

Silence is Golden

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Silence is Golden

by [GloriousBlackout](#)

Summary

Peter doesn't say a word during his first six months with the Ravagers. Yondu learns to adapt to having a silent shadow following him around.

Notes

This is one of those stories that started out small in my head and then sort of exploded when I wrote it down. I think I've become obsessed with these characters after they were so wonderfully handled in GOTG2.

I hope you enjoy this and any feedback is appreciated!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Six days after bringing him aboard, it becomes clear that the kid is refusing to speak.

Yondu knows it isn't because he *can't* speak. The kid had screamed bloody murder on his first day and some of those high-pitched noises must have been words, albeit some form of Terran none of the crew were familiar with. He quietened a little by the time they got around to implanting a translator in his head, but though he must now understand everything he hears, the boy doesn't betray a single word. Not even asking his name (which they already know) or how he's holding up – something the kid should be able to process – gets much in the way of a reaction.

It's as if an off-switch has been planted into his brain instead of a translator, yet there's a surprising intensity in Peter's green eyes that betray the fact that there is more lingering beneath the surface. During Yondu's first attempt at making conversation, the kid had clenched his jaw in a feeble attempt to look tough, his eyes never leaving Yondu's own even as the awkward silences were drawn out, and it struck such a stark contrast to the terrified, scrappy creature they'd captured that one could assume he'd been replaced by a decoy.

"e's just scared," Kraglin says on the fifth day, as they try to find the kid on the ship's security footage to make sure he hasn't gotten himself lost or killed. "e still thinks we're gonna eat him if e says anythin'."

Yondu isn't so sure. He certainly doesn't doubt that the kid is scared. His life was upturned in a matter of seconds and his home is growing ever smaller behind him, and he's constantly surrounded by a melee of creatures who either want to keep him as a pet or eat him.

He isn't paralysed by that fear, though. Not enough that he's chosen to stay absolutely silent, because he isn't silent. If a Ravager gets too close, the kid will explode in a mess of feral screams and wordless yells, and he's left impressive bruises on several members of the crew already. Fear isn't what stole his voice, which leaves only one conclusion in Yondu's mind.

The kid is refusing to speak out of spite.

Yondu will have to be careful, otherwise he might actually start liking him.

They never get around to delivering Peter to Ego. Had Yondu had his wits about him he probably wouldn't have bothered delivering any of them, but he supposes it's better to come to his senses now rather than later, when hundreds of children have been lost.

Peter is the sixth child. Ego won't tell Yondu what happened to the other five.

The fifth had been Yondu's favourite. She'd been a tiny, curious thing called Alaria, with blue skin like his own. Throughout the twelve days she spent on the ship, she'd been an ever-present shadow, constantly by his side as he carried out his tasks and ordered the crew around. She didn't seem to miss her homeworld much, only responding with a mild shrug when asked if she wanted to go home before asking for more dessert, and by the fifth day

she'd started mimicking Yondu's speech patterns and baring her teeth in the same ugly manner he did.

When he delivered her to Ego, he gifted her with a tiny Ravager outfit of her own along with one of his precious dolls, and she gave him a crushing hug in return. He'd flown off with more reluctance than usual and had unconsciously spent the next week searching for his tiny shadow whenever he was alone. It had become necessary to try not to think about her, though given how often Ego seemed to move onto the next child with barely a mention of the last, an uncomfortable sensation was starting to nag at his gut. Sure enough, by the time Ego got around to requesting Peter's delivery, he'd had to be reminded of his own daughter's name when Yondu had asked after her.

It's a conversation that still haunts him. Every time he closes his eyes he can see it play out; those bitter moments after Ego had given Yondu everything he needed to know in order to find Peter:

"Tell me. How's little Ali doin'?"

"Ali?"

It had marked the first time Yondu had ever seen the celestial appear confused, albeit subtly, and the sight was one that lanced through his chest.

"You know, Alaria? Little blue thing I delivered two months ago? Your daughter?"

He could practically see Ego trying to cover his ass, the gears grinding in his brain, as his confusion melted away into a smile that was not quite bright enough to mask the empty nothingness in his eyes.

"She's doing great, as are the others. They all love it here. I'm sure Peter will too."

Yondu stopped listening at that point. The damage was done; any alarm bells that had been ringing in his ears were now deafening, and he cancelled the call without another word. He might have forgiven Ego, perhaps, if 'Ali' had merely been a pet-name Yondu had invented for the little girl, but it wasn't.

It was the name Alaria asked everyone to call her upon meeting them. She would hold out her hand and her face would brighten with a precocious smile as she cheerfully declared "Call me Ali!" to anyone who would listen. Yondu had obeyed, amused by his new guest, as had Kraglin and most of the crew. Even assholes like Taserface would use her chosen nickname, though that was likely because 'Alaria' was too difficult for those idiots to pronounce.

It was a name that Ego should have been familiar with, and would have been if he'd shown even an ounce of warmth towards his daughter. Either she'd been too frightened to ask him to use it, or she had asked and he simply hadn't cared to remember.

Regardless of the answer, there's no longer any doubt in Yondu's mind that the little girl is dead.

The crew obeyed his orders to pick up Peter on the assumption that delivering him to his father was still the intention, but Yondu had already made up his mind by then. The only reason he hadn't left the boy on Terra was because he knew Ego would only hire someone else to do the job, and at least having the kid on the ship assures Yondu that he's alive. The boy can be a pain in the ass with his silent act and there is little room on the ship as it was without him adding to it, but Yondu isn't sending another child off to that psychopath of a father.

He crossed a line by dealing in kids; he has no intention to play a further part in murdering them.

Or at least he doesn't, until one night while trying to snatch a few hours of rest he's disturbed by a faint rustling at his back. The noise has him rolling tired eyes, before reaching for the blaster hidden beneath his pillow and whirling round to point it at his intruder, only to be met by wide green eyes hidden under messy curls. The boy at least has the sense to look terrified when there's a gun pointed at his head, but Yondu notices that he hasn't let go of the stuff he was trying to steal.

