"Peter- no, Spiderman- looked sad, like he was somehow upset by Eugene's disposition. As if the teen's sadness made him sad too. Could a person really be that empathetic? 'Jesus, Fla- Eugene, I'm sorry- you're a kid. I'm a kid. You're not the person you're gonna be for the rest of your life yet, and... there are things that happened to you that... that explained why. Why you've done the things you have.'

'That doesn't make it okay.' He could barely hear his own voice, but Spiderman did.

'No,' the hero agreed. 'But it makes it understandable.'"

---

Shitty circumstances make people react in shitty ways. Eugene knows it's not an excuse. It'll never be an excuse. But it's a reason.

Or: In which Eugene Thompson understands what's he's doing, and knows it's wrong, and hates it too, but he keeps doing it anyway. Until one day, he doesn't.

WARNING: This fanfiction is about the the abuse of a character. There are two slurs used. It is about abuse, and bullying, and self doubt. Please read the first author's note.

Notes

i'm publishing this via my cell phone because i didn't have access to my computer and i'm super bummed because a03 isn't letting me abuse the tags.
this fandom seems to have forgotten that it's canon that flash's father was an alcoholic who was physically abusive. i thought everybody needed a little reminder.

this doesn't fall into any particular canon, though i'd say closer to the comics than the mcu movies (or... the other spiderman movies ;;; don't @ me toby mcguire or andrew garfield) because i... i dunno, sometimes i just want to see that quality peter parker and tony stark acting as equals. even if it's like for a fraction of a second of this fic. and not really the focus whatsoever.

HEY!! DON'T READ THIS IF ANY OF THIS SHIT TRIGGERS YOU! take care of yourself, pls. somebody cares about you a whole lot and you've gotta do a mcnot if abuse and similar topics are your triggers. i write about these things because i think the discussions must happen more often, not because i think it's a good plot device, or because i think it's "angst" or whatever. abuse is serious. alcoholism is serious. this fic ends bittersweet because most of my fics about serious topics end bittersweet, but eugene is by NO MEANS a model of healthy behaviour or coping mechanisms. take care of yourself, if somebody is hurting you, tell someone you trust.

See the end of the work for more notes

Eugene wasn't trying to be the bad guy.

It wasn't the first thought to cross his mind, under most circumstances. Honest to God, he meant it when he said that his intentions weren't always to harm. He didn't get off on the pain of those supposedly below him, and he didn't really hate them either. He didn't really hate anyone. People hated him, and he didn't blame them, but there was only one person in the world he really hated, and... well, he saw that man every time he looked in the mirror.

It wasn't a metaphor for some deep, inner self hatred that he channelled. He resented genetics for giving him the blue eyes, blonde hair, and sturdy physique his father bore. He hated the reminder, and he hated the way it made him feel.

Eugene hated, more than all of that, how much his actions resembled his father's.

His childhood in itself was fine for the first years of it. His earliest memories were of a happy family, a happy home. An all-American lifestyle. He aspired to be like his father, prided himself on that resemblance.

And then his father turned to liquor, and the more he drank, the more angry he became.

Eugene was eight years old the first time his father hit him. He didn't make excuses for the man, he didn't try to hide that he was angry and disappointed with what had happened. He wasn't stupid. Even if sometimes he didn't understand the material in school and the teachers gave him the most patronising of looks- he wasn't a stupid guy, he didn't deny what was right in front of him. His father was a drunk and an abuser and a piece of shit and God, he deserved better.

And at first his father was sorry when Eugene pulled away. At first the man wanted to stop drinking, put an end to his bad habits. But it wasn't the alcohol that made him violent. The violence was already there. It was the lack of inhibitions that the alcohol induced that brought it out in him.

Eugene would later tell himself, while nursing a bruised rib, that he would tell nobody. This was
his battle, his business. His thin frame and limbs were easily fractured under his father's heavy hand, and he had to get stronger.

