

You can change right next to me

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You can change right next to me

by [LovesFrogs](#)

Summary

What if Tony got dusted instead of Peter? Peter gets back home with Nebula and Captain Marvel only to find that May is gone, his two best friends are gone, and the Avengers are broken and defeated. He doesn't even have anywhere to go until Pepper, who has recently discovered that she's going to have a baby, offers to take him in.

("You don't even know me.")

"No, but I know Tony, and his trust is good enough for me." She softens. Her eyes are red. "Please, I need someone, too," she doesn't say, but Peter hears it anyway. He goes with her.)

(Not strictly ironclad, but not not ironclad, so I put it in the collection anyway.)

Notes

This is not my usual style, so please bear with me as I experiment and let me know what you think!

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

What if Tony got dusted instead of Peter? Peter gets back home with Nebula and Captain Marvel only to find that May is gone, his two best friends are gone, and the Avengers are broken and defeated. He doesn't even have anywhere to go until Pepper, who has recently discovered that she's going to have a baby, offers to take him in.

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Everything has stopped. Peter and Pepper retreat to the Stark's vacation house, which is a cabin on a lake about two hours away. (Pepper calls it a cabin. Peter, if he had any joy left in him, would have argued that label for days. The place is bigger than his apartment complex.)

He watches as she pours endless time and effort into helping those who are stranded and alone, and does his best to make things easier for this virtual stranger who has taken him in. As she gets farther along he does more and more to help. He learns to cook, picks up his mess, and nags and nags and nags Pepper to take a break for the sake of the baby if nothing else.

Pepper even adopts him. It's not like anyone cares about him just living with her as things are, but she wants to make sure everything is documented and legal just in case.

("You don't have to do this, Pepper.")

"Has it ever occurred to you that I want to?"

She doesn't say, "You're all that keeps me going some days." She doesn't say, "I love you."

Peter hears her anyway. He doesn't say "I love you" back, but they both know she knows. It's enough.)

They have good days and bad days. Peter has lost his parents and his uncle already, and now his aunt and tentative mentor-figure have disappeared in one blow along with the only two friends he had to his name. Pepper is fraying at the seams, trying to prepare for single parenthood, run the remains of a company, coordinate relief efforts, and be strong for the teenager that has been thrust into her life like a final gift from her dead fiance.

One day when she's hot and very pregnant and crampy and tired, she lets loose. She screams at Peter. She barely even knows why.

(That's a lie. She knows.)

In the deepest parts of her heart that she never, ever will let anyone see, she wishes that this boy had disappeared instead of Tony. She just wants her partner back.

Peter understands. He's thought the same thing about May. They cry on the floor together at the end of the night.

(Peter's heart has been shattered too many times to fully repair, but Pepper takes pieces of her own broken heart and does the best patch job she can. Peter tries to do the same for her.)

Peter is the one to drive Pepper to the hospital to have Morgan. Peter is the second one to hold the baby and cries when he sees new life instead of death for the first time in what feels like forever. Morgan saves Peter's life, just like she would have for Tony.

(It's Morgan's whole, unbroken heart that does the most healing in the end.)

Peter is Morgan's protective older brother from the moment she's born. His super hearing picks up her little cries before Pepper can get out of bed for the third time, he learns to change her and feed her, what she likes and what she throws back in his face. She's speaking in small sentences by the time she's two, and Peter and Pepper are convinced she'll have her father's genius. That's also about the time that schools are getting back in gear. Pepper pushes him out the door and into MIT, the school of his dreams. She sends his Spider Suit with him, even though he hasn't worn it in two years. If only Ned was here to dream with him.

Peter learns. He grows. He comes home as often as he can manage, giving Pepper a break and spending time with Morgan. He swears she grows a few inches between every visit he makes. None of his new friends begrudge him for it either--everyone holds tighter to their families now than they did before. ~~What family they have left, anyway.~~ Peter says his adopted mom and little sister are all he has, and they understand. He doesn't mention names, and they don't ask. When he meets Gwen Stacy and develops a real connection with her, he regains even more life. Gwen's a year older than Peter, but they've been in a lot of the same classes, and her ongoing kindness and tenacity in the face of losing her parents at eighteen impress him. He tells her about Pepper and Morgan, and eventually about Spiderman.

She tells him to get back in the suit. He goes to Tony's workshop instead.

The bots are as welcoming as ever. Peter sits in Tony's chair, and takes in the way the empty space feels without him. (This was Tony's home, even more than his bedroom.)

"I have a message from Boss for you," FRIDAY says. "Playing now."

Before Peter can even question what that means a hologram of Tony appears like an unexpected gutpunch.

"Hey, Kid. If you're reading this, I'm probably dead. Sorry about that."

