the five times peter got panic attacks and didn’t ask for help and the one time he did

by captivatedintrovert

Summary

Peter Parker wasn't weak (or that's what he tells himself anyways).

But sometimes even the greatest of heroes can stumble.

(or, the au where Peter gets panic attacks and Tony Stark [aka daddy Stark] is there to catch him when he falls)
Peter steps inside of the metal elevator of Stark Tower Complex, his blood pumping with restlessness. Running a hand through his curly brown locks, he waits as the doors begin to close. His thoughts were running a hundred miles an hour. He had so much to do today. After he finishes up his internship today with Mr. Stark, he has to go home and begin working on his ten-page History essay that is due tomorrow. He knew it was his fault for waiting until the last minute to get started on it, but in his defense, he was always busy. With balancing his internship with Mr. Stark (which is amazing because holy shit he gets to work with Tony Stark), protecting innocent people from thugs and bad guys (after all, he was a friendly neighborhood vigilante), and maintaining his grades at the same time was finally taking a toll on Peter.

Not that he was ever going to admit it, of course.

He was Peter Parker, after all.

He had a reputation to keep up.

(Not like he really had a reputation in the first place)

“Hello, Peter Parker,” FRIDAY greeted him in her monotonous tone.

“Hey, FRIDAY,” Peter responded easily. “Can you take me to Mr. Stark’s lab, please?”

“Mr. Stark has requested for you to meet him at the lounge,” FRIDAY responded.

Peter’s eyebrow receded into his hairline. “Oh, uhm, alright,” he murmured confusedly. The elevator slowly began making its trek upwards. His backpack—his fourth one this year—was...
slung over one shoulder with his suit tucked neatly inside. As he stood there, waiting, he tried to
wrack his brain to remember if Mr. Stark had mentioned meeting in the lounge, but after a
moment, he gave up. Usually they would work in the lab and nowhere else unless… Peter’s eyes
widened a fraction. What if Mr. Stark had something important he wanted to talk about with
Peter? What if—what if he wanted to cancel Peter’s internship? Was it not good enough? Was he
not good enough?

Oh my god, that’s it. I’ve disappointed him and he’s ready to let me go and oh god what the hell
did I do—

“This is the lounge, Peter,” FRIDAY’s voice interrupted his thoughts. Peter blinked slowly, his
mind snapping back to the present. “I have notified Mr. Stark of your arrival.” The elevator doors
opened with a ding, and Peter stuffed his clammy hands into the pockets of his jeans before
stepping off of the elevator.

Act cool, Peter, he thought. Maybe he just wants to talk.

As the elevator doors shut behind him, the first thing Peter noticed was the noise. It was loud.
There was shouting and yelling coming from around the corner, and Peter hesitated for merely a
moment before remembering that Mr. Stark was waiting for him. As he hurried his steps and
pivoted around a corner, the scene that unfolded before him wasn’t something that Peter was
expecting.

The first thing Peter noticed, though, was the lounge. It was vast. That much could be said. Large
high-ceiling windows hugged the walls, letting in pools of sunlight into the room. Clean, white
couches encircled the grandiose room, forming a wide berth where a stainless-steel 70-inch TV sat
at the center, towering over all. It casted a dark shadow from behind but was chased away almost
instantly from the streams of sunlight that filtered in through the windows. And there, all huddled
near the TV, were most of the Avengers, arguing and bantering over one another.

Peter couldn’t help but let a small smile tug idly at the corners of his mouth.

The sight was absolutely… well, normal. Or as normal as it gets around here. While Clint and
Natasha argued, with the former throwing his hands up in the air in exasperation, Bruce was
sitting upon one of the couches, watching the exchange between the two spies in amusement.
Steve was standing near his arguing friends, rubbing his neck confusedly at the stack of CD’s that
were sprawled about on the ground. Bucky was crouching, mirroring Steve’s expression. “What
the hell is Mulan?” he asked gruffly, his metal fingers skimming over a particular CD. Steve
shrugged helplessly in reply.
Sam, overhearing Bucky’s question, turned and gaped astonishingly at the former man, his eyes wide with surprise and horror. “You have never seen Mulan?” he gasped aloud, catching the attention of Natasha and Clint. At this point, Natasha had climbed over Clint, trying to grab the remote from his hands. But as he was nearly a foot taller than she was, he waved the remote above his head, yelling and stumbling backwards as her elbows slammed into his sides.

“I’ve never heard of this movie in my life,” Steve said sheepishly.

Natasha and Clint gaped at Steve and Bucky for a moment, then towards each other, and with strange smiles adorning their features, they said simultaneously, “We’re watching Mulan.”

“I have a bad feeling about this,” Bruce says.

At that moment, Tony walked into the lounge, balancing a huge bowl of popcorn in his arms. He noticed Peter right away. “Hey, kid!” he says in an unusually charismatic tone. “You came just in time.”

“Just in time for what?” Peter asked, befuddled as he walked over towards Tony. Natasha smiled at him, Clint simply snatched the bowl of popcorn away from Tony who glared daggers at the man, and Bruce waved in greeting. Steve and Bucky were still both looking confusedly at Sam who was getting the movie started.

“For Mulan!” Clint shouts, stuffing a handful of popcorn into his mouth. He collapsed onto one of the couches and laid his feet upon the rest of the cushions, easily blocking anybody else from sitting down on the couch. Without so much as a glance, Natasha shoves his feet out of the way, which almost led to Clint falling off of the sofa unceremoniously. Natasha snorted, stealing the popcorn bowl away from Clint, who simply scowled at her. “You’re a witch,” he grumbles, crossing his arms together childishly.

“I’ve been called worse,” Natasha says, grinning smugly.

Peter laughed at the exchange. Just a few months ago, he was quite unfamiliar with the Avengers and how they run things around here. But after spending quite a lot of time with them over the weekends (and with the internship he had with Mr. Stark), he was getting to know them personally and he was thrilled. After all, they are his childhood idols. “Why are we watching a movie?” Peter asks, his gaze snapping back to Tony’s.

Tony shrugged. “Thought it was finally time you get a break. After all, you deserved it.”
Peter’s eyebrows furrowed. “I—do?”

