She died saving the world, saving her friends and family, her home. But, it was not a peaceful end. A hero is saved but heroes are not meant to fade away. Anansi gives her a second chance to live, to ascend. He sends her to a world not unlike her own and with a chance at true happiness.

"This universe is and is not hers. Its different. Its the same. But then again, she was
different, too."

This world needs a hero to give it hope. Fortunately, Penelope Parker, Spider-Woman, is more than willing to take up the mantle once again.

Notes

I own nothing but this idea.

I really could not help myself. The connection between these two was just screaming at me and refused to leave me alone. So, here it is.

On another note, Penelope Parker is played by Indiana Evans, an Australian actress and song-writer. She's acted in H2O: Just Add Water and Blue Lagoon: The Awakening.

Hope you enjoy!
"Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,"
-Emily Dickinson

She died.

She's 24 when she dies. She's 24, fighting Red skull, and her friends are screaming when she dies. Her name is Penelope Parker, she is Spider-Woman, and she dies protecting New York, the world, her family. Penelope doesn't regret it even though there are things she does regret but dying for the people she cares for isn't one of them. Penelope doesn't know how Red Skull is still alive but she knows the glowing cube is dangerous and powerful, can feel it as her spider sense wails inside her head. She does not hesitate, doesn't stop to think, and is reaching for it, even as the machine Hydra made starts. Between the upheaval of the Hero Registration, trouble at work, family, and her recent break up, Penelope is tired, worn at the edges. The machine, Penelope can't remember what it is for, bends beneath her strength and the cube, glowing blue and clear, the power of creation contained within, burns her hands. But Spider-Woman does not let go. She heaves, back arched, fire and lightning scorching every nerve and vessel, and screams. The machine gives, misaligned the Hydra program fails and crashes. Red skull rushes her, determined to stop her, to kill her but fails to reach her. The cube answers her, her wish buried deep within her heart, even as her determination, her goal roars from within the depth of her soul. Free the cube from Red skull, back into the InBetween -the Beyond- and yet, protect the world, friends and family, protect her home.

A paradox.

To fulfill the first, the latter must perish. To protect the second, then the former must be let go.

An anomaly. A paradox.

A wish.

The cube answers, Red skull collapses on the ground gasping for air and lies helpless as his muscles atrophy. His skin swivels and cracks. All throughout the underground compound, those of Hydra that remain suffer the same fate and the enhanced can do nothing as their power abandons or turns against them. Some implode, spreading gore and brain matter all around them. Others are consumed, drained, left feeble and emaciated. Daredevil, the Fantastic Four, and Scarlet Spider stand motionless but unharmed, proof of Spider-Woman's influence over the cube, and she's choking now unable to scream, to cry. Spider-Woman can no longer feel anything, numb to it all, but her hands hold the cube in a vice even as her legs give out. She's falling back and
Scarlet rushes to her, to his sister, the woman he's cloned from, who accepted him despite his hate, his flaws.

He manages to reach her before she hits the ground but its already too late. Blue Iris petals cascade all around her but Scarlet doesn't care for them. Distantly, he remembers they're her favorite.

(Later, the Fantastic Four will release a copy of the security footage to the public before SHIELD can hide it away. The world will watch as Spider-Woman defies a monster, watch as she suffers untold agony. The world will see a hero embrace death and fade away. They will see a brother call out to a sister who can no longer hear him and weep with him. To the heroes of the world, her actions will expose a plot to enslave and kill them. Her actions will reveal an enemy waiting in the cold expanse of space and the chance to defend against it. Later, the world will know her name, what she stood for, how she strived to save the world one person at a time, how she offered hope to all who meet her and asked for nothing in return. The world will learn her belief in the power of responsibility and the power of kindness. Her name and her deeds will be immortalized in paper and ink, in stone and steel, in history as a woman who was selfless, who sacrificed her own happiness to help others, who loved deeply, who reminded the world what it meant to care for people. Fans and supporters will petition to have her buried in Arlington National Cemetery, the first and only hero to have that honor).

Scarlet Spider, Kaine Parker, clutches his sister's body, like it was something precious, as if he could keep her alive using just his presence, and screams her name, screams himself hoarse, begs her to come back...

That is how she dies.

Beyond this place, within the InBetween, the cube breaks down. It opens like a flower in bloom before the petals scatter and disappear. There are many who witness it but only one steps forward to grasp at what is left behind. A light, small but strong. A soul, tired but bright, warm, and beautiful. It is familiar to some of those present and were it not so tattered by the cube's sloppy abuse, would evolve and ascend to join them.

"Worry not, Little Spider, you are loved. You are honored. You will join us again. But not today. Not yet. Not yet."

With great care, the being whispers softly to the soul cupped within its hands, like a parent would for it's child, and for a second it burns with all the glory of a newborn sun. Then it is gone.

This is how she is remade, in the cradle of creation and by the care of a god, ancient and powerful, whom cast a shadow against the void shaped like a spider's legs.

Penelope Parker opens her eyes and is lost. She is 24. She is 15. Penelope Parker is and is not real, is and is not here. She...just is. She doesn't know what day it is, only that she is wrong. (She's better. Stronger.) Too big in her skin and too small to rail against the world. (Perfect all at once.) So, Penelope Parker closes her eyes, sleeps, dreams and remembers and sees. When she wakes the second time its different. Not too big or too small. She's -They've - settled, somewhat, even if the edges brush against each other, glass shards piercing skin deep enough to hurt but not bleed.

They are Penelope Parker. One from a place far away; worlds, universes away and one that was already here. They are the same and not. The pieces don't fit. Not completely, not yet. They were
blending together. Growing into each other. She's 15. Uncle Ben is gone and that hurts, aches but its old, soothed over by time and experience and understanding. His loss doesn't ignite a fury inside her or sorrow that burrows into her bones. The guilt doesn't eat at her insides, doesn't fester like a disease. Its soothed with the understanding that she is not at fault and the knowledge that she's done the best she could, that she tried when she could have just as easily done nothing at all.

She's 15 and she's Spider-Woman.

Uncle Ben's words ring across her conscious, feather soft and warm, a balm to her confusion and turmoil. She's not okay, too sharp and jagged, raw. The pieces don't fit yet. Not by a long shot but she knows she'll get there.

In this world everyone is born with the potential to be anything. Not like the old world, where that means creativity, talent and ambition, spearhead this potential. No. Its something else. Some present early and some are late bloomers. Only 10 percent of the world's population present as Omega and all others are Alpha or Beta. Omegas are the cream of the crop, the golden goose, famous and desired. They get invited to VIP events and reality shows. Alphas are "protectors" and "aggressors". Betas are "neutral". This is the world Penelope wakes up to. Its a world she knows and is familiar with. She's comfortable. (She balks at it all).

Omegas, Alphas, Betas...she sees the orientation. She sees the stereotypes. She was a late bloomer, presenting as Uncle Ben died in her arms, and could not find the joy or pride in her orientation. Now, she can't stand it because it means everyone will look at her and want her, as if she were a prize to be won. (She is but it is not because she's an Omega. She's more than that. More than what she presents). It means everyone will notice what she does and does not do, what she says and does not say. Hiding the part of her that is Spider-Woman will be hard, harder than it would be originally, but she'll make do.

She's got one heck of a cheat sheet to help her along.

Its 2001 and she's 15. She's got one heavy work load to push through. But first, Aunt May. Aunt May then the world.

Penelope gets out of bed and makes her way to the bathroom to shower. She cleans away the grim and stardust. Her hair is too long for the mask. She'll have to cut it and a part of her breaks a little. Uncle Ben always told her she looked like her truest self with her hair long. That's okay though. Hair can grow back. For now, a short layered pixie cut will do and so long as she takes care of herself, she'll have that self back again, someday. Tomorrow she'll go to the salon for her hair cut.

When she steps out, she wraps a towel around her and steps up to the mirror. There is a bit of a tan to her, which is normal. (Strange but not bad. She used to burn before.) The Penelope Parker that looks back at her is both familiar and strange. But its her. Its who she is now. Who she's always been, only she's not. She's more now.

She leaves the bathroom and goes back to her room. She cleans up and gets dressed. It's Friday. Which is good. She's not sure she can handle more than one school day after the roller coaster she's been through. But one day is more than enough to get a feel for where she stands and what direction she needs to go in. She glances at the clock and notices she's got about two hours before school starts. Plenty of time to prepare herself. One pair of skinny jeans, a t-shirt, and her high top converse later, she's going through her room. She finds an empty cardboard box and uses it to
place all the things she doesn't need in it. Her science kits she puts to the side and her camera stays
settles on her desk.

She goes through her clothes, her photos, her shoes. Anything she doesn't need or use, she
puts inside the box or out in the hall outside her door. She's not the same. She's grown in ways
few if any will understand or experience, and it is only natural that she move her life to reflect that.
She doesn't get through everything. That's okay. This is something that will take a bit of time and
work. It's on her list.

"I need an actual list. Like written and everything. Later, after we see what we're up against."

Penelope turns off her light, grabs her school bag and makes her way downstairs. She starts to
make breakfast and readies herself for her first and greatest trial. She's pouring the last of the
orange juice when Aunt May appears in the kitchen doorway.

"Someone's up early." Her eyes are sad but her smile is sincere. "And hungry, too."

"I wanted to do something for you, since I spent like decades marinating in bed."

"It was hardly decades, Penny." Aunt May's eyes brighten just a bit and Penelope grins. They sit at
the table and start eating. Its an American spread, pancakes with eggs and toast.

"Still, a few days is waaay too long for me to get it together to tell you I presented as Omega when
Uncle Ben..." she trails off when she realizes that while it didn't hurt her to think of her uncle, it
would still hurt her aunt and she feels like an idiot.

"I'm glad he got to know before he passed." Penelope snaps her eyes to her aunt in disbelief. Her
aunt was sad but she was still smiling. She reaches her hand and places it on her niece's arm. "I am
glad you were there so he wasn't alone and that he knew you, all of you in his final moments.
Okay?"