Peter chokes on a laugh. Or a sob. He's not really sure which.

The hologram bounces back and forth. Tony is showing a vulnerability in this recording that Peter never got to witness in real life. It's weird. ~~It's heart-wrenching.~~

"I just wanted to tell you... I'm so proud of what you've done. What you're doing literally right now. Karen tells me you're helping a little boy get his shoe off the school roof. You're like the kid I never had, Pete. You're already better than Iron Man, and don't let anybody tell you any different, including yourself."

(Peter tries not to think about the bitter irony of the kid Tony did have, but never even knew about. He fails.)

Tony looks up, right into Peter's eyes.

“Go get married, live life, do good. Don't hold back, okay? You, Peter Parker, are going to take the world by storm better than I ever did.” He takes a deep breath. “That's all I wanted to say. You've got this. And if you get the chance, watch out for Pepper, okay? I think you two would get along.”

The message cuts out.

Peter doesn't cry. He puts on the suit.

(The world is still full of criminals, even after the biggest tragedy it will hopefully ever see. Now, though, Peter is more likely to run into a homeless teen stealing to survive than he is a cruel criminal plot.

It's easier to deal with when he can just send them to one of the StarkIndustries relief centers.)

~~(It's the hardest thing he's ever faced.)~~

Peter ends up double majoring in engineering and biochemistry in three years, taking online classes in the summer between playing with Morgan, going out with Gwen, and helping where he can as a small time hero. In no time at all he's in grad school doing research and getting weekly phone calls from Morgan about what she's been doing in kindergarten. He's not okay, no one is okay, but life is getting better. He and Pepper take turns telling Morgan stories about her daddy.

Scott Lang is still released from the quantum realm five years after the snap, but without Tony Stark to go to what's left of the Avengers team is stuck for a long time. None of them think of Spiderman, and if they had none of them would have known how smart he really was, not to mention the fact that he's still only twenty two years old. Still, Pepper manages to find out and tells Peter about it. He drops by to visit one weekend, strides into the compound, and takes a day to correct Dr. Banner's assumptions so that the time travel devices work.

Peter makes them all promise that they won't erase what happened in the past five years. He's lost everything, but he's gained some back, too, and Peter wouldn't give up being a big brother for anything.

(He wouldn't give up Pepper and Morgan for everything.)

He calls Pepper, and she tells him Tony would have been proud. They both refuse to cry.

They get the stones from the past, but Thanos realizes their plan. Dr. Banner snaps his fingers, and for a second everything is perfect.

Then the bombs hit.

The battle is a blur of fighting, webbing, punching... Peter goes harder and faster than he ever has before, Karen helping him along. Even when he's gone, Mr. Stark's program is still saving him. But it's not enough.

Peter lays, dazed, on the ground. Thanos' army is greater than ever, but the Avengers are all but wiped out.

He has almost given up when orange portals begin opening and an army walks out. An army of people he'd thought were *dead*.

Peter feels tears streaming down his face when Mr. Stark flies out, but there's no time for a grand reunion yet. They have the gauntlet and it needs to get to Ant Man's battered old van. Peter watches out of the corner of his eye as it gets passed from person to person until it's his turn to take it up. He runs, swings, grabs help from passing heroes, but Thanos' battleship is too much for them. Just as the cannons are about to decimate them all, Captain Marvel descends like a shooting star to take it out. As she works, Peter is knocked back into the ground, winded and wounded and unable to go any farther.

A blue hand pries the gauntlet from his grip. "I'll take it, Peter," says Nebula. He's barely seen her since the spaceship when he was seventeen and still only grieving Tony. "How will we get through all that?" he asks. Thanos' army of foot soldiers is advancing like a tsunami and there's no question of whether he's helping her. Even if the universe didn't depend on it, he still owes her his life for getting him out of Tony's ashes and off of Titan.

Pepper lands beside them in an armor Peter had re-purposed for her as a birthday present, just in case.

("You don't even know how much like him you are, do you?")

"What?" said Peter.

"Tony. He would have done this too. He probably would have made one for Morgan to play in."

"That's not a bad idea..."

"Stop it. Right now." But she was laughing.)

"Peter, are you okay?"

"Yeah," he says. "Now we just have to get this through all... that."

Pepper turns glinting eyes to Nebula. "You brought news of my husband and gave me a son. Tell me what you need."

Nebula spares her a single glance. "Air support." Peter thinks he catches the smallest smile of approval twisting across her blue lips as Pepper leaves the ground once more. He doesn't doubt his mom will be keeping as much of an eye on him as she can amidst all this chaos as well.