"How the hell'd ya get in 'ere, boy?!" he demands, before remembering that he's unlikely to get an answer. Not that he needs one; the question's barely uttered before he notices that the vent linking the air supply from his room to the corridor has been pried open. The kid's crawled through the tight space with the intention of stealing back the belongings taken from him on the first day, if the worn backpack in his arms is any indication. Yondu would be impressed if he hadn't made a mess in the process, flinging clothes and dolls and even his arrow onto the floor while he searched.

Yondu gives off a low growl, before closing his eyes and trying to regain something approaching composure. He's too tired for this.

"'Ere's what yer gonna do, kid," he says, blaster still raised despite him having no intention of using it. Peter doesn't even blink as he speaks, probably still wondering whether he's more likely to be shot or eaten. "You can take yer stuff, seein' as it's yours and all. But yer gonna clean up yer mess, cause I sure as 'ell ain't doin' it, and yer gonna crawl through that 'ole ya came through and run off to yer room. Ya ever break in 'ere again, I'll let my boys eat you. Don' matter how skinny you are, there's still plenty meat on yer bones to go 'round, ya hear?"

The kid nods frantically, his face white as a sheet, before desperately reaching for the mess scattered across the floor and flinging it none too neatly into the drawer. Yondu imagines it's as good a result as he's gonna get considering how much the kid's shaking, and sure enough, it isn't long before he's crawling through the vent in record time and leaving the Captain to his thoughts.

Perhaps Yondu shouldn't have been lenient enough to let Peter keep the backpack, but he has to admit that part of him's impressed at the kid's resolve to get it back.

They'll make a Ravager out of him yet.

It's a while before he sees the kid again after that, but he hears the grumbling among his crew about how unfair it is that he gets to stay on the ship without doing any work while they have to slave away day by day.

Yondu occasionally asks aloud exactly how many of them even do the work they've been assigned and revels in the sheepish response he often gets, but he has to admit that on some level they're right. It's no longer a secret that they have no intention of handing the kid over to Ego, which means they're stuck with him. If Peter's going to call the ship his home, it's probably about time he works for it like the rest of them (occasionally) do.

Telling him that would require finding him though, and Peter's new hobby is hiding in every tiny corner he can find. The ship's footage has caught him in the air-vents, in the cargo hold, sneaking around the bedrooms when their occupants aren't around, and even crawling through the ship's engine room. If he's not careful he's going to get himself killed, whether by irate crew-members or machinery, but then Yondu supposes that would be the kid's own fault. He's still keeping up his silent act after an impressive six weeks, and has even stopped screaming angrily at any crewmate who looks at him funny.

Yondu can't help but wonder if that's as infuriating for the kid as it is for everyone else who has to deal with him.

He eventually spots him by chance while patrolling the quieter decks of the ship, claiming a few precious moments of relief from the rest of his crew. A flash of Ravager red at the corner of his eye has him freezing, and he looks up to find the kid with half his body leaning out of a vent. He looks rather vexed at having been caught, especially when Yondu gifts him with a particularly unnerving smile. It's almost adorable, how his brows furrow in childish frustration and his mouth becomes fixed in a deep frown which doesn't suit him.

"Come down from there kid, 'fore ya hurt yourself," Yondu says, the grin still playing on his lips even as he aims for sternness. Peter stubbornly stays put for a number of seconds before sighing and pulling himself free from the vent, keeping his grip firm on the metal bars at the side so he can rearrange his limbs and land feet-first.

It hits Yondu, now that the kid's standing beside him, that he really is tiny. Smaller than Ali even, and he's pretty sure she was younger than Peter (though perhaps the difference in species played a part in that). For a creature so slight, it's amazing how much concealed rage and contempt lingers in green eyes and a clenched jaw. The kid almost reminds Yondu of himself at that age, though back then his silent act had been more out of fear of reprisals than an undying stubborn streak.

The kid's skinny frame looks like it'd be useful on any jobs the Ravagers get in future. Yondu decides it's probably time he followed the advice of his crew and put the kid to work.

"C'mon, boy," he says, before grabbing the kid by the arm and starting to drag him along the corridor. He uses only as much force as he needs to, seeing as anything in excess would probably snap the kid like a twig. "Bout time ya started doin' some work 'round here."

That goes down as well as one could expect. The kid starts up his incessant yelling again, his teeth bared like some wild beast, and Yondu curses out loud when he feels a small fist

hammering against his arm. He stops in the middle of the corridor, grip still tight around the kid's arm, and kneels so that they're eye to eye, any humour vanishing from his face. Peter seems to notice his anger and his tirade dies a little, but Yondu can still see the rage boiling behind his eyes. Not that that matters; the kid's probably seeing the same in Yondu's own.

"Now you listen 'ere, boy," Yondu growls lowly, wiping the rage from Peter's face and returning his expression to one of the frightened eight-year-old he truly is. "I been patient with you for a long time, but that don' mean ya get to walk all over me like I'm some kinda pushover. Ya lay one hand on me again and my boys'll be feastin' on ya after I've put my arrow through yer skull, that clear?"

The kid doesn't look as frightened as he did during the early days, but Yondu can still feel the doubt coming off him in waves. It seems the kid's finally put it together that there's only so many times he can push his luck and it's about time he started doing as he's told, and if it takes false threats to make him realise that then so be it (because of course Yondu won't kill him. Peter doesn't need to know that though).

"I asked you a question, boy," Yondu says, just to make sure the message has truly sunk in. "Is. That. Clear?"

The kid stays silent, but he gulps and gives a single nod. It's not much, but it's enough that Yondu's satisfied, and he returns to full height before continuing to drag the kid along endless corridors. They pass the occasional crewmate who instinctively sniggers at the sight of the runt being dragged by their captain, but they're quickly silenced by a single look on Yondu's part. The kid doesn't make a sound throughout the trip, not even irritated groans, and Yondu takes that as a blessing. The kid could scream the entire ship down if he really wanted to.