Tony rolled his eyes. “C’mon, kid. You’ve been working so hard for the past couple of weeks. I know finals are coming up and school can be a pain in the ass—“

“Language!”

“—shut up, Rogers. Anyways, I thought you deserved a break; you seemed a bit exhausted lately.”

Peter tried to laugh it off. “School is nothing, Mr. Stark! It’s the least of my worries!”

Tony rolled his eyes, walking over to one of the empty couches. “Right,” he says nonchalantly, “and I’m Han Solo. Now, come on, the movie is getting started.”

Peter grinned, ambling towards where Tony was sitting. Dropping his backpack on the floor, Peter took a seat right next to the older man, grateful for having the evening off.

Truth be told, Tony wasn’t far off the mark. School has been getting more tough lately. With numerous projects due all throughout next week, presentations that needed to be prepped and presented, his SAT rolling around the corner (he should probably start studying for that soon), and finals coming up within a month—well, to say that Peter was stressed would be an understatement. He was overwhelmed. Not only did he have school to worry about, but with balancing an internship with Mr. Stark almost every day after school and going on patrols every night, it was beginning to take a toll on him. Peter also noticed how things were getting tight at home, with Aunt May managing to pay enough money each month for them to squeeze by. Deep down, all Peter wanted was to help ease the stress off of May’s shoulders, especially as she was balancing two jobs at the same time. Currently, he was looking for a small job where he could work on the weekends, something to help his Aunt out with. But as of right now, he had no luck.

After all, he was underage.

*Maybe tomorrow I will have more luck,* Peter tried to reassure himself.
Maybe.

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An hour into the movie, Peter had finally relaxed, enjoying the animation and the light side notes Natasha and Clint would add at the most inappropriate of times.

“Mushu is definitely not a dragon.”

“He’s more of a man then you’ll ever be.”

“He’s a fucking lizard!”

“Correction: he’s a dragon. There’s a difference.”

“Jesus Christ, Nat, look at the size of the guy! He’s—“

“Would the two of you shut up?” Tony interrupted halfway in-between, and Peter couldn’t help but laugh softly. Tony glanced at him. “I swear I’m in a room full of idiots,” he muttered to him with an eye roll, though the playful smile curled at the corners of his lips told Peter that he was anything but annoyed.

As Peter continued to watch the animation, his thoughts slowly began to drift back towards all of the homework and studying that awaited for him after the movie was over. You shouldn’t even be watching the movie, his conscious whispered to him accusingly, if you’re not going to be helpful around here, might as well go home and do something useful for once in your pathetic life.

Peter sighed, running a hand through his disheveled locks. The voice inside of his head was right. He shouldn’t be relaxing and watching a movie with the rest of the Avengers. He should be getting home by now—or at least begin on his history essay that was due first thing tomorrow. He glanced at his backpack, his heart clenching painfully in his chest. He felt like he was going to throw up. He was so tired and exhausted from… well—everything. He was worn out with the amount of homework he received every night and all of the other things in his life that he had to balance and prioritize. After all, grades meant everything to Peter. Without his exceptional grades, Peter was nothing. He was nothing without the scholarship that had gotten him to one of the most prestigious high schools in Queens; he was nothing without the accidental powers he acquired a few years back; he was nothing without the internship that Mr. Stark offered to him. Without his intelligence, his endowment of handling technology easily, and his photographic memory, Peter would be nothing.
Peter clenched his fists tightly together, his eyes trained on the TV. But he really wasn’t paying attention to the animated characters moving on the screen, nor did he notice the concerned glances Tony was shooting him every now and then. His mind had drifted far away—far into the dark depths of his nightmares, to where his innermost fears haunted him each and every day; its grip nothing but a strong vise upon his weak and fragile heart. Too much, he thinks to himself, too much to do… so little time.

He wasn’t strong. He wasn’t strong like May, who never once complained about the two jobs she constantly balanced nor the fact that she had to take care of her fifteen-year-old nephew all by herself. He admired his aunt. May was strong, fierce, and kind. She excelled in all aspects in which he lacked in, and he couldn’t help but pathetically wish that he could be a little more like his Aunt. She was strong-willed, determined, and eager to try anything new. She wasn’t afraid of failing or falling down. She would simply get back up on her feet, shrug off the dust, and try again and again and again until she succeeded. If he was a little more like May, maybe he could’ve saved… he could’ve saved Uncle Ben—

Peter’s hands shook incessantly. Hot, unshed tears burned at the back of his eyes and a huge lump formed at the base of his throat. A thin layer of sweat covered his skin, and his chest constricted painfully.

He couldn’t breathe.

All my fault—

I could’ve stopped the mugger—

I had powers…

Why didn’t I use them?

You’re so useless, the little voice inside of his head whispered at him harshly, you’re disgusting. How could you live with yourself… knowing you could’ve prevented your uncle’s death? But instead you froze. You fucking froze. You pathetic piece of shit. How can you live with yourself—
“Kid?” Tony’s voice snapped Peter from his self-defeating thoughts momentarily, bringing Peter back to the present. He was clutching his knees tightly, the skin stretched upon his hands pale and taut. He was breathing unevenly, trying to calm himself down, but he couldn’t—he couldn’t—oh my god I can’t breathe oh my god—

“Kid?”

“—bathroom,” Peter choked out, standing up almost immediately. Steve, who had his arm wrapped casually around Bucky, glanced at Peter in concern. Without a second glance, Peter rushed out of the lounge, feeling sick and nauseous. The moment he turned the corner, leaving the dark lounge behind, hot tears were running down his flushed cheeks in rivulets. From the back of his mind, he could hear the sound of padded footsteps coming towards him. His legs nearly buckled, and he leaned heavily against the wall, his breaths coming out in rushed pants.

What is going on with him?

Why was he freaking out?

His vision blurred. With shaking hands, he tried to wipe the tears away from his cheeks. His chest felt heavy and tight, and he was gasping, trying to breathe.

“Peter!”

Strong hands grasped onto his forearms as Peter lost his balance leaning against the wall. He was shaking and gasping as a familiar face materialized into his view. “Kid, you gotta breathe,” Mr. Stark told him, his voice soft but firm. He lowered Peter to the ground, and Peter clutched onto the sleeves of Tony, feeling weak. Stars danced dizzily in his vision.

