stay away from the fire, please,” Peter said as he set a man down on the ground. “Seriously, it's dangerous to go running into a fire like that.”

“...I'm almost disturbed by how terrible that joke was,” his dad says in his ear.

“My wife! She's still up there! I need to get to her!” the man tells him, desperately looking at him.

Peter looks back up at the apartment complex. The smoke is rising high into the nightsky and the fire's flames are making it look almost like morning. This.. is going to be tricky.

“Which apartment?” Peter questions.

“Shit, tell me you're not...”

The man points up at the one facing east on the third level. 'Of course…'

“I'll get her,” Peter assures him. “I just need you to stay here where it's safe, so I'm not worrying about both of you, okay?”

He looks conflicted, but the man finally gives in with a nod. “I'll save her, I promise,” Peter swears, unwilling to think about this man in front of him losing his wife. It hurts to lose someone. Hurts so bad that it feels like a piece of you dies with them. There's no way that Peter's going to let this man experience what he has.

And without a second glance at the man, he shoots into the air, web clinging to the edge of a taller building. “I'm going in,” Peter mutters over the comm, letting them know what's going on. He swings.

“Be careful,” Coulson's voice comes over right before Peter crashes into the window and onto the apartment floor. Heat rolls over him like waves of destruction and hunger.

“Hello!” Peter coughs. They should've put in an air filter to his suit, but they hadn't quite figured out how to shape one so thin that it wouldn't show through his mask yet. “Hello!? Is anyone there?”

It's futile, but he waves his hand out in front of him as if that could direct the smoky air elsewhere. “Karen, can you detect human life signs?”

“I'm detecting one human life sign in the next room. It's rather faint. Suggested course of action involves a quick retrieval,” Peter's new, fancy AI reports to him. He's so tickled to have an AI that his dad made for him actually wired into his suit. Peter feels like he can take on anything and everything.
“...Level three collapse eminent in five minutes,” Karen tacts on.

Except that.

Peter's had enough of being trapped under a building, thank you so very much. He forces himself in the direction of the life sign, kicking down a door.

Finally, he sees her. The woman is smudged with black and coughing so much that her eyes are watering. Peter can hear her breathing shutter with effort through the creaking and cracking of fire.

“Hey there,” Peter soothes, kneeling in front of her. “You okay?”

The woman nods, fearful. “Okay then. We've gotta go okay? Now, I'm going to pick you up and then we'll get you somewhere safe,” Peter makes sure to tell her before he slowly slides his arms around her, picking her up. “Keep your head down. This level is getting ready to collapse.”

Feeling the woman tuck her face against him is all he needs to start heading out of there. It feels a lot less like fire now and more like Hell. Everything's burning. He makes himself take comfort in the fact that at least it's not as Hellish as losing part of his family. Fire? Pft. Small potatoes. The whole mess with half of the Avengers (his family) going rogue? His papa abandoning him?

A piece of the ceiling falls, his senses tingling as an alert just in time for him to smack it out of the air. It doesn't eat through his suit – no. His dad added some experimental metals to keep it from being melted, but it doesn't stop the temperature. The hot air burns his skin like acid and makes him hiss in pain.

“Are you okay?” his dad asks, concern apparent in his voice.

Peter grits his teeth and shakes it off as he continues to move towards the window he'd busted through to get in. “Could use some ice, but other than that I'm good,” he reports back.

“Ice?”

“Well, I know you don't use ice for burns, but I would love to feel cold right about now,” Peter offhandedly explains as he kicks part of a burned rocking chair from his way. The hot air fills his lungs, making him wince. “And an air filter.”

“Got it on the list, kiddo,” Tony tells him.

Peter looks down as he reaches the window. The dark night is filled with flames and the flashing of sirens. “Can I get rockets too? It'd be so much easier to just fly down right about now.” It does take some work to get carry someone away from danger when you need your both of your hands to websling.

“Trying to be 'Rocket Spider'?” Tony jokes, tense.

Batting some of the glass from his way, he jumps into the window pane, shifting the woman in his arms before flinging them out into the open air. It doesn't take long for the ground to race towards them. Just before they hit, Peter webs them stable a few feet above the ground so he can set the woman down by her husband and an ambulance.

Flicking his fingers a bit, the webbing comes undone and his feet touch the ground. Peter looks around to make sure no one else is trying to find a loved one before he remembers to answer his dad. “Don't you think that sounds a bit literal? Could be like you and name myself after the most common known metal that makes up only.. ehhh~ 2% of the suit?”
There's snorting in the background and the sound of his dad scolding them for laughing at him.  
“Hey, now. ‘Iron Man’ is a very respectable name. People love it.”

“Yeah, because how many other metals do they actually know if?” Peter points out, leaping onto the side of a nearby building and watching the firefighters battle the fire until it gets down in size. He's keeping an eye out in case anything goes wrong. Always best to be prepared.

“..You know what? No candy for you this Halloween,” his dad states, offended.

“Hey!”

“Don't worry, Peter,” Rhodey comes on the comm. “We've got you covered.”

“Besides,” Dr. Banner continues, “you're right. It's not like anyone would’ve known anything if Tony had called himself ‘Adamantium Man’ instead.”

“Now, that just sounds dumb,” Tony protests.

“Because 'Iron Man' sounds so much better, Dad,” Peter teases, relaxing as the fire dies down enough to be more manageable. His gaze wanders over it, looking for potential dangers, threats that might blow up again, but nothing really seems to stand out. “Looks like things are going good here. I think I'll move on to another part,” Peter tells his guest listeners.

He barely waits for them to acknowledge that part before he's up in the air, swinging from building to building, until – he spots something familiar in a dark alley.

Peter's starting to think Brooklyn is a terrible place to visit.

Chapter End Notes

Hey~ Hope everyone's doing well.

Okay, quite little tid bit. We're going to be getting into this one scene that I've been wanting so much to get to. I'm not quite sure how it's going to go yet, just that it needs to be written. It might take me a little bit to figure out the best way for this scene to go, but it'll be quite the scene (I'm hoping).

Anywhos.

Thanks for reading and commenting~
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Meeting someone in a dark alley - anytime - is a bad idea. This time? It's still a bad idea.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

He doesn't panic so much as... well, freak out. Peter's mind whirls through possibilities, probabilities, safety procedures... And yet... "So, I'm going to go comm silent for a bit," Peter mentions aloud. "Just gotta go to the bathroom. Not sure you wanna hear any of that, so, yeah."

"Geez, kid. If you gotta go, just go," his dad chides him over the comm, teasing.

"Will do!" Peter replies, barely taking the time to register much of anything except the scene in front of him. "Karen, mute the comms and switch the video feed off."

"Of course, Peter," Karen answers, dutifully.

"Also, send a message to Matt with my location and tell him I need a 'shadow'," Peter adds on, hoping Matt will make it there fast.

"Done," Karen tells him. "Be cautious, Peter." He can only try.

Taking a deep breathe, he lets himself fall into the alley, landing with a soft thud on the filthy pavement. "So," he tries to keep his posture and voice carefree, "been a long time, eh, Cap? You here on vacation?"

Steve hardly feels like he can tolerate this amateur right now, but he forces himself to fall back into the military persona that's hovered in his life every second since waking up after the ice. "I'm not here on vacation, Spider-Man. I want to talk to Tony," he demands.

It takes Spider-Man a second, but he tilts his head and goes, "Ummm... No." Steve didn't come all this way to be rejected, didn't slip through Wakandan security and into the United States to be turned away.

"I don't think you heard me correctly," Captain America tells Peter. It makes Peter shiver with unease as his papa cold repeats, "I want to talk to Tony. Now."

'Come on, Spider-Man,' Peter encourages himself. 'You got this. You got this.'

"And I said, 'no', Cap. Or have you forgotten that I'm under no obligation to do anything you ask of me." Peter waves his hand in the air, vaguely. "Home of the Free, remember? Oh, but then again, you abandoned this place, so you might've forgotten." He leans forward, letting his anger and hurt speak for him. "I don't have to do jackshit for someone like you."

Steve forces his outward appearance to look relaxed and open. He lets a small smile play upon his lips, eyes pleading, "Please. I just want to talk to my husband, to see my son again. Surely, it's not too much to ask? They're my family," Steve pleads.
Peter stares at him from under his mask. He wants to yell and scream at him, wants to hit him until he's too tired to throw a punch. How can he say that!? After everything he's done, after hurting his dad and abandoning him, how can he say that!?

“I believe you were rejected, Mr. Rogers,” Matt's cool voice comes, startling Peter. It had taken him longer than he would've liked to reach Peter's location, but it wasn't hard to figure out why Peter wanted him there. The few things that he did hear, Matt doesn't like. He definitely knows Peter is close to losing it. The hurt the young teen feels is almost palatable on his taste buds. There's nothing Matt wants more than to beat the “good Captain” black and blue.

“Daredevil, correct? I don't believe we've formally met yet,” Steve tries, ignoring the very obvious distaste in the air.

“We haven't, and if you weren't causing Spider-Man trouble, we never would,” Matt bluntly explains, fingers running over his clubs. “I only work with those that are trustworthy.”

Peter leans towards Matt for comfort, but it's hard to move. Not with someone so familiar and all the conflicting feelings holding him in place. He's angry, but he also wants to cry. He used to idolize Captain America, but the hurt is still fresh and deep.

“I just want my son,” Steve finally says, temper starting to rise. “I've done nothing wrong. I just want my son.”

'I've done nothing wrong?' Peter can't believe his ears. Neither can Matt. And the things holding Peter in place snap. “Bullshit.” He walks up to his papa, ears roaring with power. His spider sense is telling him this is a bad idea, but right now he could care less. He thinks he's done nothing wrong? What a crock. “You beat your son's dad almost to death, abandoned your son, and ignored your family? You didn't tell them you knew what happened to Tony's parents? And you think you've done nothing wrong? No. You are a fucking idiot if you think that. You've done nothing but hurt them. I can guarantee you that they don't want to hear from or see you ever again,” Peter hisses, vengeful.

“Now see here -” Steve starts, rage building up and ready to boil over at being denied and slandered.

“No. You see here. You're not a hero anymore. You're not their family. You're nothing but a criminal,” Peter growls. His senses blare and he barely dodges as the same shield that people have used as a symbol of justice and freedom comes slicing at his head.

Matt had barely had time to reach out and pull Peter away from the path. It's not quite out of the way, though. Matt can hear Peter's suit give, can smell the scent of fresh blood. Peter's hiss of pain is the last thing he hears before his ears are ringing as one of his clubs collides with the shield.

As soon as Peter is clear, Matt is unleashing all his anger at the man in front of him. He hadn't been able to protect Peter when he made the (stupid) decision to go to Germany and join the fight amongst the Avengers. This time? He can do it. He will do it. The Devil inside him cackles with delight as he manages to whack Captain America on the temple.

Peter has to admit, it's so damn amusing to see Daredevil go all out on Captain America. “Peter?” Karen speaks up. “It would appear you are injured. It is recommended to get treatment.”

Reaching up, he can feel the warmth and stickiness of the blood from his head on his fingertips. It's what he gets for being too sensitive to touch, but then again, that's a spider's life. “Well..” Peter remarks, looking over the scene in front of him. “I guess we don't have to stay. Hey, DD? Duck!”
Matt ducks as a web flies passed him and latches onto Captain America. He raises an eyebrow in curiosity as Captain America gets dragged with super-strength through the air before he hits the side of a building. The man is dazed and maybe bleeding. Matt hopes he's bleeding. “Leaving?”

Steve blearily sees Spider-Man nod, a look of disgust evident on under his mask as he looked Steve's face. “Yeah. We've got better things to do.” Spider-Man leans down towards him, making him want to reach out and strangle the vigilante's thin neck. “You better keep running, because the moment SHIELD catches you, you're going to go behind bars for what you've done, and you will never, ever see your ex-husband and son, am I clear?” Spider-Man talks down to him.

Oh, Steve really wants to snap the loudmouth's neck. How fucking dare that little shit tell him what to do. “They are mine!” he grinds out, trying to get a grip on himself. Man, he hit that wall hard.

“Yeah,” Peter pretends to think. “I don't think so.” And then he punches Captain America in the face. “This is for hurting Tony.”

“Feeling better?” Matt questions, hearing Peter's heart race.

“Oh, only a little. Let's get out of here,” Peter tells him, wrapping an arm around Matt and shooting a web out. “Karen, send Cap's location to SHIELD and tell them to step on it or he'll be gone.”

“Of course, Peter.”

“I think it's back to the Tower for the night...”

Matt doesn't disagree. What a night…

Chapter End Notes

Considering bringing Bucky to NYC. Who's up for it?
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

No one likes seeing Peter hurt.

Chapter Notes

Updated on 10/29/17 to tweak a few details.

It's a good thing Matt is a great navigator, because Peter's not sure he'd have been able to make it back to the Tower without him. Blood soaks his mask and makes him shut his left eye as the mask begins to stick to that side of his face. It makes him feel a little nauseous to taste his own blood on his lips through the mask. Maybe his next suit will be bloodproof. ...Or maybe that's asking for too much.

Upon landing, Peter stumbles. Matt's hands flash out to catch him, not wanting his young companion to fall face first. He frowns. “I think you've lost a bit too much blood, Peter,” Matt remarks, concerned.

Peter waves off his concern, but he allows Matt to lead him into the Common Room.

“Peter!” Coulson's by the teen's side in an instant, reaching out and inspecting the bloodied head in front of him. He hesitates to pull of Peter's mask. Daredevil. He's never met the vigilante personally (at least, not with the mask - Matt Murdock, yes, but Daredevil? Not until now). He knows that the man has some very strong opinions about criminals in suit or out.

Knowing how hesitant his uncle is, Petter reaches up and tears the mask off, grimacing in pain. The shock on his uncle's face is clear. “It's fine, Uncle Phil,” Peter tells him, trying to wipe away some of the blood but only managing to smear it. “He knows what he's getting into.”

"Do I? I can't see what it is,” Matt teases lightly.

"That's because you're blind, Matt," Peter replies, lips twitching in a smile.

Coulson eyed Daredevil, taking a little bit of time to file away that information and add new questions to the profile SHIELD had collected. It's not like he hadn't had questions the moment he'd found out, but he wanted to respect the man's privacy. Still, hunting information down on him was a lot different than being told, so he'll make note of it. With a sigh, he reached out an wiped some of the blood away. “What happened, Peter? I thought you were just taking a short break?”

Why was the damn thing still bleeding?

Peter winces as his uncle touches the tender, still bloody wound. “I did, kind of,” Peter defended, stumbling over his words. “There was a little bit of an incident...”

“And you didn't think to tell us?” Tony stood in the doorway, glaring at the trio. He wasn't expecting to hobble up to the Commons Room and find Peter injured when FRIDAY informed
him of his son’s return.

“M-Daredevil helped me,” Peter insisted. “He was right there, had my back every step of the way.”

Matt raised an eyebrow behind his mask and instantly said, “Mostly.” At Peter's look of betrayal, he couldn't help but add on, “I didn't exactly get there when you did, Peter.”

Well, that didn't help matters. “Really?” Tony questioned, narrowing his eyes. “And who are you by the way? I'm not sure I trust someone that looks like he's into BDSM to have my kid's back.”

“Dad!”

“Hmm… Logical. Well, then,” Matt, decided, pulled his mask off, focusing his hearing at the room. “It's no problem now, is it?”

