5 Times Peter Fell, and Tony caught him. And the 1 Time Tony didn’t.

by eva7673

Summary

Peter has a nasty habit of falling. And Tony, bless him, will catch him every. single. time. Until the day he can’t.

Notes

So I haven't written a fanfic in years - and then this popped into my head and I couldn't make it leave. These two are just so pure I had to write SOMETHING! So this happened...is all un-beta'ed, so any mistakes are mine. Feel free to let me know about them in the comments.
1.

Yeah. Peter was definitely failing his Spanish quiz in the morning.

He’d meant to be home, with his head shoved in his textbook, hours ago. He’d traded studying for patrolling every night this week – arguing with himself that he could always cram tomorrow. Well tomorrow was here.

And Peter was clinging to the underside of a helicopter for dear life, thousands of feet above Queens.

Not really what he’d planned for the evening – but after finding the ski-mask-wearing, large-gun-totting, group of men fleeing a jewellery store just after midnight Peter could hardly walk away - even if it did mean failing another Spanish quiz.

MJ was going to kill him – if these guys didn’t beat her too it.

“Engedje meg a szörnyeteget!”

One of the aforementioned ski-mask-clad men leaned out of the helicopter cabin and fired several shots in Peter’s direction.

“Yeah. Dude. Still not a clue what you’re saying.” Peter yelped, pressing up against the metal helicopter frame in an effort to avoid the wild bullets. “But if you bring this thing down I’m happy to try and-”

Several more shots cut him off.

The freezing November air cut to Peter’s very bones as the helicopter rose even higher. They were hovering well beyond any of the buildings in the area now, and swaying heavily from side to side as the men repeatedly leant in and out of the cabin, firing in Peter’s direction. It was becoming somewhat of an issue.

Peter was doing all he could to remain on the helicopter. The cold was doing his already cramped, and stiff fingers no favours, and sliding off the bottom was starting to become a real possibility.

And problem. The buildings below were way too far away for comfort, and he’d used his parachute last week when he’d been all but flung into the sky by a jetpack-wielding-megalomaniac.

“Lődd le!”

The shooting picked up – one man leaning almost all of the way out of the cabin to get a better aim at Peter.

“Look, if that was a surrender, I accept.” Peter yelled.

The hailing of bullets continued. Peter’s fingers slipped a little. He panicked slightly. Crashing painfully against the underside of the helicopter as he flung his entire body along the cool metal. A
bullet grazed his left leg.

Yeah. This might not end so well.

“Might I suggest a different course of action?”

Karen’s voice cut in over Peter’s panicked gasps.

“YES!” Peter all screeched, shifting just slightly to avoid another bullet. “Yes! Please do-”

“You are reaching restricted altitude.” Karen’s voice cut him off. The helicopter continued to spiral upwards. “A pre-set height of exactly two-thousand feet – dictated by the ‘Baby-Proofing’ protocall.”

“The WHAT?!” It was definitely a screech that time. Peter shook his head manically, clinging to the cool metal of the helicopter desperately as if flung from side to side. “Look, never mind – Karen I need-”

Another series of shots rung out, only this time one hit home.

Just not in Peter.

A deafening clang rang out as one of the bullets collided with the main rotor above the helicopter – the rotor snapped upward, bending back on itself, and jerked wildly.

One more jerk and the helicopter was no longer spiralling upwards.

It was catapulting downwards.

“Shit. Shit. SHIT!” Peter yelled, hauling himself upwards into the cabin as the helicopter flipped mid-air – the rotators dragging the entire thing downwards.

A boot to the face almost sent Peter cascading into the open air.

As it was he barely managed to latch his fingers onto the side of the cabin and haul himself back in. One of the masked men kicked out again, but Peter caught the foot before it met his face a second time and shoved the man across the small cabin.

“Seriously!” Peter yelled, “I’m trying to help here!”

The man surged forwards again, but was yanked back by another of the masked thieves.

“Felejtsd el! Gyerünk!” The second man yelled, strapping something around himself and his partner - and then lunging out of the helicopter together.

Peter threw himself to the edge of the cabin and gaped, watching as the parachutes opened just before they fell out of his view. Spinning wildly Peter realised that the others must have jumped as well while he was climbing his way in – because he was suddenly all along in the plummeting helicopter. Shit.

“Aha, Karen. Suggestions. Now.” Peter stammered, climbing over the seats to the pilot’s position and seizing the joystick. He jerked it upwards, and the entire cabin jerked to the right, spinning manically, but continued to fall.

“Suggested course of action: Evacuation.” Karen said.

“Great. Helpful.” Peter spat through gritted teeth as he pulled the joystick back as far as it would
go and began wildly pressing every button he could get him hands on. The helicopter continued to spin. Nausea began to settle in Peter's lower intestines. "Any suggestions on how I might do that without a parachute!"

"Your chances of survival are slim."

"I'M AWARE!" Peter screamed. The city was approaching beneath him. "I need more tha-"

"You have reached terminal velocity. 'Baby-Monitor' protocall activated. Calling Tony Stark-"

"WHAT!? NO DON'T-"

Peter didn’t hear her reply. With one final jerk on the joystick and the rotors began to spin at full speed again – only full speed with a bent rotor meant even more spiralling and no less falling. The next several seconds were past in a blur of screaming and multiple, painful collisions with the cabin walls.

By the time Peter managed to get a grip on one of the chairs – and figure out which way was up again – the city was much too close.

"Karen!" Peter breathed heavily, giving up on the piloting equipment and climbing back into the main cabin "I need a place to set this thing down!" He threw a panicked glance around him. "And a way to get it down - preferably softly."

The spinning was starting to get to him. His earlier nausea had grown, leaving him on the verge of hurling. Or maybe that was the panic - because he was definitely panicking now.

The helicopter was still in a death spiral and Peter was all out of ideas. He could web onto the side of two buildings and try to hold the helicopter with his legs? But there was no guarantee he could hold it. Or that the helicopter would even fall between buildings sturdy enough to grip. It might plummet straight into something before he even got a chance to slow it down. And if he was sure of anything it was that if the helicopter hit the ground or any of the buildings above it, people were going to die. It was too big, and falling far too quickly. It was why he hadn't taken his chances in falling back to the city without it. He needed to slow it down - or it could bring a building down with it.

"Restoring rotor balance, and resulting wind-displacement, may restore functions long enough to maneuver a non-fatal landing."

"Non-fatal." Peter breathed shakily, climbing along the inside of the cabin to look out over the edge. "Y-yes. That – good."

No sooner had he stuck his head out of the cabin, the bent rotor arched up from below him and nearly took his head clean off.

His already laboratory breathing skyrocketed into full-blown hypoventilation.

"Okay!" Peter swallowed, inching his head back out of the cabin to get a better look at the rotor. And the buildings below that we're getting uncomfortably close. "Straighten the rotor. Sure. Good. How should I do that exactly?" The damaged rotor arced up again - inches away from Peter.

Karen's silence was deafening.

"Okay. Fine. We can do this. We got this. I mean how hard can it be? It's like straightening a coat hanger." Peter argued. The damaged rotor swung up once more. "Just a really big, really sharp
coat hanger."

Peter shot a web onto the side of the cabin to brace himself, before leaning out just a little further in the open air – ready to shoot a web at the broken rotor.

“Touch the coat-hanger, kid, and I’ll eject you from this tin can myself.”

Peter pulled back into the cabin just in time. A moment later an Iron Man suit latched onto the side of the helicopter. And another a moment later. They rocked the small cabin, but Peter clung on. An Iron Man suit slammed into the open cabin space where he had been only seconds early – digging the metal fingertips of one hand into the base of the cabin, and seizing the wild rotors with the other. The helicopter engine spluttered, and then died under the pressure. The rotors fell limp.

“Mr. Stark!?” Peter cried, crawling forwards until he was crouched just in front of the Iron Man suit, wedged in the cabin doorway.

“Remember that grey area, kid?” Tony’s voice flooded through the suit. “This isn’t it. This isn’t even on the spectrum of grey. This is florescent. Bright, ugly and an eye-sore that’s about to make a not so lovely crater in the middle of Queens—”

The rant went on for some time – but to be entirely honest Peter caught very little of it. After just a couple of seconds the helicopter was already slowing. The Iron Man suits had latched on, and were beginning to haul it back into the sky.

If Peter weren’t so aware that the Iron Man suit – with its array of cameras – were so close, he would have cried with relief.

“-kid. Kid? You with me?”

“Yeah,” Peter breathed, leaning back against the metal frame of the cabin and trying to bring his breathing under some kind of control. Now that he knew he was going to be fine, his panic was starting to be embarrassing. “Yeah, I’m good. I swear. T-t-thanks for coming. I, ugh, yeah. Thanks.”

Yeah. Real smooth. Avenger’s material right there.

“Sure you are.” Tony’s voice echoed through the suit. A moment later the helmet flipped upwards to reveal – nothing. The suit was empty.

Good, Peter thought. At least he’s not here in person to watch me fail completely. The thought was fleeting, but Peter clung to it. Determined to bury the empty feeling that sprung up in his chest at the sight of the empty helmet.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y run vitals.” A red beam erupted from inside the helmet and moved swiftly across Peter’s body. Peter curled in on himself just a fraction. As if a ball of Peter Parker might make his bullet grazed leg and easily broken ribs more difficult to detect.

The helicopter was moving across the city now – headed out of Queens and towards Manhattan. It was oddly peaceful. With Peter’s advanced senses it was never quiet anymore. There was always something happening in Queens – always someone or something nearby. But up this high, and devoid of any engine sounds, the night was almost silent. The gentle whirring of the suit’s repulsors was all that broke the silence, and Peter found he didn’t mind it at all. It was almost soothing.

“Right—” Tony’s voice echoed out of the empty helmet. “First things first: where did they even get this piece of junk. Honestly. This thing is a blight on the good name of aero-space engineering—”
A loud *crack* rang out – and then Peter was falling.

The roof of the helicopter, which one of the Iron Man suits was currently grasping to help keep the thing flying, creaked and then gave way. The thin metal ripped from where the armour’s hands were clasped around its edges, all the way to the base of the rotor. Luckily the entire helicopter didn’t give way – the other suits were more than fast enough to readjust their grip.

Peter was not quite so fast. Or so lucky.

The base of the cabin tipped drastically when the roof ripped open, and before he could latch on to anything Peter found himself sliding out into the open air. And plummeting to his death.

He was definitely panicking again.

“*PETER!*”

When he had first made the web-shooters, and taken them out for a test-run, Peter would have sworn up and down that the feeling of falling through New York was the greatest of his life. The thrill of each and every lunge was somehow more fantastic than the last.

He was ready to rethink that assumption now.

Falling through New York this time was terrifying, and *final*. Maybe because he wasn’t falling through the city like he did as Spiderman – relying on the buildings and monuments he knew so well – he was falling *to* it. And much too quickly.

The night around him was a dizzying array of lights, darkness, and the distinct knowledge that the ground was much closer to him than he realized. Tony must have been close to landing the helicopter because after just a few seconds of falling Peter was about to become acquainted with some of the taller Manhattan buildings.

God. Being impaled on the Empire State building was *not* how he wanted to go.

Oh god. He was going to die.

Somewhere, in the distant parts of his mind, Peter knew he was screaming – Guttural, animalistic screams – but he was falling so fast that the sounds were ripped from him before he could fully process them.

Oh. God. *Ohgodohgodohtgodohgodohgodohgod*.

He shot a web at the closest building when he began to sail right past it – but the web pulled taught much too fast and snapped. Peter’s shoulder arced, and ripped with it. The bone popped out of the socket under the pressure.

He tried again. The web snapped. The tendons in his shoulder snapped along with it.

He could see the cars on the street below him. The people. The concrete.

*Oh god! No!*  

What would happen to May? Ned? God, what would Tony tell them? Tony. What would happen to Tony?
Something hard, cold and strong latched on under his arms and yanked. Peter let out a yelp of pain – which quickly turned into a sigh of relief when his decent started to slow. The Iron Man suit behind him pulled him upwards – slipping its metal arms around his waist and cradling him to its chest – before blasting the repulsors.

The sudden change in direction had Peter on the verge of nausea again. His eyes blurred one last time.

The image on concrete not ten feet below him would haunt him for the rest of his life.

“Peter?” Tony’s voice was still ringing in the back of Peter’s head. “Kid!?”

Logically Peter knew he couldn’t have been out for long – the clanging of metal on the pavement and the feeling of cool ground beneath his own feet told him that it could only have been a couple of seconds. But it felt like hours.

Peter’s entire body hurt. And exhaustion had set in during those few seconds. He could barely muster the strength to keep breathing – let alone open his eyes. Yeah. He’d rest for a bit. Just a little while. Just a short fourteen hour nap. That’d set him right.

He could feel himself being lowered down to concrete, strong arms still clasped around his torso.

“Kid!?!” Tony’s voice was still pounding at the back of his head. Or was it in front of him. Peter wasn’t too sure. It might not have been Tony’s voice at all. Peter had never heard him sound so panicked – and whoever was manhandling him to the ground was practically seeping fear. “Time to wake up now.” The voice went on, breaking slightly at the end.

Peter registered the words, but their meaning flew right by him. God, he was so tired.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y run vitals,” the voice bit out as soon as Peter’s head touched the concrete. “Pulse? Does he have a pulse? Jesus – get this thing off me. Get it off now!”

The cool metal left Peter altogether, and he drifted for a second. The pavement wasn’t comfortable whatsoever, but right now Peter could have kissed it. It was so firm. Not at all like the feeling of falling. Christ. He wanted to lie there for the rest of his life. Even the idea of standing seemed like it would be far too far from the ground. Yeah. He’d stay here. Sleep a while and –

Something warm was suddenly crouching beside him. Hands running along his torso. Lifting the edge of his mask up, above his mouth.

Two shaking slightly fingers dug into the side of his neck.

Peter’s eyes cracked open.

“Mr. Stark?”

The city very slowly came into focus above him – and so did the man hovering over him.

“Kid!?” Tony was hunched over him, face pale and eyes wide. At the sight of Peter’s open eyes,
he let out a chocked, ragged breath. The hand that had been pressed almost painfully against
Peter’s throat moved to rest on his chest. Rising and falling with Peter’s every breath.

For a long moment all the two did was breathe.

Eventually Tony spoke. “You alright, kid?”

When Peter didn’t answer, panic started to rise up in Tony’s eyes again. His hands moved up to
grip Peter’s shoulders.


Peter stared up at the older man – flesh and blood man, not empty suit – incomprehensively.

“You’re here.” Peter stammered. “You’re really here.”

A large sigh heaved through Tony at the sound of Peter’s voice. “Yeah, I’m here, kid.” He
murmured. His hand left Peter’s chest, moving down to poke at his bullet grazed leg instead. Peter
could already feel it healing – unlike his nerves. Those would probably never recover.

“B-but. What?” Peter stuttered, trying to wrap his head around the last few minutes of his life. 
And it really had only been a few minutes. The helicopter. The bullets. The Iron-Man suits.

The fall.

God, he felt like he’d aged a decade.

“Yeah, you and me both, kid.” Oh shit. Did he say that out loud?

Tony’s words were clipped, but there was something underneath. The hand that had been resting
on Peter’s chest found its way back. It sat just above his heart, rising and falling as Peter tried, and
failed, to take several steady breaths.

The weight of it was comforting.

“How, I-I-” Peter went on, glancing about wildly. He was lying on a deserted sidewalk in a
small side street. “What?”

Tony, clearly unhappy about, but satisfied with, the state of Peter’s leg, moved back up to lean
over him. His concern was growing with every incomprehensible stammer.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y run a scan for spinal and cranial damage.”

That broke Peter from his stupor.

“What? No. I’m good. I swear.” Peter jack-knifed up into the sitting position – nearly head-butting
Tony. “Good. I’m good. J-just, ugh, that was…high. That was high.”

Tony leaned back slightly, looking over him warily. The hand on Peter’s chest didn’t lower.

“Yeah,” Tony agreed slowly, watching the teen heave in several breaths. “Bit too high. I thought
we’d agreed that the friendly-neighbourhood-Spiderman stays in the neighbourhood – not two
thousand feet above it.”

“Yeah, yeah. T-totally.” Now that he was sitting up Peter was beginning to feel the ache in his
shoulders. And, well, just about everywhere else too.
“F.R.I.D.A.Y.?” Tony prompted, still focused on Peter.

“No significant spinal or cranial damage.” F.R.I.D.A.Y.’s voiced echoed out of the now-empty suit standing beside them. “The left clavicle is currently dislocated, and surrounded by small tissue tears. Due to his advanced regenerative cells, the tears will heal within hours once the clavicle is re-aligned. Scans do show significantly low blood pressure, laboured breathing and an elevated heart rate.”

“No. Really. I’m fine.” Peter insisted.

Tony’s other hand came to rest on Peter’s uninjured shoulder, holding him in place as a wave of dizziness passed over him.

“It’s alright, kid. You’re just in shock. It’ll ease up in a few minutes.” Tony said, shifting so that he was sitting directly in front of Peter, with one hand on his shoulder and the other still resting on Peter’s chest. They stayed like that for a few minutes, and eventually the world started to come back into focus for Peter. Tony must have been able to feel Peter’s heartbeat beneath his hand, because he waited for it to steady before he spoke.

“Let’s not do that again, huh?”

Peter let out a small, hysterical breath of laughter.

“Don’t worry, I have no plans to fall out of a helicopter any time – oh shit! Where’s the helicopter!? The robbers!?” The last few minutes finally began to break through Peter’s haze.

He leapt to his feet – scanning the sky.

“Hey, Easy!” Tony pushed to his feet beside him, grabbing a hold of Peter’s shoulder again. Only this time the hold was a lot stronger. Holding him in place. “The chopper’s at the Tower, and whoever was in it are long gone. All of their bags are still secured in the cabin, so whatever they stole, they didn’t take with them.”

“But they got away!”

“Yeah, and you almost got made into a blue-and-red pancake!” Tony hissed, his eyes flashing. The panic that Peter had seen there before was slowly giving way to anger, and frustration. “So let’s just file tonight as ‘episode 904 of Peter getting in over his head’ and be satisfied with the fact that we’re not cleaning anyone off the pavement.”

“B-but-”

“No.” Tony cut him off. His tone was final. “See that building there,” With the hand that wasn’t currently clenched around Peter’s uninjured shoulder, he pointed up at the Empire State Building – which was just visible a few blocks away. “Yeah, that’s your new height limit, kid.”

“What! No! Come o-”

Tony cut him off again.

“Every time you argue with me, you loose another hundred feet.”

“Mr. Star-”

“-1,150 feet.”
“But Mr. Star-”

“1,050 feet.” Peter gaped at the man, but didn’t make a sound. God. This was so not how he wanted tonight to go.

A sleek, black car pulled up on the sidewalk.

“Come on,” Tony said, releasing Peter for just a second to move back towards the abandoned Iron-Man suit. With a wave of one of Tony’s hands the suit began to fold in on itself until it formed a large suitcase. Tony seized it by the handle and marched back to Peter. “We need to get back to the Tower and get that shoulder fixed before it sets that way.”

“I can do it-”

With his free hand Tony latched back onto the arm Peter was moving up to his injured shoulder.

“Do not reset your own shoulder on the sidewalk.” Tony hissed, shaking his head disbelievingly. He pulled Peter towards the car with a muttered, “Jesus Christ.”

Pushing Peter in first, Tony slid inside the car and shut the door. The car started automatically and began to weave through late-night traffic to the Tower.

“Hey, Mr. Stark?” Peter murmured after several minutes of silence.

“Yeah?”

“Nice catch.”

“Oh no, we are not making a sport out of this, kid.”
Cloud Fall

Chapter Summary

“I feel like I’m falling.”
The words trickled out of Peter’s mouth before they’d really even formed, but Tony understood them. Peter was sure. Because the next moment those hands were pressing down a little harder, a solid weight on his shoulder and chest. Grounding him.
“You’re not.”

Chapter Notes

Thank-you all so much for your responses! It’s been fantastic! You prompted me to write this next chapter so much faster than I thought I would!

Here we go, another chapter! And once again it’s all un-beta’d and written in a rush, so I'm sure the grammatical errors are going to be severe...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Peter’s feet made an odd squelch with every step.

His converses had been soaked through with rain, and the pressure of them against the immaculate Stark Tower floor made them rub painfully against his feet. And squelch.

The sound was equally fascinating and off-putting. Peter found himself so captivated by it that he almost walked straight past the lobby elevator that would take him up to the Avengers’ living quarters. And then when he realized, and doubled back, he found himself standing in front of the elevator with absolutely no idea why he was there.

He’d come for a reason. An important one. But then his shoes had squelched, and the homeless man outside had reminded him vaguely of the guy from a Burger King ad he’d seen the other day and –

Peter sagged against the elevator doors. His mind was moving at a thousand miles an hour, and as much as he tried he just couldn’t focus.

There was something important. God. Something he had to do…?

His shoes squelched again as he shoved himself painfully upright.
God, why was everything so cloudy? Cloudy. There. That sounded familiar. That was important. Clouds. Clouds were important. Well, they kind of sucked when he was swinging through the city, because they made some things difficult to see, and clouds usually meant rain which really sucked when he was out patrolling because the suit, no matter how many fancy tech gadgets Tony put in it, always chaffed just a tiny bit when it got wet—

Tony. That was important too. Clouds and Tony.

Maybe that was why he was currently standing in the empty Avengers Tower lobby at two in the morning, in nothing but a pair of sweats and stained hoodie. Tony was here. Likely. And so were clouds if he went high enough.

Yeah. That was why he was here. To talk to Tony, and the clouds.

Wait. No. That wasn’t right.

Squelch.

God, that was so weird. Such a weird sound. He felt like water shouldn’t make a sound. Or was it the shoes making the sound? But couldn’t be, because they didn’t usually make that sound – but then again, neither did water. It was some mad combination of the both. Physics. So cool-

“Mr. Parker.” F.R.I.D.A.Y’s voice echoed out in the empty lobby. “Can I assist you in finding Mr. Stark?”

Peter jumped so much that a moment later he found himself hanging upside from the ceiling the elevator. And then the second after that he was on the floor again. Sprawled out on all fours with his head throbbing. His hands and feet felt strangely numb. So did everything else actually. Huh.

“-r. Parker?” F.R.I.D.A.Y’s voiced rang out again. “You vital signs are fluctuating. Shall I call Mr. Stark?”

“N-nope.” Peter scrambled to his feet – and then promptly face planted back to the floor.

On the third try he was up. Or mostly. He was definitely on his knees – and it was enough to get him to the elevator. He slammed a hand down on the button, dinting the metal framing, before sliding back down onto the floor. The tiles were cool on his warm face. Hot face. Very hot face.