They find Kraglin after nearly half an hour of searching, and Yondu finally lets go of the kid when his first-mate acknowledges them and looks down at Peter with amused curiosity. Kraglin, unlike most of the crew, has taken a liking to the kid and was the one trusted to give him a tour of the ship when he started to settle. He's probably more qualified than most to take Peter under his wing with the chores.

"Kid needs to earn his keep," Yondu says while looking down at Peter, who's now moodily rubbing his arm and keeping his gaze fixed to the grimy floor. "Any chance ya could find some jobs for 'im?"

"Sure thing, Cap'n," Kraglin says with a toothy smile, before patting Peter on the back a little too forcefully. The kid shoots him a death-glare which loses its sting when the man actually looks apologetic. "C'mon Peter. I'll show ya how everythin works 'round 'ere."

He's about to turn towards the heart of the ship, where most of the chores are carried out, before Yondu grips his shoulder and draws him close so that the kid won't hear what he has to say.

"Don't make him do anythin' ya wouldn' do yourself for now," he mutters, looking down at Peter who seems to be straining to hear. "Kid looks fragile. The slightest effort'd probably break him."

Kraglin glances down at the kid before looking back to Yondu and nodding in agreement. They both wander off after that, Peter with considerably less enthusiasm, and Yondu allows himself a small smile before returning to his quiet stroll around the ship.

The smile fades quickly, because he can't have his crew thinking another child is turning him soft.

Peter takes to his chores about as well as Yondu expects, in that he hates them with a passion.

It becomes a daily trial to not laugh when he shows up to the canteen at night, covered in oil and grime and aiming a sour frown towards anyone who looks his way. Kraglin rarely leaves his side during working hours so at least the kid is no longer at risk of being attacked and eaten, although in his silence it's difficult to tell whether he actually likes the first-mate's presence. He tolerates it well enough that Yondu can afford to spend less of his own time worrying about him though, so that's a bonus.

One thing Peter does start taking a liking to, however, is thieving.

They're starting to get jobs on the regular in this quadrant of the galaxy, and it's amazing how much easier it is to snatch thousands of units or advanced machinery or precious jewels when they send a child to do the work rather than several large, raucous men. Peter's small and quick enough to be in and out of tight spaces in a matter of minutes, and even the members of the crew who once wanted him dead have started roaring with victory and pride when he returns to their group with a backpack full of riches.

Their noise does have the unfortunate side-effect of attracting the guards that Peter had been so careful to avoid, but running back to their ship is far less humiliating when their job has already been completed.

The boy's most recent haul consists of ten glittering jade stones, and Yondu grins as he's presented with a backpack filled with blinding green. He reaches out to playfully ruffle Peter's hair and solemnly says "Good job, kiddo," and unless his eyes are deceiving him, his praise earns him a small smile from the boy.

Their group march back to the ship with little care for any attention their excited babble will attract, with Peter balanced on Kraglin's shoulders and fighting to keep his balance as his crewmates take turns patting him appreciatively on the back. If he dislikes the attention, however, he doesn't show it. Instead his eyes are bright and the tension that once seemed a permanent fixture has eased, if only a little. When they finally arrive back on the ship and Kraglin puts him down, Yondu leads Peter towards the piloting deck and doesn't miss the excitement burning in the kid's eyes when he declares "'S bout time we showed ya the market."

The market in question is the largest of its kind; a black-market gathering taking up the entirety of a small trading planet. Its thousands of stalls manned by species from all over the galaxy provides a feast for the eyes, and if one knows where to go, it's a good way for a Ravager to make quick money through selling his wares. It's also notorious for pickpockets

and ugly brawls so it's generally a place Yondu would prefer to spend as little time as possible, but he's prepared to linger just this once seeing as it's the kid's first time.

Only a small party of them embark from the ship once they land in the bay, Yondu having left strict instructions to those left behind to not cause a riot when he's gone. Peter stays by his side at all times, a silent shadow at the corner of his eye, and as they approach the endless crowd of stalls, Yondu looks down to see the kid's eyes are wide with wonder.

Not that he can blame him. The market is a sight to behold as every colour one can imagine assaults the eyes, and creatures from all walks of life wander from stall to stall to assess wares from across the galaxy. They pass traders selling silk robes which glitter under the light of the twin afternoon suns, and ageless beings selling relics from thousands of years ago (or so they say). Peter lingers outside every food vendor they pass, engrossed by the sight of bubbling pink beverages and mouth-watering meats roasting on spits and tooth-rotting sweets from thousands of planets. Yondu doesn't let him stay too long – he has jewels to sell after all – but he lets him indulge in his curiosity enough that the kid doesn't seem too annoyed whenever they have to move on.

He also becomes fixated on most of the people they pass in the narrow streets, though to be fair to the kid, it's certainly a more diverse bunch than he's likely to find back on Terra. They pass beings of pure gold and tentacled beasts with impressive gills on their slippery smooth skin and tall, imposing creatures bearing a tattoo for every man they've killed. Considering most of the latter are covered head to toe, Yondu starts nudging Peter to distract him before they can be accosted by murderous assholes who don't appreciate being looked at funny.

The creature who buys their stones is a curious little woman with leathery brown skin and piercing green eyes. Those eyes examine each stone intensely, the minutes dragging so long that Peter starts to yawn and grow restless, but eventually she seems satisfied and hobbles over to her locked chest. The stones are placed into its depths and four hundred-thousand units are taken out and delivered into Yondu's hands, and he leaves her with his most charming smile before placing a hand on Peter's back and guiding him away from her stall.

"We should prob'ly head back now," Yondu says, and rather predictably Peter's head whirls up to him, his disappointment evident. "Relax, boy. I said we *should*. Didn't say we had to. 's yer first time here and ya did good today. Ya promise not to cause any trouble and I might get ya somethin'. Anythin' ya like."