Coulson blinked. Somehow he wasn't as surprised as he thought he should be that this ended up happening. At least Tony, with his gaping mouth, was surprised enough for both of them. “Pleasure to meet you again, Mr. Murdock,” he held out his hand.

Matt shook Agent Coulson's hand with a smile. “And you as well.”

Tony waved a hand at Matt. 'Well, he can't really see, can he?'

“You can stop waving your hand, Mr. Stark,” Matt said.

Stopping Tony, glared as Peter chuckled at him. “Lucky guess.” Tony moved closer to Peter, inspecting his head. “Damn, kid. Someone really got you good. FRIDAY – Bruce?”

“On his way, Boss.”

“Right, so. I'm not sure who's ass to kick. Your's or whoever did this to you?” Tony admitted, biting back guilt as Peter leaned into his hand. He definitely hated seeing the haunting red on his son’s face.

“I believe you'll find the culprit to be more to your liking, Mr. Stark.”

Everyone's eyes turned towards T’Challa as he walked into the room beside Dr. Banner. He, for one, had little doubts about who did this. And he had no doubts about who needed to be taught a lesson. He'd been a little shocked to see the suit of his companion on Stark's son, but really, T’Challa had had a sneaking suspicion from the moment he'd met Peter, that the boy was special and brave. 'Very much a hero's son,' T’Challa remarked to himself.

“I'm listening,” Tony seriously says.

“I believe that can wait, Tony,” Dr. Banner scolds as he leads Peter over to the couch and helps him sit down. He's glad he brought his medical bag. The cut is more of a gash and it continues to sluggishly bleed. He knows head wounds tend to bleed more than normal, but… “I'm afraid I'm not that familiar with your rate of healing yet, Peter. Is this amount of blood normal for this kind of wound?”

“Y-” Peter started to say.

“It's not,” Matt speaks up, interrupting. “This usually only happens whenever he's worn down, or haven't eaten enough to support his high metabolism.” Matt tilts his head towards Peter, daring him to lie. “Have you been eating enough?”
Peter frowned, pouting. “No… I just haven't felt that hungry and there's been so much to do lately. I just find my mind so occupied with everything I have to do, so I just… I forget,” he sighs. Peter flinches back when Bruce disinfects the wound, cleaning it up.

“Coulson, would you…?” Tony began.

Coulson holds out a protein drink he'd fetched from the kitchen. “Drink,” he ordered Peter. Once Peter had downed one, Coulson held out another, and another. He made sure Peter finished three of them in order to get his healing kickstarted. They were going to have start watching out for him now that they know how much he needs to eat more in order to heal.

Peter downed whatever they gave him. It kept him busy, kept his mind in the dazed place without memories of who he'd just met. He didn't pay much attention as Dr. Banner bandaged him up, checking him out for any other signs of injury.

“So, what happened?” Tony questioned, making Peter look up at him with unfocused eyes. “I know we didn't do as much work as we could've with your suit, but I thought we reinforced it enough to not get cut like this, kid.”

Dr. Banner doesn't like it when Peter frowns, trying to bring himself back into focus. It's like he's in shock? The head wound wasn't quite hard enough to cause shock to Spider-Man, so it's something else. Something he's sure he's not going to like.

“We ran into Mr. Star Spangled himself,” Matt answers, leaning on the couch by Peter's head. “I think Rogers needs a few more good whacks across the head. He was saying some rather interesting things when I arrived.”

T'Challa swore under his breath, watching as everyone's faces burned with anger at the news. “I'm afraid I didn't make it in time then. I knew that Rogers was getting upset at the announcement of the divorce proceedings, but I had hoped to arrive before he did. I apologize for my late arrival.”

“You- You knew!?” Tony couldn't help but stare at the King, jaw slack with shock.

“I did,” T'Challa admitted. “His mind, recently, has become unstable, so I kept had him under surveillance, but he slipped through the cracks a few days ago.” T'Challa looks at Peter, heart aching at the sight of bloodied gauze. “I am sorry, Peter,” he apologizes. “I promise, he will be brought under control. I have brought someone to assist me in his capture.”

Coulson frowned slightly. “And who would that be, Your Highness?” Surely, he wasn't talking about…

“Bucky Barnes,” T'Challa said. The hurt and distrust that flashed across Stark's face made him continue, “He's awaiting my return outside as we weren't sure you would like to see him or not. Barnes has made it clear that he'll stay out of sight and do all he can to ensure that you and your family are not disturbed in any way.”

“He doesn't have to stay out there.” The words were out of Peter's mouth before he realized it. His dad looked at him, confusion and upset fighting on his features for control. “I mean, if he's not going to hurt us, and he's serious about chasing P- Captain America, then wouldn't it be better to work together?” Peter shrugged, feeling bad about speaking up, but the words were out there now.

Tony's mind struggled with the idea of having his parents' killer in the Tower with his son. He knew that it wasn't really Barnes who'd killed them. The man had just been a tool of Hydra that they used to do their dirty work. It still hurt though. He's not sure he can forgive the man just yet,
but maybe… “As long as he's not a danger to anyone here,” Tony finally said, willing to give Barnes a chance.

“He has suppressors for when he feels the programming become active,” T'Challa assured them.

'Suppressors,' Tony thought, intrigued. The man was drugging himself to remain in control, and if Tony knew anything about drugs, and he does, it's that they don't always work without harmful side effects. Maybe he'll have to take a look at those drugs…

“So… what did he say to you, Peter?” Tony turns to his son, dreading what his son heard from his soon-to-be-ex-husband. He'd rather be stuck on a plane next to Barnes than hear what kind of horrible things Rogers told his son without even realizing who Spider-Man is.

“Well…”

No one ends up liking it.
It's caution and nerves that make Bucky enter into the Common Room slowly. He's done enough damage to this family as it is, he doesn't want to make it worse. There are several pills packed with suppressants that weigh heavy in his jacket pocket, ones that he'll use without a second thought if he thinks he might be slipping into the Winter Soldier.

When T'Challa had brought him inside and up into the building, Bucky hadn't been quite sure if this was really the right thing to do. Was he ready? Were they ready for this?

But stepping into the living room to see Tony Stark holding onto his son, chin resting on the top of Peter's head, with no one really seeming alarmed, he thinks that things are okay. Tony doesn't look at him, even as his son's eyes flick up to meet Bucky's. Peter's head is wrapped with bandages, a slight red tint making it plain to Bucky that he'd been through something pretty bad. After all, the boy could catch his punch, so who could hurt him quite like that?

“I'm okay, Dad,” Peter tries to reassure him, letting his fingers trail along his arm. He can feel how tense his dad is, uncomfortable with Bucky in their home, despite what he'd said. Peter understands; he can't fault his dad for feeling that way. No one can.

“Bullshit,” Tony sighs, pulling his son to lean against him gently. “You don't just get attacked by Captain America and be 'okay', kiddo. I would know.” It makes his heart beat roar in his ears. It makes Bucky's heart simultaneously break and rage to hear Tony's words. He should've known. Of fucking course Steve did that to the teen. His metal arm creaks as his hands curls into fists. And Tony's 'I would know'? Fuck, Bucky screwed up so bad. The man has all the reason in the world to be upset with him. He killed his parents, after all, and hadn't known the truth until that moment. When would he ever quit messing up?

Peter's stomach growled, making him blush to the tips of his ears. “Um.. oops?” He was relieved when everyone either cracked up or smiled, amused at his expense. It lifted the tension in the room, gave everyone a distraction from the dark thoughts that had settled like clouds overhead.

“Let's get you something to eat, kiddo,” Tony decided, getting up with a wince. He wasn't fully healed, even with all the advanced medical technology Dr. Cho and SHIELD had set him up with, so his body stilled ached in some of the worst ways. At least he's no longer on death's door – he counts that as a win.

“You want one of those frou-frou egg and turkey sausage sandwiches?” Tony questioned, patting his son's cheek before heading to the kitchen. “I don't know why you like those so much when we have real sausage, but hey, who am I to judge?”

Coulson is so close to rolling his eyes at that, and from the expressions on Dr. Banner and
T'Challa's, he knows he's not the only one. Murdock just seems to be tuning the man out as he sits next to Peter – 'how does he do it?'

And then Tony stumbles.

It happens so fast that no one could've seen Tony's hurt leg just crumble under him in strain. But then there's Bucky. The man is at Tony's side in an instant without a thought, arms pulling Tony up with great care and concern shining on his face.

Bucky is shocked at his own actions, wary even, but he keeps his body language open. He's not trying to hurt anyone right now. He just wants to know if Tony's okay. “A-are you okay?” he stumbles over his own tongue, at the utter surprise on Tony's face.

Everyone holds their breath, waiting for something to blow up.

Tony's cheeks tint red after a minute. “I'm – I'm good,” Tony insists, scolding himself for falling, for needing to be helped up. He hates being helpless. “…Thanks,” he tells Bucky once he's upright again.

“Not a problem,” Bucky automatically replies, cautious of Tony's body. He doesn't want to see the inventor fall again.

“Are you okay, Tony?” Coulson asks, walking up to them with a look of inquisition at Bucky.

“I'm good,” Tony reassures him with an eyeroll. “Can't a guy lose his balance for one second without everyone jumping to help him?” Coulson gives him a look, and he falters. “I'll be okay, Phil,” Tony says softly. “Thanks.” He slides to the kitchen with Bucky, a shadow behind him. Gosh, he's an adult, not five! …But it feels nice to be looked after, cared for, especially after what happened.

“Bucky doesn't seem so bad,” Peter comments, watching the doorway to the kitchen. He hadn't expected the man to save his dad from falling like that. Well, he means - “The Winter Solider might be a murderer, but I think Bucky might just be an okay guy.”

Matt sighs. Leave it to Peter to see the good in everyone. “Just because he might seem like a good guy doesn't make him faultless over what happened.”

“Point,” Peter relented. It wasn't quite the Winter Solider who helped beat his dad almost to death, but... “I just think that he's been through a lot, being used to do Hydra's dirty work, and while I still am ready to bash his face in for what he did to Dad, I think there's some good in him.”

Forever the gentle soul – Peter Parker. Bruce smiles softly at Peter. If nothing else, Peter was the kindest, most loving person in their band of misfits. He hopes Peter never loses that light. Peter's the heart of them all, even those absent.

“You, Peter, are a bright soul,” T'Challa says, echoing the thoughts of the others in the room. He's never quite met a child like Peter before. Strong, self-sacrificing… Everything a hero should be and more. Maybe he's not at the level of the Avengers just yet, but T'Challa knows that he's going to be so much more.

The teen waves it away, red dusting his cheeks. Gosh, do they have to be so embarrassing? He's just plain, old Peter Parker-Stark.

“Shit!” Tony yelps from the kitchen. The sound of eggs breaking reaches their ears, making them look at the doorway with curiosity and maybe a bit of worry.
“...I hope you like your eggs scrambled,” Peter mutters, already remembering how many times Tony's managed to fail at cracking open eggs without making a complete and utter mess.

They give one another a look.

Matt raises an eyebrow as they look at him. “Don't look at me. I'm vegan.”

Peter snorts. “Liar.”

“It's not lying if I just decided,” Matt points out, devious smirk on his lips.

“Dad!~” Peter calls out, raising his voice. “Matt wants extra eggs, he says!”

“Coming right up~” Tony sings from the kitchen.

Matt looks at him with open horror making Peter grin like the little shit he is. “Peter...” he says, feeling betrayed.

Peter gives him a look. “Hey. If we go down, we're taking you with us.”

'So much for finishing out the night in peace.'

Chapter End Notes

Special thanks to Buckets_Of_Stars for the help with this chapter. :(
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Sometimes it takes a while to see clearly.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After doing some stupid things throughout his life, Scott decided that joining “Captain America” is officially the stupidest thing he's ever done (and he once stuck his tongue to a metal pole on a dare – ouch). Scott hasn't talked to his daughter in over a month. He's probably the worst dad ever.

Thinking about the press conference, about Peter… Maybe he's not the worst. But he's still pretty damn high up there.

Scott sighs, rubbing his eyes. 'Christ, I'm bored…' There's only so much for a guy to do in a palace in an isolated country where you have no friends. Seriously, he jumped into this mess and wasn't even an Avenger. Now? He's a fugitive among a group of fugitives who are all pals, except him.

Really, he's tried to get along with them, but Wanda's kind of closed off and self-centered. Not that he wanted to insult her or anything by thinking that, it's just that when she goes off the wall on Tony Stark, she feels a bit… weird.

He thinks that Clint feels it too. He may have started out this whole shebang with the defense that “she’s just a child”, but sometimes, when he thinks no one's looking, Scott can see him shiver, eyes never looking at her. 'Didn't she like haunt them or something with her powers?' Hmm.. 'Oh. Nightmares.' Wanda had given them all their worst nightmares.

One more reason to avoid her.

Leaning forward, Scott lets his head fall onto the wooden coffee table with a -thump!-

"Youch, man. Trying to knock yourself out?" Clint questions, waltzing in with a quick sweep of the area.

"Nah, just bored, and lonely, and feeling like a complete idiot,” Scott whines, letting his head fall onto the table again.

Clint raises an eyebrow. “Oh? How come? Not that I'm going to disagree. Just feel like I should know the reason(s) you're an idiot.”

The coolness of the table against his cheek is easily ignored as he turns his head to look at the archer. “Dude, if you had a family, you'd be feeling like an idiot to,” Scott says with a glare, missing the way Clint winced. “I haven't talked to my kid in over a month, and now I'm officially a fugitive?” He groans. “There's no way my ex is ever going to let me see her again.”

“T'm such an idiot for following Captain America,” Scott continues on. “I just… I didn't expect us to become criminals. I thought, 'Hey! Captain America! He's a good guy. If there's anyone you
can trust to tell you the truth, it's him!' - Which was obviously wrong. I don't remember the history books ever mentioning what an ass he is.”

“Who leaves their kid behind without a second thought!? Who does that!?'' Scott demanded, focusing on Clint for answers.

But Clint didn't have any answers. He found that he couldn't give any, because he really didn't know himself. It should've been easy to refute Scott's claims, explain that “sometimes things happen, but it'll get better” - but he couldn't. Honestly? He was beginning to think it might not get better.

*Clint* had left his family behind. *Clint* had chosen to run off and join Captain America. *Clint* is now a criminal.

Because he trusted Steve. He wanted to believe that the man he fought with so many times would never lead him astray, would do what's right for the sake of justice.

*Who leaves their kid behind without a second thought!?*

They did, and so did Steve.

He hasn't talked to his family since he left. Kissing his wife, promising he'd be back once he “talked to Tony”. But Clint hadn't returned yet. He's tried calling but every time it goes to voicemail. He's not ashamed to admit that he's left over 10 messages, and so far? Nothing.

Yet Laura had every right to be pissed at him, didn't she? Clint had fucked up – big time. Honestly, he wasn't planning on fighting, but when Cap had lead them? It'd just seemed too easy to want to fight, too easy to ignore the option of conversation and negotiation. So what should have been a peaceful meeting had become something violent and destructive – life destroying even.

So he'd left his family behind with the belief that he was doing the right thing, that Laura would've wanted him to protect Wanda. Clint hadn't seen it before, but she's so hateful, always using her abilities to subtly get what she wants. *She's not a child anymore!* - Tony's words echo in Clint's head.

And fuck, if Tony wasn't right. Willing to kill people to get revenge, to sacrifice her humanity to destroy and attain her desires… Getting into people's heads to show them their worst nightmares… Clint winces.