“M—Mr. Stark?” Peter gasped aloud.

“I need you to take a deep breath, kid,” Tony says. Peter could distinctly hear the sound of the movie continuing on in the background. Tony’s face blurred for a moment.

“—can’t breathe—“ Peter shuddered.
“It’ll come to pass,” Tony promises. Peter clutched onto the sleeves of Tony’s shirt even harder, willing himself to stay grounded. “I know it’s hard and painful. But, shit kid, don’t let it win. Just try to breathe normally and push on through. It’ll be over soon; I promise.” Tony shifted momentarily, hesitating. He looked down at the kid, who was struggling to listen to what Tony was telling him to do. His doe eyes were wide and innocent, filled with fear and terror. A pang shot through Tony’s chest; he couldn’t bear to watch Peter struggle through this. Finally, he muttered, “Ah, fuck it,” and scooted closer to the teenager, placing a hand atop of Peter’s hair. Slowly and methodically, he began to run his hand through Peter’s chocolate-colored locks, murmuring words of encouragement to the gasping fifteen-year-old.

That seemed to do the trick.

Peter calmed almost immediately. His erratic heart—that had seemed to want to jump out of his chest moments before—slowed down drastically, and the loud, incessant ringing in his ears ceased to exist. He began to take deep and even breaths, listening to the sound of Tony’s serene voice and the feeling of his fingers running through his hair.

_Breathe, Peter_, he told himself, _breathe._

A few moments trickled on by, with the sound of Mulan singing and Tony’s soothing words occupying the silence. After a few more minutes, Peter felt like he could breathe again.

“T—Thank you,” Peter murmured softly, his hoarse voice echoing in the hallway. Tony stopped running a hand through Peter’s curls, and for a second, Peter wished he hadn’t said a word just to let Mr. Stark continue. Peter sat up slowly and leaned against the wall, lowering his gaze to the ground in embarrassment. His cheeks reddening, he brought his knees up to his chest and wrapped his arms around it, trying to make himself feel smaller. He could feel Mr. Stark’s eyes on him the entire time.

“Not a problem, kid,” Mr. Stark says, mirroring Peter’s actions. Silence lapsed between them for a few moments, then— “What triggered it?”

Peter glanced up in surprise. Tony wasn’t looking at him, but staring directly at the opposite wall of the hallway. “I—uh, what?”

“Your attack,” he says matter-of-factly. “I’m not stupid, you know.”

“H—How did you know…” Peter’s voice trailed off. Tony wasn’t looking at him, and that was
all the indication Peter needed. “You had panic attacks before?” he gaped, his eyes wide.

Tony winced. “Don’t say the word,” he muttered.

“What? Panic?”

Tony’s head snapped towards Peter’s so fast that Peter wondered if he had gotten a whiplash in the process. “Yes! Kid, didn’t I just tell you not to say the word?” he snapped.

Peter’s eyebrow receded into his hairline. “Why are you so afraid of the word?”

“I’m not afraid!” Tony huffed.

Peter stared. “Mr. Stark, it’s totally fine to be—“

“Oh, okay, moving on!” Tony interrupted loudly. Peter bit back a grin. “What triggered it?” Tony repeated the question, glancing away from the fifteen-year old.

Peter’s grin faltered. “Oh, uh, it was nothing, Mr. Stark. Don’t worry about it—“

"Like hell I won’t,” Tony cut in with a frown. “You had an attack in my place, therefore you’re obliged to tell me what was the cause of said attack. Now, spit it out, kid. I really don’t want to miss the ending of Mulan.”

Peter sighed. Unwrapping his arms around his knees, he says, “It’s nothing, really—“

Tony snorted.

“—no, really! I just have a lot on my plate right now. I have to maintain my grades, somehow balance the internship with you—and don’t get me wrong, Mr. Stark, I really am grateful for the internship—and do my nightly patrols as Spiderman. Not only that, but I really need to start looking for a job soon—“
“Job?” Tony intervened. “Why do you need a job, kid? Aren’t you too young to get a job?”

Peter winced. “I, er, am, but… Aunt May… she, um…” he trailed off. He really didn’t want Mr. Stark to know that he and Aunt May were struggling. It was embarrassing to admit it aloud, and he desperately wished he hadn’t let those last words slip out of his mouth.

Mr. Stark was looking at him, his head tilted to the side. A closed-off expression adorned his features. “You need money,” he said finally.

It wasn’t a question, merely a statement. A poor, sad fact, the little voice inside of Peter’s head whispered mockingly, you’re not even old enough to get a job. You’re so useless to May. Peter nodded, trying to push the negative thoughts away. “Yeah,” he admitted quietly.

“You should’ve just asked, kid,” Mr. Stark shrugs.

Peter’s head snapped up. “What?”

“Starting from tomorrow, you’ll be getting paid. I’ll be transferring money to your account weekly. Would twenty—no, that seems too little—would 60 dollars an hour be alright with you?”

Peter’s eyes widened. “60 dollars an hour!”

“What? Is that too little?”

“N—no!” Peter spluttered. “Mr. Stark, that’s too much! I can’t possibly be paid that much money —“

Tony rolled his eyes and waved him off. “It’s fine, kid. You need the money anyways. Just think of it as like an… early birthday present.”

“My birthday was last week!”
“My point exactly,” Tony says, as if that made total sense. After a moment, he stood up from the ground, wincing at the position that he had sat for for the last ten minutes.

Peter scrambled up after him, his eyes wide and his heart beating fast. “Mr. Stark, it’s not necessary. Really. May and I can figure it out—"

"Oh, really?” Tony arched an eyebrow. “Your attack tells me otherwise.”

Peter’s cheeks reddened.

“That’s what I thought.”

Peter was quiet for a moment. “Thank you, Mr. Stark,” he says softly, “really. You don’t know how much stress you have lifted off of May’s shoulders. It really means a lot to the both of us.”

Tony’s lips tugged upwards slightly. “It’s nothing,” he muttered, looking away.

Suddenly, he stiffened, feeling Peter’s arms wrap around his mid-torso. He glanced down in surprise, seeing the kid’s cheeks press against his chest, his arms clinging tightly to him. “It means everything to me,” Peter says, his voice muffled against Tony’s button-up shirt. “Thank you so much, Mr. Stark.”