Peter's enhanced senses prickle as a green blur runs passed him, cleaving a path of destruction through the advancing soldiers for Nebula to run through. "Go for the head, Gamora!" Nebula shouts. As if listening to an unspoken signal, she and Peter make eye contact and sprint together toward the van.

Peter gets blasted from her side by a child of Thanos with a gun straight out of Gwen's first person shooter games. He has a brief flash of *this is where I die* before a repulsor blast stronger than almost any he's seen so far takes the alien out in a flash.

(There was no mistaking that blast. He could say he thought it was Pepper, but he would be lying.)

The red and gold suit lands in front of him. "You okay, kid?"

"Mr. Stark," Peter whispers. "Mr. Stark!" Before he can think better of it he runs in for a hug. Mr. Stark takes it awkwardly, but he does hug back, so Peter counts it as a win. "I missed you," he says.

("Your fiance adopted me," he doesn't say. "You have a daughter, and I've been helping raise her and you're her hero even though you've never met.")

He doesn't say, "I saw the message in your workshop." But Tony seems to see it in his eyes, because he deflates a little, looking at Peter's face. It's five years older than it was five minutes ago.)

Tony pats him on the shoulder. "We'll talk later, okay? There's kind of a battle happening, if you didn't notice."

"Yeah," Peter pulls back. "Yeah."

He fights with renewed vigor after that.

Tony gives Thanos his biggest fight so far. He puts him on the ground, where Wanda Maximoff holds the titan down. Cap is the one who pulls the gauntlet off with his super strength while the Titan is dazed and distracted from Tony's attacks, but Captain Marvel wrestles it from his grip before he can put it on to end this. "I'll take this one, Captain," she says, skin glowing and crackling under the power. "If anyone can survive this, I can."

She snaps.

(Peter pictures Tony there for a moment and shudders. He knows Tony would have done it, if given the chance, and also that Tony would never have survived such a blast.)

Thanos' army disappears, and Carol Danvers slumps to the ground. She's alive, but barely. Her powers are nearly gone.

"They came from an energy generator powered by the tesseract," she will explain later, examining her scars in the mirror and her neat, sterile stump below the elbow. "I would never have run out, except that the power of the universe was a little draining."

When the dust settles, they rebuild like they always do. Peter assumes his grad work can wait for him to introduce Tony to his own daughter. (It's likely been cancelled in light of recent events anyway.)

Tony cries when he meets her. He is also unbearably awkward. This is his flesh and blood daughter, and he doesn't know anything about her. Luckily, Morgan is the opposite of shy and drags him down to her own "workshop" to eat juice pops and explain her experiments.

(He returns later looking shell-shocked and terrified. Pepper takes one look at his face and laughs in a way that Peter has never heard before.

He resolves to hear the laugh as many times as he can in the future.)

Gwen calls him on the phone, screaming and crying with joy, and asks him about Aunt May. Peter nearly has a heart attack. Aunt May is alive, and he hadn't even processed that until now.

He finds her. (Did she always look so young?)

Peter doesn't know what is next for him or the world, but Captain America and Bucky Barnes have gone on vacation together, Captain Marvel is staying on earth to rehabilitate now that her powers have all but dissolved and half her right arm is gone, and Tony Stark is completely retired and sort of Peter's adopted dad.

MJ and Ned fill his phone with messages, and Peter laughs because it's that or cry. He wishes he was still that young, and that bad grades and Flash Thompson were his only worries. It feels like lifetimes ago. ~~It feels like yesterday.~~

They won. It hasn't quite sunk in yet, but they did.

There will be time to reunite with his old friends, time for Pepper and May to learn to work around each other and for Tony to memorize everything he can about his daughter's habits and likes and dislikes. (Peter catches him going through a list with FRIDAY. But he understands, so instead of laughing he helps Tony complete it.)

(There will be time for blackmail later.)

They can have Thanksgiving all together, with an invite extended to any heroes who want to come or don't have somewhere else to go. Maybe Peter will propose to Gwen and get a steady job, maybe he'll keep Spidermaning until he physically can't anymore. Maybe Morgan will be the flower girl at her big brother's wedding, and maybe Tony will get to walk her down the aisle at her own.

Maybe the earth is full of new hope. Maybe heroes will lead it into a new age of peace and prosperity, rebuilding and helping and saving.

Maybe.

They have time.

End Notes

As always, please leave any constructive criticism or typos that you find! Also if you liked something I would love to hear about it. Thanks for reading!

EDIT: After I wrote this fic, someone on tumblr pointed me in the direction of the story "built from scraps" by peterstank. If you would like to read a much more in-depth story with a very similar idea to this one, please go and check it out!

Works inspired by this one

[we can always try again tomorrow](#) by [neon_air](#)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!