No, she's not a child. Maybe she hasn't been a child for a long time. But you know who's still a child? *Peter*. Peter, who Steve left behind. Peter, who's lost his family time and time again, but never failed to do his best.

*Their Peter.*

Who they all thought of like a nephew/son. And who they had so easily abandoned while citing the Accords as the source of conflict.

'It's not you, kid. It's an adult thing, that we could totally solve, but we're not going to because we know more than you.' It sounded so stupid like that. It doesn't matter what it was. In the end, they're making Peter suffer. Clint didn't even have to imagine what would happen if Tony was successful in divorcing Steve, because really? The relationship had been fractured since the first punch was thrown.

“Rogers is a complete and total idiot if he thinks that he can force Tony and Peter to stay with
“...and now he's gone,” Clint softly points out, feeling helpless.

Scott gives the archer a pained look. It should've been damn obvious that Steve wasn't going to let it go. Even time he got rejected it was apparent that he grew more and more determined, a hint of darkness growing in his eyes.

Sam doesn't feel the same, they know. He's a soldier, following his Captain. He doesn't understand like Clint and Scott have, doesn't have children like they do.

And Wanda? Scott's been avoiding her ever since he saw the exchange with Bucky and Steve. Bucky's punch had been like a punch to his common sense. Clint hadn't been actively avoiding her, but he'd withdrawn a little. He wasn't overly friendly, just observant. Things are breaking apart, and Clint and Scott have to do something to right their wrongs.

“So,” Scott slowly says, leaning back on the couch, “time to head home?”

Clint's lips twitch in a weary smile. “Yeah,” he agrees, already calculating routes back and how much of his things he'll be needing. “Let's catch us a super-soldier.”

Scott chuckles, slightly afraid. “Yeah. Don't remind me that he could kill us with one punch, please. We're only human.”

Raising an eyebrow, Clint challenges him, “Speak for yourself, I'm awesome.” Scott gives him an offended look. “And don't worry~ We'll have a super-soldier on our side too.”


“..Ass.”

Chapter End Notes

Some of you mentioned Clint and Scott understanding that blindly following Steve was a crappy decision. I could totally see that (thus this chapter). Hopefully, it made sense, but yeah. I love Clint, and I can't see him or Scott just letting a kid get hurt.
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Is this good or bad? Bucky's not sure.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was a thing of wonder, really. Bucky had been surprised that Tony and Steve's son is Spider-Man. He felt overwhelmingly guilty that he'd fought against him, battling against a teen in Germany. But more than that? He is proud. Proud that the teen is doing such wonderful things.

Spider-Man's a name known widely throughout New York City for being a vigilante who protects the little guys. He doesn't really travel, besides Germany, but he's there for the people of NYC more than anyone else (well, Daredevil's there too, but it's Peter).

The teen is smart, kind, and gentle. Bucky can't help but become attached to him, wanting to know more about him and protect him from everyone that tries to hurt him. Even Steve.

Which is why Bucky is having such a hard time trying to hunt down Steve. It's been 3 days and every single night he goes out… There's a flash of red and blue following him.

The kid is more persistent than anyone Bucky's ever met.

He sighs, rubbing his face and flicking the comm on in his ear. “Stark…” Bucky breathes into it over the dull buzz of nightlife.

“...He's there again, isn't he?” Tony's tired voice comes over the comms.

Bucky hums an affirmation, rotating his shoulder cuff. He hears Stark take a breath, weary frustration obviously taking its toll. It's not Peter, he knows, that's causing Stark's exhausted mental state, but the media and trying to stay ahead of Ross on the matter of The Accords. Ross is such a heavy weight on Stark's shoulders that Bucky imagines picking him off more than once just to relieve Stark of the oppressive presence.

“Sorry, Barnes,” Tony says. “Could you keep an eye on him tonight? I'll make sure Karen has him return before the morning.”

“Will do, Stark,” Bucky promises, already thinking of detours. He doesn't want Steve anywhere near Peter. Thinking of the blood dripping down the teen's face… Bucky wishes he'd punched Steve harder. “Okay, kid,” Bucky spoke louder, “what do you say we patrol some, huh?”

Peter's feet plopped down on the roof beside Bucky, eyes wide under his mask. “D-do you mean it?” He didn't even bother questioning how Bucky had caught onto him. Super-soldier seemed to answer all questions.

Bucky's lips twitch fondly. “Yeah, but you have to show me the ropes, okay? I'm new at this.”

Peter's face lights up. “Oh my god. I'm teaching the Winter Soldier how to be a vigilante! This is going to be great!” He couldn't keep still, tapping his feet and jumping up and down a little.
“Okay, so first of all, you've got to learn how to banter with villains. It's a key ingredient to being a vigilante,” Peter explains excitedly. “Oh, this is going to be so great!”

Actually, seeing Peter nearly get skewered by a gang who'd been terrorizing a couple is the last thing that Bucky thinks of as 'great'. He did kind of enjoy the banter. Not his. God, no. Peter's. Bucky is more the kind to just taunt them silently. Peter's mouth more than had both of them covered for that experience though.

“Oh, man!” Peter cackles, webbing onto a building and leaving the gang webbed up and aching in the alley below. “Did you see it when that one guy went to punch me but actually ended up hitting his face on your elbow?” He laughed, holding his gut. “The man didn't know what hit him until it was too late!”

“That was fun,” Bucky admits, unashamed of enjoying the memory of the man running into his metal elbow. It was just too perfect for words. If only he'd had someone film it…

“Sssh!”

Bucky freezes, stiffening as his ears sharpen for the sound of movement, voices. “Wha-?” Peter starts, but Bucky cuts him off with a finger to his lips. He needs to listen and luckily, Peter clamps his mouth shut dutifully. Noise directs him to the building next to theirs, muffled behind the rooftop entrance building.

He tries to act non-nonchalant as he tells Peter to stay there for a second. “Forgot something down there,” he says. “I'll be back in a moment.” And then he's slipping away into the darkness, out of the view of their watchers.

Peter caught on as soon as Bucky hushed him. He hears the scuff of shoes on concrete, the hiss of breathing. It's hard for him to pretend that he's waiting for Bucky to retrieve what he 'forgot', but he manages to keep his body language open, focused on his senses in case something happened.

Yet even hearing Bucky growl and twin yelps to followed afterwards, Peter felt no danger. Aware that there is no danger, Peter swings over to the next building to see for himself what the heck is going on.

“Ummm… Bucky?” Peter says, head tilting as he examines the scene he finds. “I don't think Clint and Scott can breathe like that.” Not that he particularly wants Bucky to let go. He just doesn't want Bucky to be a killer. Winter Assassin or not, Bucky is Bucky.

“W-what 'e s-said,” Scott manages to stutter out, hand gripping his throat in an almost too painful way. Why do these things always happen to him?

Clint just wheezes as he tries to keep himself at an angle where his throat isn't being crushed by a super-soldier.

Bucky eyes them carefully, unsure of whether or not he really wants to let them go. But if he wants them to answer his questions… He lets them down easily, body remaining tense and ready to go. “Where is he?” Bucky demands, eyes narrowed as the two former heroes cough in front of him, rubbing their necks.

It literally hurts to see Clint in front of him, face scrunched up in aggravated pain. Peter never liked seeing any of them hurt before, and even though he's afraid of them, angry with them, it seems like that hasn't really changed much. He wonders if that's a good thing or a bad thing. He doesn't want to be sympathetic, doesn't want to be forgiving, but… “Let me help you up,” Peter softly says, holding out his hands to both of them.
Clint eyes Spider-Man's hand with caution, but reluctantly allows the bug themed hero to help him up. Scott seems to have no trouble giving Spider-Man his hand and being helped up. The archer's stomach turns, nervous. He feels bad for fighting him. Just a little though. Surely, a vigilante would've been prepared to fight though.

“Thanks, man,” Scott thanks Spider-Man, voice hoarse.


“We don't know!” Clint bites out, glaring at the former assassin. “We haven't seen or heard from him since the last time we saw him in Wakanda, okay? We didn't even come here for him!”

“Well, we kinda did,” Scott interrupts, unable to stop himself. “We just… Cap seems to have taken one too many knocks to the head, if you know what I mean, and well, we didn't think that his family should have to deal with him alone.”

Bucky blinks.

“So… you're here to help m- Peter and Tony?” Peter inquires, chiding himself for stumbling over his words.

Clint definitely does notice the slip up, thank you very much. He's a spy. He notices things. People tend to forget that fact, but he does in fact notice details. It's curious, and in some ways concerning. He's going to have to keep an eye out for other small things. “Yes...” he admits, frowning. “He's kind of lost it. And…” Clint looks at Spider-Man. “We're very sorry for what we did. We're not expecting forgiveness or mercy, just – please, let us help.”

Bucky tilts his head in question towards Peter. They seem harmless enough, though, he'll be more than happy to ensure that they are. It's up to Peter and Stark, ultimately. He can only imagine the pain they must be going through.

It makes Peter's head spin. He wants to yell at them and scold them, tell them that if they were going to end up regretting their actions, they should've put more thought into it! But he lets his anger go with a sigh. If there's one thing his dad taught him, it's that hanging onto anger hurt the person being angry more than the person the anger's directed at. He refuses to let himself fall into that kind of anger again.

“Okay… They can come back to the Tower.” Peter relents. “But, we're going to set some serious ground rules and if you break them I will kick your asses all the way to SHIELD's deepest darkest containment units.”

Scott gulps, but remains firm as he accepts, “Deal.” Clint echoes him with determination. They've made mistakes, and it took them a damned long time to realize that, but they want to do Tony and his family right. If not for their sakes, then for their children's sakes.

“Well, Bucky,” Peter sighs, rubbing his masked face. “This is going to be a long night.”

Chapter End Notes

Going to start by apologizing for any mistakes made in this chapter. It's been a long week, and it's not even over yet.
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

Things aren't getting any better.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony is a complete and utter mess when the two former Avengers follow Peter and Barnes back to the Tower. He doesn't go out to greet them. There are too many memories swirling around his head since FRIDAY informed him of the situation.

The last thing he wants to do is remember things how they were, but… somehow, he can't help it. Forgiveness is hard, but the bittersweet feelings of nostalgia keep floating up.

He sighs as he gives the machine in front of him a dirty look. “Why does everything have to be so damn complicated?”

“I believe that's what people call, 'Life', Boss,” FRIDAY says.

Tony glares up half-heartedly at the ceiling. “I didn't actually want an answer, FRIDAY,” he remarks. He's not really upset. FRIDAY is right. Life is complicated. 'Way too damn complicated.'

He leans forward and tinkers with his invention a little bit more before whipping sweat from his face. “Okay, Fri, show me what you got.”

"..There's a 79.8% chance of success," FRIDAY replies. Tony wants to pick up his wrench and throw it. “It's up from the previous attempt by 5.6%, Boss.”

Tony stares. “Is that supposed to make me feel better, FRIDAY? Because I gotta tell you, it really doesn't.” FRIDAY doesn't reply.

He sighs, running a hand throw his messy hair. It's not enough. 79.8%… It's good, but there's still a risk that the mental alterations will fail and do more harm than good. And that's the last thing Tony wants to do. Especially since he's determined to do this procedure in his home. He may be starting to like Barnes, but the super-soldier still ranks below his family. Peter is the most important person in the world to him, and he's not going to take the chance of making the Winter Soldier worse.

Nope.

...He eyes his machine with caution. He's got a lot of work to do.

But the man came back to a country where he's a criminal to protect them from his best friend. Barnes is risking a lot. Tony's going to repay him for that.

'Speaking of…' Tony swallows. “I've got a bad feeling about all this…” he remarks to himself before pushing the feelings of unease down and resuming his work.
Steve is a silent observer through the entire ordeal, watching from afar. His eyes flare every time he sees someone comforting his son and husband through the media. He wants to lash out and demand for their heads.

He can't approach the Tower recklessly. Tony has a large perimeter when push comes to shove. He's proven that time and time again. It's one of the things Steve loves about Tony, but also something that he's come to butt heads with. When it's not directed towards him, he's fine with it, but now? He wishes FRIDAY would just shut off. He wants to walk through the door to his home without the threat of being locked away and judged.

It's hard to miss Bucky missing sides. Steve wants to growl with how snuggly his old friend is blending into the spot that's his.

Steve breaks a brick wall when he sees that Clint and Scott have switched sides as well. The thief had seemed flaky from the beginning, but he'd have thought that Clint would know more about loyalty. Obviously, he'd been wrong.

The public outcry over Steve's actions seemed dull to him, and they hardly had any traction. It was a bunch of false reports that kept people this upset over the issue. He's sure about that.

He fought for this country decades ago. They owe him.

"They owe me," Steve bites out, eyes flashing red as he watches the Tower from a distance, thinking about how his son remains locked away from him. He can almost taste Tony's coffee flavored lips…

"You can take it all back," a familiar voice whispers from the corner of his mind. "Your husband... Peter… They're your family. No one should stand in your way."

That voice is right, if Steve's being completely honest. Peter and Tony are his family, no one else's (why that feels like it should sound bad, he's not sure). The fact remains that Tony and Steve exchanged the vows, were married legally. They adopted Peter together. He's their's. They are his.

"So what are you waiting for?" - The question hangs in the air, a loud whisper over all the noise of the city.

Steve waves the voice away as he squints against a flash of red. "The right moment," he said out loud in explanation. The answer felt right, but… "But sometimes, the right moment is made."

With a twitch of his lips, Steve's brain starts working on a plan. 'Colonel Rhodes… Clint.. Scott… Bucky…' He can make this work.

A few tweeks here and there… 'I'm coming, Peter.. Tony.'

~

Sitting on the roof of a building with her legs dangling over the side, appearance hidden beneath a hooded cloak, Steve's stalker smiled. "This," she said to herself with her red lips like fresh blood against her pale skin, “is going to be fun.”
Little bit of a short chapter here, but some chapters aren't meant to be dragged out forever. (Not to mention that work's been running me ragged because we're short handed...)

Anywhos.

Have a good weekend~
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

It's hard to adjust to the way things have become.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It is unusual to have Clint and Scott at the Tower. Peter had greeted them with a smile, but it was weak, pained. It turns out that rifts are hard to mend, even with forgiveness.

And Peter did forgive them, mostly. Well, it's less like forgiveness and more like forgetting. Sometimes it's just easier to forget to move on. It doesn't mean the hurt isn't there. It just means that you focus less on the hurt and more on what's to come.

Peter doesn't call them his family anymore. He has a hard enough time thinking of them as friends as it is. But for whatever they are, Peter finds himself exchanging small smiles and short conversations that ease into a light-hearted atmosphere.

He feels bad for Clint when Laura refuses to meet him or let him see their children, but he also feels proud of her. She's suffered for so long through Clint's work and then his betrayal. Peter supports her decision to protect herself and the children.

At least Clint's thinking more when he surrenders to her wishes. He seems to understand what he's done wrong and that it's not something he can fix by just apologizing.

Scott, too, seems to understand that his ex-wife and child aren't going to forgive him with just an apology. 'I'm sorry' is easy enough to say, but showing your regret is a lot harder. Peter's going to watch to see if they can gain the forgiveness of their families back.

Can they? He's not sure. But at least they understand that they're in the wrong. At least they're willing to do whatever they can to make up for their mistakes. It's more than Peter can say for his Papa.