Her hand is warm and something in the teen relaxes. She sighs in relief and smiles back at her
aunt.

"Yeah, we're okay." They go back to eating and making small talk. The air is relax and homely. A
family recovering, growing from loss and grief.

"So, you plan on going to school today? You don't have to you know."

"Yes. I do. I need to see what I'm working with."

"What you're working with?"

"Well, yeah. I mean, it depends on what happens when I go back. I may be an Omega but that
doesn't mean I'm a doormat. I...I would like to hold off saying anything about me being an
Omega."

"Penelope," Aunt May starts but Penelope rushes ahead.

"Just until I'm 16. That's a few months but I just need to get a feel for what I need to do to move
on, to move forward. It's like I'm stuck in this ditch and I can't get out and the world is trying its
hardest to bury me alive. I just...just need some space...is that too much to ask for?" Her voice gets
small in the end and she kind of hates how young she sounds. (She's only 15. She is young. But she
used to be 15 once, too.)
"Okay Penny. We can make it on your birthday. How's that, hmm? Presenting on your sweet 16? It'll be all the rage in the papers!" Penelope laughs at the spark of mischief in her aunt's eyes. The tightness around her chest loosens and she finds it easier to breathe.  

"You're amazing Aunt May, you know that?" She can't stop grinning.  

"We both are, sweetheart, and don't you forget it!"

School is hellish.

There is no other way to describe it. Since the bite, all her senses are enhanced times ten, and if she hadn't been changed from the past week, she'd have a hard time filtering what she did and did not want. There were the whispers of course. She ignored those. There were the looks she got, sympathy and pity. She ignored those, too. There were the cliques and the gossip that she avoided. And then there was Flash. She's spent the entire day avoiding him and succeeding, too. It won't last. She plans to stay afterschool to talk with an administrator because she has no intention of staying another two years in high school if she doesn't have to. So, that means Flash is bound to catch up to her eventually.

Flash asked her out before she presented and she turned him down. As an Alpha he expected her to be glad to have his attention and to be turned down in front of his friends, well, he wasn't to let that humiliation go. He's bullied her ever since. (She wouldn't date him now anyway. She's had enough of big blondes telling her what she should do or villains telling her to submit and grovel.) She has plans. Things she wants to do, that she needs to do. (She's lived this life once and it might be different but its close enough that there are things she's willing to change). Penelope cannot stop other things from happening, not without making others suspicious, or causing serious harm to others.

Helping Dr. Connor was a path she couldn't avoid, she was already on it, but there are steps she could take to keep her identity a secret. To save Captain Stacy. She needed to get on to those things right away, too.

Penny really needed to write that list.

She's walking out of the main office when Flash stops her.

"Hey! Parker!" She stops and turns to him, face carefully blank.

"Hey..." he hesitates and fidgets in place. She doesn't know what he wants. (Something not bad. He looks almost guilty...an apology?) "I'm sorry, about your uncle, I mean. I just...I'm sorry."
His eyes trail away from her. (An apology. Flash isn't bad, just...a little lost). She still would not date him but he was sincere.

"Thanks." She means it even if she feels bad about taking advantage of the others pity for her. It buys her time. And right now, time is precious. "I appreciate it but I've got to go."

"Oh, yeah. I...yeah. You, ah, you coming in Monday?"

"Yeah. I've got work to give in."

"See you then?" Penelope blinks in confusion but nods her head.

"I gotta go." She walks around him as he stutters a goodbye. (Does he know already? Is there a scent thing to being an Omega?)

The only way to know would be if he was there when she presented which he wasn't. There was no scent, she wasn't a dog and she didn't go into heat. But he might be getting some of those "protect the omega" vibes she's heard about. She's not certain if that's a fact or some story made up by a bunch of romantics. But she's more certain its sympathy than anything to do with her being an omega.

But he wasn't important right now.

She needed to get home and start preparing. There was the Lizard, the Goblin, Electro, Kraven and others that were bound to show up. She needed to prepare not only herself but the police, paramedics, dispatch, and so on. She needed to help New York prepare for whatever comes next. It was a huge undertaking. But she's ready and willing. It's not nearly as overwhelming as it should be. There are other heroes who will come out, step forward out of the dark. She can do this.

Because she is Spider-Woman.
Getting started is half begun...

Chapter Summary

Planning and moving forward.

The first year is always the hardest...

Chapter Notes

Finally, New Penelope is settled! To be clear. This Penelope is someone who has become one with her old self. So, she has experience even if its an echo of her previous life. Also, she is not going to fix the world. She recognizes that may be beyond her power but she also knows that does not mean she should not do her best to help others in ways that she can. Now, Penelope is not a wallflower. She's smart but not a pushover. She can't be because she can't afford to be!

Next chapter: Meeting her Godparent and meeting her Fairy Godmother... XD

She didn't go out that night. Couldn't really.

For one, there were serious changes she needed to make to her suit. A padded sports bra for one or lining the suit with some kind of support. But that was minor issue. Right now, she needed to make that list. Not a timeline. She's pretty sure time is not her friend. Events and things are more than likely not going to play in her favor. But if she opens up more of her own time?

Well every little bit counts.

Opting out of certain subjects was her best bet. It would drag attention, yeah, but not the kind if she showed up bruised and bloody every other day. Or if she was late to all of her classes. Every. Single. Day.

Live and learn as they say.

Well she's lived one life alright and now she's learning from it.

Penelope clears her floor of anything, takes out some poster paper, markers, pens, sticky notes, and her school calendar. She stops for a second to grab her class schedule too, before getting to work.

She made a large calendar for the rest of the month of March and made another one for April.

First, which classes can she opt out of no problem? Well, that was easy. She circled all the math and science course she's completed and marked the ones she still needed to graduate. Then, she placed possible test dates for them. This was only if the administration didn't just lump the subjects together.

If they did the latter then all the better. It would open more time up for her.
After that came the landmines. The arts. She wasn't terrible at them but she wasn't good enough to test out of all of them. Which is fine. She could work with that. Since the school system hasn’t converted to block scheduling that meant school days were 8 periods long. She can cut those days in half, meaning having a late start or an early dismissal to her school day. That should throw off any ideas that she’s a school student or someone with a lot of time on their hands. Which would include a group of people that did not include Penelope Parker.

Progress.

Could she test out of basic english? (All that time working for the Daily Bugle did help somewhat.) No. She'll leave that alone. Four years of physical ed would not change nor health. Those stayed.

What else? Should she drop photography? It wasn't like she needed it because there wasn't anything else the school could teach her that she didn't already know. It would open her up for something else...oh! She could take coding in it place. She was a decent hacker especially with the current technology but extra training never hurt.

Switching personal finance for...entrepreneur skills or business management? She makes a note and sticks it on the march section. She'll need to talk to her counselor for those she isn't sure of. What else? Penelope knows what she can't drop and what she can test out of already but looking at her school electives again, Penelope can't help but see so many possibilities. There were certain electives that would be a huge help to her later on. If she applied to take summer courses she might be allowed to take extra courses. The more skills she got now, the better off she'll be later. Technology wasn't an issue even before the Melding. (Is that the best we can do? Sounds like something she heard in a video game.)

Now, she knew more. The tech she's familiar with is years in the future. She adapted to that familiarity. (Even if she didn't use them. There were people, heroes and villains alike who did use some of the most complex and sophisticated tech in the world. Adapting was her thing.)

Already new ideas came forward. Angles she didn't see before made themselves known. Ways to help Aunt May and herself financially and protect herself politically and legally. Methods to help guard against manipulation and abuse. Penelope once saw school as a burden to bare but now...now it offered an entirely new future. All she had to do was go for it.

She can't throw away four years of english, health/physical education, or social studies. That's fine. She knows several languages though. Except spanish, ironically enough, so she didn't need to take another foreign language. She marks that on her calendars just in case she needs to test for more than one. (With all the heroes she's meet from all around the world it was only natural she picked up a few languages. Of course, she didn't leave them half way. Learning them was hard but worth it.) Japanese, Mandarin, and Italian with a sparkling of German and Arabic. (The last two are due more out of a weird necessity to know if ancient artifacts are stolen or cursed.)

She didn't mind picking up one or two more. But Penelope would rather do that in her own time because she knew she would retain it better.

There were a few other electives that she thinks would be useful but she only writes it on a note and sticks it to April. She'll come back to them and see what to do with them when she meets with her counselor.

Next, clubs. She put down Student Diplomacy Corps, which is a separate affiliate working with the school, and Foreign Affairs before putting them all for March. Also, to be discussed with her counselor. If she's switching from the chemistry club or adding the other two, she's not sure yet. But both would be incredibly useful when another hero registration came around.
(It will be different because this world is different. But some people are not. Some see heroes and they see profit. They see war. Violence won't stop them. It'll just make them look more human to the public, no matter how monstrous their nature. Batman's Alfred said it best, "Some people, just want to watch the world burn.")

If she's lucky, maybe, she can mitigate how that plays out. Or at least give heroes and those that support them a platform to negotiate. Something. She doesn't really know.

But that's later. Penelope looks over her work and smiles a bit.

"Progress, yeah!"

Now, for work. Penelope is determined not to work for the Bugle. Not again. Once is enough. The insane schedule Jameson had her running was just not feasible. In fact, looking over her make shift calendar, it adds to her chances of getting caught and exposed. (It was how SHIELD found her the last time, too. A bit more caution would go a long way here.)

Penelope pulled a separate sheet of paper and started another outline.

"Legally I can't work. But tutoring can pay well if I do it right. The problem is that tutoring by the hour won't cut it. I'd be eating up my own hours."

Penelope does some quick math and uses it against her outline and frowns.

"Charge it by person versus the hour and I can make a decent income. But I'd lose out in the long run..."