Tony couldn’t help but let a small smile tug at the corners of his lips. Usually, he hates when anyone (except for Pepper or else she’d kill him) touches him—let alone hug him—but he knew Peter was an exception.

He was a special kid.

“Of course, kid,” Tony says, hesitantly wrapping his arms around Peter’s small frame. “But promise me,” he says after a moment, “next time when you feel like another attack is coming on, please let me know, alright?”

Peter was quiet for a moment. Then, he let go of him and took a step backwards, a grin tugging idly at his lips. “You were worried!” he says brightly.
“What?”

“You were worried about me, Mr. Stark! I knew Captain America wasn’t telling the truth; you do have a heart!”

“He said what?”

Chapter End Notes

i fucking love tom holland. period.

(first time posting on this website; gimme some love!)

no, but seriously, tom holland is bae.

—captivatedintrovert
He was gasping, trying to breathe.

Beams and fallen bricks covered every inch of his vision, and he could hear the faint sound of water trickling far away. It was quiet, almost silent except for the water and a lone owl hooting in the dark night every now and then. He tried to move, tried to wriggle his leg out from one of the pieces of the building that had landed on him. Sweat shined on his skin, and he was shaking, gasping, afraid.

He screamed, his voice echoing in the dark night.

“Help me, please!”

No one responded back; only his terrified voice echoing in the deafening silence. The more he moved, trying to wriggle his body out from the fallen beam, the more he panicked. He could feel his throat closing up, his chest constricting, his body going into shock as he accepted the harsh truth that help wasn’t coming.

Not anytime soon.

He screamed louder; begging, shouting in the dark abyss. His voice was tinged with fear and helplessness; gasping, always gasping.

Please—

Peter shouted, sitting upright in the bed.
Panting wildly, he clutched his comforter, his heart thrumming wildly in his chest. He was shaking—badly, his pants and heavy breathing filling the thick silence. Tears were running down his cheeks, and he wiped them away blindly, letting out a shuddering hiccup. He could still feel the walls closing in around him, the beam weighing his leg down, the helplessness that suffocated him and closed around his heart tightly—

Peter tried to push the terrible images away, his eyes squeezing shut in vain. He could still remember the laugh of the Vulcan reverberating in his head over and over and over again, taunting him with words, letting Peter know that he was nothing but *weak, weak, weak*—

*You fought the Vulcan, Peter tried to remind himself, and you won.*

*You won, you won, you won.*

He repeated the two words over and over in his head—like a mantra, hoping it would help him stay grounded. But he couldn’t breathe. He knew it was happening again—the panic attack taking over, squeezing his heart and lungs, taking everything away from him and leaving him broken and scarred and bruised. He was shaking, the dizziness taking ahold of his mind, tears blurring in his vision.

Peter pushed the comforter off of him, feeling too hot. He stumbled out of the bed, gasping. His legs buckled the moment his feet touched the cool floor of the room, and he fell, slamming his body against the floor. He didn’t detect the pain of the fall at first—he was shaking so hard, his hands trying to grab onto anything, anything—

“Mr. Parker,” FRIDAY’s voice reverberated throughout the room. Peter barely noticed. “Your vitals are fluctuating drastically. Your heart is beating too fast, your blood pressure has risen dangerously in the last few minutes, and you’re not getting enough air into your lungs. I believe you are portraying signs of a panic attack. Would you like me to inform Mr. Stark?”

Peter vaguely wondered what he was doing in Starks Tower Complex, but he pushed that thought away immediately as it took him a few moments to let FRIDAY’s words register in his sluggish mind. “N—No,” he rasped out, his voice hoarse and thick with tears. “D—Don’t wake him.”

A pause. Then, “Are you certain, Mr. Parker? With a panic attack, it is best for the person to be around someone who can comfort them. I believe Mr. Stark can help you get through it—“
Peter wrapped his arms around his head, his cheeks pressed hard against the cool wooden floor. “I—I said no, FRIDAY,” Peter gritted out.

There was a moment of silence. Then, FRIDAY’s voice rang out in the bedroom once more, “As you wish, Peter.”

Peter lay on the ground, trying to take deep and even breaths. Out of the corners of his eyes, he could see the light shining from the moon filter in through his windows, basking his bedroom in a deep, white glow. At the back of his mind, Peter knew he probably should’ve let FRIDAY inform Mr. Stark. But he couldn’t bring himself to wake his mentor up—even though he rarely gets enough sleep as it is.

After a few more moments, Peter felt like he could finally breathe. Wincing, he stood up from the ground, blinking in the darkness. He shivered and climbed into bed, eager to steal some warmth from the blanket. Yet, as he laid back down and pulled the warm blanket up to his chest, he couldn’t sleep. Every time Peter closed his eyes, he could still see the features of the Vulture’s mocking smile, hear his horrific laugh reverberating in the background, Peter’s helpless screams echoing in the silence… his eyes flitted open.

Yeah, he wasn’t going to get a wink of sleep any time soon.

Sighing, Peter sat upright in the bed, a deep frown pulling at the corners of his mouth. Glancing around the dark bedroom, he wondered briefly why he was in Stark Towers Complex. He noticed his backpack lying in the corner and remembered that his internship had gone on for longer than he and Mr. Stark both anticipated. Actually, it was nearing eleven o’clock before Peter had decided to check his phone, and he was grateful for once that May was working late that night or she would’ve strangled him to death. Tony had thought it would be best that Peter stayed overnight, as it was already late and after a quick call to confirm with May, Peter found himself in one of the many guest bedrooms of the Tower.

Speaking of Mr. Stark—no, Peter told himself. He couldn’t go and wake Mr. Stark up just because of some stupid nightmare and a panic attack. He didn’t want Mr. Stark to know how weak he truly was. But as the minutes dragged on by and the bedside clock neared to three o’clock, Peter sighed, rubbing his eyes. He knew he couldn’t go back to sleep—not by himself, anyways. He couldn’t stand the silence in his bedroom any longer, and he didn’t trust being alone with his mind—he was certain that the moment he closed his eyes, terrible images will haunt him.