He was nine years old when he started. By eleven, he had gained a considerable amount of bulk, though nowhere near enough to be impressive- and nowhere near enough to protect himself from his father.

And no, he wasn't going to hide behind the age-old excuse of "I had no control at home so I sought to control the things I could, at school" to excuse what happened next in the young man's life, but he would explain his actions with that criteria. Eugene (he began to call himself flash at this point) felt inferior to his sixth grade peers, he felt stupid, he felt like a waste of space. His teachers knew he was a lost cause.

No matter how hard he tried, he was somehow wrong, his work was somehow... it somehow wasn't good enough. And while he tried not to let it get to him, there were some things that he just couldn't handle.

"Some things" referred to his science teacher, remarking that Eugene had done poorly, that his work would never get him anywhere in life. His science teacher, who then went to praise a classmate's work in the very same breath, speaking of it like a godsend.

The class around them laughed, Eugene's cheeks burned hot with shame, and the classmate found himself beat into the wall at lunchtime.

That classmate was named Peter Parker.

No, it wasn't Peter's fault.

No, it wasn't right.

It didn't even make Eugene feel good.

He felt dirty.

Like his father was acting through him.

But Peter had... well, he had tried, to apologise to Eugene for the teacher's cruel actions, looking sorry and looking like he truly and sincerely regretted what had happened. And Eugene had tried to accept the apology, had tried to not hold it against him because Jesus fucking Christ, it's not Peter's fault you're such a goddamn retarded freak, you fucking shitty disappointment of a person-

And then Eugene wanted to punch something.

He wanted to run to his punching bag and beat it up, make himself stronger, and beat something and imagine it was his father.

And Peter was standing right there.

He tried to convince himself it wouldn't happen again.

He tried.

He tried.

He tried.

And he tried for years.
He was fourteen when he was a freshman at a new high school. He was a strong freshman, his father's bruises faded faster now, and they were safely hidden under the jacket he got from joining the football team in middle school.

Sometimes he did things and his father was proud of him. Sometimes he played a really good game, and he scored enough points, and instead of hitting his back so hard he tumbled into the kitchen counter and his head banged against the cupboard and he saw stars, his father clapped him on the back and smiled, a real smile.

That real smile made Eugene feel sick.

Peter- poor Peter- sometimes got mistaken for a punching bag. Sometimes Eugene had gotten so roughed up by his father the night before, he came to school and the jeer had barely left his lips before Peter Parker's head was slammed into the wall, and the guy was stumbling with dizziness, his glasses knocked askew.

Eugene was joined by people who would leer and taunt the smaller teen, but he wished they wouldn't, because he felt shitty enough as it was.

He didn't want the kid to feel terrible.

He didn't want to hurt him.

He didn't want to make him suffer like he had.

Maybe he just wanted Peter to fight back, like he should fight back against his father.

Eugene felt like he was losing himself.

Who was there to lose? He wasn't sure. He had to fight sometimes to stay stable enough to keep from destroying his bathroom mirror.

Tests were still returned with the letter F written in red on top. Teachers still sighed at him, like he was a disappointment. The friends he had flinched every time he spoke, laughed at his jokes a little too soon, changed their opinion every time he muttered, in a low tone, that he disagreed.

But suddenly he was seventeen, and he was so much stronger, and things were happening so so fast. so fucking fast. He wasn't ready. He wasn't ready.

Senior year: tests, learning, college tours, tests, friends, football, tests, trying to stop himself (and failing) from hurting Peter, tests, tests, tests- goddamn it!

He wasn't doing well. He wasn't doing well.

And then one day Peter caught his fist, and his fingers dug a little into the back of Eugene's hand, and he held on with anger laced in the lines of his face, and Eugene just saw so much pain in his eyes.

He withdrew. Peter was surprised, as though he hadn't expected it, and something conflicted flashed across his expression.