The boy breaks into a grin so wide it must hurt, and he grabs Yondu's wrist before leading him back to the vendor with the steaming pink drinks. They're fairly cheap so Yondu relents and gets them both a mug full of the stuff, before swallowing his own down in a single gulp.

It's sickeningly sweet but the warmth is pleasant as it runs down his throat, and it only takes a few seconds for the pleasing kick of alcohol to brighten his tired mind. He wipes the pink froth from his lips and looks down to find the kid's face twisted in confusion, before settling on disgust as he grimaces and coughs. Yondu laughs as Peter hands his mug back to the vendor, a teenage Xandarian who's sniggering himself, and pats him on the back until he stops coughing.

"Give it ten years, kiddo," he says between chuckles. "You'll like it a lot better then."

They wander a little further into the crowds, any concern about their abandoned crew starting to fade. As they draw closer to the heart of the marketplace, scattered music from several buskers starts to rise above the noise of the crowd, and more than once they stop to admire dancers whose gentle auras and silky robes make their movements seem as fluid as water. Yondu makes a quick stop at a stall dedicated to dolls and buys one of a small green, yellow-eyed creature that Ali would have loved. Their server is a large, kindly woman who seems to be enamoured with Peter, giving him a warm smile as she hands Yondu his purchase.

"Is this for your boy?" she asks, her voice smooth as honey as she looks between Yondu and Peter. One look at the boy's face shows a mock innocence that seems entirely at Yondu's expense.

"He ain't my boy," he corrects her, perhaps more abruptly than necessary. When her face darkens a little, motherly concern boiling underneath pink skin, he tries to mould his expression into something approaching kindness, though it's hardly one he's used to. "Kid lost his momma a few weeks back. I'm lookin' after 'im for the time bein'."

Any suspicion melts into pity and she brings her hand up to her mouth with a sympathy so overblown, Yondu would almost suspect she was faking if she wasn't otherwise so sincere. She sends Peter a choked "You poor thing," which has annoyance flickering across his face before he manages to compose himself, and she lowers her hand to rest upon her chest.

"Young man, you can have anything here you like. Free of charge," she continues. That seems to earn her forgiveness for being so patronising, as the kid starts scanning every item in the stall with newfound interest.

He settles on an ugly looking thing with a weird expression and wild orange hair, but Yondu doesn't bother questioning it. He leaves the woman with a small smile and stuffs both his and Peter's dolls into the kid's backpack, starting to feel the urge to head back to the ship. The market's an interesting place, certainly, but it doesn't take long for it to become suffocating, and Yondu's not sure he appreciates the fact that at least a few people are seeing him with Peter and assuming he's the boy's father. It's not going to do wonders for his reputation if he's seen as some fool who's going soft because of a stupid kid.

A soft tug at the sleeve of his coat has him looking down to find that Peter's attention has been stolen by a distant stall draped in green tarp and advertising itself as a dealer of "Terran Wares". The kid turns his head to look up at Yondu with pleading eyes, and damn him but he can't refuse.

"Alright boy," he says, and finds himself being dragged along as Peter runs off with little care for whether he'll barge through anyone in the process. "But this is the last stop, understand?"

If Peter hears him over the ruckus of the crowd, he doesn't show it. He only puts on a burst of speed, to the point where Yondu has to fight to keep up, and practically crashes into the stall table in his enthusiasm to get to it.

It's a rather lacklustre display, in Yondu's opinion. Most of the items seem to be useless junk, ranging from weird multicoloured cubes, to small circular objects attached to a length of string, to piles of flimsy cards with different Terrans dressed in weird costumes printed on

them. The creature manning the stall is a young man with smooth red skin and milky white eyes that seem to pierce Yondu's non-existent soul. He wonders if he went to Terra himself to pick up this stuff, and if so how the hell he managed to blend in.

"See anythin' good, boy?" Yondu asks, because he'd rather not stay any longer than he has to. He'll be lenient to Peter just this once though. It's the first time in weeks he's seeing relics from his home besides those he brought with him in his small backpack.

The kid continues to silently scan every item, until his eyes narrow as he focuses on the three large objects forming the bulk of the display. They're pyramid-shaped contraptions- almost half the size of Peter himself - each displaying a crudely drawn picture on their metallic surfaces. They sit atop a circular device which resembles the old projectors Yondu sometimes resorts to when their video systems break down. Peter seems as confused by them as he is, so he looks up at the server and points to the one which seems to depict a gory scene and has the rather simplistic tagline of 'The Thing'.

"What're these then?" he asks, breaking the server out of what appears to be a bored funk. As if realising that he now has two pairs of eyes on him, the red-skinned man quickly becomes animated and gestures towards the pyramids with renewed vigour.

"These, gentlemen, are what Terrans call 'movies,'" he responds, his hands ghosting over the smooth surface of the contraptions as if they're something precious. To Yondu's surprise, Peter chokes out a laugh before looking up at him with a bitter sneer.

"Seems the boy thinks you're full a' shit," Yondu laughs, much to the chagrin of their server who had probably hoped for a reaction approaching awe rather than mockery.

"Oh, I understand why he would think so," he says, his voice high and flustered, before he holds up a hand. "But hear me out. Certainly, on Terra, movies do not look like this. They are stored on long black sheets called 'film' and are played through massive projectors this big." He raises his hand to indicate something taller than both himself and Yondu. "Obviously transporting something so large would be rather cumbersome, so I took the film and processed it. Now it runs through the internal mechanics of these machines," he continues, with a light tap on the metal casing of the pyramid. "The lower component acts as a projector. Aim this baby at a blank screen, or even just a plain wall, and Voila! You get both picture and sound, at top quality I can assure you."

Yondu remains unconvinced, but when he looks to Peter he can tell that the kid's cynicism has vanished. The expression on his face is unreadable, his eyes fixed on something so far away no-one else can hope to see it, and when he returns to the present he fixes Yondu with a silent plea that he finds he can't refuse.

"Pick one, and only one," he says gruffly, slightly annoyed at having to give money to the idiot server, but if it makes the kid happy for a few hours then he might as well swallow his pride and indulge him.