Slipping out of the bed, Peter ambled across the room and exited quietly. The hallway was lit with soft, florescent lighting, and a deep hum resonated throughout the hallway—the AC, Peter was guessing. Wrapping his arms around himself, Peter quietly walked down the hallway, passing other living quarters where the other Avengers currently resided. Reaching the end of the hallway,
he stopped in front of a deep, brown door with the words, *Starks Residence*, etched in golden letters in the center.

Peter paused for a moment, hesitating. With his hands on the doorknob, he wondered briefly if this was such a good idea. He knew that he shouldn’t be bothering Mr. Stark with his trivial problems. Again, he probably should’ve let FRIDAY inform Mr. Stark of Peter’s panic attack, but Peter couldn’t bring himself to wake the man up. With guilt gnawing at the pits of his stomach, Peter twisted the knob and opened the bedroom door, wincing at the slight creak that the door resonated in the almost-silent room. Light from the hallway flooded into the room almost immediately.

Ambling soundlessly into the room, Peter shut the door behind him and was bathed in darkness once more.

Somehow, through Peter’s heightened senses and the moonlight that seeped in through the blinds of the vast windows that encircled Mr. Stark’s room, Peter could discern the sleeping form of his mentor in the middle of the wide bed. Peter was grateful for once that Ms. Potts was out of town for a business trip—it would have been extremely inappropriate otherwise. Peter shuddered from the horrible thought and tried to push the image away from his mind. He really did *not* want to be thinking about that right now.

Gently making his way across the broad room, Peter reached the edge of Tony’s bed, hesitating. *This was a stupid idea*, he thought to himself. He shouldn’t be here in the first place, bothering Mr. Stark. Peter bit his lip, contemplating. He glanced around the room and noticed an armchair stuffed away in the corner.

A quick idea formulated in Peter’s mind.

With making sure that he wouldn’t make any noise, Peter walked towards the chair quietly, and sat down in it, leaning his head against the armrest. He was in an uncomfortable position but decided to ignore it otherwise. Shutting his eyes, Peter found relief at the fact that none of the images his nightmare had conjured up before sprung in front of him. Sighing deeply, the tranquil sound of Mr. Stark’s breathing and the faint hum of the air-conditioner lulled Peter into a deep sleep.

*Finally.*

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“Peter?”
A rough, callused hand gently shook Peter awake. Peter groaned, lifting his head up and blinking blearily in the darkness. His arm throbbed from the awkward position he was in, and rubbing sleep out of his eyes, he noticed Mr. Stark standing in front of him, a concerned look plastered upon his features.

Mr. Stark…?

Memories from a few hours ago flooded his mind. His eyes widening, Peter jumped out of the chair, making Tony stumble a few steps backwards in surprise. “Mr. Stark!” Peter says, his voice incredibly high. His eyes swept across the room. It was still dark, but he could discern the small, light rays of the sun peeking out from the horizon, illuminating the room in a soft yellow glow. Mr. Stark was staring at Peter with an arched eyebrow.

“What are you doing in my room?” he asked.

Peter fumbled with his words. “I—um… sleepwalking?” Peter tried halfheartedly.

Mr. Stark rolled his eyes. “Alright, if you won’t tell me what you are doing in my room, perhaps I can ask FRIDAY as she didn’t alert me—“

“No, no!” Peter says loudly, his eyes wide and frantic. “Don’t ask FRIDAY, please.”

Mr. Stark paused. His voice softening, he asked, “why were you in my room, Peter?”

Peter hesitated. Glancing down at the ground and picking on a loose thread on his t-shirt, he mumbled beneath his breath, “I had a nightmare.”

“I’m sorry?”

“I had a nightmare,” Peter said loudly, his voice cracking at the end. He winced. God, how stupid and weak he must have sounded to Mr. Stark’s ears. With the silence that followed, Peter continued on hastily, “I—um, just had a bad nightmare, and I, uh, couldn’t go back to sleep.” He decided not to tell Mr. Stark about his panic attack. Peter vaguely remembered how a few weeks back he had a panic attack while watching Mulan, and the embarrassment clung to him like a second sleeve after Mr. Stark had witnessed it and helped him calm down. He didn’t want to show Mr. Stark that he was weak (even though he was). The Avengers aren’t supposed to be weak, or show any weakness, for that matter. “I don’t know why, but I thought of you almost immediately
and I didn’t want to wake you up because of some stupid nightmare. So, I just decided to sleep here in the chair—as you can see—and, shit, I know it’s probably weird waking up to some kid sleeping in your room and I was probably the one who woke you up and—”

“Hey,” Mr. Stark said softly, interrupting Peter’s rant. Peter hadn’t realized it before, but he was breathing heavily now and he could feel hot tears pushing at the back of his eyes.

You’re so weak, the little voice in his head taunted, weak, weak, weak.

“Don’t belittle yourself like that, Peter,” Mr. Stark says softly. Peter’s cheeks and the tips of his ears reddened at the soft tone Mr. Stark used, and he glanced away. “Look at me.” Fidgeting, Peter looked back at Mr. Stark shyly, embarrassment weighing his heart down. Peter was expecting to see disappointment on the older man’s face, but he was surprised to see there was nothing but concern and… something else Peter couldn’t pinpoint exactly. “It’s okay to have nightmares, Peter. We all have them every now and then. It’s totally normal.”

“Even… even for superheroes?” Peter’s voice was small, and he hated it.

“Especially for superheroes,” Mr. Stark agrees gently. “Look, Peter, the next time you have nightmares, I want you to come to me, okay? Don’t worry about waking me up. I usually don’t get enough sleep as it is, and I’m used to it by now.” He shrugs.

“But—” Peter started, feeling the guilt building in his chest.

“No buts,” Mr. Stark says sternly, shaking his head. His dark, brown eyes studied Peter for a moment. “Peter, you are not labeled as someone who is weak for having nightmares. In fact, out of all the Avengers, I think you are the strongest one.”