Eugene was failing. and now the gravity of what he had been doing, and what he had done, was starting to sink in, and he hated it, he loathed it. He thought he hated everybody, he thought he hated his classmates and his teachers and Peter fucking Parker and his father and himself, he hated himself.
'I'm sorry.'

He had never said those words before, to anybody but his reflection. And maybe Peter thought so too, because his eyes were suddenly sad, and Eugene recoiled, because he recognised that look-he saw it so often in his father's eyes after a bad beating, or when he pulled away from his father's attempts to mend their relationship, or even just when he so much as frowned in his father's direction.

Regret.

It was regret.

Peter could've stopped him all these years.

Could've fought back.

And he didn't.

But now he did.

And he regretted it.

He regretted it.

Eugene ran.

He ran like there was a football under his arm, like he was holding his heart in his hands, like at his heels was somebody who would hurt him, who knew how to do everything that could make things go wrong, who would take away the strength he had tried so hard to build up.

It was the middle of the school day, God damn it, and he was running, and he heard something- a ghost of Peter Parker's voice- but he didn't comprehend it, couldn't think to listen.

Out of the school, hop the steps, down the sidewalk and across the street.

Fuck the stoplights.

Words were running through his head but they were in another language, they were English but not, words he should've understood but didn't, couldn't, wouldn't. Eugene needed to get away, he needed to be somewhere else, he needed to be gone.

And then he thumped against somebody's chest, and he stumbled backwards, and he looked up, and he stared right into his own blue eyes.

His feet, his goddamn untrustworthy feet, took him right to the bar his father frequented.

His father stared, flabbergasted. Eugene was too. He had auto-piloted- of course he knew where this shithole of an establishment was at. Thousands of times he had planned to kill his father, and thousands of those times he sought out the place his father so often touched and drank and consumed the alcohol. He knew the route by heart; so often he had come here and just stood in the alley nearby, imagining his father coming out, drunk and weak and feeble, and imagining himself, suddenly brave and strong and able to fight somebody who would fight back, somebody his size, somebody not named Peter. And he would beat his father to the ground. And then he would spit on his face.

So often he imagine that, that simple act of spitting on his face.
Eugene nearly bawled, seeing his father standing right there.

In a low voice, his father asked why Eugene wasn't at school, and Eugene said nothing, he said *nothing*. His lips stayed glued shut, and he just stared at his father like he might break down.

*He smelled like whiskey.*

It happened in slow motion. His father raised an arm, and his hand was stiff as he brought it down and backhanded Eugene across the face. Normally, he allowed himself to stumble, to be helpless. No way could he show his father that he was strong enough to fight against him, not when he wasn't yet, not when he hadn't trained enough, not when his plan wasn't fully formed.

But this time his feet stayed planted in place. His cheek stung, and he felt tears burn his eyes, but he stood straight up and dared to stare directly into his father's eyes. His shoulders shook. His hands clenched and unclenched at his sides. His heart pounded, throbbed in his chest.

And then Eugene lost control.

His father was nothing, nothing against him. He felt small. Adrenaline pumped through his veins instead of blood and a demon used his voice, letting out a guttural scream as he lunged forward, throwing punches and kicks and scratches like it was nothing, like his father, was nothing.

Utter rage possessed him and suddenly nothing was enough, he had to hit harder, he had to kick and bite and wrangle every single part of his father that he could see, every single part that his father had hurt. He felt bones cracking under his knuckles and feet and he didn't care.

His father did not fight back. The alcohol (it was all Eugene could smell) made him weak. He was weak. The monster Eugene had feared and hated and plotted to destroy for years was weak, and now he was going to kill him, with every punch and every kick and every-

Arms wrapped around his shoulders and somebody pulled him off his father, who was limp and unresponsive and beaten and bleeding. Eugene, who had been seeing red, struggled against the arms until he was sufficiently pulled off his father and his knees were on the ground and he saw the blood on his hands. All was still, for a moment. His father was still. The person behind him was unrelenting. Eugene felt tired.