God. His face was on fire.

The elevator doors slid open right in front of his face and Peter began to crawl inside. He wasn’t quite sure why, but he was in the lobby – which was nice and all – but probably not worth the trip from Queens. Or, at least, Peter thinks he came from Queens. Probably. He couldn’t exactly remember, but it sounded about right.

The elevator was blinding.

Every inch of it was white. The Ceiling. Floor. Walls. It radiated, and ached behind Peter’s eyes. So much so that it took a few good seconds for Peter to crawl inside, and when he had he was left a shivering mess on the floor. God it hurt. Someone needed to turn them down.

With a soft click the lighting immediately dimmed, taking on a red-tinge that almost had Peter crying with relief.

“T-thanks F.R.I.D.A.Y.”
The doors slid closed silently, and then the elevator was moving.

Peter – using the metal handlebar that ran around the walls of the elevator – heaved himself back to his feet. Or at least he thinks they’re his feet. They’re beneath him, and holding him up, but he couldn’t feel them. Couldn’t feel his hands either.

His head he could feel. It was pounding. The bright light had broken something in him and now all he could feel was blinding, pulsing pain.

He slammed it down on the wall, half to try and beat the pain out, and half to stay upright. His numb legs were buckling dangerously beneath him, so he leant over the metal bar and rested some of his weight on it. Okay. All of his weight.

Shit. He really didn’t feel so good. But he had to stay upright. He was here for a reason. An important one – he just couldn’t quite remember what.

Oh. Right! Tony! Clouds and Tony. He needed to talk to the clouds and Tony. No. That didn’t sound right. Did it?

The elevator stopped with a small shudder, and the small motion was enough to throw Peter off the railing and towards the elevator doors. Only there weren’t doors there anymore.

There was a very real Tony Stark.

Peter stumbled face first from the elevator – ready to meet the floor for what seemed like the hundredth time in the last few hours – when warm arms wrapped around him and saved him from a painful introduction to the tiles.

“Kid?”

The one word sent Peter’s head spinning. Or more spinning. Spinner? Because it was definitely spinning already – but Tony’s arms wrapping around him and lowering him gently to his knees definitely made it spin harder.

Peter had to tell him something. He wasn’t sure what – god, his head was spinning so bad – but he definitely had to tell him something.

“M-mr. Stark-” Peter started, staring up at the older man with wide eyes. Wow. His goatee was so well trimmed. How had Peter never noticed that before?

“Peter?” Tony asked, clearly taken-aback, “What are you doing here, kid?”

Tony pulled his hands away once they were both safely kneeling on the tiles, but it seemed that not even kneeling agreed with Peter anymore because he began to list sideways without Tony’s steadying hands.

“Wow! Shit!” Tony’s hands snapped out and grabbed a hold of Peter’s hoodie, lowering him the rest of the way to the floor. “Kid, what’s happened? Are you hurt?”

“Oh-oh, h-hey Mr. Stark.” God. Was that his voice? Was it always that squeaky? Why had no one told him!

Tell…he had something to tell. He had something to tell Tony. And the clouds.

“Peter, what’s going o-”
“CLOUDS!”

Tony, who had been leaning over Peter with his brows knitted together, recoiled at the noise. Huh. Had he shouted? He could barely hear the words himself – but he couldn’t really hear anything right now. Except buzzing. Yeah, he could hear buzzing – and squelching. God, that noise was weird –

“-eter!”

Tony’s hands were back on his hoodie, and they were shaking. Or Peter was shaking. They were both definitely shaking.

“Peter!” Tony’s head slowly swam into focus above Peter. Wow. That was a nice goatee. “Peter, can you hear me?” There was a hand on Peter’s face, smoothing back his hair, tugging back his eye-lid. Tony was really close to him now. Staring down into his eyes, with panic written in every line of his face. Panic? Tony was panicking. Should Peter be panicking? Wasn’t he already panicking?

“Clouds!” Peter said again, reaching up to seize a hold of Tony’s deep red shirt. He used it to heave himself off the ground just a few inches. “I need to talk to clouds!” Wait. No. “I have to talk to you!” Yeah. That was right. “-and then clouds.” Huh.

“Okay.” Tony nodded slowly, pushing Peter back down to the floor gently. “Okay. Just take some deep breaths kid! Talk to me. What happened?”

“Clouds-

“-Tony-

Peter’s head swivelled at the new voice – God, how many people lived here - and his eyes promptly fell on Captain America, who was standing awkwardly just down the fall.

“Tony, what?” Captain America moved towards them both, eyes focused on Peter. “Who is this? What happened-”

“Is Bruce here!?” Tony snapped at the Captain, holding Peter down with one hand and pressing the other into his neck. Whatever he found there clearly wasn’t what he wanted because Tony’s agitation skyrocketed.

“Yeah, he’s upstairs. Tony-”

Tony cut him off without even a glance in his direction.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y call Bruce down here, now-”

The Captain reached them in just a few seconds, kneeling down on the other side of Peter, and placing a hand on the shoulder that Tony was currently clasping at. Something was off though. He wasn’t supposed to be here. Not here. Not with Tony.

Tony.

Tony who had come back from Siberia with blood splattered over every inch of him – and something broken behind his eyes. They were friends. And Steve left him to die. Steve. Captain America. Left. Tony. To. Die.

“GET AWAY FROM HIM!”
Peter, with the last inch of strength he had, hurled himself at the Captain. Shoving him back from Tony. The Captain didn’t stumble back nearly as far as Peter would have liked but he did back up – eyes wide.

Peter moved to shove him again – to get him the hell away from them – when arms wrapped around him again. Holding him back.

“Peter!” Tony cried, “Peter stop!”

“No!” Peter struggled, “I won’t let him near us, I won’t let him hurt you!”

The Captain took another step back, his face crumpling.

“He’s not here to hurt us!” Tony argued, pulling Peter back to the floor and wrapping an arm around his head in an effort to force Peter to look at him. “He’s not here to hurt either of us, okay? We talked about this. Cap’s here to discuss the Accords, all the Avengers are-”

“No.” Peter maintained, his eyes darting between the Captain and Tony so fast it was making him dizzy. Dizzier. “Nonono-”

“-Peter! STOP!”

Tony’s yell broke through Peter’s haze. Kind of. Mostly. His face stopped spinning at least.

“I think you’ve been drugged,” Tony said slowly, once Peter was focused on him. “Okay?” Peter stared blankly at Tony. “Okay!? Can you hear me?”

When Peter continued to stare up at the older man with wide eyes Tony let out a strained breath, and pulled Peter closer to him – cradling Peter to his chest. Wow, Tony was really warm. Really warm. Oh god. Was he sick? He kept going on about heart problems, but the flippant way he talked, Peter had always shrugged him off. What if he was really sick? What if –

“I’m not sick. I’m not sick. You’re just cold.” Tony’s voice broke through Peter’s wild thoughts. Or words. Had he said all that out loud? Oh, god. What else had he said out loud? “You’re really cold kid, you’re shivering. I’m trying to keep you warm. Just focus on me, okay. Relax and focus – you’re going to be fine. We’re going to fix you up and-”

“Tony?! What the hell is going on?!”

From where he lay, practically crushed to Tony’s chest, Peter could barely make out the mousy brown haired man coming through the elevator doors. He rushed to Peter’s other side, dropping a large bag by Peter’s legs and leaning over to have a better looked at Peter through his slightly askew glasses.

“What happened? Who is this?” The man asked, digging into his bag and pulling out piles of different medical supplies.

“This is Underoo.” Tony murmured, lowering Peter to the ground just slightly so that the other man could get a better look at him.

“This is Spiderman?!” Peter’s attention snapped back to the Captain – who was still standing a few steps away, watching them all with astonishment. “He’s a teenager!”

“And you’re ninety-seven.” Tony snapped back. “We don’t exactly age discriminate.”

“Tony-” The man beside Peter, currently taking his blood pressure, began softly. Tony cut him
“Bruce, please. Not now.” Tony’s eyes flicked between the two men, and then down to Peter. The fight drained out of him. “Please,” Tony said, glancing back up at the two men. “Just help me with him, and I’ll explain later. I swear.”

The man on the other side of Peter – Bruce – nodded and moved back to – *Holy Shit! Bruce. Bruce Banner.* Peter was lying on the floor next to Bruce Banner. Peter was sprawled out on the floor, with his head spinning and last meal about to make a re-appearance next to *Bruce Banner.*

Huh. He really didn’t feel so good.

He felt odd. And cold.

“-do we know where his been, if we could circle back on where he’s been maybe we can-” Bruce fell silent when Peter spoke.

Well, it sounded like him, but Peter couldn’t be sure. He couldn’t exactly feel his face anymore. Or the rest of him.

“Mr. Stark,” Peter murmured. God he was tired now. And cold. He felt like the *squelch* sound. All weird and water logged. “I don’t feel so good.”

The words were soft – Peter could barely hear them himself – but they froze the room. All of a sudden whatever conversation was happening above Peter stopped, and all three men were at his side in an instant.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y run every scan we have-”

“-blood pressure is high – too high – we need something-”

“-you said you needed to know where he was, can you track his phone or something? I can follow his movements and-”

Peter’s head swum. Or maybe he was swimming. Swimming sounded nice. Relaxing. Might help with his sore *everything* – except his head. Which was pounding. And, god, water was loud. Really loud. Like, yelling loud.

Why was the water yelling at him?

“**PETER!**?”

He was shaking again. Or something was shaking, and he was shaking with it.

“*Peter!*? Answer me, dammit!” Wow. Water was bossy. “*Wake up!*”

“M-mr. Stark?”

Even Peter’s voice hurt now. Oh god. Could this night get any worse?

Tony slowly came into focus above him – and so did the rest of the room in time. Peter was back on the floor, a stricken Tony leaning over him. The Captain was on his other side, one hand resting against the side of Peter’s throat, and the other on Tony’s shoulder. Bruce was nowhere to be found.

“*Jesus Christ* kid!” Tony’s fists clenched tightly where they sat, clasped on Peter’s shoulders. “Don’t do that again.”
Peter definitely heard the words. Definitely. Sense, however, they did not make.

“Kid?” All of a sudden the Captain’s face was hovering beside Tony’s. God, his eyes were so sincere – no. No. Peter was angry with him. He did something. Something…but those eyes were just so sincere. “You need to tell us what happened. Did you take something? Did someone inject you?”

“Clouds.”

The word trickled out of Peter’s mouth in a garbled mess.

The Captain stared down at him, like he’d grown a third head.

“What?”

“-not a clue. He keeps going on about clouds.” Tony answered before Peter could even begin to decipher the word. He was still staring down at Peter – fist clenching and unclenching nervously around Peter’s shoulders. The touch was oddly grounding. Peter worried he might actually float away if it stopped. “Where is Bruce?!” Tony went on. He tilted his head slightly to the ceiling. “F.R.I.D.A.Y ask Bruce what’s taking so long.”

A moment later Bruce’s voice echoed through the walls. Oh god. Was he a ghost? Had he died? No –

“-Tony, I’m trying. There are hundreds of drugs that could be in his system – it's going to take a little while to narrow it down. Just keep him still and calm, okay. We don’t want to move him to much until we know more-”

“Cloud.”

The Captain’s voice cut ghost-hulk off mid-sentence. Rude.

Above Peter Tony’s eyes finally glanced up to the man kneeling across from him. He stared for a second in silence.

“New development,” Tony deadpanned, still staring at the Captain. “The meteorological-word-vomit is contagious.”

“No, Tony.” The Captain argued, animated. “Cloud. Like a cloud of powder?”

Tony barely missed a beat before he was rounding back down on Peter. “

“Peter, did anyone through powder into your face?” Words. Peter definitely heard words. What did people do with words again – “Peter!” The hands that had been flexing around Peter’s shoulders moved up to rest of his face, holding him still while Tony stared directly down at him. “Pay attention. Did anyone throw powder at you.” Powder. Clouds. Yeah. Yeah.

Peter nodded.

He remembered that. God, that cloud had been awful. It had burned in his throat. His eyes –

“Were you wearing this hoodie?” Tony plowed on, his grip on Peter’s face not lessening.

To be honest, Peter wasn’t really sure – he’d been more preoccupied with the cloud that was eating his face at the time – not his outfit, but it sounded about right. He nodded again.
And a second later he wished he hadn’t. As soon as he’d even started to nod, the hands on him were seizing him under the shoulders and hauling him into a half-sitting position. Another set of hands joined in once he was kind of upright, unzipping his hoodie and pulling it down and off his arms.

If he’d thought he was cold before, it was nothing compared to when the cold breeze in the room touched his bare chest.

“We need to get this to Bruce.” A voice that was distinctly not Tony’s – and brought out a hint of irritation in Peter, because he was angry at it…just not sure why – murmured. The second pair of hands that had stolen Peter’s jacket pulled away.

Asshole. Peter knew he didn’t like that voice. First he’d done…something. Definitely something bad. And now he’d stolen Peter’s hoodie. Great. Just great. When Peter’s addled mind finally figured out who it was, he was going to –

Oh. Warm. Mmm. Warm.

Something delectably soft wrapped around Peter and the arms still holding him half-upright. God it was soft. Peter took it all back. The as-yet-unidentified-asshole could keep his hoodie. This was so much better –

“Talk to him.” The not-Tony voice said, tucking what had to be the nicest blanket that Peter had ever touched more firmly around him. Mmm. Maybe not such an asshole. Yeah. Whoever he was, he could stay – “Keep him awake.”

Awake. Awake? Wasn’t he already awake? Or maybe not. This blanket was the thing of dreams – and if so what was so wrong with that. Any dream with this kind of softness in it had to be a good dream. Sometimes Peter had good dreams. Sometimes he dreamt of going to Comic-Con with Ned and running into the ghost of Leonard Nimoy – who takes them aboard the real Enterprise before the three of them are whisked off to a different planet on some epic adventure.

Sometimes he dreamt about MJ. He wasn’t so sure how he felt about those yet. Nothing ever happened! It was just the two of them, sitting around, talking or studying. Just a little bit of normality. Those dreams were soft too, but in a different way. They always left Peter feeling warm inside. He was always so rushed when they were really together – so aware of everything he kept from her. It was hard. In the dreams being with her was…easy. Soft. There were no vultures, or spiders. Just Peter and MJ. Getting coffee, or hanging out in the park – or breaking into the ice-rink on 11th and spending the night making a fool of themselves. Yeah. He’d liked that dream a lot.

Unfortunately for Peter, the good dreams weren’t so common anymore.

Now day’s sleep was filled with images of falling buildings, and planes. Of coming home to find Aunt May gone. Or worse. Dead. That one happened a lot – and every time Peter spend the rest of the night sitting outside her bedroom door with his arms wrapped around his knees. The fear that, if he ventured to far away, something might happen always kept him there until the early hours of the next morning.

He couldn’t loose her. He couldn’t loose any of them – but always did. In his dreams they were ripped from him. One. By. One.

May. Ned.

Tony.
All gone.

And with them, every part of Peter that matters.

“M-mr. Stark.”

Peter’s voice sounded far away, even to his own hears.

Vaguely he knew that Tony had been talking while he faded in and out, but he’d heard very little. And made sense of none.

Nothing really made sense anymore.

Maybe this wasn’t such a soft dream.

Slowly Tony’s face swam into focus. Peter was laying with his head in Tony’s lap, the blanket half folded around them both, while Tony stared down at him. He had an arm around Peter’s shoulders, and the other resting on his chest – which was heaving. God, why couldn’t he breathe? And how had he not noticed that he couldn’t. What was happening? What was happening to him? He didn’t like this this. He didn’t –

The arm around Peter’s shoulder tightened, just a fraction. “You need to relax, kid.” Tony’s voice sounded like he was yelling through water. Could you yell through water? “You’re going to be fine – Bruce, Cap and I are going to fix you up – but you need to breathe. In-and-out. Nice and even.”

“I feel like I’m falling.”

The words trickled out of Peter’s mouth before they’d really even formed, but Tony understood them. Peter was sure. Because the next moment those hands were pressing down a little harder, a solid weight on his shoulder and chest.

Grounding him.

“You’re not.” Tony’s was suddenly sharper than it had been all night. It broke through Peter’s haze – filtering into the last part of his brain that was actually functioning, and Peter clung to it. Clung to the words as if they the last shred of his sanity.

Maybe they were.

“You’re not. I’ve got you. I’ve always got you, kid.”

Aunt May had told Peter once about the worse hangover of her life. About how she’d snuck out of her parent’s house, with her boyfriend at the time, and two bottles of Wild Turkey, and sat around in an abandoned building until dawn. Not that she remembered any of it – actually she admitted to the night being a distant and constant blur.

The next morning, however, had been crystal clear.
Unlike the bathroom where she spent the next 24 hours periodically heaving her guts out.

Peter had always thought she exaggerated the story a little for his sakes – you know, really drive home the effects of binge-drinking. Etc. etc.

He was beginning to reconsider.

Peter’s entire body felt like it had been repeatedly crushed by a freight train. A freight train full of rhinoceros’. A freight train full of rhinoceros’, which had just eaten another freight train of rhinoceros’ – freight train and all.

And that was only his body.

Somehow, despite there being so conceivable way, his head felt worse.

Peter was legitimately concerned that his brain was dripping from his ears, and –

“Finally gracing us with your presence?”

Oh god. No. No noise. Never. Peter was taking a vow of silence. His poor, melting brain couldn’t handle this.

"U-ugh. No. Shhh."

“Did you just shoosh me?” Oh god, please stop. “Did a shooshing sound actually just leave your lips, directed at me?”

“Am I in hell?” Peter’s voice sounded like a forty-year old chain-smoker. Huh. That was new.

“Am in hell? Are you the devil?”

A strained chuckled forced its way into Peter’s pounding ears. The chuckle sounded like it was almost seeping relief – which was majorly unfair, because Peter’s head was giving him no relief at all.

“You’re not in hell, kid.” The voice went on, still chuckling. “That second part though – well, I can neither confirm nor deny.”

Peter finally cracked at eye-lid.

“Mr. Stark?”

Tony smirked down at him from where he slouched in a chair next to the bed Peter was currently occupying.

“How you feeling?”

Peter groaned. And then regretted it. All sounds were evil.

“I think I’m dying.”

“You’re not – well, not anymore.” Tony said, with a small shrug. Peter’s eyes shot open. At his terrified expression, Tony went on. “You were. Sort of. Maybe. Doesn’t really matter. You’re no longer dying – that’s what’s important.”

Despite his aching head, Peter hauled himself into a sitting position. He stared over at Tony, who was watching him with casual interest.
“What?” Peter breathed.

Tony’s eyebrows shot upwards.

“You don’t remember anything do you?” Tony asked. When Peter shook his head, Tony sighed and pulled himself up straighter in his chair. “Well, turns out, you were having a study sleep-over with your ‘man-in-the-chair’, when you apparently heard something and took off in nothing but your sweats,” the last word was hard. Tony’s casual façade was fading. Ah. Peter got the feeling he wasn’t going to come off well in this story.

Tony didn’t wait for Peter to comment before he plundered on.

“Steve managed to find a local girl who says she was trying to buy some ‘good stuff’ and the deal was going bad. Dealer wanted a little more than money.” Tony’s eyes flickered up from where he had been fiddling with his phone, staring Peter down. Yeah. Peter was definitely in trouble.

“Apparently, a bare-footed jogger raced to her rescue. And received a face full of ‘ethereal’ for his efforts when things turned violent.”

Ethereal. What the hell was that?

“It’s a super-potent, street hallucinogenic – which actually kills majority of its customers, so I don’t imagine it will be popular for long.” Tony elaborated, at the sight of Peter’s confusion.

Peter nodded, taking it all in.

Tony’s gaze hardened.

“You got lucky,” Tony murmured. “Most people would have died in just a few minutes.”

Peter nodded again. More slowly.

Tony leaned forward with sudden rigor, resting his elbows on his knees.

“You know, it actually got me thinking though.” He said, energetically. “You should really have a built in gas feature in your mask – oh, wait, you do!”

Ah. Yeah.

Peter went to explain – but Tony held up a silencing hand.

“I’m not going to yell at you. I’m not. There’s no point. You don’t even remember doing it.” Tony sighed. And then shrugged. “And May’s going to shout enough for the both of us when she gets here.”

“What!” Peter screeched – and then shuddered. Sound was still very much against him. “You told her!”

“Sure did.” Tony said, leaning back in his chair with an irritating air of smugness. “Because – for the first time ever – absolutely none of this was my fault.”

Peter threw himself back down to the bed with a groan – and then let out another, louder grown when his impact with the soft cushions pulsed angrily through his head.

“What do you remember?” Tony asked, flipping casually through his phone again, after a few solid seconds of Peter groaning into the cushions. “Just out of curiosity. And, you know, because you’re probably going to be grounded for the next decade.”
Peter shrugged. And then regretted the shrug. God. He hurt everywhere.

“Not much to be honest. Just feelings. Mostly confusion.” Peter muttered. He scrubbed an exhausted hand over his face. Slowly – very slowly – some of the feelings started to come back to him. It felt a little like looking into a kaleidoscope – except the colors were his thoughts. God, even trying to remember hurt his brain. “It kind of felt like I was floating away.”

Even saying the words brought the feeling back – and another feeling with it. Something soft. Something grounding.

“And then you were there, and I wasn’t anymore.”

Tony’s eyes snapped back up. They were wide, and uncharacteristically-sunglasses-free. Without the tinted lenses there was nothing to hide the flicker of emotion behind his dark eyes – but before Peter could name it, or even be sure it was there, it was gone.

Replaced with a suave smile and a smooth chuckle.

“Can’t have you floating away – life would be so boring.” Tony smirked. He rose to his feet smoothly, and paused.

After a second of hesitation he leant down and clasped a gentle hand around Peter’s shoulder.

“Get some rest, kid.”

Chapter End Notes

Awww. He cares. He cares so much.

...and they shall return in the next chapter...
"But you said the Captain helped you the other night?" Ned asked as they swapped places on the mat. "Didn't he hunt down the drug dealer or something?"
"I guess." Peter grumbled, pressing his hands down on Ned’s feet. "Doesn't mean he's not a dick."
Ned shrugged. Helpful.

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"Oi, Penis!"

Peter heard the paper ball barreling towards his head as soon as it left Flash’s hand. It sailed across the Chem. Lab at a frustratingly slow speed. Peter could have moved his head – just slightly – and it would have sailed right past and towards the front of the room where Mr. Lowe was attempting explain the molecular fusion.

But he did. He stayed where he was and let the paper hit him directly in the back of the head. Just like he always did.

Ned shot him a pitiful look from his next to Peter.

“Just ignore him.” Ned leaned in and whispered – and then received a paper ball to the head, too, for his efforts.