He watches as Peter assesses his three options. Besides the one that promises to be a blood and guts showcase, there's one with a badly drawn picture of a Terran holding a gun and the subtitle 'TGTBTU' – a word that probably makes sense to Peter but simply looks like

nonsense to Yondu's eyes – and one simply titled 'Jaws' which portrays some ugly grey creature surrounded by blue. Peter eventually settles on the one with the gun-wielding Terran, leading the server to clap his hands together passionately.

"An excellent choice, young man," he says, as he reaches for the contraption and starts packing it away in a box. "Terrans call movies like this one 'westens'. I'm sure you won't be disappointed."

Peter's response is little more than an amused smirk, but he willingly takes the box when it's handed over. Its weight seems to surprise him; his thin arms trembling as he tries to find a comfortable manner in which to hold it. The red-skinned man turns back to Yondu, any patronising salesmanship vanishing as he matter-of-factly states, "That'll be two-thousand units."

"Ya pullin' my leg?" Yondu spits, delighting in the slight flinch that rocks through the man's body. "It's barely worth five-hundred."

"With respect, I put a lot of work into those," the server responds in high-pitched outrage, and Yondu has to bite back a bitter laugh. "You're lucky it's not ten-thousand. I could always take it back if you're not interested."

The temptation to let him do just that burns within him for a fleeting moment, before he's reminded of the look on Peter's face when he'd realised exactly what these contraptions were. They must be important back on Terra for him to want one so desperately, and the kid did earn the Ravagers' four hundred-thousand units almost single-handedly earlier. It won't hurt much to spend a mere two-thousand on him as a reward.

"Alright, we'll take it," he says, not bothering to hide his reluctance as he hands over the units. He looks down at the kid, takes in his breathless relief, and knows that in spite of everything he's made the right decision. "But you're the one cartin' that thing back to the ship."

Peter nods willingly, even though the weight of the contraption does make their walk back considerably slower than it would have been had Yondu decided to take it.

Ah well. It's about time the kid gained some muscle.

They watch the movie that night.

Yondu and Kraglin set the weighty pyramid on a tabletop with only minimal complaining, ensuring the projector is aimed at a relatively clear portion of the canteen wall before turning it on. They then take a seat behind the device while Peter curls up on the floor, seeming to find that more comfortable for some reason, and after a few seconds of metallic rattling, the dark wall is lit up in stark white and the title "The Good, The Bad and The Ugly" flashes across the screen.

It's late enough that they're the only people in the room and any disturbances are kept to a minimum, so the kid gets to enjoy his relic from Earth in near-silence. As for Yondu, he

spends most of the time wondering which of the three main Terrans is meant to be the ugly one, while Kraglin seems to get overly emotional every time a barrage of music swells after long quiet moments. There's not much to the story, Yondu thinks, but Peter seems engrossed enough. Whenever there's a moment of tension he leans forward with wide eyes as if doing so will make the movie pass quicker, and he looks back to Kraglin with a joyful smile whenever the man makes a sound.

There's a character in the movie who seems to be the one crudely painted onto the projector; a cool, silent type in a funny hat who never seems to miss when he fires his gun. Yondu chuckles and nudges Peter's back to grab his attention, pointedly ignoring the annoyance on the kid's face at having been disturbed.

"That who ya wanna be when ya grow up?" he asks, gesturing to the man on the screen who seems to be in the process of side-eyeing one of the other characters. "Strong an' silent gunslingin' type?"

The kid's expression becomes far more thoughtful than he expects, before he shakes his head. Yondu shrugs at the answer, slightly surprised by it, before leaning back in his chair to silently watch the rest. Perhaps Peter's response makes sense. The kid spends his days surrounded by trigger-happy creatures now; he's probably figured out that it's not the best way to live one's life.

He doesn't check on Peter again until much later. They're at the part where the annoying, talky character is stumbling around gravestones and crosses while more of that Terran music blasts throughout the room. To Yondu's surprise, when he checks on the kid, his eyes are shut. He's half-tempted to nudge him and tell him to go sleep in his own room if he's that tired, before realising that he must surely be awake. His tiny body is swaying to the music as his fingers tap against the knees pulled tightly to his chest, and it hits Yondu that he isn't so much watching the movie as he is *listening* to it.

Yondu does the same. He takes in the swell of the instruments mixed with some woman's high wailing, and realises that all he can hear is a mess. There must be some beauty in that mess, however, for the kid to be so enamoured, and it hits him a lot later than it should that what has Peter so struck is the fact that it's music at all.

This is the first time in weeks he's listening to music from home that hasn't been saved on that damned device he carries wherever he goes.

It's almost enough to make Yondu appreciate it. Not quite, but almost.

The movie ends not much later, the picture sputtering before fading into blinding white as the pyramid resumes its metallic racket, and Yondu quickly silences it with the press of a button. One look over to Kraglin shows that the man fell asleep at some point if his lulling head and soft snores are any indication, and Peter himself is struggling to hide his own exhaustion as he rubs at his eyes. Yondu stands with a sigh, his joints aching after being still for so long, and he takes the device into his arms before heading out of the canteen, the kid's light footsteps following close behind.

He escorts Peter all the way to his quarters, though the ship's so quiet he hardly needs to do so, and sets the contraption on the floor of his room next to a small, slowly-building collection of stolen items from all over the ship. Yondu prepares to gruffly tell the boy to get some sleep, only to find that he's already collapsed on the bed face-first.

All he can do then is shrug, before leaving the kid to his rest.

He'll be grateful for it during his morning chores tomorrow.

Yondu makes a quick stop at the market again within the week, hunting down their red-skinned dealer with ease and delighting in the apprehension that flashes over the man's milk-white eyes. Causing trouble isn't on Yondu's agenda, but it's easy to get a deal done quickly when terrified servers assume that's the case, so he gives the man his most winning smile before asking for more of those 'westens' and perhaps some Terran batteries as well, seeing as the kid's music-player has been playing up recently.