(Unless the hour is factored in as part of the profit alongside the subject and the number of students.)

"YouTube I cannot wait until you're born. But I'll make due."

She shreds the outline and starts over. Without social media, she'll have to promote herself and find away to collect without sacrificing the information of those paying. That's not so hard either. Paypal was out and using it to protect herself and her customers was a simple solution.

But that was one avenue and it wouldn't last. It would give her a platform to work with. Once social media hit it off, she'll really be able to get the ball going and take it a lot farther but for now she'll work on building a solid "base of operations" as it is. Science was a given. What else? A blog? A blog she could do to help with the tutoring. And if she made a program to help students self study science and math, she'll have a way to maintain a steady income. A steady income means materials for Spider-Woman and food.

If she made a big enough income Penelope would actually be able to eat like she needs to. Rather than moderating herself. (She was always hungry except for a few times. Times when someone else paid and could afford to pay for her to eat like she needed.)

Being able to indulge and actually be full on a daily basis is one immediate pro to aiming for being a "social media startup user". There are others to be sure along with a few cons she isn't looking forward to, like taxes, but they're small in the grand scheme of things.

Her stomach lets out a painful howl.

"Speak of the devil...", The hunger pains were starting.
Penelope takes a deep breath before putting her planning to the side and making her way downstairs to get something to eat. She finds just enough to keep the hunger at bay but its not satisfying. It solidifies her drive to a whole new level because she knows her greatest enemy is herself.

(Shes always tired. Always hungry. And it hit her where it always hurt. Made her weaker, slower. If she was able to eat her fill everything was easier, clearer. Thinking, acting, fighting, planning. She was more readily able to get a clearer picture of a given situation. SHIELD... didn't always indulge her. Now that she thinks back, she wonders if that was on purpose.)

After her late lunch, she went back up to her room and got back to work. She added times and dates for her blog and her "SW", times as Spider-Woman which she marked as "Science Work" just in case anyone looked and wanted to ask questions. With school, work and "work" mostly taken care of, the only thing left is New York City...and Dr. Connor...

2002- December 31

**Spider-Woman** perches on a skyscraper, the view giving her a clear look down Times Square. The entire square was filled with people, streamers, and music. A massive party to welcome in the new year. She inhales deeply, taking in the cold and letting it fill every part of her. She shivered with the frigid air and anticipation.

The past year and a half- almost two years- were both rewarding and absolute hell. Changes to her school schedule was an amazing boon. Keeping some of the other classes gave her a sense of stability, something to hold on to. It helped ground her when everything threatened to swallow her whole. And that "everything" was a whole lot more than what she was expecting.

When she started her "Science made Easy!" tutoring blog, she expected some backlash because of her age, gender, and "lack" of orientation. That was fine. She handled it no problem. When the media wanted to do multiple interviews, some looking to discuss her lack of orientation, she let Aunt May loose on the world, citing her age and her unwillingness to have Penelope become an object to be poked at. (Aunt May could make just about anyone feel really small, like ant-size, when she wants to). Suitably chastised, the attention lessened for a while. Then, her birthday came and went. Aunt May spoke to their primary physican and Penelope Parker's status as an Omega became official.

That was fine, too.

Penelope had come a long way in accepting her orientation and accepting that she did not need to live by anyone else's standards. That just because she's an Omega does not mean she needs to conform to someone else's definition of who she is or who she should be. She is Penelope Parker before she is an Omega. If there aren't people who can accept that than they aren't worth her time or trust.

What was not okay was what happened after. Apparently, because she presented so late, her immune system may not have the "proper defenses" necessary to fight certain diseases and infections. Or she might not be able to produce enough hormones to promote healthy and natural growth during pregnancy. Something Penelope vehemently disagreed with. That might be true for other Omegas but she was well aware that her immune system and her healing factor were top notch, surpassed only by people like Logan and Deadpool.
But its not like Penelope could tell her doctor that she was Spider-Woman and that she didn't need to worry about it. She couldn't even come up with a suitable lie to prove it especially not without a blood test, which she refused to consider. To compromise she agreed to a series of "booster" shots over the course of the month. If it wasn't because her spider sense was silent during the entire visit, she would have simply told her Aunt to find a new physician.

The upside came to her after the first booster when her healing factor started up in overdrive. Penelope had a kickass natural immunity to toxins and sedatives. Man made concoctions only ever worked once before she developed antibodies to prevent round two from effecting her. It was a fact that she didn't share or mention with anyone. SHIELD might have suspected something but she used her "charming" personality to get out of having to prove or disprove any theories they might have had about her. Still, whatever the boosters are supposed to do, Penelope is confident that her healing factor will take care of it.

She's right. The boosters make her feel nauseous and send her spider sense buzzing lowly at the back of her head. It doesn't last long and whatever was used is flushed from her system soon after. She doesn't wait to do a background check on her doctor to make sure she isn't trying to subtly experiment on her. But Dr. Alex Reid checks out. She wasn't even sponsored by someone. So, Penny figured it was the boosters themselves. A second rate attempt to help her body when she didn't need it.

The same could not be said for Dr. Connor. She tried to get him to look at other ways, other formulas, or theories he could use. When subtly didn't work, she decided to make some changes to her father's formula before giving it to him. It would not surprise her if Oscorp employees were watching them, and she could not risk giving someone like Osborn more power. It wasn't a lot but she managed to tie it directly to the lizards and Dr Connor not unlike how her father locked the formula with her. It was the best she could do on that end. Penny simply did not have the time to do more and neither, apparently, did Dr. Connors.

Oscorp wanted Super Soldiers. They wanted Hybrid Super Soldiers. Stronger, faster, and better than Captain America ever was. And if their head researchers won't get the job done, then they'll find someone who will.

Penelope discovered this during her mini espionage trip at Oscorp. She wanted to destroy any evidence of her ever having been anything other than a visitor. Like her time with the spiders. It was almost painfully, stupid, easy. But she wasn't going to look a gift as anything other than that.

Two good things came out of that. The first, having Gwen as a friend. She is as beautiful and as smart as Penny remembers her. And this time, she's determined to make sure her dearest friend makes it to university. The other was a valid reason for Spider-Woman to have a talk with Captain Stacy. It was one nerve-wracking evening as far as Penny was concerned. It wasn't like she waited to get caught. No, she did something about ten times more reckless and dangerous. She cornered him in his office.

It was insane and stupid. It was not her first choice but she really did not have the time to have it out with the NYPD. Spider-Woman managed to keep him from shooting her. He gave her five minutes. She used three.

She explained that there was illegal human experimentation going on in the city and that she was trying to stop it. Spider-Woman may have fibbed a bit by telling him that they were picking people off the streets. They weren't ready for human testing just yet but she remembers Osborn picking one or two from the lowest of NYC. Whether they are willing or not does not make it any less illegal. And that's not even touching on what Oscorp may have done to Electro and who else...
they got their hands on.

When Stacy tried to argue that the police would take care of it, she told him as bluntly as possible that the experiments were aiming to recreate and improve the serum used on Captain America, meaning the Captain would be setting up the police for a slaughter against people capable of bending steel.

Seeing him hesitate gave her the opening she needed to wrap up. She told him, she had a contact helping her but that she couldn't reach "her" if the police were spending all their effort chasing some vigilante in red and blue.

Seeing the Captain start to frown, she hurried along and placed a USB with some of Oscorps more unethical practices and some questionable transactions on his desk. It didn't specific how or where or with who. But it did paint a grim picture.

And pictures were worth more than a million words.

She didn't tell him to call off his search. She doubted he could make that call and be able to keep it. All she asked from him was a lighter hand when tracking her. Allowing her the room to find answers he can't get. Before the Captain could give an answer Spider-Woman was at the window. She looks back and asks if he could put in a word with other responders to be on alert. (People were hurt. People died. Maybe this time will be different. All she could do is try.)

Just in case. With that Spider-Woman left.

After, the world deemed it time to remind her that she was not it's master. She expected it. But she didn't expect it to be not so bad. It was still terrible. Not the near end of the world brush with death she was thinking of.

Penelope wondered if that was because her experiences from Before, which range all over the spectrum, became hers or if she had reach the point where she acknowledges that she can do the best she can and it still not be enough to save everyone.

Dr Connor becomes The Lizard. As if predetermined by fate. She feels a moment of guilt and confusion. She had hoped if he did change, Connors would have control. She made changes to the serum to allow for that. But he doesn't. She resigns herself to the first fight of her new life and regrets nothing. She's ready. In the sewers she builds a web and waits, careful, steady, and calm. When the Lizard comes, she smiles and taunts him. She jokes and jabs, enraging him. It comes to her as natural as breathing. It doesn't take long for the fight to escalate. Had she been as she was Before, she would not have lasted long, forced to run and retreat.

But she wasn't. She was stronger. Smarter. Experienced. Trained through trial and error. She was more than a match for him.

Their battle underground soon went topside. Right. At. Her. School. She was sure fate was having a grand laugh. Luckily, the only ones still there were the staff and club members from after school. That didn't stop their fight from being any less violent. Sometime during the fight, the fire alarm went off. She doesn't know for who or why. It's good because it means evacuating anyone still in the building. Besides the slight flinch and the unexpectedness, she tunes it out and tries to wrap her opponent up in her webs. He tackles her through a wall and out into the school courtyard. Then the fight is on again.

A news crew was near by when the call came over the police radio about Spider-Woman fighting The Lizard. They manage to make it and film Live as the duo's fight spills outside. They struggle
with claw and webs. Fangs and fist. They draw blood. They bend armor and crack bones. Each sound and sassy remark magnified, so close. Heedless of those watching, two titans clash and New York watches in awe and fear. The world turns to look, speechless and shocked.