Peter watches them with his head on his dad's shoulder, snuggling into Tony's side. They look a little better as they exchange stories of their kids between the two of them, lighter somehow. It's less than quiet with them back in the Tower, but somehow he's okay with that. It's good to have something to focus on instead of thinking about the things he's lost.

It's not quite night yet, but the sun is setting earlier, evidenced by the fading rays of light that shine through the windows into the living room. It's so peaceful to Peter, so calm.

And yet somewhere out there is Bucky, relentless in his hunt. And Steve… Somewhere amongst the clutter and noise of the bustling city is Peter's Papa.

The thought that his Papa was out there on the streets used to be comforting. Who wouldn't feel better about having a super-soldier out there, roaming the streets with a “thirst for justice” (Tony's words, not his)? But now? It's kind of terrifying and upsetting. It makes it harder for Peter to not feel like whenever he steps outside, he'll be there. Instead of safety, it feels like he's being hunted,
like someone's waiting to strike at their weakest moment.

“You okay, kiddo?” Tony's voice cuts through the haze of Peter's wandering thoughts, making him look up at his dad.

“Mm?” Peter questions, turning his head in a way that makes Tony want to cringe. His kid is wayyy to flexible. He's blaming the spider. Totally.

“I asked if you're okay, Peter,” Tony tells him softly, reaching up and running his good hand through his locks.

Clint and Scott subtly turn their attention to Peter and Tony. Clint more-so than Scott, seeing as he's more focused when he wants to be.

“I'm okay, Dad,” Peter replies, closing his eyes a bit. “I'm just a little tired.” Tired of feeling conflicted, scared, upset… He just wants to feel free again, happy again.

“Why don't you go lay down for a little bit,” Tony suggests. “It's not like we've got any pressing matters today.” Peter peeks up at him, eyebrow quirking. “I mean,” Tony corrects, “I've got an appointment at SHIELD, but you don't have to come.” He brushes his fingers against his son's cheek. “You can stay here. Brucie Bear and Rhodey are going to be taking me, so I'll be fine.” Tony tilts his head towards Scott and Clint. “Besides, someone needs to keep an eye on those two when I leave.”

Clint knows Tony's right, but it doesn't stop the hurt. He knows they're wanted criminals and can't leave. Tony was trying to be light-hearted, but it didn't stop Clint from noticing the reality of the matter. He and Scott had returned, but only after they'd screwed their lives up. He's not sure there's a way to come back from what they did, but he's hoping to try.

“Yeah, kid,” Clint speaks up, trying to make things better. “You're going to need your rest for Mario Kart.”

Tony raises an eyebrow, but doesn't say anything when Peter turns to look at them with a scowl. “I could kick both your butts with my eyes closed,” Peter says.

Scott looks between Clint and Peter with caution. “Suddenly, I think I have things to do later. Like… later Mario Kart later, so I won't be able to play…”

Clint elbows Scott lightly, teasing. “Bullshit. We're going to kick the kid's ass, Bug Man.”

Scott makes a gurgled noise of offense that kind of sounds like a frog dying, at least, that's what Peter equates it to. “I'm not the only bug here,” Scott tries to defend himself.

“Actually spiders are arachnids,” Peter can't help but correct. It kind of makes him want to laugh how Scott looks instantly wounded and lonely.

“Yeah, well… Fine,” Scott finally decides, crossing his arms. “Just don't complain when I red shell your butts.”

“I'd like to see you try,” Clint eggs him on, playful.

It's amusing to Peter, but he's also getting more tired by the moment, so it's kind of lost on him. A soft nudge makes him look back at his dad. “Go get some rest,” Tony tells him. “I want you to be wide awake when you kick their sorry asses.” Clint sticks his tongue out with some very immature faces at his dad. But his dad's right. He could use the rest.
“Just let me know how it goes, okay?” Peter murmurs to his dad, concerned. He knows his dad will have Uncle Bruce and Uncle Rhodey there to watch out for him, but it doesn't dissipate the feelings of unease. After what happened last time he let his dad go somewhere without him… He thinks it's valid.

“Of course, kiddo,” Tony easily replies, pressing a kiss to his kid's temple. “Go on.”

Peter hugs his dad, careful of his still healing wounds before he gets up and pads to his room. He rubs his eyes with a yawn and slips into bed, the blinds already closed thanks to FRIDAY's foresight. 'A little bit of rest won't hurt,' he tells himself as his eyes slip shut, snuggling under an Iron Man plush blanket, compliments of the very man himself.

'Just a little bit can't hurt…' Can it?

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the amazing comments and love for this fic. Hopefully, things will start picking up in the next chapter or so.

Hope everyone's staying healthy this season!
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

Needless to say that things go downhill while Stark's away.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Lights down low, Clint leans against the doorway to Peter's room, watching his pseudo nephew sleep. He's not going to wake him, despite their loose plans of playing Mario Kart together while Tony's gone. The boy had looked tired in a way that Clint associated with the Avengers after a mission. He's not sure why it feels that way, it just does. He doesn't have the heart to make him wake up for something as silly as Mario Kart.

“He looks younger like that.”

Clint turns his head to see Scott standing there, eyes sad. For someone who acts almost as childishly as Clint does sometimes, Scott looks old. 'No, not old,' Clint notes. 'He looks his age – experienced, mature.'

It takes the archer a moment to clear his thoughts and give a whisper of a reply. “He is young.” Clint shrugs. “He doesn't seem like it lately,” he admits. “But then... what else should he look like after all that's happened? I can't help but think he's grown up a lot more than he should.”

“It's what happens when we leave them alone,” Scott murmurs, remembering his own daughter and how she was growing up without him. “They get forced to do so much more growing up than they should when they get hurt.”

It was obvious that they were implicated, both of them. It was what they did to Peter, to their own children. It's what they're still doing by having become criminals. They're not sure they can come back from that...

“You know, we're shit dads,” Clint mentions as he watches Peter roll over in his sleep. “But Steve?” He sighs, running a hand through his hair, pulling on his locks in anger. “He's the absolute worst,” Clint continues with a hiss.

“.Yeah,” Scott murmurs. He feels like crap thinking about how he'd left his daughter behind, but he's back. Even if he can't be forgiven, at least he's trying. For someone who's supposed to be the symbol of freedom, truth, and justice, Captain America is failing horribly at everything. Especially being a father.

“I don't know about you, but there's only so much bullshit I can take,” Clint begins. “Bucky was right to bash Steve's face in. The next time I see him, I'm going to...”

The power flickers off.

Scott looks around, suddenly ill at ease. “That's.. not supposed to happen, right?”

The archer hushes him, darting forward and placing a hand over Peter's mouth as he shakes the

Peter nods. He can feel it. It's a hum in his bones that makes his stomach lurch. There's no need to shake off the tendrils of sleep so soon after waking up, because the feeling of unease is chasing any lasting bit of weariness from his mind and body.

“What about my dad?” Peter whispers as Clint helps him out of bed with little noise.

“I'm sure he's fine,” Clint hurries to reassure him. “He's probably still at SHIELD bitching about their nurses and how much blood they need to 'steal' from him.” His brows furrow as he notices Peter digging some objects from his backpack. It's too hard to see what they are in the dark, but at this point, he can't afford to focus on it. “He'll probably take over the Helicarrier to get back here when he finds out the Tower's down.”

Peter laughs a little, and that makes Clint feel pretty damn accomplished since he hasn't seen Peter laugh in what feels like a long time. “He would do that, wouldn't he?”

Scott squeaks when he thinks he hears a sound and whips around to face the hallway. “Umm... Should I just go in there with you? I mean, it's best if we're all together after all. Only logical...”

He's not liking this whole power outage already. The only way he can see anything is with dim blue lights that have lit up across the hall – emergency lights.

“We're not staying here, bug brain,” Clint teases, trying to relieve them off the tense atmosphere that has settled over them. “I don't know about you, but I'd rather not be stuck in a small place if we need to fight.”

“There's a utilities elevator next to the supply closet on the floor below us,” Peter tells them, glad that his dad helped him modify his suit to make it easier to hide on his person and under clothes. He double checks his webshooters to ensure that they're full and ready. “We should take the stairway to go down. The elevator will have been frozen in case of intruders.”

“Really? I thought Stark would've had it going even without power,” Scott inquires, trying to focus less on the darkness and eerie lights.

Shrugging, Peter grabs his comm and slips it into his ear. “He said he wants anyone who breaks in to have to 'work for it by climbing all the stairs.' ...I thought it was silly but I'd rather fight someone who's worn out from having to climb stories up.”

“I think it makes perfect sense,” Scott mutters nervously, eyes darting about the hallway. He's not exactly prepared for.. whatever this is. Heck, it could be the Stay Puffed Marshmallow Man and he'd still get his ass kicked. In what little light there is, he sees Clint pull out and expand a bow, arrow slipping from somewhere. ‘...God, I am so underprepared.. When this is over I'll wear the damn suit everywhere! ..Except the bathroom. And well, it might be hard to sleep with it on...’

“Oh whatever,” he gives up.

Peter raises an eyebrow at how obviously nervous Scott is. It's understandable considering the man doesn't have powers – just a suit. Clint doesn't have powers either, but his background isn't exactly normal...

“You good, Pete?” Clint questions, notching an arrow on his emergency bow. He's so damn grateful that Stark hadn't thrown away his 'in-case-of-emergency- equipment. It's the reason why he's got a variety of compressed arrows in the inside of his jacket pocket. ..Kind of dangerous to just flip an arrow out, but that's the reason it's for emergencies only. Kind of like now.

“I'm good,” Peter answers, rolling his shoulders a little. “The staircase is about five minutes to the
right in the hallway. From there it's a ten minute opening to the utilities elevator.” It's a little big of
an opening since it's meant for maintenance and supplies, but it's the best shot they've got.

“Let's go,” Clint commands, stepping out into the hallway. “I'll cover the rear. Scott, you're in
front, and Peter – the middle. Stark would kick my ass if I let anything happen to you.” Either that
or throw him from the top of the Tower with no parachute or anything. Splat! Not a pretty image.

Peter doesn't argue against Clint's orders. To them, he's just a kid – normal, average, powerless. If
it were still before the war, before the break-up of the Avengers… He probably would've come
right out and told them about Spider-Man, but now, after everything? He wants to keep his secret
even closer to his heart; safe from the ones who hurt his family.

They make it down the stairs with ease, footsteps making soft echoes that made Peter wince. Soft
as they were to those with average hearing, they seemed to be so frighteningly loud, a giveaway to
their location. 'Just me..' Peter tells himself on loop. 'We're not really all that loud. It's just your
stupid senses, Spidey..' '...

But as soon as they step into last meters of the utilities elevator, they hear it.

“...Peter.”

Chapter End Notes

Hi again~ I thought I'd go ahead and get a chapter out there before my week starts.
(Ugh, thanks, Work.) Hope that everyone's doing well and staying warm. I'll try to
get another chapter of something out before Christmas. (Not a clue which fic, but
something.)

As always, thanks for reading~
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

Well, this is turning into a big mess. Hello, Puppetmaster.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“...Peter.”

The boy himself, his boy, looks almost... frightened? It makes Steve's insides twist and turn. What is it that makes him look so stunned, wide-eyed? 'Later...' He'll find out later. Right now, he just needs his son in his arms.

Steve repeats himself, taking joy in the name, “Peter.” His lips curve as an unusual emotional war goes on in the pit of his stomach. Righteous fury. Overwhelming love. Fire. … Warmth.

He remembers meeting his son for the first time. Peter had been so small, just 13 after having lost the last of his family. What happened to the smiles he loved so much? How come there's so much turbulence on his son's face now? He wants to know, wants to find out.

“Son.” He takes a step forward, easing himself a little bit closer but freezes when they stiffen up before his eyes.

“Hold it right there, Cap,” Clint commands, arrow pointed in his direction. It's not like it'll do much damage – maybe more damage to the Tower than to Steve since it's not one of his strongest, but he can try, can't he?

“Clint..” Steve frowns, confused as to why his friend is pointing an arrow at him, upset that he's being betrayed again. 'Again?' He hates it.

“Uh-uh-uh, Buddy,” Scott says as Steve makes another aborted movement towards them. He puts himself in front of Peter. Well, as in front as he can be since they're still partially in the stairwell. “How about you stay right there, and we'll just, you know. Stay over here, where it's farther. From you, I mean.” ...Yeah, he's terrible at this kind of talk, but he's trying.

Peter… His heart is pounding in his chest and his spider sense, a touch about a hum. He's supposed to be better than this. Why is he freezing up? Spider-Man shouldn't be freezing up in front of an adversary! Spider-Man always kicks butt and takes names (and leaves little notes for the cops signed, “Your Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man..). But.. right now he feels trapped in Peter Parker, unable to find the courage he has in his suit.

Because this time, it's not some villain, or crook. This time… It's Steve Rogers. It's the man who held him when he cried after a nightmare. It's the man who made him pancakes for dinner after a rough day at school. It's not just some stranger. It's.. “Papa,” Peter croaks, voice cracking with the effort he puts into saying the word.

Steve's heart flutters when his son says his name. “Yes, Peter,” he smiles softly. “I'm right here. I came back for you.”
'I came back for you' - ? “You left me,” the words spill from Peter's mouth as his chest aches. “You hurt Dad, and you abandoned us.” He should really stop, but he can't, somehow. It just keeps coming. “You sent me a stupid letter and a phone, saying 'you're sorry,' but you're not. As soon as Bucky came back, you dropped us and ran.”

It hurts to hear, but Steve isn't going to let Peter believe it. He needs to know the truth. “I.. I didn't mean to hurt your Dad. Things got out of control, and I'm extremely sorry for that, son, but I didn't 'drop you and run'. I wasn't leaving you behind. I left to protect Bucky and to protest the Accords...”

Peter scoffs. “That's not protesting if you never try to talk about it, never attempt to compromise and see what can be amended. You didn't fight anything. You turned tail and stomped off like an upset five year old!”

“Peter...” Steve tries. He has to explain. “I'm.. sorry that you feel that way. If there's any way I can make it up to you, I will.” His arms reach forward. “Just.. come back with me, Peter. Please?” He's not leaving without his son this time. He's left him behind for the last time.

'Get Peter first,' Steve tells himself. 'Then you can get Tony...' One thing at a time.

Peter frowns at him. It feels so familiar – the frown. He's not smiled much lately, not as much as he used to anyways. “You.. what's wrong with you?” he questions, head tilting to the side, ignoring the outright curiosity of his two Avenger companions. Looking at Steve like this, something doesn't feel quite right. The buzzing in the back of his head feels too turbulent to be associated fully with the human equivalent of the country's flag.

The man in question looks puzzled, unable to comprehend what Peter's asking.

And then he sees something blaze in the darkness. Red, and his eyes widen with horror and understanding. “Been a while, eh, Wanda?” Peter asks, pushing the sudden swell of fear and confusion down. He can't afford to dwell on it.

Feeling the others tense by his side, Peter watches as she steps from the shadows, blood red lips curling in a disgustedly satisfied smirk.

“I suppose it has been, hasn't it?” Wanda remarks as her eyes flash red.

“You?” Clint breathes out, eyes wide with shock and disbelief. He can't believe his eyes. Steve doesn't even seem to notice her, and fuck, if Clint doesn't know there's something abnormal going on in his head right now. 'Fuck.'

Scott's just.. gaping. Like, holy shit. He has got to be having a nightmare. Seriously. Wtf. He hadn't imagined this. “No one said anything about her being back in the country,” he can't help but blurt out.