“Come on, Penis – we just want to talk.” Flash’s voice carried across the murmuring classroom. Flash’s posse snorted with laughter at the back of the classroom. “Got any hot Avenger gossip for us? I mean – you’re just so close to them all, they must tell you everything – so come on, spill. Seen Black Widow in the shower yet?’’

When Peter didn’t reply another paper ball collided with the side of his head. Peter’s fists clenched around the desk.

“Ignore him – you still haven’t told me what happened the other night!” Ned’s voiced hissed excitedly in his ear.

“I told you,” Peter sighed, doing his best to actually pay attention to Mr. Lowe. And the web-
formula currently setting in the draw of his desk. “Some random drug dealer threw a handful of power in my face, and I spent the night stumbling around talking to clouds.”

Ned’s eyes widened. “Awesome.”

Peter swiveled to stare at him. “No dude, not awesome. I passed out on Mr. Stark’s floor – and I have no idea what I said.”

“Why do you think you said anything?”

“Because, he keeps asking me what Leonard Nimoy and I are getting up too now day’s!”

“What?”

“I don’t know!”


Peter hung his head, using the momentary reprieve to check on his web formula. It was still sticking firmly to the desk.

Peter poked at the webbing distractedly.

“And I think I punched Captain America,” Peter added. “Again.” Ned sucked in a startled breath and gave up all subtle pretenses. He swiveled fully towards Peter in his chair and gaped.


“I don’t know!” Peter hissed, running an exhausted hand through his hair. “And Mr. Stark wont tell me. He let it slip – and then wouldn’t tell me anything about it.”

“Wow.”

“No, Ned. Not wow. They live in the Tower now. I have to see them when I go over. And now the Captain and Bruce Banner know who I am.”

“Oh, yeah. That kind of sucks.”

“And I feel bad. Before I left I heard the Captain chewing Mr. Stark out for letting me go to Germany.”

Ned shrugged a little.

“He kind of has a point. You were fourteen.”

“And he’s a dick.” Peter retorted, pouring more of the web-formula into his beaker with a little too much force. “Therefore his opinion is irrelevant.”

The beaker started to bubble at once. Peter slammed the draw closed.

“Are he and Mr. Stark still not getting along?” Ned asked, pulling away and leaning back over his quiz sheet just as Mr. Lowe past them by.

“No, they are, which is worse. They’re not like, buddy-buddy or anything, but Mr. Stark’s just, like, letting him off the hook for everything. Like it didn’t happen.”

“What did happen?” Ned asked, scribbling down on his quiz sheet. “Like, in Siberia.”
“I don’t really know.” Peter huffed.

“Then how do you know it was all Captain America’s fault?”

“Because Mr. Stark came back with the shit kicked out of him – and Cap didn’t come back at all.” Peter snapped. Ned paused, and looked up in surprise. Peter rarely lost his temper. Even before the whole spider-bite incident – and especially after. He couldn’t afford to get angry. People could get hurt.

But he couldn’t deny that the whole situation with the Avengers moving back in frustrated him.

Peter sighed.

“I don’t know what happened.” He admitted, dropping his voice when Mr. Lowe passed by their table. “But they were friends. And you don’t do that to your friends.”

Ned nodded, swiveled a little closer and open his mouth to reply.

And then promptly shut it again when the sound of exploding glass echoed through the desk.

The whole classroom paused – looking around giddily for whoever had broken the beaker – and Mr. Lowe whirled around.

“Who was that?” He demanded.

The classroom stayed silent – gawking at each other.

“Come on, who broke something? This is the fourth time this week people. You need to be more careful. Who was it?”

Again no one spoke up.

The desk-draw by Peter’s feet began to push out on its own – frothing over with web-serum. *Shit.*

Peter slammed the draw closed with his feet. Struggling the hold in the expanding formula. Ned gawked down at it, terror written in every line of his face.

Eventually – when Mr. Lowe had looked over every desk and seen for his own eyes that everything was still in tact – the class went on. People turned back to their quizzes and Mr. Lowe got caught at the back of the room helping another student.

As soon as Peter was sure everyone’s attention was elsewhere, he moved his foot slightly. The draw had stopped trying to erupt – which had to be an improvement – but when he finally slid it open what he found a solid square of web-formula, which took up every inch of the draw, he reconsidered.

The broken beaker was set right in the middle of the clear goo.

“*Ah crap.*” Peter muttered.

Ned, who was leaning over his shoulder, gawking down at the draw, nodded quickly.

Another paper ball hit Peter, square, in the back of the head.

“Oh, *Penis-***
“So they’re all just living at the Tower now? That's so awesome.”

Peter and Ned were on the gym floor, Peter halfway through a set of sit-ups, and straining to keep his movements slow and pained, with Ned holding his feet to the floor, still prodding him about his magical-dream-walk (as Tony had taken to calling it) the week before.

"Not all of them. I've only seen the Captain, Bruce and Rhodey so far. But I think the others are close by, you know, waiting for the outcome of whatever chats they’re having."

Ned's excitement tripled, so much so that he was practically vibrating.

"What do you think they're talking about? Are they going reform?! Cause that would be totally awesome! You could be working with like the Scarlet witch, and the Winter Soldier, and-"

"Oh yay, working with the guy who tried to break my entire body with his metal arm. Can't wait." Peter grumbled.

"So aweso-"

"-No Ned. Not awesome."

"Oh come on. It was a fight. You can't really be angry that they fought back."

"I'm not. It's just. Look." Peter, finally finished his set, pulled himself upright and rested his arms on his knees. "You didn't see Mr. Stark when he got back, okay, they messed him up. Like bad. Like real bad. The Winter Soldier is crazy." Peter ran a hand through his hair. "And the Captain is a dick." He added a second later, under his breath.

"But you said the Captain helped you the other night?" Ned asked as they swapped places on the mat. "Didn't he hunt down the drug dealer or something?"

"I guess." Peter grumbled, pressing his hands down on Ned's feet. "Doesn't mean he's not a dick."

Ned shrugged. Helpful.

“All I’m saying is-”

“-Penis!"

A shadow fell over Ned and Peter, and Ned fell silent.

Flash stood above them both, in his pristine gym wear. His sweater tied across his chest like some kind of forty-year old vacation dad, about to head out for 18 holes of golf.

“You actually going to show at the decathlon meet this weekend?”

Peter sighed.

“Why wouldn’t I?”
“Why haven’t you showed all the other times?” Flash threw back – and Peter had to admit he had him a little. But come on. He’d only missed like two training sessions this term. And not a single competition round. He was trying. He was really trying.

Just some things were more important.

“How?" Flash prompted, moving forward so he was standing right in front of Peter who was still on his knees. “Why didn’t you show on the Thursday training a few weeks back?”

I was clinging to a car that was on the verge of falling of the Manhattan Bridge with three kids inside.

“Or the information night at the start of term?”

I accidently interrupted a drug-smuggling drop at the docks and got locked inside a shipping freight for two days.

“If you don’t actually want to be on the team, you should just admit it and leave.” Flash demanded. Oh god. Here they went again.

Every since Peter had come back to the team Flash had targeted him as the one to try and force out. Flash still stood as first alternate and – since they were getting pretty far into the school year and competitions – that was looking less and less likely to change. Much to his displeasure.

MJ had refused to kick Peter out, despite his occasional absence, so Flash had resolved to make Peter leave all on his own. And god, was it getting annoying. If he’d though Flash was making his life hard before – it was nothing compared to what he was suffering through now. Peter could barely make it through a class without Flash taunting him or attempting to get him kicked out of said class. Frustratingly he’d succeeded on several occasions. So much so that Peter’s grade performance was actually starting to slip – which was exactly what Flash wanted. If Peter’s marks fell much more, he’d be kicked off the team.

And flash would be in.

“-no one wants you there-”

“-No one wants you there, Flash.” Ned cut in.

He’d stopped his round of sit-ups and was now staring up at flash with clear distain.

“You’re the alternate for a reason. Because everyone else on the team is smarter-”

“Shut up, you fat shi-”

Peter was on his feet before Flash could blink.

With one hand Peter reached out and pushed Flash back, not hard, but just enough to send him stumbling back a few steps.

And enough to get Peter in trouble.

“-Coach Wilson!”

Ah shit.

“Couch Wilson! Parker shoved me-”
“Bullshit!” Ned shouted, lunging to his feet as well. “He was harassing us!”

Coach Wilson dragged himself across the room to them – looking as if he’d rather be anywhere else. Peter could sympathize.

“He shoved me!” Flash yelled, drowning out Ned’s indignant cries. “He shoved me! I was just standing here, and he came up and-

Flash was cut off suddenly when a volleyball flew in out of no where and collided forcefully with his face. He doubled over with a screech while Ned burst into laughter.

Peter whirléd around.

A good five feet hind them was MJ, sitting on the belchers, seemingly ignoring them all as she sketched silently. The rather large stack of volleyballs beside her though was a pretty good give away though. No matter how good her poker face was.

“What the hell!” Flash screeched, whirling around to MJ as well.

Her eyes flicked up at them lazily. She shrugged.

“Sorry,” she deadpanned. “My dainty, lady fingers slipped.”

If possible, Ned began to laugh harder. Tears spilling out of the corner of his eyes at Flash’s astounded expression.


MJ shrugged again, her attention moving back to her sketchbook.

“You told me to go for the ball.”

“In the game. Go for the ball in the game.”

“Whoops.”

Coach Wilson stared at her for a moment before shaking his head and stalking away without another word.

Flash watched him go, gaping.

“-but Coach Wilson!” Flash began, holding a hand to the side of his face where the volleyball had connected, and rushing after the older man. “Parker! He shoved me! Parker-”

The Coach walked all the way across the gym, to the double doors, and exited.

Flash followed – still squawking.

Peter let out a burst of laughter. A smile lit up his whole face. Damn. That had been close.

He turned back to MJ. There was a small smirk on her lips too.

Abandoning Ned – who looked on the cusp of a laughter induced stroke as he watched Flash flee the gym – Peter made his way over to MJ, who was still silently sketching.

“Nice shot.” Peter chuckled.
She shrugged.

“It’s one of my gifts.” She said, adding one last flourish to her sketch before turning it around for Peter to see.

Peter almost joined Ned on the ground in a laughter-stroke.

The sketch was a cartoon image of Flash, every detail of him down the forty-year old vacation sweater, catching a volleyball to the face. The detail in it was amazing. She must have been drawing it all period.

God. Peter was pretty sure he was ready to propose marriage right then and there.

“You’re not the only mysterious one, Peter.” MJ smirked, raising one eyebrow in silent challenge.

Peter smiled again.

And this time it didn’t fade for hours.

The bell was still ringing when Peter burst through the front doors at exactly three. With his bag flung over one shoulder he pounded down the front steps.

Okay. He had a few hours until he was meeting May at home for dinner for one of her mystery surprise nights - hmm, maybe best to duck by the deli before any patrolling. Just in case. She’d been not so bad lately, but Peter could never quite shake the time she had tried to make paella from scratch, and somehow it had ended up tasting like some weird hybrid of off-gravy and gravel-

"Hey, Penis!"

Something caught a hold of Peter’s sweater and yanked him backwards. Only his quick reflexes saved him from tripping back up the stairs behind him.

Once he was steady again, about three quarters of the way down the steps - come on! He just wanted to go - he finally swirled around.

Flash stood on the step above him, his arms now folded across his chest as he stared down mutinously at Peter.

"What the hell, Flash!?"

"You need to pull out of the decathlon team."

Peter groaned.

"How many times do I have to tell you this? No.” Peter said. "Do you want to hear me say it in Spanish? No.” He added in a god-awful Spanish accent.

"Come on, Parker!” Flash argued. "We both know you don't really care about the team-"

"-that's not true-"
"-you're too busy faking an internship with Stark. Which no one believes, just so you know. So just quit! You're not doing anyone there any favors by hanging around.-"

"Shut up, okay, Flash. Answer is no." Peter said, turning away to start back down the stairs. "Give it up already." Peter added, under his breath.

Before Peter could even turn all the way around hands were colliding with his back again. Only this time they weren't pulling. They were pushing.

Hard.

Normally, the shove wouldn't have even made Peter stumble. Bonus of his Spider-ness.

But Flash had never actually pushed him before, and Peter wasn't expecting it at all.

That, and the fact one of Peter's feet had been hovering over the next step, made Peter stumble.

And then fall.

Ah shit. This was actually going to hurt.

Before the hard, concrete steps could become acquainted with Peter's face though another set of hands caught him by the front of his sweater.

Heaving himself back upright Peter's eyes flicked upward to the owner of those hands.

Oh shit.

Tony.

He'd totally forgotten that he'd arranged to meet Tony after school to go over upgrades for his suit. They met up every week nearly to tinker with the suit. Not much tinkering really happened though. Mostly they actually just sat around and played in Tony's lab. Tony had even let Peter have a look at some of Stark industries latest production plans - wanting his input. God, Peter though he'd die of happiness in that moment. And Tony was always so relaxed in the lab - like all of his problems with the other Avengers and the accords just evaporated when they were locked down there. It was incredible to watch the man work. He was like an engineering steam engine.

Now, though, he was just a steam engine. One likely to run straight over Flash if Tony's expression was any indication. It was almost blank, but Peter could see the fury behind his tinted sunglasses. In the way he clamped his fists closed - one at his side and the other still gripping Peter's sweater.

"O-oh my god." Flash stammered, backing up a step, and almost tripping himself. His eyes were so wide Peter worried for a moment that they might actually pop out of his skull. "You're T-Tony Stark."

Tony let the hand clenched around Peter's sweater fall once Peter was balanced on a step, taking a careful step forward - standing just above Peter and staring mutinously at Flash.

"And you would be?"

Wow. Peter had always known Tony was a good businessman. He'd have to be. He owned a giant business. But, even with those few words, Peter was beginning to understand why it was such a good business.
The words were as cool as they were dismissive. If they'd been aimed at him Peter was sure he would have shrunk at least 2 feet.

"I-ugh-I-

"Name." Tony barked, harshly, cutting off Flash's stammers. Flash withdrew another step.

"F-Flash Thompson."

Tony's brows shot upwards.

"Seriously?"

When Flash did nothing but gape at the question Tony swiveled, looking down at Peter.

"Seriously?" He asked again. Peter shrugged in confirmation. Tony's brows shot even higher - now in real danger of disappearing into his hairline.

"Seriously?" Tony repeated once he had turned back to Flash.

Flash made a small choking noise.

"Christ." Tony breathed, with a small chuckle, "No wonder you’re a dick. Your parents screwed you good."

Flash stammered an incomprehensible retort, but broke off quickly when Tony took another step forward and clasped a hand around Flash's shoulder tightly.

"Though not nearly as much as I'm going to screw you if I you ever do that again. Do I make myself clear?"

Peter was sure that Flash's head was going to bounce straight off at the speed he was nodding.

"Good." Tony smiled, all of his teeth glinting in a way that reminded Peter vaguely of a cartoon shark before it took someone's leg off. "Now fuck off."

If Peter weren't still trying to wrap his head around the last few seconds of his life he would have laughed at the sight of Flash practically clawing his way up the stairs with his hands and feet, before disappearing inside.

There were a few other students milling out of the doors now - some stared as Flash fled back inside, but most gapped incredulously at Tony, who was making his way back down the stairs to Peter.

"Flash? Seriously?" Tony asked again, jabbing a thumb in the direction of the door Flash had disappeared through. When Peter nodded Tony let out a bark of laughter. "Christ. That's practically child cruelty."

Peter laughed a little with him, his nervousness bleeding through badly. Lots of people were staring now.

Tony paused when he was eye to eye with Peter. All the laughter gone from his expression.

"What's with that?" Tony asked seriously, nodding towards where Flash had been standing.

Peter shrugged again.
"Nothing."

Tony stared.

"Really, it's nothing."

Peter glanced around. Wow. They were really gathering a crowd now. On the plus side, Flash would never be able to claim his internship wasn't real again.

But. On the down side.

*Everyone was staring.*

Was this what it was like for Tony all the time? God. It sucked. Peter's insides felt like they were coiling and uncoiling at 100 miles an hour.

Oh god. Ohgodohgodohgodohgod.

A hand latched on to Peter's sleeve and pulled him down the stairs.

For a wild moment Peter thought it was Flash - with a death with clearly, because Peter was fairly sure Tony wasn't joking with the life ruining comment - but the hands were gentle with him while they led him down the stairs and into a sleek, black car that was waiting at the curb.

The hands ushered Peter inside, and the quite, empty space seemed to shatter whatever had taken over him.

Shit. Had he just freaked out? At school? In front of everyone?

And Tony?

Oh god, kill him now.

Tony slid into the car after Peter, slamming the door behind him.

“Punch it, Happy.”

Happy – who was sitting in the driver’s seat, as per usual – sent a little nod in Peter’s direction before pulling the car away from the school. Peter should have been pleased. Happy’s reactions to him usually stayed within the range of frustration and exasperation – a nod was almost a hug in Happy speak.

But Peter was too distracted by the fact he had just *freaked out* in the middle of school.

“Don’t sweat it, kid.” Tony said.

Clearly Peter’s mortification was written all over his face.

“Seriously, don’t worry about it. Everyone freaks out sometimes.”

“You don’t,” Peter murmured. Why doesn’t something ever try to eat him when he *wants to be eaten.*

“I grew up with this,” Tony shrugged, leaning back in his seat and looking over at Peter. “I had to get used to shoving cameras out of my face before I could even walk.”

Wow. That sounded awful.
“Don’t worry, you won’t have to get used to it,” Tony said. “I’ll avoid school-yard appearances where possible-”

“-no you don’t have to do that, it’s fine, I don’t mind-”

“-though I will make an exception if that little asshole is going to be a problem.” Tony plowed on over Peter.

“He’s not.” Peter assured, staring down at his hands.

“Really?” Tony asked, staring over at Peter. “So he’s not the kid that’s been harassing you for months?”

“What?!” Peter squeaked.

“Yeah, that’s right, May and I chat.” Tony said, and then paused for a second. “Well, mainly she calls me in the middle of the night to yell at me – but occasionally, after the yelling, we chat.” Tony added thoughtfully. “So, what’s this kid’s deal?”

“He wants on the decathlon team.” Peter admitted, with a shrug. Trying his best to play it all down.

“And what? His plan to do that is to torment you until you withdraw?”

“I guess,” Peter muttered. He so didn’t want to have this conversation. “I don’t know. It’s not a big deal.”

“If he’s pushing you down stairs it’s some kind of deal.”

“I’ll deal with it.” Peter insisted.

“Well,” Tony stressed with a shrug of his own. “You’re kind of not.”

“Well you’re kind of not dealing with, Cap, so, you know, whatever.” Peter snapped.

The car fell silent.

“What?” Tony asked, painfully calm.

Oh god. He did not just say that. This is not happening.

Peter shook his head manically.

“Happy, pull over.”

Happy steered the car to the edge of the road and slid into a park.

“Okay,” Tony said firmly, moving forward in his seat to look Peter in the eye. “What is your problem with the Captain?”

“N-nothing.” Peter stammered, eyes fixed on his hands. “Nothing. Forget I said anything. I didn’t… I-I didn’t-”

“Stop deflecting.” Tony ordered. Peter fell silent. "You weren't happy when I told you Cap was moving in – and I got it, he did punch you a few times in the face – but you're nicer to criminals that shoot at you, which I strongly disagree with, but that's not the point right now."
Peter remained silent.

"What's going on, Peter?" Tony asked, all frustration slowly giving way to confusion. "I thought you liked him. When I told you why we were going to Germany I was a little nervous you'd swap sides, you were that excited to meet him-"

"I would never do that." Peter insisted harshly, cutting Tony off. He would never have dared, usually, but he needed Tony to hear this. Needed him to believe it. "I would never do that to you."

Tony stared at him as if he'd grown an extra head.

"I know you wouldn't." Tony said slowly. "Kid, where is this all coming from? I don't-"

"I know what happened in Siberia."

The words were barely a whisper, but Tony heard them.

"Happy, get out of the car."

"What?" Happy barked from the front seat, where he'd been trying to look like he wasn't listening to every word. "Come on, no-

"Oh yes," Tony cut him off, waving an impatient hand at him. "Out. Now. Go get a double chocolate, vanilla syrup, extra pump espresso or something."

Happy muttered mutinously but heaved himself out of the car nonetheless. Slamming the door closed behind him.

As soon as he was gone Tony's attention focused back on Peter, and he shrank back a little. Dammit. Should have just kept his mouth shut-

"What do you mean?" Tony's hard voice cut off Peter's internal berating. "What do you know about Siberia?"

Peter considered staying silent, but the look on Tony's face told him that that wasn't going to be an option now.

"I know you went after the Captain." Peter murmured, fiddling with a hole in his sweater. "I know you found him - and the Winter Soldier."

Peter's hands clenched around his sleeves, and he refused to look up into the brown eyes he knew were staring at him.

"I know they nearly beat you to death."

Peter heard Tony's teeth clench together.

Neither of them said a word.

Tony was silent for so long that Peter was half expecting him to ask Peter to get out of the car. Maybe he should just go? Clearly Tony didn't want to talk about this. And why would he? God, Peter shouldn't have brought it up. Such a dick thing to say. Why not remind the man of the time his friend kicked the shit out of him. Yeah. Peter should just leave now, before he could make anything worse-

“How did you find out about this?”
The words slid out of Tony’s still clenched teeth.

Peter shrank lower in his seat.

“I was there when you called Happy.” Peter muttered. “Or in the next room, but Happy was shouting so I came to the doorway. I could hear you talking about the Captain.” Peter fiddled some more with his sleeve. “I could see what they’d done to you.”

Tony let out a pained sigh, and then – much to Peter’s surprise – slid closer.

“Well, Happy and I are going to have a discussion about what a private conversation entails.” Tony began, shooting a dirty look out the car window in the direction Happy had disappeared in. Guilt built up in Peter’s chest. It hadn’t been Happy’s fault –

“But, you need to know that what happened was complicated.” Tony went on. His voice faded a little. “There were mistakes made on both sides.”

“Beating the crap out of a friend counts as a mistake?” Peter asked, dubiously. Not bother to cloud his resentment.

“No, but-” Tony began again, but Peter cut him off. He’d heard enough.

“-there are no buts. You don’t do that. You just don’t.” Peter insisted, starting to get worked up.

“-it’s complicated-”

“-how is that complicated!” Peter fumed. “You don’t hurt your friends!”

“PETER!”

Peter fell silent.

Tony took a deep breath.

“It’s not that simple.” Tony insisted. Peter opened his mouth to argue but Tony held up a hand and plundered on. “It’s not that simple, because I started the fight.”

That rendered Peter silent.

He gaped at Tony for several seconds, not quite sure what to say to that.