Eventually, one of them gets lucky. The Lizard manages to toss her aside far enough to disappear back into the building and into the sewers. It's hard to swallow how similar it is to her memory of what was. But she'd pushed on. She warns Captain Stacy one more time before working on the serum. What's unexpected is the help she gets. Gwen is there and the Captain and the police force and the crane workers. And it works out. The serum works, Gwen is safe, her father is safe, and even though she's bruised and sore. She's okay, too.

The world keeps on turning.

But it does not remain the same.

Time passes and she changes with it. Sometimes cops invite her to drink with them or a bite to eat at a nearby donut shop. Other times she's joking with firefighters or trading quips with paramedics while on patrol. She learns the names of several dispatchers every time she calls in for a crime or with a victim of a crime to hear her talking with operators as a distraction. A relationship builds and blooms. It wasn't how she pictured or originally planned but she likes it nonetheless. New York changes and grows with her. She learns about people and places and they learn about her. Sometimes she'll find information that she'll pass on to them, the police and they'll work together to make a case stick.

She grows into herself. The broken pieces fit together. The cracks fill. The Before and After become one. She becomes one, whole, and strong. She's different, sure, but the fundamental bits, those principles and values that make her who she is down to her very soul, remain unchanged. That's not to say that she expects the future to be as easy. No, she fully expects to encounter some kind of obstacle. Some kind of hurdle that will take every ounce of her power to overcome. But Penelope looks forward to it. She's ready.

She stands from her perch, practically vibrating with giddiness. The massive disco ball starts its decent. Seconds to midnight.

10...

9...

8...She throws a web...

7...

6...

5...She braces herself, bouncing on the balls of her feet...

4...

3...

2...She leaps...

1!

The dome lights up and flashes. Then, goes dark before lighting up in a kaleidoscope of reds and
blues. A plethora of spiders crawl in every direction in brightly colored LEDs and when they disperse, they leave behind a message, "Spider-Woman was Here!"

She swings her body through the air. Timed perfectly. She lands right next to it, waves quickly, and jumps down toward Times Square. She makes a round with webs and jumps and flips. People in the crowds go wild, screaming and shouting. Cameras go off and streamers set off.

Spider-Woman stops by the jumbotron one more time before she swings low, closer to the crowd and calls out.

"Happy New Year, Everyone!"

She pulls herself up and swings away. To Aunt May and warmth and home. She's looking forward to what came next.
Chapter Summary

Penelope was not prepared for the New Year.


Chapter Notes

Now, THIS is the chapter Penelope meets her godparent and her Fairy godmother!

And she gets a pet...familiar...sidekick...She's pretty sure its a prank. She hopes its a prank.

(Sorry this took so long. I was looking at types of spiders online and got distracted by the cute baby spider memes. And I still could not find a spider wearing a tutu. :-(( Also! I used the actor Djimon Hounsou for my Anansi. )

2003- Year of Graduation

Year of New Beginnings

Year of Forging New Bonds

Penelope was not ready for this year. No. No she wasn't. Nope. Just no.

It started off great. It really did. Gwen received admittance into Oxford University and Penny got her letter from Colombia University. (She had no plans to go to Empire this turn around.) In a surprising twist, Flash Thompson became something of a friend. When he told them he applied for the Army, they supported him and extracted a promise for the blonde to be careful. He wasn't sure what kind of degree he wanted but he was interested in getting a degree of some kind. Penelope got him a few pamphlets on animal behavior and several other majors centered around mechanics and engineering. She figured it was something he could start to look into. The three were excited and content and hopeful.

That was fine.

Then, Spider-Woman finally meets another vigilante/hero- Daredevil.

She looks him up and down. Penny might know who he is but she hasn't earned the right to know that about him right now. So...
"Can you really see through that mask? I mean, seriously? You look like a grumpy cat. Gargoyle. A grumpy gargoyle. Like someone stole your favorite perch and during the day you get stuck with all the spots that birds poop on."

He cocks his head to the side, likely listening to her heartbeat, to understand something about her, and she rushes on before he can make a comeback.

"...are you secretly a gargoyle?" she whispers,"I promise I won't tell."

"No."

Daredevil is a riot. She gives him her spare burner phone with her number and a number for Captain Stacy, if he ever needed backup or just a second opinion. They part on good terms even if she's sure he's freaking out over how young she must be. All is fine on that front. Spider-Woman, ever since the Lizard and Electro (that was a terrible fight that almost cost an untold number of lives, including several aero collisions), has had a strange growing relationship with NYC. It isn't something she's familiar with but she likes it. There is an unofficial bond Spider-Woman has with the city, with its people.

Heck, every few weeks, Stacy invites her to a lunch or dinner with some of NYPD's finest and other first responders. She's had club sandwiches with lieutenants and rookies. She's had smoothies and milkshakes with sergeants and captains. (She refuses to drink on the job as her reasoning for not taking anything stronger.) She's tried Thai and Asian foods with paramedics and ER nurses. She's also dined with prosecutors and judges in some of the fanciest places in the city. Spidey has even shared a few food truck specials with 911 operators. She connects with the people who've been protecting the city for years and Spider-Woman learns names and lessons about what they do, about their struggles. They respect her privacy and relish whatever she shares, even when she refuses to give her orientation. They suspect but don't bring it up. They often share laughs, jokes, and embarrassing stories. The workers and customers smile a little brighter, a little more hopeful, when she arrives and mingles.

It makes the hero more human, more approachable.

Everything is fine on that front.

Of course, because everything up until that point is okay and running smoothly, something had to mess it up.

In this case, it was Harry. Harry Osborn. An Alpha.

Their first meeting was okay. Pleasant. He'd just come back from whatever private boarding school he was stashed in. The next one? Not so much.

Because she's an Omega. She doesn't know how he found out and she doesn't care. Once he found out, he tried courting her, right off the bat. Penelope cannot figure out why the desperate need to have her as a mate. But with the greater the intent, the greater the tension in Penny. At first, she didn't think anything of it. Flattered and giving his courtship serious thought before Harry started to press. She chafed under the pressure and pushed back. Harry may be her friend but he was not her Alpha. He has no right to demand anything of her. And she knows that's a fact, even if she wasn't an Omega.

It came to a head, when she mentioned the number of universities that she got accepted into.
"What do you need university for?" Penny frowns at him. Aunt May is working a shift at the hospital. So, its just the two of them sitting at the dining table eating lunch.

"For a degree. I'm smart but talent does nothing without hard work. I'm looking into bioengineering. Maybe chemistry. Or both. I'm really excited. I just need to choose."

"But why? You're an Omega. You should be looking for an Alpha. Someone who can provide for you and your children. Going to university will just leave you vulnerable to people who want to use you. You know how many Omegas are knocked up in college? How many had to abort their children because they weren't prepared or cared for?"

Penelope stares at him. For a moment she can't comprehend what he just said. She blinks rapidly for a long second before she gets her wits about her.

"Did you just...imply that I should be looking for a baby daddy?" Her temper flares.

"That's not-"

"Because that's what it sounds like. It sounds like you think I'm only good for being a baby maker. Or a homemaker. Like I'm someone who should stay at home and have dinner ready by 6 and the kids in bed by 7. It sounds like you don't want me to go anywhere you can't follow. It sounds like you don't want me to go to college and get my degree. It sounds like you just called me a whore who will spread her legs for the first pretty Alpha who flashes their eyes at me!"

"THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT!

"SO EXPLAIN IT, HARRY!"

"I'm courting you-" She bulldozes him. She won't have him continuing with that idea.

"Trying, Harry! You're trying to court me. And I still haven't decided if I want to be with you like that. You haven't asked me if you could court me. You didn't even asked me if someone else was already courting me! Did you assume that there would be no one I'd find who'd genuinely like me for more than my orientation? And besides all of that, what does courtship have anything to do with me going to college?"

"I'm just trying to protect you! College can be dangerous for Omegas." His lips start to form a sneer before smoothing his face, quick to miss if one isn't paying attention, "I don't want you to get hurt. Accepting my courtship will give you some protection from Alphas interested only in sex."

"Protect me?" she can't help but echo. Her face is completely blank, unable to decide what she should be feeling.

"Yes!" he nods his head, "Like I said college can be dangerous for an Omega of your caliber. I can protect you. Make sure you never want for anything or anyone. And our children..." A brief look of bliss crosses his face before that's gone, too. "Our children will be beautiful, healthy, strong, and smart. Just like you. I promise."

The silence stretches on between them. Penelope keeps her face as blank as she can and says nothing. She doesn't know which is more horrifying. That he believes she needs to be protected from the world and that only he can protect her or the assumption that she would throw her entire life away for children she is not ready to have. The longer she looks at Harry, the deeper her discomfort. There is a darkness there. Not like the darkness in his father, both in business and as a villain but there, nonetheless. She's heard of something like this but she never expected to see it.
Omega Obsession.

It's stalking times ten with a laser focus on Omega. He's looking at her as if she was something so valuable that he couldn't share with the world. He was the hero of the tale and she, the princess-the damsel in distress that needed saving. As if she were the greatest treasure in the world that he would fight tooth and claw for, even if it meant fighting her. Even if it meant burning the world around her, the world she's managed to build for herself. She won't have it. She refuses to let that be her fate. She lived her previous life trapped inside a box of her own making, she won't let anyone else, not even Harry, put her back into one.

"I think its time you left."

"What?" His confusion and hurt is marred by the dark look that crosses his eyes.

"If you didn't hear me the first time, I'll walk you to the door." She stand up. "I'm not Snow White or Cinderella. I don't need to be rescued by some dashing prince! If anything, I'm the sword-wielding, ass kicking Mulan!" She takes a breath and finishes, "And you, Harry, are being voted into exile."

She points toward to front door. "Now, get out."

"Penny, think about what you're doing." He stands up and walks to her, as if she were some frightened rabbit. As if she were the one in the wrong. It ticks her off. "I can give you everything you want. You'd never have to work a day in your life. How would that look for you, if you turn me down?"