“What?” Peter says confusedly. “But that’s—“

Mr. Stark smiled. “Maybe not strong physically, but mentally, I do believe you are the strongest out of the all of us. You are only fifteen—the youngest—and yet, you still fight for what is right. You don’t care about fame or the fact that you want people to recognize the actions and the good deeds you have committed. No—you wear a mask and you defend the lives of the innocents, even putting yourself at risk many, many times.” He glared at Peter for the last part, but the small smile playing at the corners of his lips told Peter he was anything but angry. “Do you remember what you told me when I asked you why you wanted to be Spiderman in the first place?”
Peter shook his head slowly. That felt like eons ago when he had first met Mr. Stark. So much has happened since then.

Mr. Stark’s eyes twinkled in the darkness. “You told me that if you had the powers to do something, and you didn’t and the bad things happen, they happen because you didn’t do anything about it. Peter, from the moment I met you, I knew there was something good and true within your heart. You are strong, kind, and persistent. Don’t think just because you have nightmares that makes you weak. It doesn’t; in fact, it only makes you stronger.”

Silence lapsed between the two; Peter letting the words register in his brain. He wiped a trail tear that had managed to escape from his tear ducts and looked up at Mr. Stark with a bright, watery smile. “Thanks, dad. I didn’t… I didn’t think I was strong enough… until now.”

And with another smile, Peter left the bedroom, leaving a bewildered Tony behind.

“What the hell did the kid just say?” Tony murmured under his breath, scratching the back of his neck in confusion. He watched Peter’s retreating back until he disappeared around the corner.

“Well, sir,” FRIDAY’s voice came on, startling Tony and nearly giving him a heart attack, “I believe Mr. Parker has just called you his—“

“It’s a rhetorical question, dammit!”

There was a pause. “Like father, like son,” the AI drawled, “you both are pretty pissy in the mornings.”

Silence. Then— “What the fuck?”

Chapter End Notes

gotta love sassy FRIDAY.

anyways - hi guys! thank you so much for leaving lots of kudos/comments in the first chapter; they really meant a lot to me.
also, i have a lot of free time this summer, so if you want to request anything, just let me know in the comments below! it can either be where tony is a father figure to peter, stevexbucky, peter & the avengers, etc.

hope y'all enjoyed this chapter!

—captivatedintrovert
Title: the five times peter got panic attacks and didn’t ask for help and the one time he did.

Author: captivatedintrovert

13 | you’re not alone

(warning: light infinity war spoilers!)

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“Peter! C’mon, let’s go! If we don’t leave now, we’ll be late!” May’s voice reverberated in the quiet apartment, nearly startling Peter from his stupor.

“Give me another minute, May!” he calls back, hoping that his nervousness and anxiety wasn’t clearly lined beneath his tone. He glances back at his bathroom mirror, biting his lower lip worriedly. He was donned in a simple white shirt with a black blazer thrown over it; plain midnight-blue jeans and a pair of new red vans. Thanks to Mr. Stark generously giving him a job when he and May were in desperate needs of money, he was able to lessen the load off of May’s shoulder. He wanted to give her all the money that he earned from his job, but May being the kind-hearted soul that she was, told him kindly to keep half of the money for himself.

“Who knows,” she had told him kindly, her auburn eyes twinkling in the dark living room of their apartment, “it may come to good use one day.”

He was really grateful that he had an amazing aunt like May.

Yet, as Peter stared at himself in the mirror, he couldn’t help but grimace at his reflection. He was skinny—way too skinny for a growing boy his age. He turned sideways, trying to flex his arms and sighed at how thin his biceps were—or if he had any biceps, for that matter. Peter groaned inwardly, rubbing a hand across his face in exasperation. Why couldn’t he look amazing like Thor or Captain America? They had large, bulky bodies with muscles bulging everywhere, and he had what? Nothing, absolutely nothing.
He tried to smile in the reflection, hoping that by smiling he can gain some confidence within himself. But as he stared hard into the mirror and tried to smile, he noticed how his smile seemed forced and crooked. He winced inwardly; he couldn’t even smile correctly (how fucked up was he?). His eyes moved up from his mouth to a small pimple that stood out like a sore thumb on his cheek. Peter glared at it. No matter how much ointment he applied, the damn pimple wouldn’t disappear. He was hoping it would disappear by tonight’s party, but luck was not on his side today.

Mr. Stark was throwing a holiday party at the Starks Tower Complex. Even though it was the middle of January, he insisted as it was “completely boring around here and we need to spice things up a little!” Mr. Stark was truly kind as he invited May and Peter to the party. Peter was, of course, completely and utterly ecstatic for tonight, but now as he stood in front of the mirror, debating and criticizing every minor detail he could discern upon himself—he wondered if this was simply a bad idea.

“No,” he muttered to himself, shaking his head, “I can’t just disappoint Mr. Stark like that. I have to go—especially after all he has done for May and I.”

His hands shook a little, and he could feel anxiety crawling up his spine. Peter closed his eyes for a moment, trying to take a deep breath. Please, he prayed, please don’t let me have a panic attack, please don’t let me have a panic attack…

It took Peter a few moments to calm down, desperately trying to keep his attack at bay. The last thing he needed right now was a panic attack—especially when Aunt May was waiting for him out in the living room.

Peter squeezed his hands into balls of fists, taking in another deep breath. When he felt his heart begin to slow down and beat normally, he opened his eyes and avoided looking at himself in the mirror.

Turning around, he grabbed his phone from the nightstand and left his bedroom without another glance at the mirror.

***

Peter took a deep breath of the cool night air as the taxi sped away, leaving bouts of dust and particles in its wake. It was nearing nighttime, the sky a mixture of lavender, marigold, and midnight blue. The sun peeked behind large clouds, its bright rays dimming as the day dragged on by. Vaguely, Peter could hear the sounds of laughter, cars honking, and machines whirring far away as he and May stood before Starks Tower Complex.
“Wow…” May murmured, her voice laced with awe as she took in the grand building that towered proudly before the two of them. “It’s so…”

“…big?” Peter finished, amusement lined within his tone.

May laughed, swatting his arm. “Yes, big,” she rolled her eyes playfully, “you’re probably used to the grand size of it, hm?”

“Yeah,” Peter replied as they made their way towards the front double doors of the building. There were already people milling around, and Peter didn’t recognize anybody he knew. He could hear the sound of music and glasses clinking together from the top floor, and Peter wondered wildly for a moment how many people Mr. Stark had invited.

Probably the entire Upstate of New York, by the looks of it.