“Why?” The word left Peter’s lips in a breath of confusion. As soon as it had, though, Peter regretted it.

Tony’s eyes fell, and he pulled away. All of the energy that seemed to seep from him, all of the time, just faded. Suddenly he seemed old. Tired.

“The Winter Soldie-” Tony said, but broke off. He stared out the car window for several seconds. Peter fidgeted nervously.

“James Barnes,” Tony began again. “Has a long history.”

Tony’s eyes flicked back to Peter.

“Unlike Rogers, he wasn’t always asleep.” Tony leant back in his seat, resting against one of the car doors. “And, when he was awake, he did…things.”
Peter stared in confusion.

Tony sighed again.

“He killed people. Lot’s of people.” Tony went on. “And there are some who have broached the idea that he should be held accountable for those murders.”

If possible Peter was suddenly more confused.

“But, wasn’t he brainwashed?” Peter asked, slowly. “Like, Hydra, they brainwashed him didn’t they? It was all over the news. They released videos of him being conditioned like some kind of animal.”

“Yes.” Tony said. “He was.”

“Then how is any of what he did his fault?” Peter asked, lost. “I mean, if he was brainwashed, then doesn’t that kind of make him a victim as well?”

Tony stared at Peter for so long that Peter was beginning to think he had finally over stepped. That the older man wasn’t going to answer.

He was wrong.

“Yes.” Tony said eventually. “Yes, it does.”

“Then I-”

“.look.” Tony cut Peter off, leaning forwards so that his elbow rested on his knees, and his face sat at Peter’s eye level. “What happened in Siberia was an epic cock-up. Alright? We let out anger the better of us, and we shouldn’t have.” Tony said, watching Peter’s expression carefully. “But the point I’m trying to make is that the mistake was on us. As in all of us. Because, trust me, I gave just as good as I got.” Tony smirked, but it didn’t reach his eyes. “It wasn’t the Captain’s fault.” He made a sour face as soon as the words left his lips, before hastily rephrasing them. “It wasn’t solely the Captain’s fault. Okay?”

Peter nodded.

“And it definitely wasn’t a good example of conflict resolution.” Tony added, his typical bravo returning. “In the case of Flash, for example, I wouldn’t recommend it. I would instead encourage a subtle emotional, and social crippling. You start with-”

The driver’s door swung open, and Happy slid inside. Hands full of some chocolaty, overflowing, Frappuccino.

“What?” He fumed. “You told me to go. You wanted to talk to the kid-”

“.Yeah, and now we’re done.” Tony cut him off. “Come on, chop chop. Lots to do tonight. We have to get through all the upgrades and home before the kid’s curfew.”

Happy nodded jerkily, scrambling to turn the car back on.

“Time for indulgences,” Tony insisted, snatching the Frappuccino out of Happy’s hands and shoving it into Peter’s.
“What!” Happy huffed. “You told me to go and get-”

“*Time is money.*” Tony stressed, and Happy finally pulled away from the curb.

Tony shot a wink at Peter, and Peter barely held in a chuckle.

He took a sip of the Frappuccino.

“Mr. Stark?”

“Yeah, kid?”

“You’re always going to be my favorite.”

“Damn straight.”
Peter, who had just shot a web into the side of the facility and was riding it down, looked up to see Falcon wiz up and over him. And directly through his webbing. The web formula snapped under the pressure of Falcon’s sharp, steel wings, and then Peter was no longer gliding. He was straight out falling.
“PETER!”

Chapter Notes

I literally have no words. Everyone’s support and comments on this fic have been so fantastic! I love and appreciate you all so much! Ahh. You're all so beautiful!
Sorry this chapter took so long! Life got in the way as per usual. Also, as per usual, this is all unbeta'd so mistakes are mine, and probably vast.
Hope you enjoy.

P.s. Also Kudos to all of you who caught the Teen Wolf reference in the last Chapter! One of my favourites!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

4.

“Oh my god, this is amazing!” Peter gushed as soon as he was inside the training room. ”This is amazing. This is probably the best moment of my life - including that time Flash got a physics question wrong at a decathlon meet and MJ-

"Wow, kid." Tony chided. "This is just a bit of a trial run, okay? See how everyone gets on."

"Yeah!" Peter insisted, trying his best to seem professional despite his excitement making him want to literally bounce off the walls. "Definitely. All just chilling. Chilling like a-

"For my sake please don't finish that sentence," Tony shook his head. "We're just ten mature adults, coming together to see how we get along as a team now. Sort out the dynamics."

Peter nodded manically and took another look around. God. This was so cool. The Avengers training room. The Avenger’s training room! And he was actually going to train with them. Oh god. This was the best thing to even happen to him. Hands down. No questions. Not even any close comparisons –

"Well, 9 and a half mature adults." Tony muttered, breaking off Peter’s racing thoughts.

“Hey.” Peter argued, turning to shoot a light glare at Tony who was still waiting by the training
room doors, “I’m at least two thirds.”

“You can be two-thirds if you stop gaping at everything and come and wait over here like a normal person.” Tony waved him over. Peter followed, still craning his neck to take in every inch of the room.

“Okay, here’s the deal,” Tony began. “We’re going to train for a few hours, make some small talk and try *not to kill each other*. Think you can handle that?”

Peter nodded again.

“Good.” Tony sighed. “That makes one of us.”

Before Peter could reply the double doors opened and Rhodey stepped inside, his bionic leg-crutches clunking loudly with each step inside the large room. He was dressed in a loose t-shirt and cargo pants. Ready to work.

“Oh, thank-Christ you’re here.” Tony panted. He took a steadying breath that Peter hadn’t realized he needed. Wow. He was really nervous about this. Should Peter be nervous about this?

“Chill, I’m here.” Rhodey said, moving over to Tony. “Everyone’s arriving.”

Tony nodded and began clicking his fingers nervously. Glancing about the room – or generally anywhere other than Rhodey and Peter. Peter moved forward, but Rhodey cut him off.

He moved towards Peter and clapped a hand on his shoulder.

“How you doing, kid?”

Peter had met Rhodey a couple of times now. They’d met when he’d walked in on Tony trying to remove Peter’s suit after some goon, breaking into a hardware store, had sprayed him in super adhesive. Not Peter’s finest moment.

Rhodey, though, had been oddly cool with the whole thing.

He’d barely even raised an eyebrow before asking where Tony kept his baking spray. When Tony had fallen into a panicked tangent about why he was not allowed to keep baking supplies in the penthouse – curtsy of Pepper and several failed attempts – Rhodey had simply held up a silencing hand, disappeared for several minutes and returned with a jumbo jar of peanut butter.

Needless to say, Peter was free in no time. But incredibly sticky.

Yeah. Really not his finest night.

He’d run into Rhodey several more times since then, mainly in the Avengers Compound where Tony was still improving his bionic legs. They often sat around and ate pizza while Tony worked. It was nice. The man was just, so, constant. Nothing ever rattled him.

Peter could see how he and Tony got along so well. Where Tony was a constant mirage of movement, Rhodey was solid and immovable.

“How’s school?” Rhodey went on.

Peter gave a shrug.

“That kid, Flash, still giving you trouble.”
Peter shot an annoyed look at Tony – which the older man completely missed. Tony had started to pace across the doorway, hands fiddling with his sleeves, and gaze still fixed on anything but Peter and Rhodey. Peter’s annoyance faded away. Wow. He was really nervous. Was there something Peter didn’t know? Was this likely to end badly?

Peter moved to take a step towards Tony again, but Rhodey moved just slightly to the side, blocking him.

“Just let him go.” Rhodey murmured, not even needed to look over at his friend to know that he was panicking. “He’s not so great with situations he can’t predict with a mathematical algorithm.” Rhodey explained. “He’ll be fine once everyone’s here, and nobody spontaneously combusts.”

Peter nodded slowly.

It made sense, really. They hadn’t all been in a room together since Germany, and that had ended…badly.

“So,” Peter began, his own nervousness building. “Who exactly is here?” He asked. “Mr. Stark didn’t really say…”

“We’ll Steve’s here,” Rhodey said, leaning down and fiddling with a screw on his metal leg-braces. He shot a quick look up at Peter. “Tony says you already know that.” Peter scowled again. Rhodey didn’t push the subject. “Same with Bruce, and Vision’s been living here for the past year already, so he’s here.” Rhodey straightened back up. “Other than that, Sam, Clint and Scott are all flying in from underneath whatever rock they’ve been hiding under. And Natasha. I’ve got no idea how she’s getting here though, or where she’s been, but she said she’d be here so–”

The training-room’s double-doors swung open, and the woman herself walked in.

She was dressed in all black – just like the last time they met – but instead of a cat suit, she was dressed head-to-toe in tight fitting combat gear. Her blonde hair – wait, blonde? Wasn’t she a redhead the last time they-

“Do you just wait out there for someone to talk about you, so you can make a dramatic appearance?” Tony asked, finally pausing his pacing to glare at the Black Widow. The. Black. Widow.

Peter was in the same room as the Black Widow.

“Tony.” Romanoff nodded. She glanced across the room. “Colonel Rhodes. Peter.”

Peter’s eyes widened.

As did Tony’s, though not, Peter suspected, out of awe.

“How do you know his name?” Tony fumed. Romanoff smiled, just slightly.

Peter’s spider-sense tingled.

The double-doors opened again a head of messy brown-hair appeared.

Clint Barton. Hawkeye.

OhmygodthiswasthebestdayofPeter’slife.

“We late?” He asked, stepping all the way inside. “Sorry, bit of a piloting mishap. Turns out the
pilot couldn’t actually fly a plane—"

"-I can fly a hell of a lot better than you can, you-

Sam Wilson followed Barton inside, his metallic wings securely fastened and folded up against his back. He scowled as he spoke.

Barton cut him off.

"-giant metal, fairy wings don’t count.” Barton argued, “A Quinjet is a sophisticated, and advanced piece of technology. Okay. Not even a close comparison to your glorified gliders—"

"-my what! These wings are one of the most advanced aero-dynamic instruments in history—"

Bruce slipped in the doors behind the two men, took one look at them while they bickered, and moved towards Peter and Rhodey.

“Hey Bruce,” Peter waved. Bruce smiled a little.

“Hi Peter, how you feeling?”

“Much better than last time.”

Bruce let out a small chuckle, that didn’t reach his eyes.

“I’m glad.”

Rhodey shot them both a confused scowl.

“I didn’t know you two had met.”

“Oh yeah,” Peter said, enthusiastically. “He helped me when I was dying of a drug-overdose.”

Rhodey’s eyebrows rose, just an inch. Ah. Maybe not the best choice of words.

Peter was spared from explaining when the last of the team wandered through the double-doors.

Vision, fully clad in slacks and a purple sweater, swept inside with his usual silence and grace, and a scrubby looking, brown-haired man followed him. Who was he? Peter didn’t know him?

Before Peter could question it the doors opened one last time and Steve Rogers stepped through. He closed the door softly behind him.

“We ready?” He asked, glancing around at the many faces in the room.

A few nodded in return, but most glanced over to Tony, who was standing with his arms folded near the wall of windows.

For a minute no one said anything.

“Yeah,” Tony murmured. It traveled through the reinforced room. “We’re ready.”

Steve nodded, glancing around at the others. Everyone stood slightly spread through the room. Peter, Bruce and Rhodey to the left of the door, Romanoff alone in the middle of the large room, Tony by the windows, Vision in back corner, Barton and Wilson just in front of the large doors, and the Captain and mystery guy barely through them. Ah. Peter was starting to see why Tony was so nervous.
For a really long moment no one said anything.

“Okay,” The Captain said at last, breaking the silence and taking a large step into the room. “Where do we want to start?”

“How about introductions?” Tony shrugged, nodding at the strange man standing hovering next to the Captain “Whose this guy?”

“Oh, this is Scott Lang.” Rogers said at once, waving a hand at the man, who gave an awkward wave of his own to the group. “He’s-ugh-

“I was the dude in the red suit.” Lang cut in when the Captain broke off, unsure. “I was tiny, and then kinda big-”

“Giant-tiny-red-dude!” Peter yelled, eyes-wide. “Yeah, wow, you were awesome.”

Every set of eyes in the room flicked to Peter.

Ah shit.

“You are a child.” Barton said, staring over at Peter in astonishment. Barton cast a stray look around at everyone else, all of which were still staring at Peter. “There is a child in the room.” Barton clarified, as he couldn’t quite compute that bit of information. “Whose child are you exactly?” He asked.

“He’s mine.”

The gaping stares shot over to Tony.

“Not like that. Christ.” Tony added. He waved a hand over at Peter, who still stood between Rhodey and Bruce, and suddenly felt a lot less enthused about this whole thing. “Everyone this is Peter Parker, or Spiderman as YouTube has coined him.”

That got the attention of the room.

“Um. How old is he?” Wilson asked, his voice tense.

“He’s fifteen,” Tony cut in, and then continued on over several outraged cries. “And before any of you contest, he’s about to kick all of your asses, so…don’t.”

“Just because he can, doesn’t necessarily mean he should.” Wilson argued, staring over at Peter with an unreadable expression. “Fifteen, Jesus, are you still in High School?”

Peter opened his mouth, but nothing came out but a chocked breath.

“He is.” Tony answered, pulling himself away from the windows and making his way over to Peter, Bruce and Rhodey, stropping just foot or so in front of Peter – half shielding him from the eyes of the other Avengers. “And he’s also far too stubborn to stop swinging from skyscrapers and attacking muggers, no matter how many people ask him to. So feel free to try.”

Several of the others opened their mouths to do just that – Wilson and Barton most animatedly – but the Captain cut them all off. His was voice calm, but eerily final. Peter couldn’t imagine many people arguing with that voice. Himself included. Not that he wouldn’t do just that if Rogers started to weigh in on Tony again – because that was not happening. At all. Peter would have a lot to argue about if that started up right in front of him. This was Peter’s choice, not Tony’s, and it the Captain had something to say about that he could say it to Peter’s face, not –
“Peter’s a part of the team now, so he’ll train with us like everyone else.” Roger’s voiced echoed through the training room, cutting off Peter’s already enraged train-of-thought. Huh. That was not what he’d been expecting. Judging by Tony’s look of utter astonishment, the older man hadn’t expected the support either. “Any other questions before we get started?” The Captain asked, staring around the room.

Lang raised a hand in the air, stirring several chuckles.

“Umm. Yeah.” He started. “What exactly do we do now?”

Even the Captain had no real answer for that one. Everyone stared silently around the room again. God. It was like waiting for the first person to rack up the nerve to dance at a school event. Someone always did, eventually, but the awkward loitering before hand always left Peter queasy.

You could have pounded through this awkward silence with a sledgehammer.

So of course, Romanoff did.

“We hit each other repeatedly in the face.” Romanoff said, her face even and arms crossed across her chest as she stood in the middle of the room. A silent challenge. “Whose first?”

No one said a word.

Peter leaned closer to Bruce. "She's joking right?” He murmured.

She was in fact not joking.

Peter watched in awe as Wilson, Barton and the Captain all faced off against the Widow - one at a time. Wilson was flipped onto the mat in just a couple of seconds. Peter wasn't entirely shocked at that though. What had shocked him was that the Captain eventually joined him. The fight had lasted much longer, it was clear that he was much more of a match for Romanoff, but Peter noticed at once that he was clearly reaching for her more than she was reaching back. It left him open. And she never was. Rogers was agile, sure, but he relied on his strength a lot as well. It was what he was known for really, and Peter was sure that in any other fight the combination of the two would have worked. But not in this one. Peter wasn't sure what it was. Whether it was Romanoff's speed, or her ability to turn every move against an opponent, or the fact that she seemed to know every move someone made before they made it, but the move Peter watched the more he was captivated. She never lost. She just didn't. Even when it came to Barton's round - and he lasted longer than both the Captain and Wilson, clearly more experienced with her particular brand of insane-ninja-skills - she didn't loose. Barton still hit the mat in the end, but he'd given just as good as he'd got.

Peter was pretty sure he was in love. Or petrified. Definitely one of the two.

"Kid, at least try and make it look hard. You know, for the rest of us.”

Scott Lang was next to Peter on one of the exercise mats, struggling through a round of push-ups while Peter flew through a set of his own.

Peter grinned and smashed out the last few with a flourish. Scott let out an exaggerated sob and flopped to the ground, spread out like some kind of dilapidated worm.

Scott was weird, but kinda awesome. He was also just as new to the group as Peter, so the two had gravitated together when the group had divided up for a warm up (or to be beaten up in Wilson, Rogers and Barton's case).
Warm up was a loose term though, as it ended up only being Peter and Scott that pumped through a few cardio sets. Rhodey - still out with his legs - had watched the fights, yelling suggestions, while Tony and Bruce hovered around the fighting mat as well. Vision had remained in the corner of the room. Just watching.

"What kind of a warm up is that?" Wilson had called down to Tony and Bruce, halfway through his time with Natasha, and clearly needing a minute to catch his breath. He nodded over at their relaxed position by the mat.

"A scientific one," Tony had retorted without even a beat. "We're running the odds on how many times you're going to hit the mat if you keep this up."

Wilson had barely had time to let out a sarcastic bark of laughter before Romanoff was on him again. And he was on the mat. Again.

Even Peter gave up his rouse of warm-up to watch Romanoff and Barton go at it one more time. With Scott still face down on the mat beside him, no one was there to mock his for openly gaping. Which he was. Not even subtly. Especially when the match ended with Romanoff swinging her legs around Barton's throat and twisting him to the mat.

"I'm getting to old for this shit." Barton muttered, but he was smiling slightly as he heaved himself back upright. But the Widow had moved on.

She was staring at Peter now.

Oh shit.

"How about you, little spider?" Romanoff murmured, smiling just enough to get Peter's spider sense tingling.

Peter was on his feet with a hell yes on the edge of his tongue when Tony cut in.

"No." He called, not even bothering to look up from the phone he was typing on. "There will be no breaking of the underage participants before we even get past the warm-up."

Romanoff smirked but didn't protest.

"I think we're all warm now, anyway." Rogers agreed, moving back into the middle of the room. "Why don't we all get suited up and head outside for some drills?"

The team nodded and began to trudge out of the training room. Peter, who had his suit on under his sweats, pulled his mask out of the pocket of his hoodie and made his way over to Bruce who was heading out a glass-side door of the training room and into the garden.

"No suit?" Peter asked as he caught up to the older man.

Bruce turned and, upon seeing Peter, smiled. "No. I don't think the other guy's going to make an appearance today."

Peter nodded absently. Tony had already told him not to push Bruce when it came to the hulk. They were lucky to have the man here at all at the moment.

"So what's up with Vision?" Peter asked instead, matching Bruce's stride as they made their way down to an empty patch of grass at the back of the facility. "Does he normally get in on these things?"
"I'm not really sure," Bruce admitted, watching the android in question step straight through a wall and out onto the back lawn. Awesome. "I've never trained with him before, but-"

Bruce cut off suddenly.

"But what?!" Peter pushed before he could stop himself, trying to keep his voice low.

Bruce sighed, but leaned a little closer to Peter.

"Wanda's not here."

The Scarlett Witch. Peter had noticed when she didn't show with the others, but he'd been so absorbed with the others that he'd forgotten to ask about it.

"Why?" Peter asked. "Wasn't she with the Captain."

"She was..." Bruce began carefully, still watching Vision as he moved across the lawn to stand at the edge of the trees that lined the estate.

"And where is she now?" Peter asked. He knew he should let the whole thing go. That clearly no one wanted to talk about it, but now they'd started on the topic Peter found himself brimming with curiosity. He'd admired these people for so long - it was just so captivating to be with, and hear about them, in person.

"No one knows."

That got Peter's attention.

"No one knows?" Peter repeated, astonished. "How can no one know?"

"Apparently she left in the middle of the night while they were in Wakonda." Bruce explained. "Left a note saying there were things she had to do, had to fix, and just disappeared."

"Wow." Peter breathed, glancing over to Vision as he started to however just an inch or two off the ground, head lifted to the sun.

"Yeah," Bruce agreed just as the doors to the compound opened and the others began spilling out. "Best not to bring it up though." Bruce added softly as the other moved towards them. "Tony and Steve have already had a row about it, and fighting is going to get us no where at the moment."

Peter nodded.

"Why would her not being here effect Vision though-"

Peter cut off sharply when the others started to reach them.

"Ready to go, kid?" Tony asked, setting down the case, with his Iron-man suit inside, on the grass.

Behind Tony, Rhodey was already in the War Machine suit, shooting up into the sky with Falcon hot on his tail. Scott was no where to be seen - meaning he was probably already tiny and slipping between them all - and Romanoff and Barton were at the edge of the lawn, talking too softly to hear.

The Captain was the last the make it down to the lawn. He was fully suited up - cowl and all - and running his hands over his shield.
Rogers looked up and met Tony's gaze for just a second, before nodding softly at the engineer. Tony returned the nod, just slightly, and the Captain ran his hands over the shield one more time before sliding it into place across his shoulders.

"Shall we?" Tony called. Rogers nodded.

Peter took it all back. This was the greatest moment of his life.

He was flying through the air, swinging around the Avenger’s facility while the Avengers battled around him. Tony had released a crate full of training bots, and they were now flitting through the air and along the ground while the Avenger’s chased after them.

“-one on you’re tail, Falcon.” Barton called across the comms. from his perch at the edge of the facility, where he was firing arrow after arrow.

“Got it,” Falcon called, spinning up into the sky with the drone at his heels.

Peter swung around the corner of the facility, webbing an unsuspecting drone of his own and catapulting it into the side of the building. It crumbled upon impact.

“Hey,” Tony’s voice echoed through the comms. “Mind the building. I just had her renovated.”

“Really!!?” Falcon called from above them all, trying to throw off his tail in the clouds.

“Oh, yeah,” Tony said, blasting a bot clean out of the sky. “Had the whole kitchen redone.”

“Finally get that soft-serve machine I told you about?” Barton asked. An arrow whizzed by Peter and slammed into a bot that was shooting towards him. Awesome. Peter flipped backwards and shot out another web, swinging himself up towards the very top of the facility.

“Yeah, and a waffle-maker that makes waffles in the shape of the Hulk. Had to special order that one-”

“Chatter!” Rogers’ voice cut them all off.

God. This was amazing. This was the best day of Peter’s life.

Rogers was on the grass, beating bots to the ground left-right-and-center with his shield. Romanoff wasn’t far behind, taking cover in the trees and surprising the bots that strayed in after her. She took each of them down with electric bracelets that Peter had absolutely no desire to get to know.

Vision was up in the clouds with Wilson, occasionally shooting down a beam from the jewel in his head and obliterating the bots. Rhodey and Tony were circling the compound, shooting down bots as they ringed around the entire group.

Bruce had gone inside as soon as the bots were released, already edgy and not really up for team bonding.