When he's close enough, he tries to loom over her using the few centimeter he has over her. Penelope growls, startling him, and moves into his space. She catches as he just manages to stop himself from moving backwards, from losing ground he never had to start with.

"It shows I've got some damn sense. Now, you will get out or I will make you." She would never use her powers to hurt someone. But you don't need superpowers to make someone leave your home. She knows a few moves that could have him on the floor out cold in seconds. From there it would only be a matter of how fast the cops show up. And if she played the Omega card, that was pretty damn fast.

Something must have shown on her face because he leaves without complaint. She waits almost half an hour before she leaves, too. She's tense and twitchy. She doesn't stop until she makes it to the police precinct. Captain Stacy is on duty, she's made sure to remember his schedule, and its something she's incredibly glad she did. They've grown closer since she's becomes friends with Gwen. Taking her in and treating her as if she is his own daughter. It's been helpful. A balm against the memory of hurt.

Penelope relaxes at last when he shuts the door to his office and she spills everything that happened. She knows she can't press charges. Harry hasn't done anything. But talking about it helps because this isn't a situation she's familiar with. And like with what she's taking to doing, she's asking for help from someone who knows what to do. It's a practice that she's used as Spider-Woman as well, often asking seasoned veterans questions about certain situations. Like how to best calm hysterical civilians? Things like that. They always reminded her that if she ever needs help that she should call for it. Because there is no such thing as too much help, not when lives were at stake.

In this case, both her life as Penelope Parker and Spider-Woman is at stake. She needed help. Captain Stacy told her the best she could do for right now was file a complaint. After, if the
situation changed than they could go from there.

She files the complaint. Because even though she cared for her friend, she also knew she had a responsibility to Aunt May and to herself. If she cannot be trusted to look after her own family, how can anyone trust her to protect others?

It all goes downhill from there.

(She maintains it is all Harry's fault.)

Her online presence has grown since her first debut.

But she's grateful because it's allowed her to make a living a bit more luxurious than she's use to. Bills are paid, savings are put to the side. She's sure, in a few more years, she can pay off the last of the debt, the mortgage and let Aunt May retire. It's something she's working on. Her blog is still going strong, too. In fact, it has also grown. She made the tutoring program designed solely to help with comprehension. The program is geared entirely at making sure the user understands the principles behind their studies, even if they get the answer wrong, the program will simply re-show the user the progress of their steps, and stop at the first mistake. From there, the program will give clear and concise directions and examples of what formulas or functions are best for that segment.

It's a complex bit of programming that took really little effort on her part. So, she didn't charge an arm and a leg for it. Nothing that would break the bank either but she did try to make it reasonable so that it didn't seem like she was giving it away. That would make it seem like a scam or something. Of course, she also placed a disclaimer that if the program failed or needed maintenance that she would be happy to fix or refund the program. So far, no one's done that. There have been demands for minor maintenance and questions about best computer use but that's it. She's had no shortage of schools buy her program by the dozens, too. Which is a surprise.

Penelope isn't really concerned since she patent the program.

It's separated into two branches. "Tutor Me Math" and "Tutor Me Science"! She's made it perfectly clear that this program is not a substitute for practice or homework but a means to understand the principles at the pace of the student. Intellectually, she knows this is big. She knows this but it always seems so surreal until she opens her computer.

Then its an entirely different story. With her blog gaining so much traffic, she's had numerous requests for sponsors (some that she's approved and others that she has not), questions and concerns. She made a forum/chatroom on her blog so that customers and users and new arrivals can chat with one another about the program. It lets her see if there is anything she needs to improve on. Or if there is anything she needs to look out for.

(Shes looking forward to YouTube, Twitter, and the rest because she could really use a few more versatile platforms for marketing and services.)

On the other hand is the glowing praise. It takes a while for Penelope to be comfortable with it. She glows a little because while they praise her for making such a program, they also praise her to sharing it as a tool for teaching. As something to help students learn and to like math and science rather than grow frustrated with it. As a result of the serious growth of her business blog, she's hired two workers from Queens College. It took a while to vet potential helpers but she settled on Jessica and her brother Morgan Reid.
Jessica is a Hispanic, spunky kind of girl who was majoring in graphic design and her "African" brother (they say that bit like its a joke which she doesn't get but anyway...), Morgan, with his small smiles, decided to major in computer programming. He was the calmer of the two siblings but no less social. They're also orphans who've managed to stick together after being fostered by the same family. Penelope didn't dig too deep but she found enough to know that even though they're not related, they've been through a lot together and that they only have each other. With dedication like that and with a work ethic that she likes, she confronted them on campus and offered them jobs. It was more than minimum wage and it helped them pay for classes and supplies.

(UNKNOWNLY, Penelope ran the numbers using the tuition rate she's familiar with. A rate which is actually higher than it currently is.)

All they have to do is help her maintain the blog and the program. Help her keep the business going.

The siblings agreed, quit their current jobs and went the extra mile. They added firewalls and protections galore. When Penelope looks over their work, she not only praises them, she shows them how to improve, too. The siblings can only look at the teen in awe a little. She's a genius, they can tell, but she's so humble and sassy that they can't help but start to love her a little. After a while, she introduces them to Aunt May and they adore her. With all the help she gives them, they do all they can to give it back because they've been burned too many times not to cherish the ones who genuinely care. When they meet Gwen and her family, they glow, just a little bit, at the trust their boss (they call her that and she can't get them to stop!) gives them.

Penny, in her own unique way, makes more friends. And they grow to love and appreciate her. (Like a Pit bull and Rottweiler would a human who gives the best belly rubs and sneaks them treats under the table. That human becomes there's and they will rip the face off anyone who hurts the special human.) So, they feel justified, really, looking out for her.

When she logs in everything looks fine.

But it looks misleading. Penny has that feeling in her gut. The one she gets when something is wrong but may not actually be dangerous. Just embarrassing. Mostly for her. She looks over the Q&A, the program, the exchange data, the connection, and even checkout. Nothing looks wrong. Its working as it should. Better even and she'll have to make the siblings something, maybe a cake? Or pie? Before making her final stop for the day, the forums to look over the chats.

Penelope will deny the sound that came out of her mouth was anything like a dinosaur in the final throws of death.

Apparently, Morgan and Jessica posted an apology for Penny having missed a day. She was "taking out trashy Alphas who need to understand the meaning of the word No!" and it spiraled from there. She glances over the responses. Most of them along the same lines of praise for standing up for herself and getting rid of the "trash", so to speak. Others were asking for the name of the Alpha so they could help "put him in his place". Then, one declares "trashy Alphas" unsuitable for "Princess Penelope"!

"Why?" she whimpers, "In the name of all that is sweet and chocolatey, freaking why?!!"

Penny's voice may have been a bit hysterical at the end.

This is how Penelope's following starts. She's a little more freaked out than she lets on. (She's secretly screaming on the inside. Like. A lot.)
She now has a following. With Morgan and Jessica making another blog dedicated to it, using the princess title bestowed upon her, and deciding to serve as her Priest and High Priestess.

Penelope's eyes are open. So wide, she knows she looks as freaked out as she really feels.

"You two are crazy and absolute jerks. You know that, right? Mostly jerks." They just laugh.

"Aw! You love us!" Jessica's smile says she is not sorry. At all.

"A cult. Jess. You started a cult."

"Cult is such a strong word." Morgan starts, "Its more like a movement or a faction. I like those better." He smiles softly before typing away. Likely adding something to the new site.

"That doesn't-"

"Wait, wait, before you say anything hear us out!" Jessica is still smiling. It's starting to freak her out a little. "This isn't bad. In fact this could be the best thing that's ever happened since Tony Stark presented!"

"What?" Now she's confused. So confused that Morgan pats her shoulder in a 'there-there' motion.

"How many Omegas do you know have started their own business? Not just own. I mean worked from the ground up. Tony Stark runs SI, yeah, but he inherited it. He didn't build it himself. His inventions are used by the government but what you've made is used by the people. You're both geniuses and you're both Omegas. But despite that, the world loves to criticize and hate him. Are you starting to see where I'm going with this?"

Penelope frowns. "He builds weapons because he owns a weapons company and people don't like that. He's a genius but the world hates him. And that...Dr. Stark gets a lot of flak because he's an Omega? " She does not get it. "Okay. No. Tony Stark builds weapons because he doesn't know any better and I'm pretty sure his Board of Directors aren't going to tell him differently to make him stop. He's a genius, he's rich, and an Omega. People want him but hate him anyway. I don't get how that connects to me."

"He doesn't know better?" The scepticism in Morgan's voice breaks her heart a little.

"Dr. Stark," she begins slowly, a constant reminder to use Dr. instead of Mr., and to find her words, "he's in a haze right now. It's like, he's trying really hard to protect himself and if it means not feeling anything at all then the world could hate him all it wants, he doesn't care."

"Better to feel nothing at all," Jessica whispers, "than to feel absolute agony for the rest of your life. Right?"

Penelope gives small, sad, smile. She doesn't say anything else. She can't. It's not her place.

"That aside for now," Jessica straightens back up, "you are an inspiration. You're young, educated, strong-willed, friendly, and you've got your very own business up and running. In fact, if memory serves me right. You've got the first online tutoring program up and running from nothing but your very own personal computer and a blog. It's sold and you are maintaining it and the blog as time moves on. And if I'm right, which I bet my next paycheck I am, you've got another one on the way. Right?"

Penelope manages to hold eye contact. Which means squat since she can feel the blush creeping
"That's incredible." Morgan starts, "It's also an example for other Omegas to follow. They see Tony Stark, they see the partying, the wild sex scandals, and the drunk lectures and they get uncomfortable or into really shady and dangerous situations."

As his voice trails off, he gazes off into the distance, clearly remembering something. Penny quickly looks to his sister, she knows PTSD, even a mild version of it, and how powerful it can be, how it hangs onto a person; how the memories can flash across a person's vision in ultra high definition with surround sound. She doesn't know his triggers or how to help him out of it. So, she respectfully looks away to his sister. Jessica smiles gratefully for a moment before picking up after her brother.