He could feel sweat dripping down the back of his neck. Though it was a chilly night, Peter felt like he was suffocating. A cool wind whipped past him, running through his chocolate-colored locks, and for a moment, Peter felt the world tipping on its axis.

They reached the front doors in no time flat. Peter could feel his anxiety building, and his heartbeat spiked drastically in the last few moments. He could feel his throat closing in, and stars danced in front of his vision. “Hey, uh, May?” he asked, his hands shaking. He stuffed his hands into the pockets of his trousers, so May wouldn’t be able to discern how nervous he truly was. “Do you mind if I meet you inside? I want to, um, look at the view and the scenery a bit longer.” Peter tried for a smile, praying that it was convincing.

May glanced back at Peter, a confused look etched upon her serene features. An emotion flitted through her eyes so fast that Peter wasn’t able to grasp onto what she was thinking. After a second, she smiled and touching his arm warmly with her hand, she says, “Alright, but be careful, okay?”

He nodded, not trusting himself to speak. And with another smile, May disappeared into the throng of people standing about inside of the ground floor, chatting animatedly to one another.

Once May had disappeared, Peter turned around and hurried through the crowds of people that were increasing dramatically by the minute.
But he couldn’t. He couldn’t think, he couldn’t breathe, he couldn’t say a word. All he knew was that if he didn’t get to somewhere where he can hear himself think, he might have a breakdown right here and now.

From the back of his mind as Peter pushed past more strangers, he faintly heard a familiar voice shouting his name, “Peter!” Thinking it was something his mind conjured up in the midst of his attack, Peter ignored the voice and continued on, gasping and his hands shaking nonstop. People glanced at him strangely, but he ignored them, desperate to get away.

Finally, though he won’t remember later how he had gotten here, Peter found himself in a secluded part of the Tower, where there was no one in plain sight. He was somewhere towards the back of the Tower, that he knew. Leaning against the steel wall of the grandiose building, Peter closed his eyes, breathing unevenly in the dark night. Eliciting a small groan from deep within his throat, Peter doubled over instantly as waves of dizziness washed over him and he emptied his stomach out on the sleek lawn.

He continued for what seemed like forever, and he vaguely felt somebody place a comforting hand on his lower back. “It’s okay,” someone said soothingly, their dulcet voice velvet to Peter’s ears, “it’s alright, Peter, let it all out.”

After a few more moments of letting bile escape through his lips and out into the lawn, Peter straightened up and winced, seeing black spots appear in his vision. He took a step forward dizzily, and his knees nearly buckled as another wave of nausea overwhelmed him once more.

“You need to sit down, Peter,” someone says from behind him. Taking his arm, the person guided him to sit on the ground, and once Peter felt like the world wasn’t shaking anymore, he glanced weakly to his right to see—is that Captain America?

Peter stared at the man for a moment, before blinking rapidly. “Mr. America—Mr. Steve… er, Mr. Rogers… fuck—oh, shit, sorry, I cursed in front of you—and I did it again—“

Captain America laughed, his face shining with amusement. “You can call me Steve, kiddo. And don’t worry about it; I swear I say ‘language’ one time, and I’ll never hear the end of it.” He shook his head, a small smile playing at the corners of his lips.

Peter ducked his head, his cheeks reddening (oh my gosh I’m talking to Captain America!)
stared down at his hands, and he was grateful that it had stopped shaking. His eyes widened as he realized that Captain—er, Steve, witnessed his panic attack and he couldn’t help but inwardly wince in embarrassment. *You idiot,* he scolded himself, *he probably thinks less of you now.*

“So,” Steve says, leaning his back against the wall and staring up into the dark night sky. The sky was now clear, with no sun nor clouds in sight. Glittering trinkets sparkled in the dark night, and Peter could discern the large crescent moon that was situated right above their heads. “you wanna talk about it?”

Peter blinked. He was about to refuse, because (*why in the world would someone as great and powerful as Steve Rogers would want to waste his time with someone as pathetic as me?*). Yet, he stopped. He didn’t know why, but he felt compelled to tell Steve about his problems—about what was bothering him. He barely knew Steve, only fought against him in Germany, but he absolutely idolized him. And the fact that he was sitting right here next to Peter instead of mingling around with other people or hanging out with the rest of the avengers made Peter want to tell him *everything.* Sighing, he said, “I… freaked out, I guess.”

Steve arched an eyebrow, urging him to continue.

Peter fumbled with his hands for a moment, thinking. “I’m not really…” he winced at how high his voice sounded, “I’m not really comfortable with myself lately. I don’t—I don’t like how I look, and I wish I could be more muscular—and not, well, too skinny. I’m also feeling very… self-conscious of myself. Like, I don’t like the fact that my skin is too pale or I have way too many pimples on my face. I know it’s just puberty and all, but *I don’t like it.* And it’s really hard to be happy and positive when you’re feeling down about yourself, you know? That’s why I guess I had a panic attack back there… because I couldn’t handle seeing all these good-looking and professional people, and I’m afraid that when they look at me, they’ll think I’m nothing and…”

“… weak and pathetic?” Steve finished for him, a sad smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

Peter nodded solemnly. “Y—Yeah. How’d you know?”

Steve turned towards him, his eyes glinting in the darkness. “I wasn’t always muscular, you know. I’m sure you’ve heard of my pre-serum days, right?”

Peter brightened. “Oh yeah! There’s a section in the museum about a few blocks away from here that is dedicated to you!”
Steve laughed, though it sounded almost bitter and sad. “Yeah,” he says, nodding, “I saw that as well. Anyways,” he shifted so that he was fully facing Peter, “I wasn’t always confident about how I looked as well. Before I took the serum, I was extremely skinny and scrawny. I would get into many fights on the street, and I would almost always lose.”

Peter furrowed his eyebrows. “What made you keep going?”

Steve smiled, a dazed look crossing over his features. “Bucky,” he says softly. “Bucky was always there for me, through thick and thin. No matter how many fights I got myself into, he almost always somehow got me out of them—sometimes getting his ass kicked in the process.”

Steve snorted as an old memory resurfaced in his mind. Seeing Peter’s surprised look and his lips forming a small ‘o’, Steve couldn’t help but roll his eyes, “Yes, I do curse as well, Peter. Just don’t let the others know. The last thing I need is for Stark to try to piss me off just to see if I could curse or not.”