Scott was nowhere to be found. But every so often a bot would explode mid-air, and Peter could swear he saw something tiny fly off from the debris.

Yeah. Definitely the best day of his life.

“You’ve still got a bot biting at your heels, Wilson-”
“-PETER MOVE!”

Tony’s voice cut through everything else.

Peter, who had just shot a web into the side of the facility and was riding it down, looked up to see Falcon wiz up and over him. And directly through his webbing. The web formula snapped under the pressure of Falcon’s sharp, steel wings, and then Peter was no longer gliding.

He was straight out falling.

“PETER!”

Tony’s voice echoed through the comms. but Peter barely noticed. He was too busy trying to shoot a new web onto the facility before he hit the ground. Hard.

But the snapped webbing seemed to have done something to his wrist-shooters because the left one was no longer working, and if he used the right the odd angle would propel him straight into the windows of the compound. The bullet and missile proof windows. Yeah. That didn't sound fun. Though neither did hitting the ground after a six-story drop, but Peter was very quickly running out of options-

Something solid slammed into Peter.

Metallic arms wrapped around him in a death-grip and threw them both off to the side - slamming into the grass at an angle, with Peter clutched to the metal breastplate.

Despite the angle, and landing on top of the hulking metal figure, Peter felt a couple of ribs give way as they hit the ground. His shoulder, too, popped hideously, and began to scream with pain. Peter clenched his teeth together to keep quiet.

As soon as they had skidded to a stop, though, Peter sprung up to his knees, leaning over the brilliant red Iron Man Suit beside him. Ribs and shoulder be damned.

"Oh my god! Mr. Stark are you okay!? What-"

The suit, which was now half hurried in the grass, opened at once and Tony pulled himself out. He clawed his way to his knees, and across the grass to Peter.

"Jesus kid, are you okay!?" Tony's hands reached out, one closing around Peter's undamaged shoulder as the other reached up and ripped the mask of Peter's head.

"I'm good. Really. Bit sore, but – what about you? T-that was a hard-"

"Don't worry about me, kid." Tony sighed, tension draining out of him as soon as he’d yanked the mask from Peter’s face and could see that he was relatively unharmed. "My suits are actually made to fall a few hundred feet, unlike your glorified tissue paper! Why didn't your parachute release!?"

"Oh, ugh," Peter stammered, "I meant to tell you about that, I kinda used it. A few days ago. I meant to-"

“-everyone okay!”
The others were starting to reach them now. Roger’s being the first. He must have really floored it, because last time Peter saw him he was on the other side of the compound, but there he was skidding to a stop beside them both, breathing heavily.

“Are you both alright?” He went on, eyes rolling over Peter and Tony.

“Yeah, we’re good.” Tony sighed, beginning to heave himself up. “One of us is totally grounded from patrolling for a few days – Christ I sound like my dad, how does this keep happening – but other than that—”

“Ah, that arm does not look so fine.”

Scott had popped back into normal size beside them all, and was staring down at Peter’s dislocated arm with equal amounts of disgust and concern.

“What arm?” Tony asked rounding back down on Peter and finally noticing the arm Peter was currently cradling to his chest. “Kid!!”

“It’s fine.” Peter gushed, pushing up to his feet with his good hand and grimacing when it put pressure on his ribs. “Really. It’s just dislocated. It’ll be fine in a few hours. Same with my ribs.”

“What ribs?!” Tony protested, moving closer to Peter and seizing his good shoulder again before running a gentle hand across Peter’s torso. Peter couldn’t help the groan that slipped through his lips when his ribs protested painfully at even the gentle pressure.

“Okay,” Tony said, pulling away and resting a hand on Peter’s back, marching him towards the compound. “You’re done.”

“No! No. Really. I can still help. I-I can—”

“You,” Tony cut Peter off. “Have a date with an X-ray and a very large icepack.”

Peter groaned, but didn’t bother arguing.

He could already feel his shoulder trying to heal – but with the bone out of place the whole thing was starting to set a little strangely. Yeah. Probably better to fix that.

“-Brucie-bear!” Tony called, plundering through several different cupboards in the medical room. “Where are the micro-freezers?”

“The what?” Bruce’s voice called from another room down the hall – where he was taking a closer look at the X-rays of Peter’s ribs.

“The micro-freezers,” Tony screamed back, heaving a frustrated sigh when he came up empty in another cupboard. “You know. The mini, instant, icepack things I made a few months back.”

“I don’t know, Tony.” Bruce called. “Just use a real icepack.”

“No,” Tony groaned, slipping out of the med-room and into the hallway.

His voiced echoed loudly through the compound’s basement level.

“These were so cool! They set on the skin and—”

“Didn’t they burn you the first time you used them?”
Yeah. But I fixed all that-

Peter was sprawled out on a med-bed, newly aligned shoulder strapped down to ensure everything stayed where it was supposed to while it healed. His ribs had been looked at, and deemed a clean break, so there was nothing to do but wait for it all to heal. It’d only be a few hours. But still, a few hours of lying around doing nothing. Ugh.

At least Tony had been entertaining to watch as he flitted about the med-room playing with all of the equipment. That is, until Bruce had come in and banned him from touching anything after he got halfway through making a sentient defibrillator. Tony had been naturally outraged, while Bruce’s exasperation rose with every syllable.

"Tony you made an AI out of a blender." Bruce had reminded him, eying him critically.

"Wha-" Tony had squeaked, pressing a shocked hand to his heart. "You love Frederic-"

"-and you can't even use the blender anymore! As soon as you start to put anything in, it turns on and tries to blend your fingers off!"

"He's vivacious." Tony insisted, with a shrug. "And he likes blueberries, so you have to put them in first."

The whole conversation had come to a dramatic ending when Bruce had all but banned Tony from the room, and Tony had stalked around in search of his micro-freezers – which Peter was honestly not sold on. Though he would take a real icepack right about now. The joints in his shoulder were really starting to ache.

"-here."

A frozen bag of peas appeared under Peter’s nose.

Peter looked up at Rogers, who had appeared in the room out of nowhere.

The others had called off the training exercise as soon as Peter had fallen. They’d all loitered a little while Bruce looked him over, but once he’d been given the all clear they’d all dispersed so shower and settle in for the night. All except Tony and Bruce, who had hung around to bicker and keep Peter company.

Peter had assumed Rogers had cleared out with the others, but apparently not.

"Peas?" Peter asked, probably a little more dryly than the man deserved. He was trying to be nice after all. Sort of. Maybe. “Really?”

Rogers shrugged, setting them down next to Peter on the bed. “I can go find Tony and his skin melting micro-freezers if you like?”

“Nah,” Peter denied quickly, pulling the peas towards him and pressing them hard against his shoulder. “These are fine.”

Rogers nodded a little awkwardly, but he didn’t leave.

“How’s school going? Anything-” He began, but Peter cut him off.

“Sorry, but I don’t really want to make small talk with you.”

Yeah. That was definitely harsh, but Peter really wasn’t in the mood to be nice to Rogers. Not that
he was even in the mood to be nice to Rogers. But if the Cap wanted to argue then –

“Fair enough.”

Peter’s eyes snapped up to meet the blue irises staring down at him softly. So damn sincere. Wait. What. A serious case of Déjà vu washed over Peter, and he blamed it for throwing him off-guard, because before he knew it he was calling out to Rogers.

“Mr. Stark told me what happened.” Peter blabbered, and Rogers stopped midway to the door. “In Siberia.”

The Captain turned, slowly, eyes falling on Peter again. Cautious eyes this time.

“He did?”

“Yeah.” Peter went on. Well, he’d dug himself into a hole, might as well make a crater out of it. “He said it was both of your fault’s.” Peter said carefully, watching Rogers for any hint of emotion. There was none. The man stared down at Peter solemnly. Never moving to interrupt. “That the whole thing, blowing way out of hand, it was kinda everyone losing their cool.”

“It wasn’t.”

Scratch that interrupt part.

“What?” Peter asked, thrown off. God. If this asshole was about to blame the whole thing on Tony then Peter was –

“It wasn’t everyone’s fault. And it certainly wasn’t Tony’s.” Rogers said, his eyes never falling. “It was mine. Just mine.” There was a sternness in his voice that Peter hadn’t expected. “And don’t let Tony tell you any different.”

“But – he said-”

“I let my personal feelings on – well, just about everything – get the better of me. And Tony paid for it. So did Rhoye. And the others. You. None of us should have been at that airport. Or in Siberia. And if I’d just been honest with Tony from the beginning, we wouldn’t have been.”

That rendered Peter silent. Rogers sighed, and then moved forward. He took a seat on the edge of the bed, by Peter’s legs.

“What do you mean?” Peter asked, when his head finally wrapped around the Captain’s words.

Rogers stared at him for a minute – taking in his evident confusion – before shaking his head softly.

“That’s not my story to tell.” He said soberly. Something about his voice kept Peter from arguing that particular point.

Peter opened his mouth to say something else, but Roger’s spoke first. And Peter’s words faded away.

“Tony’s a good man. Better than he knows, and I’m glad you’ve got his six.” Roger’s said, a soft smile curving at his lips. It didn’t reach his eyes though. “He needs someone to remind him of that every now and again.”
Peter sat up a little straighter.

“I do.” Peter said firmly. “Have his six.” He added.

“Good.” Rogers said without missing a beat. He leaned forward, just an inch. “And I have yours.” He said, staring straight into Peter’s eyes. If it had been anyone else it might have been awkward, but from coming from Rogers the declaration held weight.

So. Damn. Sincere.

“I mean it. If you ever need anything, I’ll be there.” Roger’s said. “I’ll have Tony program my number into your suit. You can call me night or day. I’ll answer.”

For a second neither of them said anything. What do you say to that? Especially considering Peter was starting to feel really conflicted about that man. I mean, he still hurt Tony, and that was one hundred percent not okay no matter what had happened –

“This team-” Steve said, breaking Peter from his wild thoughts. The Captain’s eyes had fallen while Peter was lost in thought. They were now staring at his hands, which were clenched together tightly in his lap. “This team is the most important thing in the world to me, and I won’t anyone on it down again.”

“What about your friend?”

Peter hadn’t meant to ask. He really hadn’t. But, god, he was so curious. He hadn’t dared bring it up with Tony, but he really wanted to know. He’d been in Germany, seen the soldier, fought him, and yet he knew nothing.

“He’s safe.” Rogers replied. “A very long way away.” He added gravely. “Truth is, I clung to him when I found out he was alive. Clung to the idea of him, as if by holding onto him I could hold onto what little I had of my old world.” Rogers’ eyes drifted, and Peter didn’t have to be psychic to know that he was an age away. And then he wasn’t. His eyes were back, focused on Peter. Sad, yes. But not lost. “But this my world now, different as it is. I have friends here. Purpose. And I don’t know where he fits in, in that. Or if he can.” Rogers ran an exhausted hand through his hair. “I don’t know him anymore, not really. And he doesn’t know me.”

Peter stared at the older man – half of him wanting to reach out, but not sure how.

Rogers cleared his throat and glanced back up at Peter, his face a little taken aback.

“I’m sorry,” Rogers’ said, shaking his head, “You don’t want to hear about all this. Get some rest, kid-”

“No – I do. I-I mean, if you want to tell me, I do. I don’t mind.” Peter babbled. He glanced down to the bag of peas that were resting on his shoulder. It had just about stopped aching now.

“And I get it.” Peter murmured. “If something happened to Ned – my friend – I think I’d probably do some pretty stupid shit, too.”

Rogers chuckled softly, but again, it didn’t reach his eyes.

He pulled himself off the bed and to his feet, moving back towards to the door. Before he did though, he pressed a soft hand on Peter’s uninjured shoulder.

“Rest up, kid.”
Peter called out to him before he could disappear down the hall.

“Rogers?”

“Steve.” Rogers corrected, turning back to Peter. “You can call me Steve.”

“Steve,” Peter said, testing the word on his tongue. It felt weird, but not wrong. “Touch Mr. Stark again and I’ll fling you off the Manhattan bridge. Hard.”

“Good.”

Peter’s eyebrows rose almost all the way into his hair, but Rogers – Steve – was already gone.

A crash sounded from a room at the other end of the basement, and Peter sat up a little higher – trying to peak down the hallway. A second later Bruce’s voice echoed through the basement. Loudly.

“Oh, for god sake, TONY!”

Chapter End Notes

I know....feelings....
I got quite a few mixed reviews about adding Steve into the mix, both positive and negative - and I agree with most. Steve was wrong. He made the wrong choice. He blindly put Bucky above everything. What I don't agree with is that he did it out of malice, or even because he thought it was right. He admitted that at the end of the film.
I like to think he genuinely regrets what he did to Tony. To all of them.
And in this fic, he definitely does.
That does not mean that he has abandoned Bucky! Not even a little. But what is he doing in this fic is trying to figure out his place, in this world, and where Bucky fits into it. That is, after all, what his arc has been through the last few films - especially Winter Soldier. He has no place anymore. But he wants one. He wants purpose again. A place again.
THIS DOES NOT MEAN HE IS FORGIVEN!
Especially not by Peter.
Oh, darling, grudge-holding, pouting Peter.
And Tony needs no comment. He is perfect. Damaged, but goddamn perfect.

...Also, to those wondering about Wanda...I may or may not write another fix to match this. And in that fic she would feature heavily. She is a favourite of mine, and I just feel like there is a lot about her life and choices that the films aren't touching on at the moment. If that fic does become a reality, you can expect a whole lot more Peter whump, and lots of Wanda whump to match...
Cause I'm cruel...and a sucker for the babies of the team...and their various, emotionally stunted parental figures...particularly Tony

Let me know if that would be something you're interested in?

Until the next chapter...which I will warn you, is going to be intense...
“They’re going to be fine – both of them.” Clint assured him, though he understood the trepidation. He’d carry the memory of Tony, well over the edge of hysteria, tearing the unresponsive boy out of a med-suit on the Compound’s front lawn for the rest of his life.

(Trigger Warning: attempted suicide, mentions of suicide)

Hey all! I can't even describe what all of your support means to me. Every single comment means so much! And I'm just having such a fantastic time writing!

That being said...here is the next chapter!

Before we get into it though I would like to let everyone know about the TRIGGER WARNING for this chapter! There is a SUICIDE ATTEMPT - though the circumstances around it are a little convoluted - and quite a few REFERENCES TO SUICIDE. If this is a trigger for anyone please read with caution/don't read at all. Be safe everyone!

With that all out there! Please do enjoy!

The world was falling. Or at least Peter’s was.

And what did it really matter if the ground below his feet was still here, when what had kept him grounded to it was gone. All gone.

All dead.

All Peter’s fault.

Higher.

There was a voice in Peter’s head – it had to be his though. Who else could get in there? Who else was left, too?


But god Peter’s legs hurt. Every square inch of him ached, but he kept climbing, one stair at a time. That was all he had left in him. One foot in front of the other. He couldn’t stop. Not ever. Stopping meant thinking. Thinking meant feeling.
And he couldn’t feel this. He just couldn’t. It would kill him.

*Higher.*

He clutched at the handrail, using it to haul himself up every time he stumbled, but he kept climbing. The concrete steps were cold on his bare feet. He’d lost his shoes somewhere along the long walk home.

The white walls began to blur together. And Peter blurred with them.

Oh god. He was alone. Alone.

*Higher.*

Peter’s hands slammed into the metal-door at the top of the staircase. It took him a full minute to realise that he couldn’t go up any further, and when he did the thoughts that were threatening to kill him started to pour right back in. No. No, he couldn’t. He couldn’t think about this. Couldn’t –

*Keep going.*

The door grinded against its metal frame loudly as Peter swung it open. The lock had been broken for as long as Peter had lived in the building, and because of that the roof had become a bit of a hideout for him when he was younger. He used to go up with a blanket, and a pair of binoculars, and watch the New York skyline. Uncle Ben or May would bring him hot chocolate and sit with him – Ben would talk about the planets, and May would talk to Peter about school. And when they ran out of things to talk about they’d sing Beatles songs for hours. Or try to. They always botched the lyrics, and ended up making their own.

May.

Oh god. May.

No. No. He couldn’t think about that. Not that.

The roof was deserted. It was only ten o’clock, the city’s nightlife barely kicking off below, but there was already chill in the air that swept through Peter and threatened to bring him to his knees.

He stumbled out of the staircase and onto the roof, his bare feet carrying him numbly towards the ledge. This wasn’t real. Was it? This couldn’t be real. The skyline was all wrong. It was…empty. There was no more wonder in it. No more thrill. Peter had stared out across that skyline for majority of his life, and never once had he not been able to find something glorious about it. Possibilities hidden it.

He used to sit alone and watch the sky for hours just to catch a hint of red and gold soaring above Manhattan.

But the red and gold was gone.

He’d fallen, and he wasn’t getting back up.

And neither was Peter.

*Climb onto the ledge.*

What. What? Wait –

*Climb onto the ledge.*
Climb onto the ledge. His feet were moving before he really knew what was happening. They were dragging him closer to the ledge. Stepping up onto the cool brick – and freezing there.

Peter had never known New York to be silent. Not once. He’d hated that in the beginning. How the sirens never seemed to stop, and the crowds never ended, but he’d grown used to it. Now he couldn’t imagine his life without that noise – without the constant reminder of life around him.

It was gone now. The noise and the life.

Oh god. What was he –

Move closer to the edge.

Peter’s feet inched forward.

What was he doing? Why he up here? No. This was wrong. This was all wrong –

They’re gone. They’re all gone.

Because of you.

Oh god. They were gone. What had he done?

A choking sound ripped its way out of Peter’s throat. The sheer force of the sob that heaved through his chest nearly sent him plummeting from the ledge.

The skyline blurred as tears burned at his eyes. Stained his cheeks. He couldn’t breathe. Sobs were tearing through him now, taking every breath before he could choke it down.

God. He was dying.

He couldn’t breath. He was dying –

A whirring sound erupted above Peter, but he could barely hear it above his own gasps for breath. It didn’t matter anyway. Nothing mattered now. Everything that had mattered was gone.

Step forward.

The voice in his head was soft. Reasonable. That sounded reasonable. Didn’t it? But. No. Wait –

Step forward.

God his chest hurt. He couldn’t breathe. It hurt so much –

Something hard, and metallic landed on the roof behind him – and with a whoosh Peter wasn’t alone on the roof anymore.

“Kid?”


“Kid?”


Something inside Peter broke. He felt it. Somewhere deep in his chest something shattered, and
the hole it left ached. Everything he was started to cave inside. His life. His future. It crumbled into that gaping hole.

*Step forward –*

“-I’m not gone. I’m not! I’m right here. Just turn around. I’m right here.”

*Don’t*, the voice in his head whispered. *Just step forward –*

“-Peter, turn around! *Look at me!*”

*Don’t. It’s all a lie. Step forward –*

The voice in his head sounded so sure. So calm. So unlike Peter. He wanted to do what it said. Everything would be fine so long as he listened. Everything would be fine –

But Peter had never been able to deny Tony.

Slowly – more slowly than Peter had ever moved in his life – Peter glanced behind him.

Tony stood a few feet behind Peter, dressed in nothing but an oil stained tank and a pair of sweats – with his arms held out. His eyes were wide as they took Peter in.

Terrified.

One of Tony’s arms reached out a little further, and he took a small step forward.

“Hey. Hey, it’s just me,” Tony breathed, inching forward. His hands were shaking. Peter couldn’t look away. Tony’s hands never shook. Never. He was an engineer. Steady hands were what he was known for – but they were definitely shaking now. “Just me. Just Tony and Peter.”

“No.” Peter shook his head. “No you’re gone.”

Everything was gone now. The hole in his chest had swallowed everything Peter was. All he was left with a strange feeling of weightlessness.

*Step forward.* Peter slid a foot towards the edge.

“NO!” Tony lunged forward, but quickly ground to a halt when Peter turned back to him, drawing away, closer to the edge. “No, I’m here. I’m really here, I promise! J-just come down, and we can talk.”

Peter stared down at Tony blankly. He was vaguely aware that he was breathing again. His sobs had been swallowed by the hole in his chest as well. He was just numb now. Whatever had been suffocating him, though, must have been contagious because now Tony seemed to be having trouble breathing. The older man’s chest was heaving, breaths coming in strained pants, as his incredibly wide eyes stared up at Peter. One hand still outstretched, and only a foot or so behind Peter.

“I know you’re confused right now,” Tony went on, hand never lowering. “But this isn’t you. Okay? You don’t want this.” He said, words tripping over one another in his rush to get them out. “You remember? There was a man, a man who was infecting kids with *something*, and then they…died. Remember? You caught one. You caught a boy falling from one of the buildings on twenty-third – saved his life. You must have started looking for the man – even when I *told* you not to!” Tony broke off, heaving in a large breath that he looked like he desperately needed. If Peter weren’t so sure that the man before him was a hallucination he would have been a little
worried. He was so pale that Peter could see veins in his temples throbbing wildly – even in the dull, rooftop lighting. “Peter, you don’t want to do this. You need to remember. You need to remember the man – okay? I think he’s gotten to you. Please. Y-You need to try and remember-“

Peter shook his head, hard. Trying to cast the image of Tony away. He wasn’t real. He was just there to taunt him.

“You’re gone.” Peter muttered, his head still shaking. His vision was starting to blur. “You’re gone.”

“I’m not gone. I swear, I’m right here, Peter.” Tony argued, eyes wide and honest - as open as Peter had ever seen them. “I’m loosing about ten years off my life for every minute you stay up there, but other than that, just fine. J-just come down-“

No. The other voice was back. No. Step forward. You’ll feel better. This is what you deserve.

“No. I can’t. I can’t-” Peter wasn’t sure if he was talking to the voice or Tony. Or both. He couldn’t bring himself to follow either. To step forward or back. He just stayed where he was, balanced on the edge of the rooftop.

“You can! You can. Just one step – just take one step, and come down. Okay?” Tony insisted, inching forwards again, with his hand still outstretched. “Here, I’ll help you. I-”

“No.” Peter said, growing more agitated. His whole body was beginning to shake. “You’re dead. Dead. You. May. Ned.” Peter rambled. The words echoed from his lips, but were still cloudy in his mind. They were just so foreign to him that he couldn’t make sense of them. “My fault. My fault.”

“No. No, we’re not. I’m right here, and May’s just downstairs – I swear.” Tony cut in, one hand still outstretched. “And Ned, Ned’s wherever Ned is, but I promise he’s fine. We’re all fine. You’re the one that’s been hurt. This man, he’s done something to you – but it’s okay, we can fix it. We’re going to fix it, you and me, I promise. All you have to do is take my hand.”

Peter glanced down at that hand. It was just inches from him now. He could reach out and hold on without even stretching – and god he wanted to. Wasn’t that what he’d been doing since the day he met Tony? Reaching out. Before then even.