“I'm not sure sure anyone knew she'd even left,” Peter muses, eyeing the situation with caution. He's faced some seriously strong people, but this lady can throw him into the air with her mind. 'This is so bad.'

Wanda waves a glowing hand at Steve, who straightens up with his face blank.

'...So, so, sooo bad.'
So... It's a short chapter, but I couldn't fit everything into one chapter. Next chapter, things get messy and get revealed.

Hope everyone is having a good holiday~ Happy thoughts for the coming year!
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

Coming close to the action.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Steve is lost. He doesn't understand who Peter's talking to, doesn't understand why his body is moving without him. All he knows is that he's gotta take Peter with him. He can't leave his son behind again. And anyone, anything, who gets in his way... he's gotta take out.

“So? What's all this?” Peter questions, fingers lightly pressing on his webshooters to remind himself that they're there, that he can and will defend himself if needed.

“Wouldn't you like to know, Peter Parker-Stark,” Wanda sneers with disdain.

And, oh~ Peter's starting to get a picture. “This is about my dad, isn't it? You still blame him for your family's death.” He looks at her, taking in the picture of red hatred that she embodies. Peter knew she'd blamed him from their first encounters, but he hadn't realized she'd hung onto it for so long.

After the battle in Sokovia, Tony had investigated Wanda's account, had hunted down answers that were tucked deep, deep down. And he'd come up with the conclusion that, yes, it had had Stark Industries logo, but it wasn't his design, not truly. It was weaker, more compressed and shoddily thrown together - it was his former partner's work, done behind his back and sold on the Black Market. Even after Tony had ripped Stane from his life, the man was still there, ruining things and destroying him. That's why he'd apologized to Wanda - Peter had seen it.

“That man took my family from me!” Wanda snaps, eyes glowing red as waves of disgust and hate roll across her.

And then, Peter can't help it. He knows better. He knows better. He knows. But the words just slip through, anger overtaking him. “No, he didn't!” he bites back. “Dad had no part in those attacks! Did he sell weapons?” He shrugs. “Yeah. He did, but those weapons weren't his. He found the evidence. Showed it to you. And still, he apologized.”

He can tell by the look on her face before she spits out the words that she doesn't believe him. “That evidence is fake,” Wanda hisses, hands sparking like fireworks. “There's no way Stark didn't know about the weapons. He knew and yet he turned his back on it! He killed my family!”

Clint can't help but stare at the one who's side he's fought, the one who's brother sacrificed himself to save others, and he almost can't believe it. 'She's insane,' is the thought at the forefront of his mind. How could she see the evidence and yet still deny it?

Scott has absolutely no idea what's going on, but all he can think is This is a special kind of batshit crazy.

And Peter just.. looks at her, veins boiling. 'Calm down, Spidey,' he tells himself. 'You're losing
control of the situation. Think for Pete's sake! He's good at thinking. Most times. It only turns into a mess when he's confronted with embarrassment – (Thank you, Flash Thompson). 'Turn it around. okay. Let's try it.'

“So, you decided to join Hydra with your brother, and when that failed, you sided with him?” Peter carries on quickly when Wanda opens her mouth to protest. “Fake sided with, I meant. Sorry, gets to be confusing when you're all buddy buddy and messing with people's minds. Anyways, you twist things, manipulate people. Ultron was you too, wasn't it? And then Germany, the whole thing with the Accords? What a complete and absolute mess you've made.”

Does he sound like an adult talking to a child? He sure feels like it.

With a few notable exceptions.

Peter moves his wrists very slightly to remind himself that he has his webshooters on, muscles tensing in preparation. Any moment now the talking is going to turn physical, and the only way they're going to win against Captain America and the Scarlet Witch? Spider-Man. He's betting they'll be shocked for a few moments before training kicks in. That's his chance.

Wanda's cheeks flushed as she glared daggers at Peter. “So what if I did that? No one noticed. No one ever noticed me! I would've had it all if it hadn't been for you Avengers.”

Peter feels insulted with how she sneers the word. And him, not even an Avenger technically. Yet. He's going to have to ask his Dad about that when this is over with. “Wow,” he remarks, blunt. “Sad. Just sad.” He sounds anything but sympathetic. “I've lost people, people I've loved, but I've never even come close to having such a giant temper tantrum. You, crazy lady, need to grow up.”

He knows he's in trouble when Wanda's cheeks burn a furious red. Heck, he's sure Clint and Scott know too, but he can't find it in himself to regret it. “Silence! I will not be insulted by a powerless child!” Wanda screeches, hands flickering with power.

Clint and Scott tense in front of Peter. How much can they do against her? They don't know. It's like a pebble before a wave, but like Hell they're going to let her hurt Peter.

...On the bright side, at least they get to deck Steve.

Going to hurt, but still. Silver linings.

“Get them!” Wanda finally commands Steve into action.

Muscles unfurling with strength, this is what Peter's been waiting for. This is his time, he knows as Clint and Scott go hurtling forward towards Captain America. He aims, careful not to hit any of the brawling men in the middle, and then? He fires.

Chapter End Notes

Hello all~ Sorry about not updating sooner. Having a full time job and being sick really don't mix. Baby steps.

Anywhos! I hope everyone's staying healthy.
Anywhos! I hope everyone's staying healthy.
Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

Peter outs himself, but it's not the biggest deal - at least, not to him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It's as if from the single moment he was bitten, he was building up to this point. The expansion of his muscles, the calm of his mentality as his webs latch on to their target. His neck twinges as the possibly of danger increases, but Peter ignores it all, and pulls.

It happens so fast to Clint. One minute, he's avoid Captain America's fist, and the next he sees a red figure go flying through the room. 'What the fuck!?' It's Wanda.

Clint knows it's dangerous, looking away from a fight, but how can he not? She's being jerked through the air by white string. He follows the string back to Peter and 'Holy fuck, he's doing that!?' He doesn't have much time to contemplate the sudden event, because the next thing he knows, he's being tackled by Scott as Captain America's shield goes racing over his head with deadly accuracy.

It's rude, yes, and even more stupid, but Clint shoves Scott off and rolls over. He has to see.

Peter doesn't even notice Clint's stare, nor how Scott grumbles half-heartedly and throws a lamp at Steve's head. He's too busy with the sudden notion that now that Wanda's whizzing towards him at a dangerous speed… He doesn't quite have a step 2. His spider sense is roaring at him to freakin' move.

So he does.

Only Peter doesn't fling himself left or right, he ducks down, leaving the mutant to zoom over his head and hit the wall with a very loud crack. If Peter actually liked her, he'd cringe, but she'd probably – definitely deserved that. She doesn't move from her position, having slid down onto the floor.

Clint gapes openly, unable to find it in himself to care that Scott's squealing for help in the background. “Holy shit,” he breathes out. “Holy shit.”

Scott? He's definitely going to have some questions when a super-soldier isn't trying to smush him into bug mush. “A little help here!?” he cries as he dodges a fist.

And then Peter's there, shield in hand as he rams into Captain America. The super-soldier staggers back as Peter snarls, “Not so fast, Pops.”

Steve gives himself a shake and then tackles Peter, who flies back. His feet hit the wall, sticking to it and flipping over him. “That was close,” Peter can't help but blurt out.

It was. It still is as the shield is ripped from his hands by some maneuver that Peter definitely has to learn. He ducks as Steve brings it to slice over his head. “Again, too close!” He scuttles away
from the man.

This isn't like Germany. The connections, the familiarity – there's nothing there to cushion the blows. There's just raw power and even rawer emotions that feed the situation. Even with Clint and Scott with him, Peter feels alone. But it's okay, isn't it? He's Spider-Man. He should be fine.

But he still wishes he could hear his Dad's voice, telling him to be careful, to watch his back. Maybe it's best that he's not there though. This way he doesn't have to see Steve trying to kill them, to kill his son.

Even though Steve hurt him, Peter knows Tony would still be hurt to see what his ex-husband is doing. Peter doesn't wish that on him. He can handle this himself.

For all the times that Tony has protected him, this time, it's Peter's turn.

Something shatters, falling from the wall, and Peter can't help but look at it. His eyes catch a glint of glass from a picture frame that once had a place up high. It's full of smiles, joyful looks as a younger Peter jumps into his Dad and Papa's arms. It reminds him of something sweet, a forgotten taste. 'Papa…' he can't stop himself from being distracted.

And with that moment of distraction, is Steve's opening. Peter feels Steve's leg catch him in his left side, ribs crying out for mercy as he's flung into the wall with a groan. It hurts to breathe. He might've cracked something. Peter's arm curls around his ribs automatically. “Shit..”

“Peter! Eyes up!” Clint calls as he sees Steve step closer, fist raised.

Peter's head shoots up, but there's really no time. His spider-sense is yelling! And then…

“Not on my watch.” Daredevil comes out of nowhere and practically jump kicks Steve into the opposite side.

'He's so cool,' Peter secretly awes.

“No one hurts those under my protection,” Daredevil growls at the groaning form of Captain America.

'...I'm not five, but whatever.'

Scott and Clint have recovered and kneel by Peter's side, guards up in case a certain someone decides to get back up.

The lights flash, and Peter recognizes his uncle Phil sliding in, SHIELD agents behind him as he rushes over to Peter.

“Peter,” Coulson breathes out, relieved and worried all in one. “Are you alright?” Needless to say that with Peter's arm around his side, a 'thumbs up' doesn't make him believe his pseudo-nephew very much. Bluntly, he replies, “Forgive me if I don't believe you when you look like crap.”

“I'd feel offended but if I look as bad as I feel, Dad's going to ground me forever,” Peter retorted, mildly humorous. He didn't like the tension that had settled over the room, wanted to forget that not even 20 feet away is someone who was like family to him, someone he called 'Papa'.

With agents, not to mention Daredevil, Hawkeye, and what's his name, Coulson didn't bother to hide his concern as he reached out and pulled Peter against him carefully. His hand found Peter's hair and instantly threaded through the slightly damp locks. “You did good, Peter,” he whispered softly, gently. “You did really good. It's okay now, though. We're here. You can relax.”
Muscles unwinding, Peter found himself relaxing in his uncle's arms. He felt better. Safe. The fingers in his hair were quickly relieving his tension and his heart steady in his chest.

At least, they were until a loud groan permeated the area – a sign of someone waking up from a long dream. Like the bear who slumbered in the winter, obviously to happenings outside of its territory.

“What's going on?”

Everyone knows what's going on. Steve Rogers is waking up.

Chapter End Notes

Always going to be sorry when my schedule gets too insane to write much. Admittedly, I've been sick, but I'm 99% now! Hopefully, I don't get something worse.

Anywhos. I hope everyone's doing okay, staying healthy. We're getting ready to wrap this fic up (sad, I know, but it has to happen).

Have a good week~
Chapter 36

Chapter Summary

Confrontations lead to heartbreak.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It felt like a eons ago that the same voice would've made Coulson's lips curl and his eyes sparkle with excitement. Growing up, he'd held nothing but admiration for the hero of American truth, justice, and freedom.

But now, like the very ways the ideals that America had been founded on had grown dirty, he couldn't help but feel anger and distaste. Clint once told him, “Reality is a bitch”. Despite his former agent's language, Coulson could feel the reality of it in his skin.

Watching the former Avenger, his former hero, wake up with confusion written on his face tied with innocence? Coulson could hear those words echo in his head. 'Reality is a bitch.'

Everyone was holding their breaths as Steve Rogers came around. They were afraid to breathe. How utterly ridiculous was that? Coulson held Peter closer, his eyes not daring to leave the figure that's slowly getting up.

“Hold position,” Coulson's voice was solid, clinically cold as he ordered the agents to remain still but ready to fire if needed.

Steve is confused – his head feels like it's been tossed around in the laundry. “W-what's going on here?” He blinks, gaze running across the agents, their weapons, Scott, Clint, Coulson, a stranger in red and finally… Peter. “Peter?” He frowns, unsure as to why his son looks so blank. He looks like he's had a nightmare and doesn't want to talk about it. Steve knows that look well.

Filled with concern, Steve, who had since stood, makes a move towards Peter. The instant he does, however, everyone jolts. The agents' fingers press on the triggers. Clint and Scott ball their fists and get into combat positions. The man in red tightens his grip on his weapons. Coulson turns his shoulder a little, keeping Peter tucked against him – protecting him. And Peter flinches.

Steve's heart stops beating.

“No,” Matt growls, hearing, feeling Steve Rogers' heart stop. “You don't get to feel heartbroken over what you've done to Peter. To Stark. To the both of them.” Sympathy is something he can't even try to feel for this “hero” in front of him. The man lost any bit of positive feelings from Matt the instant he'd hurt him.

Peter's fear bleeds over Matt like a blanket, and it's almost hard to ignore the tense atmosphere in the air. “It's okay, Peter,” Matt murmurs quietly. “Just relax. Your dad will be here soon. Everything will be okay. I promise.”

Peter clings to Coulson's suit jacket. There are a million things running through his head, but all his heart wants to do is pretend that everything really is okay. That none of the events of the civil
war between them happened. His heart wants to pretend.. that he can just walk over there and throw his arms around his papa, letting him stroke Peter's brown locks.

But it's not.

This time pretending doesn't have a place in reality.

Peter's heart is hammering in his chest. He's angry. He's sad. He's scared. He's mad. More than anything he wants to pick up a fallen frame and throw it at the man he once called 'Papa'. He wants to forget the pain, but at the same time, he wants to remember the happiness.

It's too bad that he can't remember the joy without remembering the agony. Peter has to face it.

“Cap,” Peter says, keeping his voice as steady as he can without letting anyone know how utterly torn apart he is inside. “Nice to see ya all not 'Rawr~ kill all!~' and all that jazz.” Of course he falls back onto his arachnid persona's humor.

Steve's face twists in discomfort. “Peter… Son..”

“You don't get to call me that!” Peter snaps from his uncle's arms. “After what you did to Dad, to us.. You don't get to call me that anymore!”

Steve's heart falls apart. “Peter… please…” Images flash before his eyes. Blood, a cracking voice. 'So was I.' Everything he's ever wanted disintegrating before his eyes. A web. Peter's face. Tears.

It all fits together to create a clear picture of destruction.

“Let me explain,” Steve begs, tears prickling in his eyes, threatening to spill over. He needs his son to understand. It wasn't him! It wasn't… was it? It couldn't have been! It can't have been. He just needs his son to listen to his explanation.

“Peter.. please,” Steve pleads. “I love you..” his voice cracks. “I love you with all my heart. I would never do anything to hurt you. Don't you understand that?”

“...And Dad?”

Peter's soft voice cuts through Steve's frantic desire to be forgiven and accepted. The American hero blinks, confused.

“What about Dad? You abandoned him.. You nearly killed him,” Peter can't help but say. “You said you loved him before the fight. You said you'd never leave him, never hurt him. But you did. How can I believe you? How can I even think to believe you, when after all this time, you haven't even tried to find out how badly you hurt him?”

Peter shakes his head, heart caught in his throat as he fights to not cry. “You destroyed us.” He takes a breath, hearing the sound of thrusters approaching the Tower through the silence. “Dark powers or not… You're not my Papa… You're a monster.”

And just like that, everything that Steve holds dear to his heart… shatters.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the shorter chapter. Hopefully going to be one or two chapters left. I've
really got to get my tail in gear and work on -finishing- fics as easily as I tend to start them. (Easier said than done, though, right?)