"But you offer a different outlook. A different model to aspire to. I don't know if you realize, but being a role model can make a world of difference. Especially for those who need it." She whispers the last bit but Penelope hears it.

The hero can't find fault in it. As Spider-Woman she's had people love her, hate her, and love to hate her. There have been people who were inspired to do good because the wall-crawler did good. It comes natural to her, as Spider-Woman, to hope that she's made some difference in someone's life. There have been a few times where she's thanked by someone for saving the day, for saving their life, and giving them the chance to try a little better.

She's just never expected that as Penelope Parker. She expected something like with Tony Stark. Love and Hate. Omegas shouldn't be in the work place and blah, blah, blah. But this...from Jessica's explanation...

"Fine." she sighs, her brain hurts, "Just drop the "Princess" bit okay?" She is not prepared for the full on tackle hug Jessica gives her. They both go tumbling to the ground. (She does not scream. She will deny it forever.) Just as quickly, she's on her feet, and Jessica has her hands on her shoulders. There is an almost maniac look to her eyes that makes Penelope question everything she knows about her friend.

"You won't regret this!" she gushes, "It's going to be great. And if you ever want to see anything let me know. We'll filter all the crazies, promise! And if you want to do a chat session we can. Like a small Q&A for other Omegas looking to start their own business, too! Oh, this is going to be great!"

Jess is practically vibrating where she's standing and starts spewing plans and ideas that make no sense to Penny. She is sure of one thing, though, Penelope may have (this is a big "may" with a leaning toward the positive) just unleashed a terrible force of evil onto the world. But the only proof she has is the slight chill that runs down her spine.

They do not drop the "Princess".

Apparently, her fans like it. They vetoed the idea to scrap it. Besides a pillow muffled scream, Penelope leaves it to the siblings. After a brief profile interview with Morgan, she ignores it. Does not touch it. Willfully blocks it out until Tony Stark strolls through her front door like he owns it.

"Your Highness!" His grin is utterly unrepentant. "Or do you like Princess Penelope? Princess P? Pretty Princess? Pretty Penny? Wait that- "

"I will call you Mr. Frowny Face Crinkly the Old and then call a paramedic to help you find your up her face.
"You did NOT!" She does not regret the feeling of relish his outrage gives her, "I am not old!"

"You are. There are wrinkles and frown lines everywhere."

"Says the one who can't even drink." He quickly looks at himself in a mirror on the wall. (Something she put up so she can see who might be trying to come through the dining room.)

"I think I'll live without, thanks, old man."

"Not old, brat. You-" A cough interrupts them. They both look to see Aunt May standing in the entry to the kitchen. (Crud). She raises an eyebrow at the two of them, clearly unimpressed.

"Now, its almost lunch time. Penny set the table please. Mr. Stark can help me in the kitchen."

"Tony, please," His grin is charming and completely photo ready. "Mr. Stark was my father. And I'm not-"

"Anthony Edward Stark,"

Aunt May doesn't yell. Not unless she's calling you from some other part of the house. But when she uses a person's full name, slow and with emphasis, oh, look out! Then, she shifts her gaze just a bit. Its not accusing but it is intense. Its Aunt May's way of saying, 'I will have your attention, now and not a second later because you did something and now you will hear from me' without actually saying anything. Its incredibly powerful and Penelope hasn't figured out how to use it yet. (Oh, glorious day when she does though!) Its use is powerful enough to shut up even billionaires and the man's eyes go wide.

"Do you mean to tell me you can't carry a few trays to a table...five feet away?" She is using that neutral tone of hers, the one that isn't accusing but still manages to tell the person its directed at 'who are you trying to kid?'

"Well, when you put it that way.."

And its almost a surreal moment when Penelope watches Tony Stark trail after her aunt like a puppy into the kitchen.

They adopt a billionaire. (Because, of course.)

"Don't call me Uncle Tony. Makes me sound like a mob boss or something. Say...say I'm your godparent!"

"No."

"What? Why?" She ignores the whine.

"Because if I have to deal with you calling me princess, you can be the fairy godmother. Add some sparkle, a musical number, and you'll be perfect."

"I'll have you know Cinderella wishes she had me as a fairy godmother."

"So, should I call you Cosmo or Wanda?"

Penelope frames his expression. She thinks its beautiful.
There is a man sitting across from her. He's black and bald. His face is painted white with these markings that look tribal. Except they keep changing. He is wearing a full piece suit complete with a cane and fedora. (He looked like one of those 1920s gangsters.)

Which in the grand scheme of things did not hit her top ten weirdest things ever.

There were several strange things going on right now. One being that she had no clue how she got to this café. It is small, homely, and warm. There are cakes and desserts spread out along the table. She doesn't recognize half of them but they look and smell mouth watering. But she refuses to touch them (an applause for her self control, please) because she is not Persephone. She will not be tempted and married to some guy she does not know, thank you! There is also a blue colored tea set laid out on the table. Its pretty and she's sure the gold inscriptions and decorations are made with actual gold. The tea smells lovely even if she's not an avid tea drinker.

Penelope finds herself wearing a dress that she knows she does not own with a pair of nude strappy heels. Its a pretty dress but she's a little freaked out to be wearing it because she knows she didn't put it on. So, she feels safe blaming the guy she's sharing a table with. Of course, since she's freaking out her brain to mouth filter is shot to hell.

"Are you cosplaying the Godfather? If you are I'm pretty sure I'm not supposed to be here. Like, I'm not a mob wife. I'm not a wife at all. Not even a mate. I mean if I was in the mafia, which I'm not, ya' know, just saying, but I would totally be the Boss. I've already got two jerks who call me that anyway. I'm pretty sure I'd be an awesome Boss, too! But, no, not a wifey. You should probably find someone happy to be a trophy wife, mate, partner, or whatever, if you catch my drift."

Penny wants to smack herself when she finishes because rambling does not give the impression of someone in control. No. No it does not. Nope. It shows how absolutely not in control she is. Funnily enough the guy just laughs. The moment he does she knows he isn't normal but her spider sense stays quiet. His voice sounds like thunder, like the crashing of lightening as it impacts the earth. It doesn't hurt to listen to it. The sound echoes around her, soft, and fond.

"If I was cosplaying," he starts as he calms down, "I would have you dressed in a gown fit for your station. Like a true princess. But I know this is something you prefer. Now, onto other business..."

He moves a slice of cake towards her and starts to pour a cup for both of them.

"I recommend you start with the banana crumb cake first. It goes well with this batch of tea." Seeing her hesitate makes him smile, and Penelope is struck by how much it reminds her of her uncle, but she can't put her finger on why or how. "Go on now. Nothing is poisoned or curse to hold you here or to me. Quite the contrary, you've earned this sampling."

"Sampling?" she frowns but picks up a fork to try the cake. Her spider sense is still silent. "And who are you?"

"Ah! Of course." A slow grin makes its way across his face."I Am The Spider God, The Trickster, The Son Of Nyame, The Sky-God And Asase-Ya, Goddess Of The Earth. I Am God Of Wisdom And Culture. I am Kwaku Anansi And All Stories Are Mine!"

His voice thunders all around her. It does not press down on her like a weight. It does not demand servitude or submission. No, it flows through her. Warmth and Power and all Things she knows that remind her of Safety. His words are magic and power. It is a declaration. An
Get more enjoyment from reading by understanding the context of the story. The character Penny is in a conversation with Anansi, a god who has arrived. Anansi tells Penny that she is tasting a sample of life that awaits her in both her lifetime and afterlife. He also explains that had Penny's soul been in a better state, she would have become a Loa, a spirit both revered and serviced. Anansi offers Penny a sip of tea and asks her if her soul ascended. Penny reflects on her actions and the sacrifices she made, which led to her being granted a peaceful afterlife. They continue their conversation about Penny's life and her sacrifices, mentioning the cosmic cube and Hydra. The god also describes Penny's behavior as a hero and explains why her soul ascended. The conversation is filled with references to Penny's life, her sacrifices, and her afterlife.
not to commit herself to any of them.

"Your soul was shredded almost beyond recognition. Had I not known you, your soul would have withered into nothing. When I did, I could see the damage done to you. I could see that you could not ascend. The natural choice would be to let you go or to remake you so that you can ascend. To remake you would be to replace the very core of who you are. It would be a grave violation of your soul. Something only the most unethical or uncaring of beings would enjoy. So, I chose a different path. I chose you."

His words make her stop for a moment. Not out of fear. But to take in exactly what he's saying. He's talking about before the merge completed, before she became whole, when there were two halves of her in one body. The before was worn and tattered. More a collection of experiences, memories, and bits of personality than an actual consciousness. That aspect of her had come to her, out of dozens of universes.

For a long time, the only sound to surround them is the careful clinking of fine china and the aroma of the sweet tea. She lets it lull her into a relaxed frame of mind.

"Why me? Out of the entire web..." she trails off, unsure.

"You were not only the closest, you were young just starting your journey, with great potential but," he refills both cups," you were also the closest, soul-wise. There are many versions of you, male and female. Just as there are different versions of them. However, there is always a difference. If the differences were too wide and too many than the two souls would have imploded together. The two of you were exceptionally close and you have grown incredibly well."

He nods his head towards her. Penelope cannot help the smile that grows from his words, glowing a little with pride. How could she not? This was The Spider God, telling her she was doing good!

"Those parts that were missing were filled when you two finished merging. However, for the merge to take place, a filter of sorts was needed. A means by which the two of you would not break down or apart. This is where I come in."

He places a plate of assorted cookies in front of her and gestures toward her tea. Penelope wordlessly takes a bite and then a sip, her eyes brightening with delight.