"Oh god." He choked out. "Oh god."

He had done this.

His father was dead.

He had killed him.

He had-

"Hey, hey, take it easy," the voice behind him was achingly familiar, and the arms let go and as Eugene slumped forward, suddenly those arms had a torso attached to them and the person was in front of him, blocking his father's body from sight. All Eugene saw suddenly was blue and red.

Something registered in Eugene's brain.

Why was Spiderman holding his shoulders, masked face level with Eugene's own? Why was his voice so familiar? Why could Eugene feel his gaze, intent and concerned, on his face, even though his eyes were hidden behind white screens?
"I killed him, I-"

"No, you didn't." Spiderman was so calm. "Look, you're fine, okay? You're fine. You're fine. Flash, look at me, you're safe."

"Flash isn't my name, it's Eugene." Eugene would later wonder how Spiderman knew him, but comprehensive thought wasn't possible right then, because everything around him was shaking. No, that wasn't right, Spiderman's hands and grip were so still and reassuring. He, Eugene, was shaking. He was trembling hard. His breath caught in his throat, and it seemed like his lungs were tripping over themselves in a rush to get out as much air as possible.

Heaving. His chest was heaving.

"Move over." He managed.

Spiderman complied without question, and he dropped down, holding himself up with his hands, and he vomited.

There was a hand on his back, rubbing circles. He didn't deserve this.

Eugene had expected it to feel good. He had expected to feel satisfaction upon so utterly destroying his father, he expected pride and relief and self confidence and relaxation. But he just felt sick. His head was swimming, and his joints were aching, and he kept seeing the enraged pain in Peter Parker's eyes as he held tight to his bully's fist, keeping it away from his face.

Eugene slumped back down, sobs escaping from his throat and racking his body, making him shake with the cries.

"You're wrong, he has to be dead, I have to have killed him, oh god, I'm a murderer, all I do is hurt, I-"

"No," Spiderman was kneeling next to him. "No, listen, Fla- Eugene, he's not-" the hero broke off. Eugene didn't see his head snap up, the whites of his mask narrowing, but he could only guess that it had happened. "Stark, he's not dead, right-?"

"No," said a voice Eugene didn't recognise. "He's alive. Barely. I'm having FRIDAY check the damage. And yes, the cops are on their way."

"Okay." Spiderman's hands were on Eugene's arms, rubbing up and down. "Hey, hey, buddy, you're okay. You're safe."

Eugene sobbed. "I always fuck things up."

"No-"

"Yes, i do. You don't even understand. I'm a failure. I'm a disappointment. Nobody really likes me, they fear me. I'm shit at school. All I can do is be strong and hurt people. That's all I'm good for. I should just-"

Spiderman suddenly dragged him to his feet, holding his shoulders tight. The grip was strong, strong enough to startle Eugene, and even though he swayed a little, he knew Spiderman wasn't going to let him fall.

The hero said nothing. but he looked at him for a long minute, as if trying to understand something. And then Eugene felt himself being pulled into a tight embrace, thin but strong arms wrapped around under his own. It was close, and Eugene was unused to the tenderness in the hug.
(the most tenderness he'd ever had with another person had been when he hooked up with that one girl at school, and she hadn't seemed to care much about him, really, just the act of *doing* him) and for a moment didn't know how to respond.

And then he hugged back.

And then he lowered his head.

And then he cried.

The police came and they said so many things.

It was the first time Spiderman stuck around to talk to the authorities.

Eugene didn't hear much of what any of them said.

He didn't really hear anything.

Every once and a while another wave of tears arrived, and he gave up trying to hide them a long time ago. He had no more energy left trying to be strong.

A flash of red that Eugene later identified as Iron Man circled the scene, keeping watch.

He didn't understand.

He was so confused.

Why were there so many people?