Peter laughed. “That does sound like Mr. Stark,” he agrees lightly. After a moment, he says carefully, “So, Bucky was the one who helped you get through your… body issues?”

Steve shrugged. “In a way, yes. He knew of my insecurities, and he always comforted me—making sure that I knew that he loved me for who I am: skinny and scrawny. I know that it’s hard to get through your day when you’re feeling absolutely down and negative about yourself. But—god, I know this will sound cliché (is that what you youngsters say nowadays?)—‘Peter winced at the incorrect usage (who the hell says youngsters now?), but he nodded anyways (the least he could do was give the ‘old’ man a break; after all, he must get a lot of shit and teasing from the others already about his lingo). ‘—it will get better. Sometimes,” he hesitated for a moment, gazing up into the night sky with a look of wistfulness washing over his features, “sometimes… it will be hard and difficult and tenuous. But you have to push through the negative thoughts. Because once you push through the negative thoughts, that’s when you can come out on top.”

Peter nodded, letting Steve’s words sink in. He looked up at the night sky as well, focusing on the half-crescent moon and the glittering stars that surrounded it in a wide berth. He couldn’t tell whether the moon was smiling down at him or not. “So, I have to push through?” he murmured, his voice tinged with uncertainty. “How… How do I do that? It’s not like I have someone like Bucky…”

Steve threw his head back and laughed. His laugh filled Peter’s ears, and it was contagious enough that Peter nearly cracked a smile. “You don’t need someone like Bucky, Peter,” Steve says, a grin tugging at his mouth. “You already have so many people in your life who can help you.”

Peter nodded, understanding flitting through his eyes. “Like Aunt May…” he murmured thoughtfully.
Steve smiled and says gently, “I was talking about Tony.”

Peter blinked, taken aback. “Mr. Stark?”

Steve chuckled. “He’s a father figure to you, Peter,” he paused before adding, “from what I could tell, at least. He cares about you, and he only wants what’s best for you. I don’t know about you, but I’d say that he seems like the perfect guy who can help you get through this. You’re not alone.”

Peter smiled, his heart blooming at Steve’s words. Vaguely, he could hear the sound of laughter drifting from the party above them. The small whispers of the wind whistled past him, running its soothing fingers through his locks, calming him. He picked absentmindedly at a blade of grass, pondering over Steve’s words. “Thank you, Mr.—Steve,” Peter fumbled for a moment, “I, um, I really needed that.”

“Anytime kiddo,” Steve says lightly, standing up from the ground. “You ready to go inside now?”

Peter smiled and felt at peace for the first time that night. “I’m ready.”

As he stood up and followed Steve to the front of the Tower where the party awaits, he could’ve sworn the moon was smiling brightly down at him.

***

“Peter!”

Peter heard his name being shouted from somewhere. Glancing up from where he was chatting excitedly with May, he spots Mr. Stark a few feet away, a grand smile lighting up on his features. Mr. Stark walks over to him, his eyes lit with joy. Peter wondered briefly when was the last time he had seen Mr. Stark look so… well—relaxed. After they had won the war and Mr. Stark (and whoever was left) had managed to restore half of the universe’s population back to order, Peter hadn’t seen Mr. Stark look so calm and at peace. He was always stressed out, talking a mile a minute, and Peter could bet big bucks that Mr. Stark wasn’t getting enough sleep at all. He wondered what kept Mr. Stark up at night. “Hi, Mr. Stark,” Peter greeted with a bright smile once Tony reached them. May nodded politely at him, still a bit aggravated at the fact that Tony had let Peter on that god-forsaken ship (though it wasn’t really his fault as the kid is nothing but stubborn and persistent). “Your party is amazing!”
“Isn’t it always?” Mr. Stark grins, and May couldn’t help but roll her eyes at his arrogance. “Hey, May, do you mind if I burrow Peter for a bit?”

“He better come back in one piece,” May warns, a playful smile curled at the corners of her lips as she ruffled Peter’s hair. Peter yelped, lunging away and May couldn’t help but laugh.

“May!” Peter complained.

Something flashed in Tony’s eyes, and for a moment, Peter caught a distressed look crossing over his features. But as suddenly as it came, it disappeared and Mr. Stark laughed, though it sounded a bit forced and strained to Peter’s ears. “Of course,” he smiles politely. Throwing his arms over Peter’s shoulder, Mr. Stark led Peter away, humming thoughtfully. “You look nice,” he told him as he nodded in acknowledgement to other people who they passed by.

“Thanks,” Peter murmured, his cheeks reddening.

Mr. Stark smiled down at him. “You know,“ he says slowly as they reached the edge of the vast room where the elevators were situated, “even though this party is fun and great—if I may say so myself—I was thinking… there’s this incredible piece of tech that I have been working on for a while now and I need a bit of advice. Care to check it out with me?”

Peter’s face brightened. “A new piece of tech? Yes, of course! Oh my God, Mr. Stark, what have you been working on? Have you built a piece of robot—“

Tony laughed as the kid continued to blabber on while throwing his hands around in the air and making wide gestures. Across the room, he spotted Steve, who had his arms thrown around Bucky’s shoulders and was talking to him softly. Somehow, he caught Steve’s gaze. Thank you, Tony tried to voice his sincerity by plastering a grateful expression onto his features, for taking care of my kid.

Steve nodded politely at him, as if he understood what Tony was saying. He’s a good kid, his expression seemed to say.

They both held the gaze for another moment before a crash from the opposite side of the room made them look away. “What do you mean you do not have sushi?” Thor’s outraged voice ranged loud and clear, startling everyone into silence. “What place does not offer the fine delicacy that is sushi?”
“No one likes sushi!” Clint shouted.

“Who in the name of Asgard does not like sushi?”

Tony sighed, shaking his head.

He knew the peace wouldn’t last.

But as he made his way over to the overexcited Midgardian with his kid in tow, ready to throttle the two idiots who were disrupting what was supposed to be a peaceful evening, he knew he wouldn’t have it any other way.

Chapter End Notes

ramadan mubarak! :)

—captivatedintrovert

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