The man had offered him so much. A mentor. A purpose.

A friend.

And Peter had reached out and taken all of it. It was all he’d ever wanted. To mean something. To do something. And Tony had given him the chance to have, and do, both.

“Step down.” Tony said again, his voice starting to break. He stared up at Peter. Terror in his eyes, as if Peter were the ghost among them, not Tony. “Please, Peter. Take my hand, and step down.”

Tony had given him so much. So much.

And Peter had disappointed him again, and again.

And now – for the last time.

Step forward.

“I’m sorry.” Peter whispered. “I’m so sorry Mr. Stark.”
“NO!”

Peter slid one foot forward. And fell.

Or, at least, he started to. He started to feel the air beneath him, and the familiar sense of weightlessness that came with falling through the streets he knew so well.

And then something strong, and desperate, seized a hold of one of his arms and clung to him.

Tony was above him – halfway over the ledge himself in an attempt to keep Peter from falling the 30 odd floors to the pavement – gripping Peter’s arm with one, strong hand.

“Hold onto me!”

Tony’s voice screamed above Peter – but Peter couldn’t really hear him. Or maybe he could – but words were fuzzy. Everything was becoming fuzzy.

He’d done what he’d been told to do. He jumped – just like the man said. But he didn’t feel better. The man said he would feel better. That it would put everything right – but it wasn’t right. It couldn’t be.

Tony was still screaming.

“Hold onto me!” The older man yelled from above him – his breathing skyrocketing to hyperventilation as he clung to Peter with wild eyes. He was so pale now. He really must be dead. B-but. He was here. He was clinging to Peter. God. Peter’s head was starting to ache.

The man had said. T-The man had said –

“-don’t let go!”

But Peter had already.

And now the world was letting go of him.

Somewhere – in the distant reaches of his numb fingertips – Peter felt himself slipping. And then he was falling again.

Something hard and cold smacked into Peter’s back – knocking the air out of him. But then, whatever it was wasn’t just on his back. It was circling his arms. His legs. Clasping around his chest and face. Encapsulating him. And then he was no longer falling.

Or, he didn’t think so.

No. Now he was flying.

Maybe he’d fallen already – hit the ground at a hundred miles an hour – and this was what came after. The man had promised it would make everything better. Was this it? Was this better?

Peter’s metal bound feet smacked into the ground, and then, without warning, his prison opened and Peter crumpled. Every inch of him was numb now. Nothing moved. Nothing had to – he’d fulfilled his purpose. He’d jumped.

The man hadn’t told him what to do after.

Before Peter could hit the ground something else grabbed a hold of him. This something was
warm though. Its grip on Peter was strong, and unyielding, but it was warm. So different from the cold air, the cool concrete and his metal prison.

“-Peter!? Christ, please, PETER!?”

Peter felt himself being lowered to the ground. It was cool concrete – but not pavement. It was too smooth to be pavement. Was he back on the roof?

With Tony?

“Peter!? Come on, Peter, look at me!”

That same warmth wrapped around Peter. Fingertips slid along his scalp, while a warm hand against his chest. Those same fingertips pulled away from his head and pressed against his neck. They were shaking.

Tony?

Peter was shaking too. But…gently. He was swaying. The warm, solid, mass that he was pressed against was rocking, back and forth. And Peter was rocking with it.

Slowly – so slowly – Tony’s voice started to filter through the sieve that was Peter’s brain.

“-No, no. Please. Christ no! Pleas-”

The fingertips that were pressing into Peter’s neck moved, fluttering up and down his neck before pressing down again, painfully hard.

Peter could faintly feel his pulse beating against the fingers.

And, apparently, so could whoever was holding him.

“Oh god!” The words came out as barely a breath, but Peter could feel them above him. Warm arms closed more firmly around him, and a forehead dropped down to rest on his own. “Oh Christ, thank-you. Thank-you.”

For a few minutes there was nothing. Peter just…existed. And so did the man above him. The man heaved in several breaths – Peter rising and falling with each one as he was still clenched against his chest – and continued to rock.

It sounded like Tony. Hell – it even felt like Tony.

Peter knew those hands. They were scarred and rough. Calloused to the core. They swept over Peter’s hands when they were in the lab, working on the detailed sections of his web shooters. They clapped him on the shoulder more times then he could count. And damn were they strong. He thought it every time he did something stupid, or dangerous, and those hands clasped onto him like chains. Engineer’s hands. Strong and steady.

But the man had said he was gone.

The man had said –

“-Peter. Peter! You need to look at me. Look at me! Come on, give me something, kid, please-”

Those fingertips were on his face again. Ghosting over his forehead, and eyes. Hovering over his lips as he breathed.
At the feeling of Peter’s breath against his finger the man clutching Peter let out another heaving breath, and the hand on Peter’s face disappeared for a moment.

Peter faded with it.

“-Bruce! Bruce.” Tony’s voice broke back through the haze.

“Yeah, I have him. H-he didn’t fall. Or he did – he just didn’t. He d-didn’t – I have him. I have him, but he’s not okay. His eyes are open, but he’s not responding.”

Huh. Peter’s eyes were open? That was odd. He couldn’t see anything. He couldn’t…well…anything. He was so numb that he wasn’t entirely sure he had a body at all anymore.

“-he has a pulse – but he’s barely breathing. I need you to head down to the workshop, okay?” Tony’s rushed words swayed in and out. Peter only caught a few hear and there. He had more important things to worry about. Like whether he still had a body. He wasn’t sure if it was a concern or not, but it was worth pondering.

“There’s a new med-suit that I’ve been working on, but it’s still plugged into the configurator. You’ll know the one when you see it. I need you to unplug everything and then set it to online – I can take-over from here – no. No. I need that suit. He’s barely breathing as it is, okay, if he stops in the normal suit on the way – no, okay, just no. The one in the workshop has a respirator, so if – if anything happens mid-flight it can keep him alive until he gets there-”

Peter must still have a body. He was definitely tied down to something – and god was it heavy. And Tony was saying…something. Something about breathing. You needed a body to do that right? And if you had a body, you needed to do it. Huh. Peter wasn’t so sure that he was though. He couldn’t feel –

He couldn’t feel – anything.

He didn’t feel cold, or sore, or anything else that he probably should have been feeling. He could barely feel the flat hand that was rubbing roughly along his sternum – trying to spur some response from his heavy lungs.

“-come on, kid. I know you have good lungs.” Tony’s strained voice weaved into focus, breaking through Peter’s thoughts. “I’ve heard you talk for hours without taking a breath. You need to use them. Come on, take a deep breath.”

This was nothing like the man said it would be.

He had said Peter would be safe once he fell. Everyone would be safe – but he didn’t feel safe. And Tony didn’t sound safe. He sounded scared.

This wasn’t what the man had promised. This wasn’t…right.

Peter was not right.

“-my anxiety levels are already well off the charts tonight.” Tony’s voice cut through Peter’s addled mind, “We are not adding in a few rounds of hysterical CPR, so, just, keep breathing. Okay? Keep breathing.”

Keep breathing. Keep breathing.

Peter could do that. Couldn’t he?
All of a sudden he wasn’t so sure. God. He was really beginning to not like this. T-This nothingness. It was everywhere. It was in his hands, and his feet, which he still couldn’t feel. It was in his bones and his chest. In his lungs – which, no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t make move any more.

“-come on, kid – Peter – please, please, just keep breathing-”

Keep breathing. Keep breathing.

Keep breathin-

This wasn’t what the man had promised.

______________________________

Peter woke slowly – sunlight streaming into his eyes from every direction. God. Had he forgotten to close the blinds again? And, damn, that was some bright sunlight. Had he slept in? May was going to kill him if he was late for school. He had a calculus quiz, and decathlon practise, and god MJ was going to kill him if –

Something pulled him back when he tried to sit up.

Reaching up he moved to rip whatever it was away, only to meet a long piece of plastic tubbing that wound around his face and under his noise.

A nasal cannula.

Peter’s eyes shot open, and everything swum into focus.

He was in the Avengers Compound. The med-bay. Bare chested, and wrapped in a bundle of the softest blankets he’d ever had the pleasure of meeting. His chest, though, which remained uncovered, was littered with monitoring wires and other, various, medical equipment.

A heart-monitor was beeping steadily beside him.

Oh shit.

May was definitely going to kill him.

An echo of voices just down the hall from the med-bay broke him from his building panic. The door of the med-bay had been left slightly ajar – and Peter strained to make out the voices.

“-No. No. I don’t care-”

“-Tony-”

“-I’m going.”

It was Tony and Steve – and they weren’t being very quiet.
Peter made an effort to calm his breathing, and keep his heart rate steady. The last thing he needed was for the machines around him to start going off, and for both men to come running in before Peter could work out what happened.

He knew from experience that Tony tended to downplay things when he got hurt. He never lied – Peter could tell at least that much – but it was always clear that Tony only gave him very abridged versions. Whether for Peter’s sake or Tony’s, Peter wasn’t sure.

And considering Peter remembered absolutely nothing he was pretty sure something bad had happened.

“-going where?” Steve’s voice echoed down the hall. “You don’t even know where this man is.”

“I’ll find him.” Tony’s voice insisted, harshly. “I have all the other victims locations – and Peters – he must circle somewhere around there. He’ll pop up eventually.”

“-and then what? You’ll kill him? Right in the middle of New York – with hundreds of witnesses-”

“Yes!” Tony’s voiced thundered. “You’re fucking right I will. He’s killing kids Steve.”

Peter’s breath caught in his throat.

“Even the ones that don’t throw themselves from skyscrapers, or bridges, half of them don’t make it to medical help! Respiratory, and full cardiac, failure sets in pretty much straight away-”

“I know. I know, Tony-”

“NO! You don’t know!” Tony roared – loud enough to make even Peter flinch. “You don’t know!”

Tony’s voice broke on the last word. The hallway fell silent.

“Tony.” Steve’s voice was soft now – its previous edge having faded away. “Tony, he’s going to be fine.”

“No. No, I didn’t-you weren’t-”

“He’s fine.” Steve’s voiced stressed. “Between you and Bruce he’s been checked over about a hundred times in the last few hours – and he’s fine. He’s breathing, he’s moving. He’s responding – just like the others who got to medical help in time. They were fine – and he’s going to be too.” Steve’s voice paused, but then went on at a murmur. “And when he is, what kind of example are you going to be setting.”

Tony’s silence was cutting.

“This kid worships the ground you walk on.” Steve implored, “If you go out there and kill this man, and get yourself thrown in prison, what does that say to him?”

“It says that kids are going to stop walking off buildings-” Tony argued, “He touched my kid, I’m not going to-”

“I’m not suggesting that we let this stand. Not even slightly.” Steve cut in, harshness returning. “I’m not arguing because I care about what happens to whoever this asshole is – I want to kill him too, believe me – but what I do care about is what happens this team. I’m not going to let you throw your life away, and go to prison, when we can do this right. Together.”
“And you’d be okay with that?” Tony’s voice challenged, “Killing him?”

“The man is killing children.” Steve deadpanned. “I’d be very okay with that.”

The two fell silent again.

“Hmm.” Tony hummed, softly. “Maybe you do have a dark side.”

He didn’t sound all that displeased at the thought.

Peter leaned over the side of the bed a little further – straining to hear more – but one of the wires attached to his chest pulled tight and the machine on Peter’s left tilted dangerously.

“Oh shit!”

The machine crashed to the ground, cracking in several places and ripping the connecting wire from Peter’s chest.

Tony and Steve scrambled inside the room.

“I’m sorry! God, so sorry Mr. Stark.” Peter gushed, sitting up and leaning further over the bed for the machine. “I-I just – it fell – I got it. I swear I’ll-”

Strong arms latched onto Peter’s shoulders and heaved him upright on the bed.

“Don’t worry about the damn machine,” Tony said, not even sparing a glance at the clearly broken – probably very expensive – piece of medical equipment. “Lay down. How do you feel?” Tony pushed Peter back down into his mound of pillows and took a seat on the edge of the bed – watching Peter warily. “Do you know where you are? What happened? Does anything hurt? Your chest – does your chest hurt? Does it hurt to breath?”

“-Tony.”

Steve had wound his way around the bed and was now leaning down on Peter’s other side – taking him in with worried eyes. He let out a soft chuckle when Tony’s eyes flicked up to him.

“He might actually answer if you give him a second.”

Tony didn’t acknowledge the captain, but when he turned his attention right back to Peter he stayed silent – heaving in several deep breaths.


Steve and Tony shared a look.

“What do you remember?” Tony asked, slowly. “The last thing?”

“I-I was at the Deli on twenty-first.” Peter said, struggling to put the hazy pieces together. “With Ned, I think. Ned was riling up Murph – Mr. Delmar’s cat – and – I don’t know. I don’t – what happened?” Panic started to set in. “You said kids were dying? Ned? Is Ned okay? What-”

“Ned’s fine,” Tony cut in, inching forward and placing a warm hand on Peter’s shoulder. “He’s fine. So is May. Everyone’s fine.” He said. “You need to take a breath, okay, several preferably. Just relax.”

“But what happened?”
“You were,” Tony shot another look at Steve. “Well, for lack of a better word, whammied.”

“Whammied?”

“Yeah.” Tony sighed. “There’s a man who’s been targeting kids around the city – and somehow he gets in their heads, and makes them-”

Peter’s stomach dropped.

“Makes them what?” Peter asked – but he had a feeling he already knew the answer.

Tony opened his mouth to answer, but the words seemed to catch in his throat. He stared at Peter. Eyes wide and…lost.

“He makes them walk off buildings, or bridges, anything tall enough to-” Steve answered instead, his voice fading. Peter didn't need him to finish.

Peter nodded slowly. “How many?”

“That doesn’t-”

“Please, Steve, how many?”

“Eight.”

“Eight!” Peter yelped, shooting upright despite Tony’s attempts to keep him horizontal. “In one night?! How?”

Steve’s eyebrows shot together, confusion in every line of his face.

“Peter,” Tony spoke finally, watching Peter warily again. “What day did you go to the Deli with Ned?”

“Yesterday,” Peter said at once. “Tuesday.”

Tony and Steve shared one last look.

“Peter,” Tony began. “Today is Sunday.”

“What?” Peter asked, shaking his head. “No. No, I – but. Oh god. May. I have to call May – she’ll be freaking out, I-”

“Hey, hey, calm down,” Tony insisted, shoving Peter back into the pillows again. “I called her, she knows where you are. And you’ve only been here since last night, okay? Whatever he did to you, it must have messed with your head a little. Made you loose a few days.”

“What did he do?” Peter asked, hesitantly. Not entirely sure he wanted an answer. “Or, what did I do?”

For a few seconds no one answered. Both men just stared down at Peter.

Finally Steve opened his mouth to speak – but Tony cut him off.

“You didn’t do anything. He whammied you, you went for a bit of a wander, and then I found you. Got you back to the Compound and fixed up. That’s it.”

Peter didn’t know whether to be offended at the clear lie, or grateful. He got the impression that he really didn’t want to know – but at the same time he really did.
“That’s it?” Peter pressed, but his heart wasn’t in it. If the other kids had…then what had he done?

Tony stared at him for a moment.

“Something nearly happened,” The older man murmured, his voice low, and eyes fixed unwaveringly on Peter. “Very nearly – but it didn’t. And now you’re fine. That’s it.” Tony’s voice hardened at the end.

Peter nodded.

“So what do we do now?” Peter asked, more than ready to change the subject while he processed all of that. “How do we find him?”

Tony’s typical Tony-ness returned with a vigour.

“Oh no, there is no ‘we’. There will be no ‘we’ in this. You’re out.” Tony said, leaning back and levelling a glare in Peter’s direction. “You are confined to this room for at least the next two days, and-”

“What?” Peter argued, pushing against the arm that Tony held out to keep him from sitting up again. “No! I can help. Mr. Stark, please, I can-”

“Nope. You’re benched.”

“But-”

“No.”

“Steve!” Peter appealed to the man across from him. “Come on, please!”

Steve smiled softly, but shook his head. “Sorry Pete, Tony’s right. You need to rest up. Let us handle this.”

“What! No-”

“You heard the man,” Tony cut him off, giving his shoulder one last squeeze before rising back to his feet. “America has spoken. Can’t argue with that. So you rest up, and Cap and I are going to head out and deal with this-”

“-that is no longer necessary.”

All three of their heads snapped up to the doorway where Clint Barton was leaning against the frame lazily. He shot a smile at Peter, as he looked him over.

“You look better kid. Feeling okay?”

“Yeah, I feel fine-” Peter said, but Tony cut him off.

“-what do you mean, ‘no longer necessary’?”

Barton stepped into the room, pulling a file out from where he had it pressed up against the doorway. He held it out to Tony.

“Meet Adrian Turner.” Barton said, as Tony snatched the file from his hands and began scanning over it. “He met an untimely end early this morning when he threw himself off a ninety-three story building on Broadway.”
“You’re sure this is him.” Steve said, leaning over the bed to read the file over Tony’s shoulder. Peter rose a little, trying to do the same, but Steve pushed him back down with a gentle hand without taking his eyes off the file. Rude.

“We have him on camera with one of the kids, doing something.” Barton nodded. “You can’t really see, but something happened, and then an hour later the kid jumped off his family’s apartment building in Chelsea.”

“So he’s dead. Turner.” Tony said. It wasn’t a question – but Barton answered anyway. Clearly sensing Tony’s need for validation.

“Yeah, he’s dead.”

“Good.” Tony shoved the file back into Barton’s arms and pulled away from the bed. He spent the next several minutes fluttering about the room – cleaning up the broken medical equipment on the ground, checking over the other machines around Peter that were reading his vitals, and then dragging over a plush armchair that had been resting in the corner of the room.

Steve and Clint exchanged a knowing glance, but before Peter could question it Barton was taking Tony’s now vacated place on the bed.

“You can’t pull this kind of shit with us, kid.” He said, smirking. “We’re all old men, we can’t take it.” He jerked a thumb towards Steve. “Especially him. He’s like a hundred now – he can’t take the stress.”

Peter huffed out a laugh, but couldn’t keep himself from watching Tony out of the corner of his eye. He’d abandoned the armchair by Peter’s bed and had turned his attention back to one of the fancy machines in the corner of the room that was monitoring Peter. Steve wandered over and murmured quietly to him.

“He’s okay.”

Peter eyes flicked back to Clint, whose voice had lowered to barely a murmur. But Peter could hear it.

“He’s okay,” Clint murmured again, his eyes never leaving Peter’s. “You really freaked him out on this one.” Peter’s eyes fell, shame wafting over him. Barton leaned forward, though, brushing a calloused hand over Peter’s bare shoulder. “He’ll be okay. You, just, lie low, heal up, and stick to grand-theft bicycles for a week or so, and he’ll be right as rain.”

“I’m sorry.” Peter whispered.

“Don’t be.” Barton’s voice, despite remaining low and out of range of both Tony and Steve, was hard. “This guy was a monster.”

“But I let him-”

“You didn’t let him do anything. What he did was wrong – and nothing that stemmed from it was your fault.” Barton argued, his voice leaving no room for argument. He was still murmuring – but there was a fire in his eyes. “Trust me. I’ve got some experience with mind-controlling assholes.”

Peter’s brow crinkled in confusion.

“I’ll tell you the story one day,” Barton said, nudging Peter’s shoulder playfully. “But for now, rest. And if you need anyone to talk to anyone about what happened, I’m here. And for a smart-ass, I’m a decent listener.” He shrugged.
Peter couldn’t help but laugh.

“Hey,” Tony cut in. He was back at the end of the bed, with Steve leaning against the doorframe at the end of the room. “What are you two talking about? Are you scheming? You two are not allowed to scheme. Okay? This building was not built to withstand your combined scheming forces.”

Peter opened his mouth to argue – but Barton beat him too it.

“Do your worst!” Barton mock cried, swirling around to Tony and glaring at him in challenge. The edges of his mouth betrayed him though, twitching as he fought off a grin. “You’ll never get us to talk!”

“Oh, Christ, get out.” Tony sighed, swatting the archer with a pillow from the opposite bed, before collapsing into the armchair he’d moved to the edge of Peter’s bed. “My migraine can’t handle this right now.”

“Sure, sure.” Barton agreed, good-naturedly, heaving himself off Peter’s bed and moving towards Steve at the door. He threw a wink at Peter. “Old man needs his beauty sleep.”

Peter barely held in a snicker and Tony launched the spare pillow across the room towards the archer.

Barton ducked easily, cackling as he skipped out of the room.

Steve followed him out, throwing a small smile towards Peter, and a nod at Tony, before ducking out the door.

Peter sunk back into his sheets, pulling the mound of blankets over his bare torso and settling in – waiting for Tony to follow the others out.

Only, he didn’t.

Instead he, too, relaxed. He slouched down in the armchair, resting his feet at the edge of Peter’s bed, and threw his head back to rest against the plush cushioning. Closing his eyes.

Peter stared.

And then stared some more.

“Yeah,” Tony muttered, not even opening his eyes. “Starting to get creepy, kid.”

“You don’t have to stay.” Peter insisted.

God, he’d taken up enough of the man’s time. Peter honestly had no idea how long he’d been in the Compound – but it must have been at least over-night from the way Tony described it. Peter must have taken him away from New York – and his huge work schedule. He shouldn’t be wasting anymore time with –

“I’m staying.” Tony muttered, slinking down in the armchair a little more to get comfortable, but not opening his eyes.

“You really don’t have to, really. I-I-” Peter began, the sheets crinkling loudly as he shifted up on his elbows.

“I’m staying, kid.” Tony said again, still not opening his eyes. He reached out a hand and pushed
Peter gently back down onto the bed. “So, stop talking, and get some sleep.”

Peter relented, sinking back down to the mattress and pulling the blankets back up. He shot a glance at the man beside him, sprawled across the armchair, and then closed his own eyes.

He was asleep within seconds.

“How long do you think it’ll take him to notice?”

Clint was leaning against the observation window that looked into the med-room, staring over at Tony and Peter as they slept.

“Notice what?”

Steve stood behind him – his face buried in the file Clint had brought with him – but every so often he threw a glance over at the sleeping pair as well. Clint nodded towards Tony’s prone figure in the armchair.

“That he’s practically adopted a child.” Clint said. He stared down at the two for a moment longer. “It suits him.”

Steve didn’t even bother hiding his next, quick, glance at the sleeping pair.

“Yeah, it does.”

Steve’s eyes fell back to the file a moment later.

“So, that’s it then?” Steve asked, flicking through the last few pages. Soaking it all in. “It’s all done. He just jumped off a building and did our job for us.”

Clint shrugged.

Steve’s questioning silence spoke volumes.