Why were people asking him *questions*?

Why did people expect him to know the answers?

They asked so many questions.

He tried to answer but sometimes his words came out choppy.

Eugene didn't remember any of what he said, in the aftermath.

He thinks maybe he told the truth.

Eugene was eighteen when he knew he wasn't going to get a scholarship for college. He knew that being good at football wasn't enough- he had to be good in school too, but he never was, and never had been, so he knew that all chances were off.

Besides, even if he could pay tuition, which his aunt was willing to do for him, he knew that his grades were shitty enough that they just wouldn't let him in. There was only a semester left- and even if he got 100% on everything, which wasn't happening, he would still fail, because he'd already fucked up the first semester. So he let go of the notion early, let himself forget about the future until it was staring him in the face

Eugene stopped working out.

He dropped off the football team.

He told his friends to fuck off.
He backed away from everybody, pulled into his own shell and sat alone at lunch.

None of his friends cared to sit with him, because they didn't care about him. They cared about nothing but their own lives, and their own problems. Eugene would bet that none of them had ever been hit by their fathers in their lives. And that was okay. He didn't need them to understand or care. He didn't want them to. It was too much to deal with.

There were four months left in the school year.

Eugene was tired.

He wanted to give up.

He wanted to go home and sleep.

Most days he just spent staring off into space, sitting in the back of the class by himself. When lunch came, he sat alone too, eating his food, or not touching it. He could barely stomach it.

His teachers let him be, to their credit. Of course they did. What had happened was all over the news. Everybody knew who his dad was.

What his dad was.

Eugene walked home after school. He had a car, of course, had once used that car to impress friends who didn't care about him, but now he ignored it, let it get dusty in his aunt's garage.

He watched his feet hitting the sidewalk, scuffing against the concrete. His eyes were downcast, and his attention was so entirely on the ground that he didn't notice a shadow swooping over him until somebody dropped down right in front of him, hanging down by a white strand.

Spiderman.

"Hey buddy, how's it going?"

His voice was so damn familiar, why couldn't he place it?

Eugene looked up, surprised, and took a step back, eyes wide. Spiderman held himself by his hands, his legs bent and pulled in a crouch that would've been more of a crouch if he wasn't hanging upside down by a web.

"Wow, man, i'm sorry, didn't mean to surprise you." Spiderman said good naturedly, dropping down onto the sidewalk and holding up his hands in a gesture of surrender. Looking at him, Eugene saw that the hero was shorter than he was. built, definitely, but not tall. He had seen what the guy could do on the news, so it wasn't as though he was about to underestimate him.

But he was short.

"It's fine." Eugene muttered.

Spiderman deflated, as though he had been hoping for something else. The hero shifted from one foot to the other, hand going to scratch the back of his neck.

Eugene's heart stilled. He knew that mannerism- he knew what he meant, he knew who it belonged to.

"Look, I-"
"You're Peter Parker." Eugene blurted, and then the hero in front of him froze, as though stunned.

The silence drew thinner and longer.

Spiderman said nothing and neither did Eugene, staring at him.

Of course. Of course. It made sense. Eugene heard it in the guy's voice. Without visuals, he would've identified him as Parker in a heartbeat.

But this meant...

Peter Parker stopped him from killing his father.

Calmed him down.

Held him while he broke down.

Christ, he brought him home after everything and promised he'd check in.

This was the teen he'd tormented for years, who had been so kind to him.

Eugene thought he might throw up.

"How did you...?" Peter's voice was quiet but unafraid. His posture had changed, slightly, as though shocked but not intimidated. Eugene wondered if there was simply no hostility to be found anywhere on his person- just guilt that came off of him in waves. His heard thrummed out a pattern that he didn't recognise. He didn't deserve Peter's kindness. Not after everything he had done.