"I used less than a fraction of my power to keep the two of you together. Enough to hold your souls but not overwhelm you with my power. This had a side effect in that when you finally merged a part of me lingers on with in you. This makes you, in essence, my babaa. My daughter."

"What?" Its good she's had so much tea. She's sure without it, she'd have sent herself into a massive sprawling panic attack.

"Oh, your mortal parents are still your parents." He shrugs, "Consider me your third parent. Soul-wise, you would be considered my child. Adopted or not is irrelevant. I suppose this makes me your God parent. In the literal sense, of course. You can tell the billionaire he is free to be godmother but I will not share my title with him. Understood?"

"Yeah, I..." she completely misses the intense look he gives her because its gone the second she agrees. "How-"

"Oh, before I forget," he reaches into one of his suit pockets and pulls out a long white box wrapped with a blue and black ribbon. "This is a gift for your friend, Gwen, yes? She must never take it off. It will give her some protection. Do not open it. She must do it. She is a lovely girl
and you hold her in high regard. It would be terrible if you stopped speaking to me because she was not protected."

"Wha-" As he slides Gwen's gift across the table, he's already reaching for another pocket and talking on.

"Here is also a gift for the lovely Aunt May. She is a darling and if she ever seeks a new mate I would be more than happy to search the world for the best potential suitors. Honestly, for a mortal to be able to make one such as you not once but multiple times? She is magnificent, simply magnificent."

"And, of course, there is your gift." the god nodded toward her. "As my daughter you can expect a few changes. Nothing drastic. You are still mortal. But a few extras from me will make their appearance soon enough. To help with one is my next gift. Since you are a princess," he smirks, "it is only fitting that I give you something incredibly rare as proof of my favor to you.

"Your favor? Wha-"

"I have taken the liberty of naming her for you. She is not a fighter but she has no problem guarding your secrets while you are away. Penelope dear, meet Ashaki. It is a name that means 'beautiful' in West Africa."

A butler, wearing the iconic black two tailed coat and polished shoes, shows up at her side. He is carrying a fluffy white pillow. And on that pillow is a massive and hairy spider...wearing a bright red tutu. It turns to her and even though its lips weren't moving, it started to talk!

'Hi Penelope! Its nice ta' meet ya'!'

"Hi...Ashaki. Nice to...meet you too..." her voice sounds faint even to her own ears. Everything was suddenly happening very fast, too fast.

'We're gonna' be great friends. I just know it!' "Sure..."

"She is a Hercules Baboon Spider. She feeds on insects and the occasional rodent. She became lost and almost drowned before I found her. She will make a great companion and guard for your work. Just tell anyone interested that she's a regular tarantula. They are more than likely not going to look twice at her."

Penelope slowly turns back to Anansi, shock starting to set in.

"Ah, yes." For the first time since the meeting began, the god seems...almost apologetic. It makes her pulse skyrocket. "Earlier I may have gotten a bit carried away. Declaring myself as I did let those who pay me homage know that I have taken an interest in the mortal plane once again and that I have attached myself to one in particular."

"Attach-!" she chokes on air, cutting herself off.

"Do not worry. No one knows what you look like but if they are trained in the mystic arts, they will know that you have a connection to me. This can cause people to try and carry favor with you to try and impress me. If you want to accept such things you can. Should they try to harm you I will put them in their place."

"Who-!" Her eyes are blinking rapidly now.
"There have not been any attempts to harm those directly associated with me. But one can never be too careful and you are mortal. You are incredibly fragile. Not as much as some but still. And if you run into anyone possessed by a god do not be alarmed. They are either completing a task for some of their followers or being incredibly nosy about who I've attached myself to. If they offer you something to eat, politely remind them that I can be terrifyingly possessive and it would best if you did not. Understand?"

"Of course! But-"

"Excellent!" the god smiles brightly before barreling onward. "Then, with your recent acquisition of a following of your own, it should not be difficult to handle the rest when they appear. On another matter, it was wise of you to turn away the Osborn child. He is hardly a mate fit for a princess. I expect you to choose your True Mate and not some knock off. When you do meet, however, I expect you to make him work for it."

By this point, Penelope is pale and on the verge of throwing the table over to make a run for it. This was it. It was the end. She is barely holding on. She could not take anymore!

"And when you mate I expect many grandchildren."

She wakes up choking on a scream. Jerking awake in bed, she throws herself to the floor. The slight jarring pain knocks her out of her shock. Glancing frantically around, there is no café, or Spider God, or tutus. She sits up slowly.

"Just a dream...just a dream..."

'What's a dream?'

Penelope snaps her head back to her bed so fast she's half surprised she didn't give herself whiplash. There on her bed, is a spider. A spider bigger than her hand...wearing a red tutu. The spider waves one of her front legs.

'Hi!'

Penelope feels justified, perfectly justified in finally losing it.
Bridges were made for more than Burning...

Chapter Summary

Tony is a great godmother.

Even when he doesn't say anything. Penelope trusts him. Because she knows he's an amazing hero. Sometimes you need to take a Leap of Faith. Luckily, Penny isn't afraid of heights.

On the other side, an Alpha receives a vision with his God.

Chapter Notes

This took forever. So sorry. T_T

This chapter was so hard!!! I had to fight not to try and push the main plotline. While doing that I came to the realization that I have two possible plotlines to follow.

I can't decide if I want T'Challa to meet Penny or Spidey first. But this chapter does lead up to it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Trying to explain away how she got a spider the size of an average puppy is a challenge. Penny tries and fails in the face of Aunt May's 'Cut-the-Bullshit-Cuz'-I'm-not-buying-it' face. It's painful. So, so painful. Because she tells Aunt May everything.

Everything.

She tells her about Spider-Woman from Before. About dying and being saved. About living again as a broken thing, a soul made of glass. Taking a year to merge, to smooth the edge together. Penelope tells her of trying to be better, of learning from her last life to be a hero the people deserve. A hero people can have some trust in. She tells Aunt May of her working with the police because last time they got hurt or died, thinking she was a bigger threat.

Penelope talks about the fear and hate for empowered people. About the Avengers fighting each other and registration for the enhanced. For mutants and Inhumans. For anyone different.

About Hydra and a cube with the power of the cosmos trapped inside. About friends and a clone she saw as a brother. About Responsibility and Family and Sacrifice.

The teen hero talks about war among friends. Against brothers. Against half of the world. She speaks about Kings and Governments and Gods.

And she doesn't get halfway through it all before they're sitting on the couch crying and holding each other.
Because it hurts. Even if she's made peace with what she knows, what she's experienced.

Afterwards, Penny gives Anansi’s gift to her aunt and watches as she opens it. Its a necklace, gold and beautiful. The charm at the end is designed like a web with a spider inside, not unlike the one on Penny's suit. Its hard to make out but Penny can see what look like runes etched on to the web and the spider's legs with white gold.

Penelope can feel the magic coming from it. Soft but strong. Watchful like a sentinel.

After that they spend the day together. They cook, work on the vegetable garden they planted two days ago, and watch a movie. Ashaki scurries around the house like an excited puppy. It doesn't take long for Aunt May to stop flinching.

"Its the tutu, I think." she says with a thoughtful look. Its a look that turns into a smile when Ashaki manages to lure out a mouse from somewhere and catch it. That turns into a laugh when the spider does a weird victory dance, wiggling her abdomen and two stepping with her legs.

Penelope relaxes. Everything looks like its going to be okay.

__________________________

She's wrong.


She drags her eyes open and to the scene in front of her. It can only be described as the Coming of the Apocalypse. The End of the World. A picture of Cruelty and Evil, in truest form. It is devastation and inhumanity. It is the Darkness that lurks within all of Mankind. The Calamity of Sin. The Violation of Innocence.

"And this is Penny when she was eight..." Penelope, horrified, tunes out the rest.

The living room is to the left of the front door. So, when someone walks in, you hear who is in the living room just as you turn to look. And on the white couch, sits Aunt May and her guest.


"Oh my god!" Penelope whispers. Scream-whispers. Whisper-screams.

"Yes?" The African Trickster turns to grin at her. "I'm right here. No need to call or pray, my dear."

Penelope clenches her eyes shut. "How? Just...how?"

"Oh! Penny, dear! Did you get the bananas?" Penelope inhales deeply and snaps her eyes open to her aunt. A strangled scream trapped in her throat as she raises the fresh fruit her aunt wanted her to get from the farmers market.

"Lovely!" Aunt May smiles before turning back to the Trickster. "I hope you don't mind just the bananas. I wasn't sure what kind of fruit you would like and I wasn't sure where to find any of the fruit from Africa. I'm sure you'd prefer those much better."

"My dear, you are a treat. So thoughtful." The Spider God takes her hand and places a kiss on her hand, charisma at full max. "And any fruit is fine so long as its fresh. The mango and watermelon you used were especially juicy."
He turns to Penny and eyes the bag in her hand. "Those bananas are quite lovely. You have a very
good eye, babaa."

The eighteen year old is certain she's going into shock. Or having a heart attack.

"The altar you made is also quite charming." Anansi says as he turns to his left, where a box has
been placed on the mantle of the fireplace wide open with a bowl in front of it. Penny can tell it is
something that her aunt handmade with care. "I do not believe I have ever had some take such
time and care when crafting something so...humble."

"Knowing what you did for my little girl, it was the least I could do. You're always welcome here,
remember that. Oh! I almost forgot the fruit cake in the frig. I'll be right back!"

As Aunt May takes the fruit from Penelope's limp arms, the teen whimpers, horrified at the unholy
bond forming in front of her.

Penelope has come to terms with her old life. She remembers things, people, places and things.
Other things she has forgotten. Things that fell away, faded. It doesn't bother her so much.
Things are different here. What she knows she can't actually use. She can rely on it for the
experience it gives but that is all. However, her knowing has become more of a distant
remembering. Almost like when one watches a movie. Penelope knows the big things. Remember
the facts even if some of the details escape her. Penelope knows the movie is real, was real, in
another place and time. That time is no longer the Now. She knows this. Knows it like she knows
the sun rises and sets everyday.