"Take it your boy liked his movie, then?" the server asks cautiously, as he packs away two more of those ludicrous pyramids along with a small case of what Terrans amusingly call batteries. Yondu does little more than shrug, hiding the fact that the question nags at him like an embedded knife.

"He ain't my boy," he corrects, not for the first time, although at least his answer doesn't seem to interest the server much this time around. "Kid jus' liked the music in it."

"Well then, I can assure you that he won't be disappointed by these," the red-skinned man replies with an exaggerated smile as he hands over the tall boxes. Yondu tries not to baulk at the ridiculous weight of them. He figures he could probably just hire someone around here to help escort them back to the ship anyway.

The round trip only takes an hour, drawn out slightly by quarrels over the newly inflated price of the movies (*"Ten-thousand?! Ya want an arrow in your 'eart, boy?"*). Upon his return, he tells Kraglin to hide the boxes away after salvaging the batteries from them; he can't be seen spoiling the boy all at once. Peter can get the movies if he does well on future jobs, and only then.

The batteries he can have now though. Mainly because Yondu imagines that losing his music would destroy the kid, and he's too useful an asset to be reduced to a blubbering mess over some broken device.

The fact that maybe, just maybe, Yondu might be starting to care about Peter dawns on him in the worst possible circumstances.

It's supposed to be a basic job. The kid will climb through the vents built into their target's base with the aid of a holo-map and emerge twenty minutes later with a priceless platinum crown, and then they'll all be off to the market and swimming in units by dinner. It's nothing he hasn't done dozens of times before and Yondu isn't particularly worried as he watches the red dot representing Peter crawl across the lines on his screen. He's getting closer, will be

able to break into the vault in only a matter of minutes, and he can feel the eager excitement brewing among the small group of waiting Ravagers until it's broken by a familiar, terrified scream.

The cry is endless and high – a bitter reminder that it's a child making it – and Yondu swears loudly before activating his arrow and heading thoughtlessly towards the corridors which provide another route to the vault, only to be held back by a firm hand on his shoulder. He doesn't bother hiding his impatience as he looks into the eyes of Horuz, and the man at least has the sense to appear frightened when he sees the red glow of the arrow peeking out from Yondu's coat.

"Leave 'im," Horuz says, seeming to second-guess his own words as he speaks due to Yondu's icy response. "There're too many guards through there. We can jus' find some other kid to replace 'im."

It's those words that force Yondu to whistle, until the sharp tip of the arrow is almost touching the man's eye, and he sneers as Horuz lets go of him and steps back, his face ghostly pale and his breaths shuddering in his fear. The others have quietened as well, either baying for blood or wanting this all to be over, and Yondu indulges in their quiet terror for a few more seconds before remembering the more important matter here.

He calls the arrow back to him, the relief at not being skewered escaping Horuz in a sharp sob, before heading towards the thick steel doors once again. It's a surprise when the next man to raise his voice is Kraglin, albeit he does so rather hesitantly.

"Maybe 'e's right Cap'n," Kraglin says shakily, causing more ice to snake into the heart Yondu had assumed was as black as coal, but he actually has patience for his first-mate and so lets him speak. "I like Pete too, bu' there's a lot o' guys out there. And he'll prob'ly be dead before y-"

"I don' care 'bout the guards," Yondu says in a low growl, and Kraglin obediently shuts up. He tries not to dwell on the fact that the man is probably right on his latter point. So long as the kid's still blinking red on the screen, Yondu's gonna assume he can get him out of here in one piece. "I been wantin' to kill some folks for a while. Anyone else wanna try n' stop me?"

The answer is an unsurprising no. Yondu leaves them with a final instruction to go to the ship if he's not back in ten minutes, before pushing open the steel doors and grinning as the loud screech of metal attracts three armed guards at the end of the corridor. They fall in tandem as the arrow sends its red trail through their hearts, and Yondu grabs it upon its return before continuing along the path which should take him to the vault.

The journey is marked by high whistles followed by the dying screams of guards, with only two of them coming close to getting a good hit in. Their fear has their blasters firing just past Yondu, but he can still feel the melting heat as it whizzes past him and he swears under his breath before resuming his constant whistling. The arrow's easy to control in spite of the panic of the situation, and it's only a matter of minutes before he finds himself at the entrance of the vault, still ajar presumably from whoever found Peter. As Yondu pries it open, he's surprised by the sweet relief that floods through his veins as the kid's muffled groans sound from within. He may be hurt, but he's alive at least.

Their assailant has been expecting him, it seems. He's a large, brutally scarred creature with more burnt tissue on his body than untouched flesh, and a mane of thick unwashed hair flows past his shoulders. He has Peter locked in his grip, his arm alarmingly tight around his throat, and his blaster is pressed against the boy's skull, remaining there even as his captive struggles clumsily in his arms.

There's an impressive, newly bleeding scratch along the length of the creature's face that has Yondu resisting the urge to beam with pride in favour of assessing Peter's own condition. The kid's in one piece at least, though there's an impressive bruise forming on his forehead and a trickle of blood running down his face like a grotesque tear, and the alertness that Yondu's come to expect in his eyes is slightly dimmed. They can deal with that later though, when the kid's safe, and he keeps his arrow primed by his side as the creature growls a bitter welcome.

"I see you've come for your pet," he says, yanking on Peter so roughly that his feet leave the floor and he's left choking for several brutal seconds. "I'd advise you not to take another step, Captain. Unless you want me to blow your boy's brains out."

Hot, liquid rage flows through Yondu's veins at the man's words and the gleeful twist in his mangled lips, but he knows he can't be rash here. One whistle could have his opponent dead on the floor in seconds, but he can't risk him pulling the trigger through some dying-reflex. Nor can he let this draw out; Peter looks like he's struggling for precious air and the creature holding him doesn't seem to care much whether his bargaining chip lives or dies.

He's saved from having to make a difficult choice by a small movement from the boy, and before he has a chance to understand what's going on, his captor is yowling in pain and the blaster is lifted just slightly, just enough that Peter's out of the line of fire...