“Natasha might have helped him.” Clint admitted. Steve let out a put upon sigh, running an exhausted hand over his face. “He admitted to it. Everything. Every single kid – including Peter.” Clint explained, and Steve looked up. Fire in his eyes. “Peter caught him hassling a kid from his school – probably didn’t even put two and two together before he got hit.”

Steve threw another glance towards the boy sleeping just on the other side of the glass.

“Why?”

Clint didn’t need him to clarify the question. He knew exactly what he was asking. Clint had been asking himself the same thing since he heard about the first kid.

“He said he was addicted to the feeling – told Natasha he was helping them find peace.”

Clint spat the last word, his features twisting.

Steve went back to the file. Flipping through it a little more aggressively.
“Is there anything to trace back to her?” Steve asked. Clint threw him a disbelieving look – eyebrows in real danger of disappearing into his hairline. Steve nodded. “Well then, I guess we can just put it all to bed.”

“Yeah,” Clint sighed, pulling away from the glass and shooting one last look at Tony and Peter. “Right, well, I’m going to head home, and hug my kids.” He chuckled, but the sound was strained. Steve’s face twisted in understanding. “You’re welcome to join? I was thinking of having a fry-up?” Clint went on.

Steve shook his head softly.

“I might stick around here. Keep an eye on things.”

Clint didn’t need to follow his eye-line to know that he was still watching Tony and Peter.

“They’re going to be fine – both of them.” Clint assured him, though he understood the trepidation. He’d carry the memory of Tony, well over the edge of hysteria, tearing the unresponsive boy out of a med-suit on the Compound’s front lawn for the rest of his life.

“I know that.” Steve said with a small shrug. “Still, I can help out for a few days while they get back on their feet.”

A short bark of laughter burst through Clint’s lips.

“The entire building is practically an AI. What exactly does it need help with?”

“I can make a better breakfast spread than Dum-E.” Steve argued, with a small smirk.

“That is true.”

Steve nodded, and then paused, considering.

“What do mutated, spider teenagers eat for breakfast?” He asked, brow furrowing. “Well, if my thirteen year old boy is any indication – everything.” Clint chuckled, moving towards the elevator just across from them both.

“I can handle that.”

“And sleep deprived geniuses – when they can finally drag themselves away from their adorable, adopted children – eat coffee. No boiling required. He’ll just eat the beans.” Clint went on, stepping inside the metal elevator and moving to the side as Steve joined him.

“I’m pretty sure I could put that in a pancake.”

Chapter End Notes

...And they will be seasoned with patriotism!

Hope you enjoyed that piece of shameless whump.....

...because believe me, the next one is going to be 2731794832048% worse...

Poor Tony. That's the only spoiler I'm giving. Poor, poor Tony.
Free Fall

Chapter Summary

The image of a small, frail, body being thrown from the sky flashed across his mind, replaying like a bad cassette recording. Again. And again. And a hundred more times after that.
Peter.
Peter had fallen.
Peter had fallen and Tony had done nothing.

Chapter Notes

First of, oh my god, I’m so sorry! It took sooooooo long to write this. I don’t know what happened. My muse just abandoned me right at the start, and I ended up re-writing the whole thing about 3 times.
But here it is! At last, the final segment of this 5+1.
And it’s a bit of a doozy. Prepare to cry your eyes out.

Secondly, as with all of the other chapters, I do not have a beta and therefore all mistakes in this chapter are my own – and possibly numerous. I’m afraid my proof-reading skills really decline after about eleven (and it’s now five to one in the morning here…) So apologies – feel free to let me know of anything I may have missed in the comments.

Last but most certainly (by a long shot) not least, you guys are honestly more than I could ever express in words. All of your comments and kudos have mean to damn much to me – I can’t describe it. The response to this fic has been something that I only ever dreamed about. Writing, and sharing that writing, is so hard sometimes because you pour everything into it and then lay it out for the world to see – but every single one of you have made this the best writing experience of my life.
Thank-you all so damn much.
And as my gift to you for all of your amazing responses, I give you the final chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

+1

“-and then we have the quarterly meeting with Devin from accounts, he’s got some input about the new line coming out in fall-”

Tony ran a hand across his face, attempting to sweep away the exhaustion that was setting there. And failing. Miserably.

He glanced down at Pepper’s face, which was lighting up the screen of the laptop that sat in his
lap on the bed, and sighed.

“You know I’m pretty sure that when most couples video chat – after weeks of not seeing each other, mind – they usually skip all the accounts chat and head straight for the Netflix and chill kind of vibe.”

Pepper’s eyes flicked up from the report she was reading to him, staring at him through the computer screen, with a small smirk on her lips.

“Netflix and chill?” She asked, eyebrows rising. “Tony, you’re upstate and I’m in Croatia.”

“We can make it work. I’m a pretty imaginative guy.”

A short chuckled slipped out of Pepper’s lips. Her eyes glanced down and a shuffling echoed through the speaker as she pushed her papers away.

“Oh, I know.”

God. That sultry tone had Tony adjusting the laptop that was still resting on his now quite tight, silk pyjama pants.

“Really?” He murmured, sliding the laptop forward on the bed until it was resting on the edge and he was sprawled out on his stomach staring at Pepper. “What is it that you know, Ms Potts?”

Pepper leaned towards the screen slowly, resting her elbows on the desk that her own laptop was perched on and folding her hands under her chin to stare at Tony. Christ, that stare did something to Tony that – no matter how many times she levelled him with it – never went away.

“I know that you have a meeting with the secretary of state this morning at eight, and it’s already three.” She murmured, seductively. It took a full minute for the words to seep into Tony’s brain. When they did, his face must have fallen, because Pepper let out a soft chuckle and leant back in her seat. “Go to sleep, Tony.”

Tony shook his head, running a hand through his hair and leaning up on an elbow of his own.

“Nah, this view is way better than anything I can dream up.”

Pepper’s eyes sparkled. That grin grew.

“I thought you said you were imaginative?”

“I am, but even I have my limits.” Tony argued, leaning back down onto the bed and throwing a smirk of his own towards the laptop. “The mere image of you, Ms Potts, is too much for even this genius to invent-”

Pepper was bent over, and in hysterics, before he could finish.

“Oh, my god.” She gasped. “That was awful.” She threw her head back, whipping away tears that were escaping out of the corners of her eyes. “That was-”


Tony cut off sharply when every light in the room flashed an ominous red – and then a booming alarm sounded all through the compound.

Pepper’s hands shot up to cover her ears. Even through the computer speaker the alarm must have
Pepper’s hands shot up to cover her ears. Even through the computer speaker the alarm must have been deafening.

“What is that?!” She yelled, eyes wide.

“I have to go.” Tony shouted over the alarm, panic setting in. “I’m sorry – but I have to-”

“Tony!?”

Tony shoved the laptop closed before Pepper had a chance to get another word out. He was up and off the bed a second later, scrambling for the sweatshirt he’d thrown across the room when he’d first collapsed on the bed. He shoved it over his head and wrenched open the door. No sooner had he taken a step into the large hall, than something large and warm collided with him. The force of the collision would have sent him to the ground if it weren’t for the quick hands that caught him.

Steve was a step behind him, equally frazzled, and gripping Tony’s shoulders tightly to keep the smaller man from toppling over.

"What the hell is that?" Steve panted, but the wild look in his eyes told Tony that, in the back of his mind, he knew already.


"We need to gather the others-"Steve began, but Tony was already miles ahead.

"Natasha, Vis and Bruce are here. Rhodey's in Manhattan so he can be here in minutes if I can get onto him-"

"-Sam's here too, got in late last night-"

"-PETER!"

Tony pulled away, wrenching out of Steve's hold, and stumbled down the hall.

"Peter's here! I h-have to-"

Steve followed at once, and the two of them hurtled down the corridor towards the other rooms.

They barely made it two doors down before a massive boom echoed through the building, and the entire compound shook violently. Both Tony and Steve were thrown off their feet - colliding with the hallway wall painfully.

"What the fu – F.R.I.D.A.Y what's happening?!” Tony ground out, pushing himself back to his feet. Steve practically sprung to his - the adrenaline activating every inch of the super soldier - and reached down to haul Tony the rest of the way to his feat. Steve pushed him forward and the two were hurtling down the hall again.

"Several armed men have entered the facility through the north wall, sir." F.R.I.D.A.Y’s voice echoed, but the sound was crackled.

North wall? The mainframe. Damn them.

"F.R.I.D.A.Y shut everything down. We're going manual. Scramble all previous access codes and blow out the mainframe - literally. I want a boom of my own.” Tony panted as they reached the end of the hall.
Where they promptly collided with Bruce and Peter.

All four of them opened their mouths to speak – confusion and panic coating every face – but another, billowing boom echoed through the compound and the ground around them shook again.

Tony seized a hold of Peter’s arm and pulled the kid towards him, tucking him against his chest and covering him as best he could as the roof above them quaked ominously. Steve and Bruce braced as well – but after a moment of shaking the ground stilled, and the compound remained intact.

Before they could get back to their feet another body flew around the corner and nearly collided with Bruce. The doctor let out a short cry of surprise – and turned several shades greener – but at the sight of Sam, panting, beside him he began to relax.

“What the hell is going on!?” Sam cried.

“We’re being attacked.” Steve answered shortly. He rested a hand on Bruce’s shoulder, watching the man suck in several controlled breaths. Bruce gave him a short nod a moment later and Steve pulled away.

“I gathered that.” Sam breathed, throwing a glance towards where the explosions had sounded. “By who? For what?”

“Not a clue,” Steve answered, before turning to Tony. “The second explosion, was that yours?”

“No.” Tony said, “Trust me, when the mainframe blows we’ll know.”

“Why are you blowing out the mainframe?” Peter asked, his voice far quieter than the others – who were talking again – but it rang out to Tony. “Wouldn’t that be an asset to us?”

Tony, who had released the kid from where he’d been crushed against Tony’s chest, looked down at him properly for the first time. He was ramrod straight, eyes flitting around the hallway at the slightest noise, and dressed in nothing but his pyjama pants, the too large I survived my trip to New York t-shirt that Tony had thrust upon him all those months ago, and his web-shooters – which Tony was beginning to suspect the kid never took off.

There was fear in his eyes though. Honest to god fear that cut straight through Tony, and made him want to march right outside and end these asses now.

“It’s only an asset to us for as long as we can control it,” Tony answered honestly. The kid was smart – too smart for his own good half the time – and lying to him now would do nothing. As much as Tony hated himself for it, they were likely going to need him to get out of this. “And I don’t think we’re going to have control for very much longer.”

Peter nodded sharply, throwing another glance down the hall.

“Hey, look at me.” Tony murmured, leaning closer in an effort to get the kid’s attention and block out the rushed plan that was being made above both of their heads. Peter’s wide eyes landed on him without hesitation – god dammit the raw faith in the kid’s eyes was going to cripple him one day.

“We’re going to be okay.” Tony said, no small amount of force behind the words. “I’m going to get us out of here – just stick with me.”

Peter nodded, a little more firmly this time, and Tony nodded with him. Okay. Good. Peter sorted. Peter safe.
Now to the getting out of here part.

“-where is Vision?”

Steve’s voice was strained, but steady. His soldier instincts had kicked in, and he was in full combat mode now. His plan so far had gotten no further than gather the team and find out what the hell is going on. Tony couldn’t argue with either point.

“-he went for a walk earlier, but I don’t know if he came back.” Sam answered, the same readiness in his stance. “And Natasha-”

The compounds lighting – which had remained dimmed since the initial alarm had sounded – flashed a blinding white and then shorted. The hallway was thrown into pitch darkness for a second before the secondary red lights switched on and left them all bathed in scarlet shadows.

“Everyone brace – and cover your ears!” Tony called, pulling Peter back towards him and shoving them both to the ground. A second later something strong, and solid settled over the both of them.

Steve.

Tony didn’t have a chance to question to super soldier before a blinding light erupted outside the compounds widows – and a second later the resounding boom echoed across likely the entirety of upstate New York.

The widows shattered immediately – glass raining down all around them – and the building shook once more. Only this time it was earth-rattling quakes that left Tony’s teeth chattering and his heart racing faster than it had in a while. For a moment everything blurred. The building was vibrating far too much to focus on without vomiting, so Tony squeezed his eyes shut and moved his hand from over his ears to cover Peter’s eyes as well.

It lasted only a couple of seconds, but it felt like hours before the building finally stilled.

Silence followed.

“That,” Tony breathed, “-was the mainframe blowing.”

Steve’s weight disappeared as fast as it had come. Tony pulled back too, climbing to his feet and pulling Peter up with him. Tony ran an eye over him – a couple of glass scratches that were already healing, but other than that he was in one piece. The others were in relatively the same condition.

Steve seemed to have taken the brunt of the glass, covering Tony and Peter who had been closest to the windows, but even he was sporting only a few scratches.

A shadow fell on them all when another figure slid around the closest corner. Steve was in front of them all faster than Tony could even process, but a moment later the red lights glinted equally red hair and he pulled back in relief.

“Natasha.” Steve sighed.

The woman ran an appraising eye over them all in the dark lighting and, when seemingly satisfied that they were all in one piece, relaxed just slightly.

She threw a smirk over at Tony.
“Still not a sharer I see.” She murmured, nodding her head behind them – where the mainframe used to be.

Tony shrugged.

“No one plays with my toys.”

Natasha stepped a little closer, and directly beneath one of the red lights, which illuminated the red droplets setting on her neck and the left side of her face. There were dark stains on her black tacsuit.

“You okay?” Tony asked, eyeing the stains. Steve and Sam – who had been looking over the damage – whipped around and focused in on the stains as well. “Where have you been?”

“I took a detour – met one of our guests.” Natasha said, running a casual finger over the droplets splattered across her face. “Not very chatty, but he didn’t need to be.”

She brought up her other hand, in which was a set of high-tech, night-vision goggles.

“Military grade.” Sam said, eyeing the goggles.

“Not just any military.” Natasha added, throwing them over to Tony. “These are special order – recognise them?”

Tony looked over them, and something deep in his gut clenched.

“Ross.”

Natasha nodded.

“From what I could tell from a quick sweep there are three teams – all of about twenty men. Two coming in from the east and one at the west.” Natasha said. “Using the lake as cover.”

Everyone in the hallway froze.

“Why is Ross attacking us?!” Wilson hissed. He waved a hand at Tony. “I thought you two were buds?”

“Yeah.” Tony drawled, his face pinching in frustration. “We haven’t been getting along so well lately.” When confusion clouded every face in the room, Tony sighed and went on. “I broke his boat – I think he’s taking it kind of personally.”

“That was you.” Steve gaped. The others stared – confounded. “The cameras and the access panels were all down for maintenance when I got onto the raft – you did that!?"

Tony rolled his eyes so forcefully that it almost made his dizzy. “No.” He said, sarcasm dripping from him. “They just like to run hour long system reboots with four high priority prisoners on board.”

“You helped get us out?”

Tony knew that Sam’s absolute astonishment wasn’t intended to hurt him – but he couldn’t deny that it did a little. He’d been trying, Christ, he’d barely slept in the last month in an attempt to get the accords in some kind of order, but he supposed the mistrust was somewhat warranted. Still, it stung. He had – somewhere in the last few weeks – really started to value Sam. He was a good man. Fair and honest.
And Tony was, well, Tony.

He’d made one – or twelve thousand – too many mistakes to ever really be thought of as a good man.

“Well, I helped put you in so it seemed kind of fair – but this probably isn’t the best time to get into it.” Tony murmured, tossing a glance of his own in the direction of what was surely a smouldering pile of his once beautiful mainframe.

“He knew it was you.” Natasha asked, nodding to herself as the pieces came together.

Tony shrugged.

“Well, it isn’t exactly a long list of people who could hack into his glorified, floating, soda can.”

That silenced the room for a couple of seconds.

“Sixty men.” Sam murmured finally, breaking the silence. “Kind of flattering.”

Bruce let out a sigh of his own – his skin mercifully pink with only hints of green – and spoke for the first time since the shit-storm had started.

“Well this kind of complicates things – I mean they’re not exactly an enemy. What do we do?”

“We run.” Was Tony’s immediate answer.

“What?” Steve’s voice cut in. Equal parts enraged and astonished. “No. We can’t run. We can’t just let this stand. They’ve attacked us where we live – they just made themselves an enemy-”

“We can’t fight-” Tony started to argue.

“The hell we can’t.” Sam’s voice thundered over his.

“We’re locked out of the armoury.” Tony cut both men off firmly. “We don’t have access to any of the suits, or the weapons.”

That got their attention.

“What?” Sam screeched, only for Steve to knock him painfully over the head in an effort to keep him quiet.

“We can’t get in without the mainframe to open it.”

“Then why the hell did you just blow it to shit?!” Sam hissed, taking a heated step forwards.

Tony opened his mouth to argue, but Natasha beat him too it. She stepped between the two of them, staring over at Sam with a glint in her eyes that Tony would not be comfortable having directed at him. Sam seemed to feel the same. He took a step back instantly.

“We were never going to get to it before they did.” She said, calmly, but there was definitely a warning at the edge of the crisp tone. “It’s better out of play altogether than in their hands.”

Sam sighed – but nodded. Steve nodded as well.

“Agreed.” Steve said, nodding once at Tony before facing the group. “Where does this leave us?”

“Facing down sixty mercenaries without any weapons or back-up.” Bruce outlined stonily.

The truth of their situation slammed into all of them, and they fell silent.
Beside Tony, Peter hands were clenching and unclenching nervously. Tony shot the kid a glance, taking in the pale tint of his skin and the slight quiver of his hands.

Steve opened his mouth to speak, but Tony cut him off.

With one last glance at Peter, Tony grabbed a handful of Steve’s shirt and dragged him a few steps away – not out of sight of the others, but just far enough to give them a hint of privacy.

Steve opened his mouth to speak, but Tony cut him off again.

“I know you want to fight – but we can’t. I can’t.” Tony stressed, softly. Careful of the enhanced ears behind him, and their owner who was staring over at Tony and Steve, and nervously abusing the hem of that I survived my trip to New York t-shirt. “I won’t.” Tony added, tearing his eyes away from Peter and looking back up at Steve. “I’m getting him out of here.”

There was no room for argument in Tony’s voice. He wasn’t swaying on this. All of them were a part of this already – but Peter could be spared. He could go home to May like he was supposed to in a few days and never have to look back. If Ross found out about him –

The sight of Wanda, bound and motionless in her cell on the raft struck him like the blast from a repulsor. Ross would take him. Tony was sure of it. Who was he after all? Not a world-famous super soldier. Not an army veteran. Not a renowned spy with hands in more international pies than any other person alive.

Not the sole air to a multibillion-dollar tech company.

He was just a kid. Just a kid from Queens. A kid that Ross could snatch away, and no one would care.

Except Tony.

“I know that everything in you tells you to fight. It’s just your nature. To stand and do something.” Tony went on before Steve could try and interrupt. He swallowed heavily. “To plant your feet and say no, you move.”

Steve’s eyes widened, his face twisting equal parts shock and pain. Tony knew it was harsh to let the words dangle as he did – knew that this wasn’t the right time to get into their shared past with Peggy – but god he needed Steve to understand.

“Tony-”

“Yes. I was there. I knew her.” Tony cut in, not ready to go into any further detail than that. She was a part of his life that he’d shared with very few people. “I knew her very well.” He added. His voice lowered. “She is part of the reason you are here, that I am trying – and I am trying – but you need to understand that the world has changed. There are no battlefields anymore. Wars are fought at home now. With chlorine grenades in hospitals and pipe-bombs at pop-concerts, designed to blow up children.” Tony ran an exhausted hand over his face. “If we fight, we escalate the shit-storm that is descending on us, and the people around us get hurt.”

The words hung in the air for several seconds.

“What do you want us to do?” Steve asked softly.

“Run.” Tony stressed. “Believe it or not, but this could be good for us. Ross has shown his hand. He’s loosing with the accords, and I’m willing to bet this is some last ditch attempt to provoke a response that could get us put on the United Nations threat list. If it fails – if the compound is
empty when he gets in – then nothing is on us. He’s attacked us with no warning, and violated the terms we’ve already set down. That could give us the leverage we need to finally push the last few points the council have been chewing on.” Tony breathed, hope blossoming in his chest as Steve took in the words without obvious argument. “It’s not a defeat – it’s a tactical retreat.”

“I agree with you.”

Tony sighed, ready to argue, and then Steve’s words sunk in. “Y-You-wait, what?”

“I agree.” Steve said again, his eyes flitting to the other behind them and hardening in resolve. “My issue is in the details. How do we run?” He asked. “If we’re locked out of the armoury, then I’m also willing to bet we’re locked out of the garage, and the hanger, and every other door that might lead to a form of transport. Short of physically running, I’m all out of ideas.”

Huh. Tony actually hadn’t gotten that far. He’d been too focused on getting Steve to agree to the plan to really make one.

Tony opened his mouth to speak, but was silenced by a voice barely an inch behind him. “…There’s a farm-house about six miles up.” Natasha said, causing Tony to jump and skid across to Steve’s side. Natasha smirked. “Our second closest neighbour.” She elaborated, when neither Steve nor Tony seemed to catch on. “Ross’s teams are coming around the west side of the late, if we head along the north rim we could skirt around and be at the house in an hour.” She explained. “Mr. Beauchamp is seventy-two, and a sweetheart.” Wow. That word sounded wrong coming from her lips. “I’m sure he’d be willing to lend us a truck.”

Tony shot her a look.

“Do you spy on all of our neighbours?” He asked.

She tilted her head. “Do you not?”

“You need professional help.” Tony shot back. He opened his mouth to speak again, but before he could another boom echoed through the compound. The building shook so forcefully that it threw all of them off-balance, and to the floor.

Tony scrambled over to Peter, who was already halfway back to his feet. Damn, the kid was fast. Peter pulled Tony up with a strong hand, and Tony wrapped an arm securely around his shoulder. Natasha sprung up to her feet as well.

“I think they’re inside.” She murmured.

Sam pulled a now very green Bruce to his feet and cast a look around.

“That would be our cue, then.”

Tony nodded, shoving Peter forward and towards one of the blown out windows.

Time to get the hell out of dodge.

“Stay next to me, and close to the ground.”
Tony murmured, pulling Peter along beside him as the six of them made their way silently around the lake. Peter nodded jerkily, not even trying to pull away from Tony’s hand, which was fastened around the kid’s upper arm. His silence was unnerving. The kid was never quiet. Not once since Tony met him. And now, despite how many times he’d wished the kid would shut-it for just a couple of minutes, he found himself desperate to hear the kid jabber about something. Anything.

“You’re going to be okay.” Tony breathed, pulling Peter down to take cover in the bushes near the lake when Steve waved a warning hand back to them. “We all are. We’re going to get out of this.”