Hope everyone's staying healthy and having a good weekend.

Thanks for all the wonderful comments!
Chapter 37

Chapter Summary

While some things come to a close, there are always others that are just beginning.

It's almost too easy at that point for Coulson. Steve Rogers doesn't even fight as agents cuff him with metal made from special material and technology that he doesn't quite understand. He wants the man to fight some, struggle. It's almost too easy.

He wants to have a reason to wound the man.

But seeing the captain break down… shatter under Peter's words, it's almost revenge enough. *Almost.* He can't wait to hold the man accountable for all the destruction he caused, the innocent lives that were lost. Coulson can't wait to throw him into that hole.

The agents gather him up, prodding him with no amount of gentleness. The shield is left on the floor to rot, for all anyone cares.

Matt hears it first. The distant sound of an incredible piece of technology that has so many intricate details. It's almost too loud for him, but it's okay. It's okay, because Peter hears it next, and Matt can feel the way the young superhuman's heart settles into anticipation and ease. Matt knows that to Peter, it's the sound of safety and love.

Tony walks into the room with pieces of armor withdrawing from his body and returning to their neutral, hidden positions. The entire room is filled with disarray. He can already see what's happened, knows the details. Clint and Scott are talking to agents to the side. Daredevil is there? 'Huh..' There's… *Him.* But all Tony focuses on is.. Peter.

His son, who's in the arms of Agent Phil. His son, who's looking at him like he's his *hero.* And Tony's heart clenches. “Peter...” he breathes out, relieved to see his son safe as he holds his arms out.

There's nothing to fight. Peter slips out of his uncle's arms and runs into his dad's, wrapping his arms around the older man and burying his face into his shirt. “Dad..” He feels like he's finally home in his dad's arms.

“I'm here, Peter.. I'm here,” Tony murmurs softly, hugging his son to him. There's nothing more important right now. No treasure more worth it. Nothing can compare to Peter. He lets his fingers run through Peter's hair, reminding himself that he's safe.

Steve's eyes were on Tony from the moment he walked in. They followed his former husband like there wasn't anything else in the world. And as Tony holds his son like he's the most precious being in the world, Steve is numbed by the realization that he's lost that. He's lost them both.

It *hurts.* He wants to make it better, make it up to them. Steve wants to prove to them that he can change.

“You can't,” a soft voice draws his attention. It's Agent Coulson. His voice is low, but his eyes are cold as they look down at Steve. “You destroyed them once. I will never allow you to do so
again, so don’t try ‘fix this’. There’s no fixing what you broke this time, Rogers.”

“But Wanda—“ Steve tried, desperate.

Coulson’s eyes narrowed with anger. “You think that she did all this? She made you hurt your husband.. made you destroy your family and become a criminal?” Coulson scoffed. “As if she could do that when she was in Raft. I have a sneaking suspicion that whatever she did was just an amplification of what you wanted. She’s a bitch, there’s no question there, but all she did, was let your true desires out. And let me tell you,” Coulson leans forward, looking into Rogers’ eyes, because fuck if this isn’t going to feel good, and hisses, “I’m going to make sure you both pay for what you did.”

That’s it? Is it really? Steve’s head is spinning and, for the first time in decades, he feels like the weak man he was before the Super Soldier Experiment. Except this time he’s alone, and there’s no war to fight. Not anymore. He’s already lost it.

Bucky, who’s just recently arrived at the scene, doesn’t say a word to Steve. He merely watches the ghost of the man who was once his friend be cuffed. It hurts, but he knows it’s for the best. Steve’s changed. Everyone does, of course, but when Steve hurt his family, Bucky knew he was gone for good. At least he can look at Tony holding Peter tightly. That makes the hurt go away, because he knows that those two are worth it.

As agents drag the former hero towards the door, Daredevil ends up beside Coulson. “I imagine there are going to be various lawsuits filed against him once the US Government finds out he’s in your custody,” Daredevil casually mentions.

He’s not wrong. Coulson is going to have a never ending migraine if — when they learn about it. SHIELD may have started as a powerful organization, but after the Hydra fiasco, it's influence has whithered significantly. It's been recovering since then, but nowhere near the amount it needs to for the US and the UN to allow them to have complete control over such a high profiled prisoner.

Coulson rubs his temples. “It's going to be a nightmare,” he admits. “And what we're going to do with Wanda is going to be difficult to arrange. She may be a criminal, but her powers are very unpredictable. The tiniest hint of her powers and everything could go up in flames.”

“Not to mention that you're going to want to isolate her, yet keep a watchful eye over her,” Matt adds. “I've heard her country is divided as to whether or not they want her there to be punished.” He rolls his shoulder, relaxing it. “As you said, her powers are dangerous. With her scheming mind and powers, she’s like a bomb waiting to go off, so it’s no surprise that prosecuting her for her crimes will be difficult.”

And that's going to be a total bitch. Coulson can already feel the migraine lying in wait for when he was to tackle that. “Don't remind me,” he grunts, unhappily.

Decided, Matt silently pulls a card from a pocket Foggy had insisted he get. He hands it over to Coulson without turning his head towards the man. “I think you'll find that there are options, and I'd love to help you prosecute both of them, Agent.”

“Murdock & Nelson, Lawyers for any and all situations.”

Coulson tucks the card away, safely. He understands what a huge risk Daredevil is taking by outing his civilian self to him. ‘I’ll keep this under lock and key.” They both know it's not the card he’s talking about. It's Daredevil's safety and the safety of those close to him. “I look forward to working together.”
“As do I, Agent,” Matt agrees, listening to SHIELD agents taking Wanda into custody, treating her unconscious form with less than regal care. One accidentally whacks her head on the wall. Matt can't help but smirk. He thinks Foggy would take joy in such a situation too.

Coulson's relief churns into melancholy as he watches Tony checking Peter over for injuries. The worry and love on the man's face, and the way Peter beams up at his dad, leaning closer... He can't help but think about what's coming. There's going to be consequences – for all of them. “Is it wrong that I wish we could just throw the two traitors back into RAFT and leave all of their crimes buried, just so Peter and Stark could have time to heal before the government gets wind of their capture?”

Matt sighed. “No. I wish the same, Agent. I do...”

Once the government finds out they have the Witch and the Captain, it's going to be brutal. It's going to dredge up everything that's happened. Because that's the legal way. That's the law.

“The law sucks,” Clint mutters from behind them, having overheard their conversation.

“No always,” Matt feels he should point out.

“But plenty of times,” Clint tacks on.

“Yes,” Matt grudgingly agrees. “It does suck.”
Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

It's all over.

...Or is it?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

What should've been the end of everything, Peter finds, is really just the beginning of something almost as bad. With all the attention the Avengers get worldwide... It's no surprise that once the information leaks and the media gets wind of it... Their phones won't stop ringing.

FRIDAY redirects every call with precision to the appropriate places. And when Peter's phone number gets leaked somehow? He gives up on it and just lets FRIDAY handle everything. His friends will understand. He thinks.

And with the constant presence of reporters in front of the Tower, demanding answers, Peter doesn't even dare suit up. The idea of being trapped makes him nervous, but the thought that someone could see him makes him afraid. He's got enough attention on him being the son of the Tony Stark and former son of Captain America.

Peter knows he'll have to face the cameras and questions eventually, but all he really wants to do is snuggle into his dad's side and stay there until it's all over with.

The feeling of his dad's fingers threading through his hair is soothing and gentle. It makes him feel safe and loved. "It's going to be okay, Peter," his dad tells him softly. "We're going to be okay. Those vultures out there can eat garbage - they're not going to get their claws in us. I promise."

Even as Tony said those words, he was already thinking of plans A-Z. He knows how cruel the media can be, knows even better how tricky and dirty the government can play, but he's not going to let a single one of them touch a hair on his son's head. They can eat a repulsor beam for all he fuckin' cares. Peter is off-limits. It doesn't matter if he can stop a truck with his bare hands. Tony wouldn't let a truck get close enough to Peter for that to even be necessary. His son is the most important treasure in this fucking universe.

Peter hums, snuggling into his side, careful of the wounds that Tony's still trying to recover from. "As long as you're here, everything will be alright," his son says with a certainty that makes Tony blink tears away. God, he loves his kid.

"I love you too, Dad," Peter mumbles softly.

And damn if Tony can resist pulling Peter even closer to his side. Having his son by his side, safe, is like oxygen. Necessary to breathe. He's never going to let Peter go again.

Bucky watches them from afar, quiet yet attentive. Sometimes... these displays of familial love make him feel broken inside. He did this to them. It was by his hand that Tony Stark's mother and father met their deaths. It was his reappearance that led to the breakdown of their family. He
doesn't deserve to be here, and yet, they allow him. They welcomed him to stay.

There's no doubt that there are still cracks between them, but… neither Peter nor Tony has shown a sign that they want him to leave. Bucky can't fix what Hydra made him do in the past, but they seem to be okay with it. It's not perfect, but it works. And for that, Bucky is irrevocably grateful.

Bucky despises the way that the media is eating up the news about the Avengers. About Peter and Tony. He growls and wants to march downstairs and kick their asses. How are they allowed to be such blood suckers!? How dare they hurt Peter and Tony the way they are! Why can't they just shove it!?

“Patience,” Coulson murmurs to Bucky, having silently tread through the nearest door. “The media is unsympathetic to victims, but it's the government that we really need to be aware of.” *That* particular headache has had him mainstreaming caffeine. “The United Nations is demanding a private trial in London to review all of the events and sentence Rogers and the witch. They're insisting that everyone be present. Even myself.”

Hearing that Rogers will be sentenced would've made him burn with fire and righteous rage before all of this happened, but with the Bucky now it barely makes him consider raising his hackles. What Steve did to this family… What he threw away without a care in the world… Okay, those things are personal, but the affects resulted in the loss of lives, of leaving the world vulnerable… They can't be easily forgiven. And for the laws that were broken.. for the blatant disrespect of the United Nations, they need to be disciplined.

He almost feels bad for Steve, but the man made his choices, and the consequences for those choices are his own. Wanda, Bucky has absolutely no feelings of sympathy at all. He's seen the dark hatred in her eyes, recognizes it from those blood red moments in his life. She will not see reason. Her obsession with destruction and drive to kill Tony cannot be changed. He will make sure that she's properly contained with no chances of murdering Peter and Tony again.

And yet… no one can avoid the world forever. Not even Tony Stark.

“Sir? General Ross is on the phone for you and is refusing to speak to anyone else,” FRIDAY announces later that evening.

Tony can't help but be glad that Bruce took Peter down to the lab to discuss updates on his suit. As much as Tony hates to conversing with that self-centered, mutant hating prick, so he really doesn't want to expose Peter to that monster. Ross is a special kind of bastard.

Out of the corner of his eye, he can see Bucky standing stock still, attentive and prepared. It makes Tony want to laugh. He still can't believe sometimes that the man who killed his parents (albeit who was being controlled) is looking protective of him. The sad part is, it almost reminds him of Steve…

Tony shakes those thoughts out of his head. “Put him on, Fri,” Tony says, wondering if a drink would be too much for this conversation.

“Stark!” Ross' voice blares over the speakers, making him wince. Actually, Tony could probably use a whole bottle to get through this, but he'd since kicked the habit when he took in Peter. He refused to be the same drunk ass his father was.

“Rossie Boy, how can I help your Constitution tattooed ass?” Tony snarks. It was impossible to be formal with this bastard.

“Can it, Stark, or I may just have to make a trip over there. I'm your General and I demand you
“Beg your pardon, but you are most definitely not ‘my general,’ and frankly speaking, I'm still wondering how your biased ass made it to becoming a general. I'm thinking some bribes here and there..” Tony says, lips curling in a dark smile as he taunted the military man.

“I can't wait to see you in handcuffs. I've got a nice cell with your name on it,” Ross hisses back.

Tony doesn't miss the way Bucky tenses, fists clenched and face darkened with anger. It makes something flutter inside of Tony, but he doesn't bother to think about it now. “Sorry, but you're not my type. Let's get to the main point, so I can hang up and go do something to forget your horrible voice,” Tony flippantly replies.

“I want Spider-Man.”

He can't breathe. Everything's stuck. His lungs won't move.

“When the UN sentences Rogers and the witch, I want that criminal there with them, standing trial. Don't tell me you don't know how to get a hold of him, because you and I both know you do,” Ross demands.

Something crunches by Bucky, but Tony can't bring himself to investigate. He's too busy making his lungs work, trying to keep his own murderous rage from spilling out. His voice sounds cold and deadly, even to him as he replies, “You are fucking insane if you think you have the right to go over Spider-Man. There are no charges against him from the US government, let alone from the United Nations. He's not a criminal, Ross. If you go after him, just because he's got powers, I swear you won't even live to regret it.” Tony could see the man laying dead as his feet already. There's no way he'd let the fucker get within 20 feet of his son.

“Perhaps not at the moment, but I'm sure I could find a few charges fitting,” Ross seems to take pride in saying.

“Be my guest to try, but just know that I'll be there to crush you, and let me tell you, rats like you are easy to squash with my suit,” Tony threatens, feeling his nails dig into his palms. He sees red everywhere. “Looking forward to seeing your guts, Ross. Stay away from him if you know what's good for you. Ciao! End the call, FRIDAY.”

“Call ended,” FRIDAY informs.

It takes a few moments for Tony to collect himself to look at Bucky. The super soldier looks completely and utterly ready to kill the moment Tony says 'Go'. Running a shaking hand through his hair, Tony breathes out. “...Shit.”

Chapter End Notes

Well. Lookie there. A new chapter. How'd that happen?

Hope everyone's doing well!
Chapter 39

Chapter Summary

A look at how things are going with a certain devil.

Chapter Notes

Kinda needed a distraction from reality, so this is what happened.

It's not like Matt thought this would be easy. He sure as Hell didn't. Dealing with the public court systems of New York City were one thing, but dealing with a world court? He wonders if Claire can get him some Xanax. He knows he's going to need a miracle to get through this.

“No, sir,” Matt tries to keep his voice level. “I can assure you that Spider-Man had nothing to do with this incident.” This man's voice is really giving him a headache. “No, sir. This isn't something that the Avengers planned – No, even the Rogue Avengers were against Rogers' and Maximoff's actions. They specifically warned Mr. Stark about it. - I know, sir. This is going to be a mess to deal with. Yes, sir.”

Matt's all too pleased to hang up the phone. He's happy to assure them that Spider-Man wasn't involved in any of the conflicts that went on in the Tower recently. Even though he still has bitter feelings towards the recently returned Avengers, Peter asked him to help them. That's what he's going to do. Peter definitely owes him a batch of those Cowboy Cookies he's always making.

Stark's lawyers are good, he admits. He just hopes good is good enough to win. They've been gathering evidence for the defense of the Avengers and the prosecution of Rogers and Wanda. He's ready to have them out of the country, away from Peter and his dad.

Matt sighs, leaning back in his chair and tilting his head backwards. God, is he tired. He's not even sure when he felt not tired anymore. Maybe.. back before Germany? Before he found himself guarding a spider-super-soldier kid.

It was never hard to find out who Spider-Man was. All you had to do is look in the right places. ..Well, 'hear' in Matt's case. The kid has a heartbeat like a hummingbird, and he often smells like chemicals with some kind of lemon undertone. And his voice? Matt knew his age range before he'd even taken a step out of the shadow to meet the spider themed vigilante.