"Your voice is the same." Eugene choked on his words, trying not to sound like he was insulting the guy. "You- why did you help me, when I've-"

Peter- no, Spiderman- looked sad, like he was somehow upset by Eugene's disposition. As if the teen's sadness made him sad too. Could a person really be that empathetic? "Jesus, Fla- Eugene, I'm sorry- you're a kid. I'm a kid. You're not the person you're gonna be for the rest of your life yet, and... there are things that happened to you that... that explained why. Why you've done the things you have."

"That doesn't make it okay." He could barely hear his own voice, but Spiderman did.

"No," the hero agreed. "But it makes it understandable. I'm not here to pity you. I'm here to understand. And I do. You're allowed to just feel sorry for yourself. Feeling sorry for other people should be your second priority after what happened to you."

Eugene wasn't convinced, but he nodded anyway. He didn't understand how any one person could be so kind. Peter Parker should hate him. He shouldn't empathise. He shouldn't sympathise. God damn it all, he shouldn't care. Eugene didn't deserve it.

"Please don't tell anybody who I am."

Spiderman was gone in a blink.

And Eugene did the only thing he could do.

He went home.

He went to sleep.
And then he went to school the next day.

School trickled by slowly, days blurring into each other as each moment brought him closer and closer to the day when school would be over and he would have to figure out how he would support himself. He couldn't rely on his aunt forever; he'd have to get a job. Eugene didn't like planning for the future, but he could only assume that that was all that was left for him.

He walked down the hallway on a Wednesday morning with his backpack strap resting on the fingers of one hand. His eyes must've been glazed over- he was in the process of auto-piloting the trip to his first period. But as he walked, something caught his eye, and he stopped going.

He had assumed- assumed- that once he stopped tormenting Peter Parker, everybody else would too. He had assumed that because he was no longer leading others to bully, that they would realise that it was a disgusting practice, and they would refrain from doing so.

Instead, what Eugene saw, was another senior. He didn't recognise the guy (though he'd probably been friends with him once) but what he did recognise was the position the guy was in, pinning Peter Parker to the locker by his shoulder. He was leering right in the smaller student's face, cockiness lining his expression, and insults that he couldn't hear were probably leaving the guy's lips.

Eugene didn't know why that made him so angry. He didn't care that Peter could fight back but chose not to. He knew the reason for that. What he cared about was that this guy- some random ass guy- thought that since Eugene wasn't, he might as well. Not only was the act of doing so in itself disgusting, but he was doing some sort of queen-bee takeover shit that happened in teen dramas.

Something snapped inside of him and he walked over, hearing the blood rushing in his ears.

"Leave him alone."

The guy smirked at him- smirked.

"What if I don't? What would you do?"

"Do you really want to find out?"

Eugene sneered, and the guy relinquished his hold on Parker's shoulder, but before he could feel any relief, the kid actually stepped over and raised a fist, trying to land a blow on him.

He was so tired. Eugene stepped to the side, keeping his hands relaxed at his sides. His expression wasn't cocky, or proud, or threatening. It was exhausted. He was done. He didn't even know why he was doing it, it would be so easy to just keep walking like other students had done over the years.

But Eugene wasn't like other students.

"It's not that hard to leave the guy alone, you little shit," he forced out, sidestepping another attempted punch. The guy stumbled, taken off guard by the lack of body there for him to assault. One of Eugene's eyebrows quirked, and he stared down at the guy, unimpressed.

"What do you care, huh? You used to do this just like the rest of us!" The guy snapped, and he stopped, taking a moment to breathe.

Eugene watched, impassive.
"Answer me goddamn it, why do you care about Puny Parker all of a sudden? You gave him that nickname! You've always hated the guy! What, are you in love with him or something? Should we change your nickname from Flash to faggo-"

Even though he didn't lash out, Eugene's glare turned dangerous, and the other guy fell silent before the slur could fully escape his lips.