Steve and Natasha were ahead of them, just slightly. Leading the small group through the trees and manoeuvring them around the encroaching soldiers. Bruce was nearby Tony and Peter, taking cover behind a nearby tree.

Sam was a couple of feet behind them. Bring up the rear and making sure they weren’t spotted from behind.

A pack of soldiers appeared a couple of feet ahead of them. They tracked through the woods cautiously, automatic weapons raised and ready as they moved towards the compound. They disappeared after a few moments, and Steve waved the six of them on again.

“Peter?” Tony prompted softly when the kid didn’t answer. Steve raised a hand again and they slid into the bushes for cover once more. Tony took the momentary pause to clamp his other hand onto Peter’s shoulder and force the kid to look at him. His panic skyrocketed when the kid refused to look him in the eye. “Kid? I need you to tell me you’re doing okay. Okay?”

Peter’s eyes crept up. The terror in them struck Tony hard. Damn this kid would be the end of him. Before Tony could ask what was wrong though – and how he could fix it – the kid spoke.

“What if he knows who I am?”

The words were barely audible, but Tony caught them.

“What do you mean?”

Peter cast a look back towards the compound.

“Ross. What if he knows who I am?” Peter breathed. He glanced up at Tony. “What will happen to me? To May? My friends?” He asked, the panic in his eyes growing. “I can’t be the reason something happens to them. I-I can’t-”

“-You won’t.” Tony cut him off, tightening the hand that he had clenched around Peter’s shoulder. “Nothing is going to happen.” He assured the kid. “Ross doesn’t know.”

“You don’t know that-”

“I do know that.” Tony hissed, pushing the kid further down when a group of soldiers past them by. “Not only do I know it – I’ve ensured it.” He went on, barely breathing the words, but sure that Peter could hear them. “You forget, I have access to every inch of his floating tin-can. I know every little piece of information that crosses his desk, and yours never will.” Peter’s eyes snapped away from the soldiers and flicked up to look at Tony. Tony didn’t look away. “I have you, kid.” He breathed. “And I will burn Ross to the ground before he touches you, or anyone around you.”

The smallest of smiles crept over Peter’s face.

“Thanks, Mr. Stark.”
Tony snorted quietly. “Don’t thank me, kid.” He breathed, pulling them both back up when Steve waved them all forward. “I got you into this, remember?”

Another explosion echoed behind them. Peter’s head swung back towards the compound, a groan escaping his lips.


Tony could have cried with relief. There was the kid he knew.

“I’ll forge you a note.” Tony promised lightly. “You should have seen some of my more impressive ones in high-school, once I even-”

“Get down!”

Tony slammed Peter into the ground as soon as the words tore out of Steve’s lips.

They’d been spotted.

A halo of bullets rained down around them. Tony chanced a glance upwards as light flooded into the trees where they were taking cover.

A helicopter. Shit.

“Dammit, this makes things more difficult.”

Sam appeared beside Tony and Peter, sharing Tony’s sentiments exactly. Peter cast a glance upwards as well.

And then he was no longer on the ground. Damn the kid was fast.

“I can take care of it.”

With that he was gone.

Shooting a web up at the tree beside them, Peter hoisted himself into the air and took off after the helicopter.

“What?! No!” Tony screamed after him. Another downpour of bullets was the only answer he got. Seizing a handful of Sam’s shirt, Tony pulled them both beneath a close-by tree.

Tony leaned around the trunk wildly, struggling to catch sight of Peter.

“Can you see him?!” Tony hissed at Sam – who was straining his neck around the other side of the tree in an effort to spot the kid as well.

“No.” Sam breathed, ducking back around when the gunfire started up again. “God damn that kid is fast.”

“What about the others?!”

Sam shook his head, “I don’t-”

A wild, and guttural, roar cut him off.
Tony’s breath caught in his throat, and heart slammed against his chest,

Sam’s eyes snapped up to his.

“Is that—” Sam began, his eyes wide.

“-Bruce.” Tony finished as the Hulk let another roar and the gunfire started up with even more ferocity.

Sam nodded. He leant back around the tree and froze. Tony followed his gaze and caught sight of the Hulk a few hundred feet away from them – tearing through dozens of soldiers in a wild rage.

“Does this make things better or worse for us?” Sam asked slowly.

Tony – who had already forgotten about the Hulk, and was once again searching the sky for any sign of Peter – didn’t answer.

“We should—”

Tony never found out what they should do. Before Sam could get the words out a light erupted a few dozen feet away from the two of them – and an explosion ripped through the forest.

It tore through the tree Sam and Tony were taking cover behind, thrusting the two of them forcefully forward.

Tony collided the trunk of a nearby tree – hard. He spilled out across the forest floor, skidding a couple of feet in the dirt.

God. Everything was spinning. And screaming. Tony’s ears were ringing so loudly that he couldn’t hear the gunfire anymore. Couldn’t hear anything.

He tore his eyes open, fighting to make his retinas stop spinning, and failing.

They slid closed again after a moment – sight of small body hurtling towards the ground imprinted on his eyelids.

Tony came to sharply.

The sounds of gunfire, and the stench of smoke and scorched skin, never resulted in a slow or gentle return to consciousness for Tony. And unfortunately he was startlingly familiar with both.

He shot up to his feet, his head screaming its disagreement with being upright. There was blood running down the back of his neck, sliding down through his hair and disappearing beneath his sweatshirt, and his eyes refused to focus, but nevertheless he trudged through the forest. Keeping low to the ground he hunted for any sign of the others. Sam had been close to him – he could remember that much – but the others?

A enraged roar coming from what remained of the compound told him where one of said teammates were, but there was no sign of the others. Had Ross taken them? Killed them? Had he—

Tony stopped dead in his tracks when his agonisingly muddled, and probably concussed, brain finally shifted through all of the information that had been thrown at it in the last hour since the
security alarm had sounded. All of a sudden everything snapped into place.

The image of a small, frail, body being thrown from the sky flashed across his mind, replaying like a bad cassette recording. Again. And again. And a hundred more times after that.

Peter.

Peter had fallen.

Peter had fallen and Tony had done nothing.

Tony cast his eyes up, frantically searching the sky for even a glimpse of the kid. He wondered through the woods, sidestepping around small fires and praying for any hint of movement above. For any hint of that small, frustratingly fast, form.

And then he found it. Only it was in the sky.

The terrifyingly small body was crumpled, and unmoving, at the edge of the lake. Water was streaming over untameable curls, bare feet, and soaking through the white *I survived my trip to New York* t-shirt that still left an unshakeable stab of guilt in Tony’s chest every time he saw it. Every time, except that one moment when his eyes settled on Peter – unmoving, broken, and laying face down in the lake. Because in that one moment Tony’s chest felt so hollow that nothing could have pierced it.

“Peter.”

He was sure he meant to scream the word, but it trickled through his lips as nothing more than a breath. A prayer.

Oh god. No.

Tony stumbled through the trees faster than he ever thought he could move. Crashing down to the bank of the lake in seconds. All caution forgotten.

"PETER!"

The kid didn't move.

Tony sprinted along the embankment, his feet splashing wildly through the icy water. No. No. No.

"Peter..." The word ripped through his throat. Echoing through the trees. Tony slid to his knees. Rocks that littered the lake’s floor cut into them painfully. Tony barely noticed. Instead he yanked the still body towards him, rolling the boy onto his back and cradling him to his chest.

"Peter…?" Tony breathed.

The boy didn’t respond. Didn’t move.

Didn’t take a breath.

“No-” The word tore out of Tony’s throat again. He leant down, pressing his fingers desperately against the kid’s neck and letting his ear hover above Peter’s lips. Praying that the breaths were just too fine for him to hear.

They weren’t.
Absolute stillness met his fingertips as well. No matter how hard he pressed his fingers against the kid’s neck, he couldn’t find a pulse.

God. No. No.

“Peter?” Tony called, hysteria seeping in, pulling the boy closer. “Peter? Please…no. D-don’t do this–please-Peter!” Tony ran a shaking hand over the kid’s head – smoothing away the sopping hair. “No, p-please-no. No.”

The trees around him and Peter erupted suddenly with light. A moment later the roar of another explosion hit Tony’s ears – so loud that it had him bending down over Peter, tucking the boy further into his chest, and clenching his teeth to keep himself from crying out. The sound echoed through his head for several seconds, ringing in his ears and drowning everything else out.

It woke up the part of his brain that had short-circuited when he’d first caught sight of Peter in the lake.

What was he doing? God – why was he wasting so much time?

Looking down at Peter he latched onto the slight warmth that he could still feel coming off the kid’s skin, and the small hint of pink still in the his otherwise pale lips.

Tony was out of the water, with the kid cradled in his arms, in seconds. He pushed back up onto the bank of the lake and crashed back down to his knees, releasing Peter onto a dry patch of dirt.

Without wasting another second Tony pulled up higher on his knees, tilted the kid’s head back, threaded his hands together over that sopping I survived my trip to New York t-shirt and began pumping down over Peter’s sternum. The kid’s chest caved downward with each rough compression, but he remained otherwise motionless.

Thirty compressions. Two breaths.

Tony knew this. Knew the science behind it. Keep the blood pumping, and oxygenized, and you keep the brain alive. Keep the heart from decaying. Spur motion back into the lungs.

But, god…this was Peter.

“Come on, kid.” Tony panted, shoving the heels of his palms continually into the kid’s sternum. Hard. Tony could feel ribs giving way beneath his hands, but he didn’t dare let up the pressure. This had to work. It had too.

Hope had blossomed in Tony’s chest when his brain had finally kicked in, and he’d noted Peter’s dwindling warmth. Warmth meant life. It meant that the kid hadn’t been without a pulse for very long.

Meant that this was something Tony could fix. Had to fix.

“Come on, kid, please–” Tony breathed, reaching the end of his first set of compressions. He leant over the Peter’s head, grasped onto his lax jaw and sealed his lips over the kid’s. Pushing a breath of air into Peter’s unmoving lungs. Looking down, Tony watched Peter’s chest rise and fall with the forced breath, and then still.

He leant down and forced another breath down into the kid’s lungs. Again Peter’s chest rose and fell, and then stilled.

“Dammit kid, don’t do this–” Tony barked, rising back up and folding his hands over Peter’s chest
again. He started on another round of compressions – rougher this time. Desperate. This had to work. It had to.

There was no alternative for Tony.

He cast his first real look over the kid’s body. He had a small cut on his forehead, which was slowly oozing blood as Tony continued to pump the kid’s chest, and a few burns scattered across his arms and bare feet – but other than that he looked all in one piece. On the outside at least.

God, Tony hoped there was no damage inside that he was currently making worse.

He finished up his round of compressions, and then leant back down over Peter’s face and blew two breaths down into the kid’s lungs. Pulling back slightly Tony pressed his fingers back against the pulse point at Peter’s neck, and moved his ear to hover over the kid’s lips.

Nothing.

Something very close to dread seeped down Tony’s spine, but he refused to let it take root there. No.

Dread meant he was failing. And he couldn’t fail.

“Come on, kid.” Tony hissed through his teeth, pulling back up and folding his hands back over Peter’s sternum. He pushed down rhythmically. “Breathe dammit!” He ordered with no small amount of force.

God Tony was tired – his arms were aching with fatigue – but he wouldn’t stop. Not ever if it meant this would work.

Tony fought through another cycle – barely pausing to catch a breath before leaning down and forcing it into Peter’s still chest.

He pulled away and lifted his trembling fingers to feel for a pulse. Nothing.

“No. No. D-don’t do this-” Tony pleaded, everything in the world fading away except his absolute need for the kid to breathe. He threaded his hands together over Peter’s chest and resumed compressions. Pounding down on the kid’s chest with every last piece of strength he had.

“Come back,” Tony panted. His helplessness morphing into rage, as the boy continued to lay, unresponsive, beneath his desperate hands. “You’ve never given up on anything in your life, so fight dammit.”

Droplets of water dripped from Peter’s sodden hair and trailed along his pale checks – spurred loose as his body shook with Tony’s frantic compressions.

That small tint of pink in the kid’s lips, which had ignited so much hope in Tony, was gone now. A hauntingly blue tinge had taken its place.

No. No. No. No. NO.

The word rung through Tony’s head in time with his every shove as he continued to pump the otherwise motionless chest. This wasn’t happening. It couldn’t – he couldn’t – no.

“No.” The word slipped through Tony’s clenched lips. He leaned over again and forced two breaths down into the kid’s lungs – watching as his chest rose and fell with each – before pulling
himself back up and settling over the his chest again, pumping down over the sternum with everything he had. “No. You can’t have him.”

Tony wasn’t sure whom he was talking to. God? The universe? The soldiers that had done this? It didn’t really matter. They could all go to hell – because Peter was staying right here. With him. Tony was going to make sure of it.

“You can’t have him.” Tony heaved, his head tilting forward in exhaustion, and pain, but his hands never wavering as they pressed down again and again on the small chest beneath him. It wasn’t working. It wasn’t –

“Anything – anything – else. You can have anything else, just give him back,” Tony pleaded, pausing to blow two quick breaths into the kid’s lungs, before pulling himself back up to continue pumping the still chest. “-Just give him back – give him back to me-”

A faint whirring sound was the only warning Tony got before something slammed into the embankment only a few feet in front of Peter and him. Tony pulled away – ready to cover Peter – when the achingly familiar silver, metal suit finally swam into focus and Rhodey stepped out.

Dressed in nothing but bright red boxers, his leg-braces and the watch that Tony had gifted him the Christmas before last – which allowed him to remotely call the suit – he looked absolutely ridiculous stepping out of the multimillion dollar war suit. Any other day Tony would have laughed, and commented wildly on every brilliant part of the picture in front of him.

Not today.

Not with the still unmoving boy beneath his hands.

Rhodey’s eyes roomed over Tony, and then down to Peter beneath him. They froze there.

“Help me-”

Rhodey didn’t need to be told twice.

He was at Peter’s other side in seconds, pressing his fingertips against the kid’s neck and peeling back one of his eyelids to check his pupils as Tony continued his set of compressions.

“How long has he been down?” Rhodey asked. His shoulders were tense as he leant down over Peter’s head and ran his fingers probingly along his scalp – where the small laceration was still bleeding.

“A few minutes now.” Tony ground out, breathing heavily with every shove on the kid’s sternum. “I found him in the lake.”

“The head wound doesn’t look serious.” Rhodey murmured, pulling up to watch Tony work through the last few compressions in his cycle. “Do you know what happened?”

“No.” Tony breathed. “He fell. I know he fell, but I – I don’t know what-”

Tony broke off and leant over Peter’s head, tilting it back and blowing two breaths down into his chest. He pulled back up – ready to fight through another round of compressions – but Rhodey beat him to it.

Up on his knees, with his hands clasped together, he pumped the kid’s chest rhythmically – his compressions far stronger and steadier than Tony’s.

Leaving Tony with…nothing. Nothing to do but watch as Peter quaked beneath every shove of
Rhodey’s strong hands. Watch as the droplets continued to trail along his pale cheeks. Too pale.

Oh god. They were failing – Tony had failed. He still wasn’t – he wasn’t –

“Tony, breath!” Rhodey’s voice cut through Tony’s panic. Tony blinked up at his friend, who was still compressing Peter’s chest even as he stared across at Tony, clearly panicked. “I need you to stay with me, okay? You need to breathe so you can breathe for him.” Rhodey stressed, nodding down at Peter. Tony nodded jerkily. Rhodey hands paused after another moment – and it was the only cue Tony needed before he leant down and forced two more breaths into the kid’s lungs.

Rhodey resumed compressions as soon as Tony pulled away.

“You can’t go into shock yet, alright?” Rhodey ordered, his eyes locking onto Tony’s. “I know this is hard, but you need to-

“-Shock.”

Rhodey stared at Tony as if he’d lost his mind – which to be fair in the last few minutes he probably had.

“Tony – what?”

“Shock.”

Tony was on his feet and stumbling towards the stationary War Machine suit before his barely function brain fully caught up with him. Shock.

Defibrillator.

Tony dug his fingertips into the still-open breastplate of the suit and tore into the inside lining. His hands screamed in pain at the abuse – blood spilling from gashes where the suits metal edges cut deep into the flesh – but he didn’t have time to be gentle.

Peter didn’t have time for him to be gentle.

Tony had installed a defibrillator into Rhodey’s suit years ago now. It was fastened to the inside breastplate, which remained pressed tight against his friend’s chest whenever he was in the suit and could therefore be utilized if something were to happen and Rhodey was still inside. It ran on its own power-source and was programed to activate if Rhodey’s heart rate ever dropped or spiked to a certain point. He’d added it as an afterthought. Something that made him feel a little better about Rhodey being out there alone – but something he’d hoped to god that his friend would never have need to use.

Tony had never been more thankful for his crippling anxiety than in that moment – because his all-consuming fear of loosing Rhodey a few years back might actually help him save Peter today.

“Tony!?"

Tony finally pulled the last piece of the makeshift defibrillator free and lunged back towards Rhodey and Peter.

“Get his shirt off.” Tony ordered, his voice firm and his hands steady as he set about connecting the de-fib pads that he’d ripped free of the breastplate back to the small, isolated power source that he’d stored lower down in the armor.
Rhodey didn’t hesitate. Pulling his hands away from where they were pumping Peter’s chest he seized handfuls of the kid’s shirt and pulled. The cheap fabric ripped down the middle, and he shoved it away roughly.

Tony leant down and smoothed the de-fib pads over Peter’s bare chest – one high on the right side, just near his heart, and the other on his lower left– and then dove back to the small reactor battery that was charging them.

“Move back.” Tony barked, and Rhodey pulled away from the boy between them.

Tony connected the last lead to the small, reactor battery – just for a second – and Peter’s body jolted.

And then fell back to the ground. Motionless.

No. No, this had to work.

Rhodey was back up on his knees and pressing down the kid’s chest before he’d even fallen still. When he paused at the end of his set Tony abandoned the battery in his hands for the moment and leant over to blow two breaths down into Peter’s lungs.

They continued their cycle – Rhodey grounding out thirty strong compressions and Tony delivering two quick breaths – as Tony kept a hand rested against Peter’s throat. Feeling for any kind of flutter beneath his fingers. After a couple more rounds he felt it – a pulse fighting to thrum in time with Rhodey’s hands.

“Stop.” Tony breathed, snatching up the battery that he’d abandoned on the dirt beside him. Rhodey pulled his hands away.

Tony connected the last lead from the de-fib pads to the battery and Peter’s body jerked violently again.

Rhodey moved forwards to clasp his hands over the kid’s sternum again, but before he could Peter’s chest suddenly heaved as he gaged, and then sucked in a small breath.

“PETER!?"

Tony was leaning over him in an instant, tugging the boy onto his side as he gaged. Rhodey slid a hand under his head, lifting it slightly to ease the pressure the odd angle put on the kid’s neck, as Tony pounded an open palm into his back.

A lungful of water trickled steadily from the kid’s lips as he coughed brutally.

Eventually the gaging stopped and Peter was able to suck in another labored breath. Tony inched closer, rubbing a hand firmly against the kid’s back to help clear his lungs, and smoothing the Peter’s mop of hair back with the other.

What he found beneath made his chest clamp.

Peter’s eyes were open – half-lidded and very clearly out of it – but somewhat aware. They fluttered upwards towards Tony and stayed there.

“You’re okay,” Tony breathed, resting a gentle hand on the kid’s forehead as Rhodey pulled away and rushed back to the suit – calling for help.

Peter’s eyes blinked slowly but didn’t look away. His breaths were coming in short pants, but it
was something.

It was life. And Tony could work with life.

“You’re going to be okay.” Tony murmured, thick tears openly sliding down his cheeks and falling onto Peter’s forehead – mixing with the last few droplets of water from the river.

The knot that had formed in Tony chest the moment he saw Peter face down in the lake finally started to loosen – and when it did the rest of the world came back into sharper focus.

The forest around them was still cracking with small fires, and in the distance he could hear the sound of the Hulk tearing through what he was sure used to be the foundations of his compound.

“You’re team is safe.” Rhodey said, moving back towards Peter and Tony. He settled on Peter’s other side again – resting a hand on the kid’s side as if he, too, needed the physical confirmation that the he was breathing. “They’ve been trying to get through on the radio. The intruders are gone – pulled back as soon as the Hulk made his appearance. The team managed to salvage some comms. from the soldiers and were spread out in the woods looking for the two of you.” Rhodey nodded at Tony and Peter. “They should be here in a few minutes.”

Tony nodded, but he was only half listening. He’d tuned out as soon as Rhodey had told him the others were safe. That was all he cared about – everything else in that moment, with Peter alive and cradled against his chest, was inconsequential.

The whole damn world could have been on fire and it wouldn’t have mattered – because Tony’s no longer was. Everything that really mattered was here, and whole, and breathing.

Peter woke to a quiet beeping and the startling realization that he didn’t know where he was. This bed was far too soft to be his lumpy mattress, and the semi-lit room was almost silent, which his never was. Crappy insulation and shitty neighbors meant that Peter’s room was almost always buzzing with some kind of noise – be it from the street below or the neighbors going at it – but all he could hear now was soft snores ruffling the air beside his bed.

He forced his eyes open through sheer stubbornness. They ached something shocking, just like the rest of him, but he had to get them open.

Something had happened. Something important.

Dim light seared through his skull when his eyelids finally flickered upwards. Wherever he was, it was dark, but not pitch black. A small – and expensive looking – lamp sat alight on the bedside-table and it illuminated just enough of the room to settle Peter’s panic.

Namely, it illuminated Tony.

Peter turned his head slowly – pain shooting through his skull and chest as he did – to look at the older man.

He was sprawled on a plush looking armchair, one arm folded under his chin as he slept and the other resting on the bed beside one of Peter’s. Next to him hospital equipment was set up – all leads and monitors running down to Peter’s arms and chest – but despite that the room didn’t look like it belonged to a hospital.
It was far too nice for that. There was a leather sofa on the other side of the room that Peter was willing to bet cost more than *everything* in his room, and – no matter what time it was – no hospital was ever this quiet.

Not to mention the bed.

So. Soft.

**So delectably soft.**

Nope. Peter had absolutely no idea where he was – or what had happened that landed him here. But he found, after a couple of moment of watching Tony drool onto a suit that *definitely* cost more than May’s entire apartment, that he really didn’t care.

Sleep was calling him again. He could feel it at the edge of his already waning consciousness.

Whatever had happened, and wherever he was now, it could wait.

Tony was right there – so Peter knew he was going to be just fine.

Chapter End Notes

And there we have it. All done and dusted. Our boys are safe – just.

Please let me know what you thought. This chapter was really hard for me to write, and I’d absolutely love to know what you thought. I read each and every comment (multiple times!) because they all mean so much to me.

Thank-you for sticking with me!

Until next time…

Eva

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!