It's at the exact moment Yondu whistles that he sees that Peter's clamped his teeth onto his captor's hand, refusing to let go even as the man tries to shake him off and foul blood spills forth. The pained shouts are replaced by a surprised yelp in a split second, as the man looks around in confusion without realising that he now has an arrow in his eye, before he relaxes his grip on Peter and falls backwards onto a pile of coins.

Yondu reclaims his arrow and cleans it on his sleeve, while Peter shakily rises to his feet and wipes grey blood from his chin. Yondu walks over to the kid and kneels before him with a proud grin, and it's a surprise to find that despite the aftershocks of terror and pain, Peter returns it.

"Ya did good, kiddo," Yondu says, wondering if the boy's even present enough to hear him. "Gave me a 'eart attack, but ya did good."

Peter nods, but Yondu notices that his eyes are becoming more and more unfocused. He's not in a fit state to walk back to the others, and even if he tried, it would only slow them both down.

Without a second thought, Yondu places two hands under the kid's arms and lifts him up. It's probably a bad sign that Peter doesn't even groan in protest at being manhandled, and instead wraps thin arms around Yondu's neck and rests his head tiredly against his shoulder, but that's something they can deal with back on the ship.

Yondu rises to his feet, ensures that the kid's safe enough in his arms, and walks out of the vault to meet up with the others.

He should probably be more concerned by how he must look, cradling a sleeping child in his arms like a caring mother, but after the rush of the last few minutes that thought doesn't have the chance to cross his mind.

The kid wakes up five hours later. Yondu's roused from a light doze by a pitiful moan as Peter starts flailing among his bedsheets in confusion, and he only calms and opens bleary eyes when a cool, damp cloth is pressed against his forehead. He'll be fine, if the scans are any indication, but it's likely he'll have a killer headache for at least a day. Yondu can't say he envies him.

"Now, I know wha' yer thinkin', boy," he says with an amused grin when Peter's eyes finally focus on his caregiver. "Yer wonderin' why ya haven' got some pretty nurse or why the ship medic's not 'ere instead. Well let me tell you, I'm as pretty a nurse as yer ever gonna find on this ship, an' I only trust the medic bout as far as I can throw 'im. And he's a big fella so I can't throw 'im very far."

To his surprise, Peter starts to laugh. It's all too brief, and quite possibly an indicator that he's more damaged than Yondu had previously thought, but it's a strangely pleasant sound to hear in the quiet bowels of the ship. It's almost a shame when it ends, especially seeing as what replaces it is a pained groan which only quietens when Yondu re-soaks the cloth in icy water and returns it to Peter's forehead.

He's not going to be able to keep this up for long. Most of his men are already irate at the fact that he risked his own life to bring Peter back, no matter how useful the kid's been for the last few months, and staying by his side until he gets better is hardly going to dispel any rumours that he's going soft on the kid. He can threaten those who try anything funny with his arrow for the time being, but he's going to have to start being a little harder on Peter once he's better. At the very least, he can give him more chores to do seeing as he's starting to get a little meat on his bones, though he can only imagine how well that suggestion's going to go down.

For now, though, Yondu doesn't care. He can deal with his men in the morning, or at the very least distract them with a job if they get any clients through the night. At present, the kid's his priority.

Despite his five-hour rest, Peter still seems exhausted. His eyes are bleary and his limbs look achingly heavy every time he rubs his eyes, and when he glances over to Yondu, it's with the same confusion every time. He's probably in need of some proper sleep rather than the unconscious funk he's emerged from, and Yondu leans back in his chair as green eyes lazily fall on him once more.

"Ya need somethin' to help you sleep?" he asks, because he's pretty sure if drifting off were easy, Peter would have done so by now. Perhaps it's Yondu's presence that's putting him off. "I can put on one a' those movies ya like so much, or give ya yer music?"

Peter's eyes light up at the latter suggestion, so Yondu reaches into the drawer at the side of his bed and pulls free his precious device. He helps the kid place the orange headset over his ears and clicks the button to start it up, and before long the air is interrupted by the soft, muffled sounds of some Terran singer, probably crooning away about love or pina coladas or some other nonsense. Peter likes it though, so Yondu doesn't bother judging.

The kid wraps the covers more tightly around himself and turns onto his side, curling into a little ball, and Yondu smiles before clapping him on the shoulder and rising to his feet.

The air is broken by a soft, barely audible, "Thanks mom."

Yondu freezes, as if the moment is being stretched out around him, and he finds he can't quite suppress the smile that spreads across his face, much as he tries. The kid's delirious, sure, and it probably won't be long before he returns to being a silent shadow, but for the first time in six months Yondu actually got to hear his voice.

He isn't cruel enough to correct Peter. He might as well let the kid indulge in exhausted fantasy, where his momma is still there to look after him, and so he simply leaves him with an order to get some sleep before wandering back to his own quarters.

It's a good thing no-one's around to see the smile on his face. Denying the fact that he's going soft would probably be a lot more difficult otherwise.

The kid doesn't emerge the following day to do his chores. Considering how out of it he was the night before, Yondu's willing to forgive this, but some of the crew are crying 'special treatment' (instead of doing their own work, funnily enough) and so he assures them he'll talk to the kid and force him to do some work the next day.

He doubts that's truly the reason he drags himself to the kid's room that evening, when the rest of the crew are feasting in the canteen. Much as Yondu hates to admit it, it's more likely that he's acting out of concern; a need to know if Peter is still as sick as he'd been the night before, or worse. The fact that Peter had finally spoken after all this time is more concerning than anything else, even though the soft, tired voice is one that clings to Yondu's mind in much the same way as "*Call me Ali!*" has after all these months.

Peter will be fine. The ship's footage showed him up and about in his room earlier, weakly dancing to the music playing in his ears.

Yondu still feels the need to check.