'Spider-Man' had squealed at the time, leaping up and off the ground. “What the heck, dude!? You know it's not nice to stalk people from the shadows, right? Right!”

He'll never admit it to Peter, but he definitely enjoys hearing the kid ramble. He could go on and on about science, but Matt would never once fail to listen. Pay attention, maybe, but not to listen. It's Peter's voice that reminds Matt he's still alive, still growing as a teenager. He's still safe...

'Safe' is a relative term when used in conjunction with Peter, Matt has found out for stubborn determination. In which means, Peter's idea of 'safe' is making sure that he keeps going, keeps
fighting the bad guys. To Peter, 'safe' means protecting those who can't protect themselves, helping the common person without a desire for gratitude. Peter's 'safe' is making Queens a better place, not only for others but also for those he cares about.

Since Matt had found out about the whole incident in Germany, he's tried his best to be there for Peter. Stark wasn't exactly known for his emotionally stability, but Matt sees why now. He's heard things, eavesdropped a couple of times, because why not? He finds that Tony Stark has lost people he's loved too, been betrayed, almost died several times.

With Peter, Matt sees a completely different side of the billionaire. It's domestic – warm and comforting, yet powerful and protective. It's what Matt's dad was. Now it's Tony Stark. The man was determined and his love of Peter unyielding.

All of what Tony Stark is, is what Matt had believed Steve Rogers to be. After all, who's supposed to be a symbol of the United States of America? Who's supposed to protect and care for the citizens of his country? Who was everyone's idol before Germany?

Captain America. Matt had expected better of the man. Needless to say, he certainly doesn't live up to Foggy's ideals. He stopped being a hero when he threw away that title and became a rogue soldier. That's it.

Well, no. Steve Rogers makes Matt seethe with anger. He knew how happy Peter had been with them, how loved the kid had felt. The man betrayed Peter – betrayed him and Stark both. Their image of a happy family had been burned to ash, and man, Matt wanted to let the Devil take him and show him what he's done to the people who loved him most.

But Matt can't do that. There's too much going on, what with figuring out the Accords and prosecuting the two rogue superhumans. He also makes sure to patrol at night, because criminals never stop coming, so neither should he.

Matt's thrown himself into being Matt Murdock, the Lawyer, and Daredevil, the Devil of Hell's Kitchen. Yet in between it all? He wants to be with Peter, wants to make sure he's being looked after properly. He doesn't quite trust the 'returned' former Avengers. He's not trusting in general, at least Foggy always tells him so, but Matt doesn't just forgive and forget easily. He's not fully convinced of their willingness to be 'heroes' again.

With a huff, Matt leans forward, stretching and pulling a bruise on his side from the night before. It aches, but so does his head – but that's for a completely different reason. “Peter,” Matt growls without any real heat, “the things you make me do...”

Here he was. Trying to prosecute the two rogue superhumans, and, at the same time, do his best to defend the returned former Avengers.

Matt reaches out and picks up his now cold mug of coffee. It's bitter, but the caffeine is a nice kickstart to keep him going. “Foggy!” Matt calls out.

He can hear Foggy's footsteps pound closer, the door opening with a squeak only he could notice. “Matty? What's up?”

Matt holds up a file for Foggy. “Can you send this to Stark's lawyers? It's a list of all the likely defenses for James Barnes.”

Even though Foggy had been torn over Captain America, he's ecstatic that 'Bucky' Barnes is 'one of the good guys'. “Yes! Trip to the Tower!” Foggy grinned, joyfully.

Rolling his eyes, Matt made sure to tell him, “Don't get lost this time, okay?”
Foggy was halfway out the door when he turned, looking over his shoulder. “Bite me.”

Matt smirked. ‘That man is a treasure,’ he couldn't help but think to himself.

Taking a breath, Matt dived back down into the information in front of him. “Let's see how many national/international violations I can dig up on Rogers and Maximoff...” He's going to need a lot more caffeine for this.
Chapter 40

Chapter Summary

Tony helps clear some air with Bucky.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It's hard for Bucky to believe how things have turned out. He's begun Stark's treatment for the manipulations Hydra implanted in his mind, he's got a teenage spider climbing up the walls, he's living with the son of the couple he'd murdered under Hyra's hand, and oh, he can't forget the fact that his former best friend tried to kill his legal husband.

He thinks this is one of those times where Peter would sigh and let his head fall to the table, and say, “What is my life, really?” He doesn't get it but it seems to fit.

Sometimes it's difficult for Bucky to be around Tony, especially alone. He's afraid he'll hurt the man, afraid he is hurting the man just by living. Bucky honestly has no idea what he's supposed to do from this point? Does he go to jail? Will he be put in a superhuman prison somewhere he can't escape from?

They're both rational ideas, he thinks. Valid, even. What Bucky did… the amount of blood that's on his hands is permanent. There's no washing it away, because doing so won't bring any of his victims back. It'll only make him numb to it all.

Even hearing the laughter of Clint and Sam doesn't make it easier. He can't relax like they can. It's a stiffness that follows him no matter where he goes. He doesn't know how to fit in.

“Hey, Barnes?” Bucky hears Stark say one day. He looks up from a book he'd begun to read – trying to catch up to Peter's phrases and references. Bucky can't find it in him to reply, too uneasy.

--------

Tony shuffles, eyes roaming with nervousness around the room until they return to meet Bucky's. He's still sore, still got bruises. Tony's definitely still got Bruce on his ass about 'resting'. The good doctor's even got Pepper and Rhodey on his side. Maybe he offered them tea cookies.?

“I can look at your arm in the lab if you'd like to? It seems like it's bothering you a little, and well, to be honest, it's kind of a piece of crap,” Tony admits, unable to stop his prude words from spilling out. This is the 'him' that the public sees. Peter hates that facade he puts on. Tony's still trying to learn to be genuine when he's around friends.

...More genuine, he should say. Howard always wanted him to be independent. Of course, his definition of being 'independent' equated to 'not embarrassing the Stark name'. He had to be perfect. He had to be mature. No matter what he did, though, it was never good enough… So he stopped trying altogether, but he could never escape the kind of attitude his father engraved on his heart.

That's why he's always made himself look proud, strong… Immobile and powerful. Even despite
the new leaf he'd led Stark Industries on, he couldn't allow himself to be weak, vulnerable... To be human.

Things changed. He struggled to reach Steve Rogers, to save the world. When they'd gotten married and adopted Peter, Tony had done his best to throw himself into caring for them like he'd often throw himself into projects. At least, he thought he'd done that. With what happened with the Accords, maybe he'd just been delusional.

With Peter, however, with his friends... He wants to try harder to show them how much he cares. Tony wants them to know that he cares, despite his lack of social skills. He's trying.

Bucky is silent for a minute, making Tony want to rethink this whole idea. Awkward.

“Okay,” Bucky finally replies. “Here or...?” The man looks nervous.

Tony scoffs. “As if I'd do any important repairs in here. Come on. Let's go to my lab.” And thus began the most nerve-wracking elevator trip ever, and Tony's been in a lot of awkward situations.

Clearing his throat as they enter his lab, Tony gestures to a chair. “Pull up a chair, and let's see how that baby ticks.” It almost hurt to see Bucky causally taking off his goddamn metal arm. Tony's fine.

“Or not.” The arm clearly has a lot of wear and tear on it. Frequent usage made sure of that. Tony tried hard not to think about that 'usage', suppressing a shudder. He forces images of a certain wrecked vehicle from his mind and brings up Peter. Peter's soft smile, his big eyes, his squishy cheeks... It makes it better.

He knows Bucky's staring at him, unsure of what to do and what's going on. Tony bites his lip as he has FRIDAY copy the blueprints for the metal arm. “Thank you...”

Bucky's head shoots up with an astonished look. “What?”

“I may be drugged up at night thanks to Mean-in-Green, but that doesn't mean I don't know you've been keeping Peter company when he can't sleep... So... thank you, for that. And...” Okay Tony really sucks at expressing his emotions. “Yeah, I actually suck at this whole touchy feely stuff, so I'm going to give it to you straight.”

Tony squares himself and makes himself meet Bucky's eyes. “What happened back then... It wasn't you. You were the tool, but you yourself didn't inflict the damage. Even back then, I know you weren't really sure of yourself. You may have fought for Rogers, but fear can make us fight too.”

He runs a hand through his hair, probably getting oil in it, but who cares? “Yeah, I was pissed. I hated your guts, but only because I couldn't get to the ones who did it... Because Rogers lied to me, let me continue on believing a lie. And yeah... He chose you over me... over Peter... That made me beyond pissed. But it's on him.”

“You're not like him,” Tony feels like he needs to assure Bucky. “I know you were close, but when you realized who we were to him... You chose to defend us instead of him.”

“He changed... He's not the Steve I once knew,” Bucky's soft voice answered him, features twisted in guilt and pain.

Tony closed his eyes, heart aching as he remembered lips against his own. “No. He's not the Rogers I used to know either.” He opens his eyes. “This doesn't make us friends, mind you.”
Bucky seems to curl up on himself.

Breathing out, Tony lets the ache go. “But it's a good start to becoming friends.” It makes him want to smile to see Bucky look so stunned and shimmering with the birth of happiness. “You're welcome to stick around, Bucky...” he tells him. “Peter already adores you, and I know there's not really any other place you could go, so you're welcome to stay here, to make it your home.”

Tony coughs. “If you want to that is.” He lets silence fill a gap between them, knowing that Bucky is going to need a lot more time to think this through. After all he's been through, asking for an immediate reply is too much, so Tony will let him sleep on it.

“Aways!” Tony's quota for emotions is filled for the rest of the month. “Enough of the feels. T'Challa said he's going to give me some vibranium to work with, and I was thinking… How do you feel about an electric punch?”

Business, they both can work with. It makes things more comfortable with any bit of serious heart-to-heart moments. Bucky lips quirk upwards. “That sounds pretty electrifying.”

Tony laughs. It feels good to not be so afraid, so upset with Bucky. He's beginning to accept what's happened, who Bucky is and was, and he's willing to work towards something a lot less like accepting and more like friendship...

Chapter End Notes

I'm thinking about who's perspective I should write this from next... And maybe back to Peter.
“Hey, Dad?” Peter asks one afternoon almost two weeks later.

“Mm?” Tony makes a questioning noise as he looks over a design for another addition to Bucky’s arm. Apparently, Bucky likes knives, so yeah. Tony definitely wants to work some knives into the design somehow.

“I want to go out.”

“Okay. Happy can give you a ride to your friend's house,” Tony replies, mouth twisting as he tries to figure out where he can hide the knives without compromising the integrity of the metal.

“Actually,” Peter starts, hesitant but determined. “I want to go out as Spider-Man.” He bites his lip as he sees his dad’s head snap up. “I mean, it's been a while and I don't want New York to think that I died or anything, although some people are trying to say that...”

“You want to go out as Spider-Man?” Tony questions, curious and wary.

Peter rocks on his heels with anxious energy as he takes a bite of an apple, chewing and swallowing it before he replies. “Well, yeah. I can't not go out there. It's what Spider-Man does.”

This is getting to be a little much for Tony's head to compute at once. Logically, he knows that Spider-Man does go out there and do good, but this is his son. It's the teen that's grown up under his care. Why would he ever want his son out there against guns and knives?

Tony has to bite his tongue before he can release all those fears and worries. He knows that if he doesn't allow this Peter will do it behind his back. Just like that time he told Peter not to try and make a lightsaber. He's pretty sure the lab still has burns under all that reconstruction from the attempt. “When?” he makes himself ask, hiding his concerns in the back of his mind.

“I was thinking… right now?”

Peter shifts, unable to sit still as he watches his dad breathe, looking like he's been caught off-guard. He really needs this. He needs to be Spider-Man, the vigilante without the giant mess that Peter is tangled up in. It's been a long time since he's seen New York from the fly as he flips and whips himself through the tall buildings.

“You… Right now?” Tony repeats, unable to hide his frown. He's not prepared for this. Sure he's got Peter's suit prepared, but he hadn't been expecting it to be this soon. “You do remember the entire world is looking at us right now, right?”

Huffing, Peter admits, “I do.” Then of course he continues on. “But that's exactly why I need to be out there. I need to be out there to show people we're still here for them.” He waves his hand in
the air. “All of this? It's a giant fucking mess. Everyone's so tied up in the politics that no one's been out there helping people.”

Tony knows that. He understands it.

“They need me… And I need this. Please, Dad? Pretty, pretty please?” Peter begs, widening his eyes and giving them a little sheen of tears as his lower lip juts out.

And that's it. Tony knows he's lost when he sees those adorable eyes. “Fuck. Geez kid. I regret that you and Foggy ever met… Murdock can't even see those eyes, but he still crumbles like sandstone.” He sighs. “Fine. Go ahead. But you're going to let me know that you're okay and tell me if you get hurt, okay?”

Peter nods, excitedly with a big smile on his face. “And my suit?”

“Ugh... Fine. It's in my lab, FRIDAY can help you find it,” Tony says. “It's been updated, so there are a few surprises to it!” he yells after Peter, who's already running to the elevator.

“FRIDAY…” Tony begins.

“Yes, Sir?”

“How does a parent begin to discipline a superhuman teen?”

“...Good luck, Sir.”

Apparently, there is no answer to that question. Or if there is, FRIDAY doesn't know it. Then again, not everyone's raising a superhuman teenager. Xavier is… either blessed or cursed, Tony doesn't know which. “I hope he remembers we're having a 'family' dinner tonight...”

~ ~

In the lab, Peter is overjoyed to be slipping into his upgraded suit. “Hello, Peter,” Karen greets as soon as he slips the mask over his head.

“Hey, Karen. I've missed you,” Peter tells his AI with a smile.

“And I, you, Peter,” Karen returns gently. “What are we doing today?”

“Open the window, FRIDAY,” Peter tells FRIDAY. The AI doesn't respond but the window opens. “Awe, you know. The usual. Kicking butt and taking names.” Cracking his neck a little, he shakes himself, trying to relieve himself of the overwhelming energy.

He notices Dr. Banner walk into the room. “Hey Dr. B,” Peter calls, waving to the scientist.

“Hello, Peter,” Bruce replies easily. “Heading out?”

Peter grins under the mask. “Yup!” He starts running to the window, calling behind him, “I'll be back later!”

Bruce can only shake his head with an amused smile. Peter is certainly one of a kind.

~ ~

No one will ever know the joy of swinging from web to web high above ground in New York City. No one except Peter. He whoops as he back-flips in the air, letting himself fall a little before catching himself with a web. It's a rush of life. He's missed this – more than he thought he would.
Suddenly, he pulls his body up, tucking into himself as he flies over a roof. As soon as he starts to fall, he uncurls, landing on his feet on the rooftop. God, he loves his powers.

Peter bounds up and onto the ledge, overlooking part of the city. He cups his hands around his mouth and shouts, “Hello~ New York City!!! Spidey's back in business!!!!”

“You do realize that no one can hear you, correct?” Karen asks him.

Peter huffs. “It's not that they're supposed to hear me. It's the thought that counts, Karen.”

“I shall make note of that.”

It's hard teaching an AI human habits and thoughts. Feelings were just too much as well. He loves Karen, though. Sometimes he'll take 10 minutes to explain to her why “humans like eating take-out so much”.

“Got anything for me, Karen?” Peter asks, crouching down and ready to leap again. It really has been too long.

“Police are chasing a car on Elm Street. The movement of the car is unpredictable, therefore causalities are likely to occur,” Karen announces to him.