And then Eugene wanted to scream, suddenly, that he was standing up for Peter Parker because Peter Parker was good. Because Peter Parker cared about people, because he was kind and he had forgiven him despite all the shitty things he'd done, despite the fact that he didn't deserve his forgiveness. He wanted to scream that Peter Parker wasn't just some student who got picked on because he was a nerd, he was a student who spent his spare time protecting people, even people who didn't deserve it, and a student who let people hurt him because he didn't want to hurt them.

Because Peter Parker was Spiderman. Because Peter Parker didn't deserve to be in pain. Because nobody deserved to be in pain.

Eugene met Peter's eyes. There was no silent communication between them, no metaphysical conversation that went down unbeknownst to those around them. The only thing that Eugene read in his classmate's eye was curiosity. And he could only imagine what the teen saw in his.

He looked back to the kid in front of him.

"I'm not protecting him." Eugene said calmly. "He doesn't need protecting, he can do that himself. I'm just doing what I should've done a long time ago, and treating him like the person he is." He lowered his voice so that nobody else could hear him. "And you're a damn fool if you don't realise that the only reason you can pick on him is because he lets you."

He knew he wasn't a good person. He wasn't playing hero, he wasn't trying to win anybody's forgiveness. Eugene knew (God, he knew) that the only thing he deserved was to rot. His father was a piece of shit, but that didn't excuse what he spent years doing. It just showed how good Peter was, that he was willing to overlook the years of torment in the name of what his tormenter had been through.

But when he sat down at lunch that day, alone at his own table, Peter sat down across from him. Eugene knew that if he accepted another kindness from Peter Parker, he might just burst, but the guy just said, "Thanks for keeping my secret," and then began to eat.

They didn't talk to each other.

They didn't become best friends.

They didn't do things together.

They just sat there.

Well, for the first week, at least.

Eugene was four months into eighteen when he finished high school. He hadn't done well enough to graduate, so no diploma for him, but he had done a lot of thinking over that past month.

And though his aunt was against it, though his common sense was against it, though statistics were against it- he thought, well, since when had his common sense ever influenced his decisions in the past?

Eugene Thompson (formally known as Flash, but no longer) enlisted in the military
They taught self-discipline, that was part of the appeal. But also... he hadn't seen the world, really, past what his limited goals and expectations allowed him to see. His whole life, he wanted one thing: to make his father suffer as he himself had suffered at his father's hands. But when he first realised that he had achieved that goal, not only was the outcome different than he had expected, after he had done so, he didn't know what he wanted anymore.

So long, he had wanted just one thing. everything else seemed to be... insignificant, in the long run.

But that hadn't been the solution to his problems. That hadn't been what he needed, no matter how much his younger self had thought so.

What he needed...

Well, he didn't know that yet. Eugene didn't really know anything. He just hoped that maybe joining the army would help him find out.

And none of what happened between him and Peter Parker for the past four months, no matter how friendly they had become with each other, had excused or made up for what Eugene had done to the other teen for so long. Even if he had been forgiven, he still knew that he was nowhere near a good person, much less a person who deserved Peter's friendship.

So yeah, maybe he wanted to earn that too. Maybe being in the military would show him how to be better. Because he wanted to. Because Peter deserved that. Because Eugene deserved that.

Joining the military wasn't going to solve all of his problems. Eugene knew it. He had outgrown the mindset where he would choose one solution for multiple problems. But he knew that it would teach him. And it would help him. And he would learn from it. And maybe, when he came back, he would be ready to be the person he wanted to be.

And maybe, when he came back, he'd be able to sit down with Peter Parker and give him what he deserved: not an excuse, but an explanation.

And an apology.

End Notes

hope you were able to at least feel something in reading this. it's really heavy, especially compared to my last work.

all feedback is welcome !

also, sorry it some proper nouns or first words in sentences aren't capitalised. i am sleep deprived and i originally wrote this piece without capitals whatsoever so i had to go through and edit to make it more professional. i tried my best.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!