He doesn't bother knocking once he reaches the kid's room, but if Peter minds the interruption he doesn't show it. He simply peels the headset away from his ears and pauses the tape, before settling on the edge of the bed as Yondu approaches. It's likely he was expecting visitors after his no-show today, and that having Yondu rock up at his door is a more preferable option than anyone else.

"How ya doin', boy?" Yondu asks, settling down on the rickety chair by Peter's bed. It's as uncomfortable as it was yesterday; the pain of spending all those hours in it still clinging to

his back.

Peter merely shrugs, but when his eyes meet Yondu's own they seem a lot brighter than they were yesterday. His bruise has become a pale yellow and the cut across his forehead is healing faster than Yondu expected, fading to a pale pink line. There's more colour in his cheeks as well, making his skin seem a little less ghostly against the red leather of his jacket. He'll probably be good as new in a matter of days.

"Yer lookin' better anyhow," Yondu says, clapping the kid on the shoulder and earning a small smile in response. "Don' know if ya remember, but ya were a little out o' it yesterday. Thought I was yer momma."

The memory has him laughing, but he doesn't miss the way Peter freezes at his words. It's almost enough to make him regret mentioning it, seeing as it's likely the kid doesn't remember much from last night, but it's too late for that now.

He'd forgotten how raw the pain of losing his mother must still be for Peter.

"She musta loved ya," he continues, doubting the words will help but finding them pouring out regardless. "If she were the type o' momma who looked after her sick kid then she musta loved you a lot. Makes ya lucky."

Yondu knows at that point that he's said too much, opened himself up far more than he should have done. Peter knows it too. His eyes lift to meet Yondu's own, the thoughts running beneath them as clear as if he were voicing them, and the sudden spotlight prickles uncomfortably at Yondu's skin. Just because his own mother found more value in the units the Kree gave her than the son she sold to them, doesn't mean he should spite Peter for having a mother of his own who actually cared.

Especially considering his asshole of a father. The man who hadn't deserved the love of the woman he left to raise his child alone, and who certainly doesn't deserve Peter.

Silence stretches for endless moments, and Yondu would appreciate it more if it wasn't so crushing. Peter's attention has been drawn to the music player in his hands, as though his visitor no longer exists, and Yondu is tempted to just leave him to his thoughts before he's interrupted by the soft voice he hadn't put much hope in hearing again.

"I didn' take her hand," Peter says, the words sounding forced and uncertain after so many months of silence. Yondu thinks he can see the kid's eyes watering, but he doesn't mention it. "She asked me to, but I couldn' do it."

"Why couldn' ya?" Yondu asks, as gently as he dares.

Peter shrugs, before furiously wiping the tears from his eyes. His chest shudders with every breath and Yondu notices that his grip on the music-player is now white-knuckled.

"I knew her hand'd be cold," the kid says finally, a stray tear slipping down his cheek. If Peter notices it, he doesn't seem to care. "Her hands were always cold back then."

Yondu doesn't say anything for a while. He faintly remembers Ego telling him that the kid's momma was sick – that she was *dying* – in the same nonchalant tone he'd used to describe how the other kids were doing, even though they were probably all dead by then. Ego hadn't seemed to care, and Yondu had been too concerned with getting the kid to safety to think about the mother he'd be leaving behind. Peter had been the one to suffer as his momma got sicker; the one to face the prospect of being left on his own.

A notion that had been perfectly summed up by once warm hands that had become ice-cold.

"You really miss her, don't ya?"

Peter gives a wordless nod, before looking up with wet, red eyes. Had he been anyone else then Yondu would have mocked him, berated him for being so weak, but at the end of the day Peter's still just a kid. His life with the Ravagers is not going to be any easier because of that, and there are very few on the ship who will actually care about his age. Most will have no qualms pushing him around.

There will likely be occasions where Yondu's the one who has to do the pushing or threatening to keep the kid in line, but at the very least he can help Peter look after himself and ensure he actually gets the chance to grow up.

(Unlike the others. Unlike Ali)

"I tell ya what, kid," Yondu says before the silence that surrounds them can become too heavy. "You go get somethin' to eat, then come back an' listen to yer tunes, or watch yer movies or get some sleep. Do whatever makes ya feel better for now. An' tomorrow, if yer willin' to give up yer silent act, I migh' even teach ya how to shoot. That sound alright?"

A smile breaks across Peter's face, slightly forced but real enough that Yondu lets himself be reassured that the kid's gonna be fine. He responds to the suggestion of learning to shoot with an eager nod, and leaps off the bed to make his way to the door before Yondu stops him in his tracks.

"I didn' hear ya, kiddo," he says, not bothering to hide the amused grin breaking across his face. "Ya wanna learn to shoot or not?"

For a split second, Peter looks like saying another word will break him, before his playful smile returns and he gives his answer as a bright, "Yes."

Yondu chuckles, before shaking his head and waving Peter off.

"Go get somethin' to eat, kid."

He doesn't bother watching him go; only listens as the kid's footsteps echo along the corridor before fading into empty silence.

If the warmth that spreads through his otherwise empty heart is any indication, he's going to have to be careful from now on. It's bad enough that he likes Peter and that he's protective of him, but if he doesn't watch himself then it won't be long before he starts to love him.

Yondu's pretty sure that'll be all it takes to destroy him.

It takes a few more months, but it's not long before Peter's talking so much it's almost enough to make Yondu wish he'd return to his silent act.

Almost.

End Notes

Some notes about this story:

1) I'm not the biggest fan of westerns, but I'm pretty sure if I heard Ennio Morricone's music after several weeks in space I would cry like a baby (especially if it was 'The Ecstasy of Gold') so that's why I chose 'The Good, The Bad and the Ugly' for Peter's movie choice. Also because him choosing 'The Thing' would probably break the universe, assuming it still stars Kurt Russell in the Marvel-world

2) Alaria was an aspect of this story which had a much smaller part in my head, then kept cropping up until I started getting angry at Ego all over again on behalf of a character I'd made up

I hope you enjoyed this! Thank you so much for reading :)

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