“Always wanted to be in a high-speed police chase,” Peter blandly sighs. He jumps off the building, web catching the next in his line. “Track the car and let's see if we can't cut ahead of it.”

“Tracking.” Karen reports as Peter flies through the air towards the location. “It has made a left turn and will be intersecting with your direction in 20 seconds.”

“Roger-dodger!” Internally, he can't stop himself from counting down as he web-slings. ‘18...15..12..10..6..3… Bingo!’ Peter hears the screech of the car as it hits a food vendor and people run away screaming.

“Going down!” he can't help but yell as he falls. Peter lands on the top of the car, clinging to the surface of the slick, warm metal.

It swerves and Peter tightens his grip on the surface in order to not be thrown off. Police sirens blare in the background. “Suggested course of action?” He can't help but wince as bike abandoned in the panic gets crushed on the car's wheels.

“Suggest course of action: passenger window.”

Peter reaches over to feel if it's open. “..It's not open, Karen.”

“Shall I activate electro-sonic 'Spider' web?”

“..Um, yes?” Peter's not quite sure what it is… Until he feels his right hand's fingertips tingle with energy.

“Place fingers on passenger window,” Karen guides him.

Peter manuvers so he can stick his fingers on the window. The energy pulses and he sees the window begin to crack, 'webs' spinning until it reaches the edges. Then of course it bursts, shattering the window. “That was cool. Incoming!” Peter flings himself into the passenger side of the car.

There's a man with his hands on the wheel, dressed in a white uniform. ('White' – Peter dubs him.)
White looks at him with wide eyes and reaches for a his gun.

“Yeah, no!” Peter webs White's hand to his thigh. “Pull over.”

White's eyes narrow and he suddenly makes a sharp right turn, throwing Peter into him where he grabs Peter's head and slams it on the dashboard.

Head aching with the sudden action and his senses screaming danger, he narrows his eyes at this guy. “That hurt!” The man continues to make sharp left and right turns, making it difficult to keep still enough to take him out.

His heart pounds faster without reason – or at least until he hears people screaming for a child to get out of the way. Peter's head snaps to attention. There's a little boy frozen in the path of the speeding car. “Shit!” - the explicative slips out.

It's a sudden decision, but Peter jams his elbow into the man's face and puts his hands on the wheel. It's a bad idea, but Peter can already his plan working. He pulls the wheel to the left a little before dragging it all the way to the left.

The speed combined with the sudden directional change? The car leans on its side for a split second… And then it rolls.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so the results of the survey were as follows: 1) Bucky, 2) Coulson, 3) Strange/Murdock.

-However!-

The majority of people who wanted to give Tony time to recover, which I definitely understand and have already planned some more recovery with Tony & Peter / domestic fluff. I did read a few responses that Tony should remain single - understandable again. Not every divorced couple finds a new love, but it's not impossible.

Therefore, my decision will be to continue this fic as more recovery and dealing with the political aftermath. I make it into a series, so that we can see ficlets about Peter, Tony, and the gang; of course including Tony finding someone to date. It's all gotta start somewhere after all.

I hope you can understand and accept this decision.

Thank you for all your responses.

Feel free to msg me on tumblr if you have any questions. tumblr - tabihe
Chapter 42

Chapter Summary

Who could possibly be disappointed in Peter? Not Coulson, that's for sure.

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Peter can hear every creak of metal, every shattering window. He can ever hear the screech of metal against pavement. It's definitely not a pleasant sound, and Peter will probably have nightmares about it.

Being, well not buckled up, he thanks his powers for how instantly he sticks to his spot in order to not go flying onto the pavement. ...At least White had enough sense to buckle up.

His jaw is clenched so tight, Peter's sure that it's going to be extremely painful later. Glass is being thrown into the air and tumbling with them, and it sucks. Peter hates to equate it to a bounce house full of glass, but it is. 'Oh shit, oh shit,' Peter screams inside his head as the car hits something large, proceeding to spin on its side for a few more meters before it finally stops.

It takes Peter a painful few moments to relax enough to un-stick from the car and actually open his mouth. “Holy shit...” he breathes out, heart beating fast in his chest.

Peter shakily pops the buckle on White's seat and pulls him out of the car with him. White's got some cuts, definitely bruises, and perhaps a concussion from hitting the inside of the car. He's breathing though. And so is the little boy, as he notes with a quick glance that way.

The police have stopped a ways away to avoid getting caught up in the destruction, but are now rushing towards them. “Spider-Man! Nice job,” one officer says as the sound of an ambulance rings in the distance.

"You made a mess," another officer says bitterly. Definitely not a fan.

"Sorry, officers," Spider-Man apologizes. "I can help clear it up, if you'd like?"

The first officer just waves his offer away. “We got this. The ambulance is almost here.” Then he leans in towards Peter and murmurs, “Despite what Dan says, you did a good job.”

His words give Peter some comfort, but maybe it's not enough. “Not a problem. Thanks for taking over. Bye, Officers!~” Peter webs himself away, muscles tingling with ache.

“What's the damage, Karen?” Peter questions, a splitting headache building.

“Possible concussion, whiplash, possible fractured ribs, bruises, strained muscles...”

Peter takes a breath to push the pain down. “Yeah, yeah, I can feel that,” he acknowledges, gritting his teeth. One sudden jerk of his body while web-slinging and his stomach churns with nausea. “I'm never doing that again.” ..He hopes.

“Incoming call from Tony Stark,” Karen announces.
Groaning, Peter flings himself onto a nearby roof, stumbling upon impact. He closes his eyes for a moment to feel less like jello and more like something solid. “Put him through, Karen.”

“Peter...” his dad warns over the connection.

“Is there a chance you didn't see that?” Peter asks, hesitantly.

“Not a chance in Hell,” his dad bites out. “What the Hell were you thinking? You could've been seriously hurt!”

“I thought I could handle it! I didn't realize how totally whack White is, and then there was a boy in the path...” Peter sighs, shoulders slumping.

“You couldn't have called the moment you needed help!? If I weren't stuck here, I'd grab you and drag you to the Tower infirmary,” Tony growls, making Peter grimace. He sounded angry, yes, but underneath that, he sounded shaken up. And it was Peter's fault.

“I'm sorry, Dad,” Peter mumbles, guilty and ashamed. He hears his dad take a deep breath over the phone.

“You're coming home.”

“Okay, Dad. I'll come home,” Peter replies. It's going to suck to get back on 'the web', so to speak, but he can make it there. 'Just gotta avoid the flag poles...'

“Oh, no, no, no. You're not coming home alone. Coulson's almost to your location. He's going to make sure you get home safe. And then you're never going to get into a car again,” his dad tells him, a bite to his tone.

“Yes, Dad.” Even Spider-Man gets in trouble with his dad. Yup. Vigilante and all that, and he's probably going to be grounded for the rest of the year. And on his first day back, too! 'Ugh..'

“I'll be waiting. No detours,” his dad commands before the line goes dead.

“I am in so much trouble,” Peter moans, rubbing his sore neck. Karen doesn't answer, which is more than likely a good thing, because Peter already knows what she'd say.

“Suggest returning to street level to meet Mr. Coulson,” Karen softly recommends.

“Sound advice, Karen. Thanks.” Peter craws down the side of the building and into an alley, avoiding the windows. He certainly doesn't want JJJ to be write about him 'peeping' on people. Nope.

Not to say too much, but he's breathing hard when his feet hit the ground. Sweat makes his suit stick to him, giving him the uncomfortable feeling of being wet – in a gross kind of way. He's really going to need a shower when he gets back – after the scolding he's going to be getting.

Since Peter didn't have to change on the street, he didn't have a change of clothes. That's why it's a good thing that the sleek black vehicle that pulls up has tinted windows. He can only imagine what people would say seeing Spider-Man getting into a random car.

He slides into the passenger's seat without anyone seeing. Peter buckles up, because it's the law – okay? He obeys the law. Mostly. …Okay, so he wasn't exactly approved to be a vigilante, but here he is.
Coulson eyes Peter when he slides in, buckling up. It's not hard to see that teen is shaken up. Peter doesn't appear to notice his body trembling with overuse. He also notes that Peter seems withdrawn and ready for harsh words and disappointment. He doesn't like seeing that. Not one bit.

“I'm not going to yell at you, Peter,” Coulson tells him, voice leveled and easy. He gets back onto the road, keeping one eye on the road and the other on the spider he's come to love like his own nephew. “And I'm not disappointed either.”

He sees Peter take off his mask with a confused face. Coulson knows Peter doesn't understand why he says that. “You did a good job, Peter. Without you, there would've been far more causalities than there were.”

Peter is silent for a few moments before he looks down, questioning, “How many were there?” It's no secret that Peter feels guilty for everyone he couldn't save from harm. It's something that Tony knows, that Bucky and Bruce have come to know, and he has a sneaking suspicion that Clint knows as well, but who knows with him anymore.

“Five,” Coulson states, trying to pretend he doesn't see the way Peter flinches from the knowledge. “There were no deaths, Peter, and those causalities all happened before you arrived at the scene,” he tries to reassure the teen. “Unless you could see the future, there's nothing you could've done. He was intent on hurting people however he could. And he would've hurt a lot more people if you hadn't stopped him. You did a good job.”

Peter doesn't respond, but Coulson isn't expecting an it. He knows that it will take more than his words to convince Peter of his words. It's not because he distrusts him, but because he takes everything to heart – even the dark things.

“Dr. Banner is waiting for you in the infirmary,” Coulson tells him as he pulls up in the secure parking lot of Avengers Tower. “Why don't you head up and I'll join you when I park the car?”

The teen seems hesitant to leave, nervous to go in, but Coulson lets his lips curve in a gentle smile. “Don't worry, Peter. No one's going to be disappointed in you. You did well.” He thinks and adds on, “If Stark gives you trouble, just remind him I'm in the Tower too, and I can make him eat Brussels sprouts for a week.”

It makes him feel victorious when Peter laughs at that. A happy Peter is all Coulson wishes for.

“I'll see you in there then?” Peter asks, still a bit nervous.

Coulson raises an eyebrow. “Nothing can stop me.”

Reassured, Peter takes a breath and gets out of the car, mask clutched in his fist as he starts to walk to the elevator. Coulson smiles at him until the elevator doors close. He parks and sits back against the seat for a little bit. “Ronald Dingman, huh… I think I'll pay a visit to his cell soon.” After all, no one hurts Peter and gets away with it.

Chapter End Notes

Lookit that! A chapter! -sigh- It would've been out sooner if this week hadn't been a complete mess. If I hadn't been a complete mess (still am, but what can you do about
I hope you've enjoyed this chapter. Next time.. We get into Tony's reactions to Peter's accident.
Chapter 43

Chapter Summary

Meanwhile, back at the Tower.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony hates the 'waiting game'. Honestly, he sucks at it – has ever since he knew what 'waiting' was. He's used to always making things move as fast as possible, because waiting? It sucks. It takes forever. It's waiting. Tony's got better uses for his time.

Except for times like this. Nothing is more important to him than his son. He could wait forever for him, but right now, he's anxious for Peter to arrive. Tony can hear Bruce behind him getting the remaining medical tools and equipment he might possibly need to check on Peter's condition.

“Sir, Peter is on the elevator, heading to this level now,” FRIDAY informs him.

“Bout damn time...” Tony mutters to himself. It's not like he hadn't been worried the entire time his eyes had been glued to the screen, but when the car flipped… His heart had stopped. His entire body tensed, frozen in the moment without oxygen to breathe. And he, for a second, had thought back to the multitude of nightmares about losing the kid, his kid.

It was terrifying to watch, to have the entire world shut out as his son became the sole focus of his universe.

And even as the elevator doors slide open, revealing his weary and beaten son, Tony knows that what happened today will only fuel the nightmares even more.

That's why he doesn't say anything, teeth clenched as he marches up to Peter, limping still, and drags him close to his chest. Tony can't feel anything except the warm body in his arms. Not pain. Not reality. Just Peter.

“Shit, kid...” Tony growls, voice convoluted with emotion. It's grounding he feels arms wrap around him in return, super-strengthened hands curling into the fabric of his shirt and clutching tightly. He barely registers the sound of tearing, but what does he care? It's an old shirt anyways. Nothing is more important than his kid.

“I...I'm sorry, Dad...” It's a wet, broken voice from the bundle in his arms.

“Shit, kid.” Tony can only say, because what else can he say? There's too many words, too much chaos to speak.

It seems like it's too much for Peter too, because his son keeps repeating, “I'm sorry… I'm sorry...” But everything that needs to be said can be said later. Right now, nothing else matters.

~~~

Bucky's heart has stopped many times before. It stopped when he lost Steve amongst the chaos of the war. It stopped when he fell and when he awoke. It stopped when he saw Steve again, and
when his dreams of light laughter and blond hair became more than just dreams.

But he's not sure his heart has ever stopped for as long as it did watching the car that Peter and a violent criminal were in crash. It reminded him of Hydra – of the utter emptiness that he felt as he waited for a command to fill the void. Except this time, he was waiting to see that blue and red suited teen walk out without a scratch.

That's what he wanted to see; however, he didn't.

He sees the teen stumble, almost sloppily webbing himself away from the view of the cameras and phones.

The only thing that keeps him from breaking out of the Tower to go after Peter is Tony. It makes him want to reach out and hug the man close to keep him from falling apart. Bucky's too afraid though. He's already hurt the man once. He refuses to do so again. If he doesn't have permission.. He won't touch him. Baby steps.

The others look horrified as well, concern and worry causing their faces to contort. Banner's face looks ashen with sweat beading down his green tinted neck. It should scare him, but the numbness of moment keeps it at bay.

It's not Tony who asks the resident AI to find everything it can, but instead Colonel Rhodes. The colonel is composed outwardly, restraining himself like the kind of soldier Bucky was during the war. It's all too familiar and all too sad.

It takes Bucky too long for his liking to regain his own composure and join Colonel Rhodes' side. If he were still under Hydra's control, he'd be beaten and thrown into the black box where no light ever reaches. Where time doesn't exist and life feels like an illusion.

A ringing makes him perk his head up, and he hears Peter's voice echo overhead. It's a huffing voice that has everyone's attention, followed by the silent snap of Tony's control as the man proceeds to almost yell at his son. It grates on his sensitive ears, but he imagines it does for Peter too. The reasoning behind it, however, has him putting the stabbing pain to the side.

“Sir?” FRIDAY interrupts. “Agent Coulson would like me to relay that he's heading there to retrieve Peter.”

“You're not coming home alone. Coulson's almost to your location. He's going to make sure you get home safe. And then you're never going to get into a car again,” Tony demands over the line.

Bucky's happy when Peter doesn't argue. Everyone else is too, he knows.

He's tempted to start pacing with Peter when the phone call ends. Everyone is so harassed from the situation and tense from the panic of it all. Clint seems to be busy helping Bruce collect medical supplies and plan for the chance that Peter will be more injured than medical supplies can help.

It doesn't take forever for FRIDAY to announce their arrival, but it feels like hours. It's too long, and they're too impatient.

-Ding!-

The elevator stops. They hold their breaths as the doors slide open.

And their teen spider falls pitches forward, mask up to his nose.
Everyone moves at once.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it's taken so long to get another chapter up. I'm afraid that it might take me a while more since I have early morning shifts for a week consecutively.

Yikes.

I'm starting to get used to the work, but still... Who likes waking up when it's still dark to go to work?

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!