That doesn't make the dreams stop.

-falling and falling. Breathless. The sun at her back and the wind flowing along the curve of
muscles and spandex. Infinity stretching on behind skyscrapers and concrete. Red and blue
sparking and reflecting off silver and grey and black and mirrors and windows. A flash of string,
web, a tug and she's flying. Soaring. All the world at her back. Arms spread, embracing the sky.
Limitless.

The dreams are broken things. They do not come in any order. They do not show the full story.

and Faster. Heat against skin. Scorching and hissing. The sky is on Fire. Burning. The air taste
like Ash.

Rarely. Very Rarely. Memories come like a flashflood. They crash against her new reality. They
roar and scream. They rebel against the peace she's surrounded by. Nightmares howl, daring her,
challenging her to fight.

Fighting. Still fighting. The skirmish was so short but so long. Lifting her head is hard. All she
can do is turn. Breathing as evenly as she can. Try to regain some strength, something, anything,
to help. Parts of the armor are dented, giving in under the power of vibranium and a super
soldier. He's losing. Iron Man is losing. She twitches. Struggling. They need to stop. They need
to stop before...before...Iron Man stumbles. The Captain takes advantage, forces him to the
ground. He raises his shield. Raises it above his head, jaw clenched, eyes hard. Intent clear. She
still cannot move. Cannot get off the floor. The shield comes down.

Down onto the heart of Iron Man.

The casing does not give in. It cracks but does not break. Stop! He raises it and Iron Man reaches, struggles to fight back. The Captain is faster. The shield comes down. Again and again. Stop! She tries to cry out. To move. He's killing him! He's killing Iron Man! Crushing his heart! Breaking it! The armor starts to give. The arc reactor starts to flicker...STOP!

The shield crashes into Iron Man's chest. The armor caves. The reactor, Iron Man's heart, flickers. No. Dims. No! Dies. -

Screaming. She wakes up screaming. She's panicking. Terrified. Its a dream, a memory. She knows this. She knows that Iron Man doesn't die there. That does not stop her fear. Penelope ignores Aunt May's frantic voice. She ignores how her aunt tries to hold her. She's reaching for her phone. Desperately, she calls Tony. She can't breathe, gasping for air.

Its ringing. Ringing. And ringing.

"Pick up. Pick. UP!" The longer it rings, the harder it is to breathe, to focus. She can feel the hysteria starting to grow. "Pick up the damn phone!"

Penelope collapses back onto her pillow, trembling, sheets thrown haphazardly to the ground. Aunt May is behind her, rubbing her back, trying to soothe her, to calm her.

"He will, Penny. He will." she whispers, calmer than she was a few minutes ago.

Just as she feels she's at the end of her rope. As she feels like the only answer is something drastic. Something to make sure he's okay.

"How's my favorite princess doing?" And there he is. Whole. Alive.

"Tony!" her breath is short, ragged. But the relief. It is sweet, sweet, sweet! A rush of relief so profound tears fall from her eyes.

"Penny? What's wrong? Penny!" His voice is strong. It doesn't wheeze, struggling to even out. To breathe.

"You...okay?" her throat is sore. She doesn't care.

"Am...I...Am I okay?! Of course I'm okay! You're not. You are not okay. So not okay because I can hear you crying. Over the phone! What happened?" He's serious. She can hear it in his voice. In the slight panic that he tries to hide. In the hard edge that forms at the very end.

"Nightmare." she whispers, "You died. Like Uncle Ben." Because she was weak and tired. She didn't stop it. She was right there.

"Oh," he whispers back, breathless. "I...don't know what to say. About that. This. I mean..."

"Its okay," she's still a little high strung, still out of it. "Just, talk to me. So I know you're okay."

"I can totally do that. Have you meet me? Silly question. Course you have. I can talk about anything. Do you need anything? Like the real Tony Stark knocking at your door? I can do that, too. In fact, Jarvis! Change of plans. We're going back to New York. I'll be there in like an hour and we can...J, what are you talking about? Of course, we...fine. I'll be there soon. J, remind me to
build a faster plane. Its ridiculous that my goddaughter sounds like she's having a heart attack and I'm like four hours away. Unacceptable!"

Penelope lets out a huff of laughter. Trust Tony to go big.

"We can totally do a sleep over. Girls do that kind of stuff, right? Right. I'll ask Pepper what to buy. Ice cream is a given because it is glorious and you refuse to drink coffee."

"Not my fault." she can feel her eyelids dropping. "'nanci won't let me. Says it stunts my growth."

"Well Nancy is a lying liar who lies. I mean, look at me. I'm fabulous!"

"You're short." His outrage is swift.

"I am NOT!" Something falls over and crashes on Tony's end. "I'm taller than you! And who the heck is Nancy anyway? With a name as boring as that I wouldn't trust them with my diet. That should include coffee. Because it is awesome and the reason so many kids survive college. You know, that place that you've applied and go to for years. Not prison. Although there are plenty of people who would argue such a thing. Especially for those places with terrible food. Like, this one time at MIT Rhodey and I..."

The rest of the his words wash over her. Exhaustion finally wining out. His voice a soothing lullaby against her old fears and regrets. She lets her eyelids drop and relax. Secure that her friend, her "fairy godmother", is safe and alive.

(Across the country, a billionaire tugs at his tie and shrugs off his suit jacket. He doesn't stop talking even though he knows the person on the other end has fallen asleep. He shuts off his shoes and tells his driver/bodyguard Happy, he was turning it in for the night. When Happy hesitates, confused, the other man waves him off and walks to his bedroom. He had plans to go to a party for some celebrity he doesn't know the name of but doesn't feel up to it anymore.

The billionaire grabs a glass of water before heading to bed. He just lays there. Still talking. He's Tony Stark though. No one can multitask like him. As he's talking about the time he stumbled upon a drag queen club with his best friend, he's also thinking about his new goddaughter. About meeting a spunky, sassy, teen who presented late and made the best of it. About a girl whose told off Alphas and Betas before she ever presented and even well after. About an Omega who used her genius to make something to help others.

Who thinks making weapons only enables more violence. Who believes making weapons offers protection to no one, not even the ones they're meant for. Or the ones who make them.

Who believes he's a hero.

Who tells him he is an amazing hero. That she looks forward to the day he sees the hero inside of him, too.

Who calls him because she had a nightmare of him dying.

Because she cares.

Someone cares for Tony Stark. Like a much beloved uncle. Like family.

Someone cares enough to cry at the idea that he could die. And trust him enough to fall asleep at just the sound of his voice.
Across the country, if a billionaire falls asleep with tears in his eyes...well, there's no one there to witness it.)

Later, Tony will get on a plane to New York to have lunch with the Parkers. Penelope, still feeling just a touch too raw, will hug him. She'll place her head over his heart and just listen to it beat, steady and calm.

She'll thank him for coming then haggle him for not taking care of himself. Aunt May will demand he stays for dinner and he will because No One Argues with Aunt May.

Later, he'll see the altar to the Spider God, watch as they place a few pieces of fruit in the bowl, offer a small prayer of thanks and then said god will appear from the shadow of the altar in a parody of a genie. The god will greet them and introduce himself to the "shorter, less pretty, mortal godparent", which will lead to complete and utter mayhem.

(Secretly, Tony files the god bit away for his freak out later. When he's alone with his bots and JARVIS.)

Of course, such a big family gathering means all need to be present. So Aunt May goes to fetch a certain spider and Tony is introduce to Ashaki. Tony will shriek like a five year old and more mayhem will follow.

Later, Ashaki will find Penelope's mask, try to put it on, and succeed. Then, she will be unable to take it off and run around with it. (To Penny's mortification and Anansi's amusement.)

That is how Tony Stark learns that Penelope Parker is Spider-Woman. That is how the billionaire learns that the hero of New York, the first superhero, (true and good in his opinion), who has without question opened the door for other heroes and vigilantes, is eighteen years old, and she's fought villains and monsters and helped police catch regular criminals. Who has endured harsh criticism and severe public scrutiny for all that she has done. A hero who has paved the way for other heroes (though not as well known or as "super") to follow.

A hero who is loved so fiercely by the city of New York and its people that proposals for federal interference have been rebuffed and out right denied! (Prosecutors know how to deflect and bullshit like the best of politicians.)

That's when the Mechanic learns that she's been fighting using a suit that's no better than padded spandex and promptly...Flips. The. Fuck. Out!

Later, he'll have Jarvis have some of his penthouses cleaned up and ready for him. He'll leave the Stark Mansion alone, unable to step foot inside. Draw up plans for both a new Stark Tower in New York and a new suit for his hero goddaughter (whose other god parent is an actual God!) and saves his (now massive, thank you) freak out when he's alone with his A.I. and starts his plunge into America's alphabet soup of agencies to make sure no one else knows.

That's how he'll find SHIELD. About their profile on her, on possible identities, possible origins, and if its possible to recreate what she could do. About their still incomplete threat assessment and possible asset status.

Tony Stark will start planning contingencies and back up plans. His back up will have back up plans.

Later, Tony will introduce his goddaughter to his best friend (and secret crush) Rhodey, to Happy Hogan, and Pepper Potts because they are his family. All Alphas who have experience with
sassy Omegas and have no problem with one starting her own business. When they meet, it'll be hard at first, unsure of the others, wondering if they're just using Tony for themselves and get in a fight over it, over Tony.

When they realize it, they'll laugh and get along as if they were friends their whole lives. Aunt May will then wrangle everyone for dinner because apparently no one eats unless they order out which she finds blasphemous.

Rhodey will mention her similarity to his mother. Which will lead to a rather terrifying union of strong willed Beta mother figures.

Later, Tony will gift his penthouse on the East Side of Manhattan to Penelope. He'll buy out the entire building and outfit it for her as a home and base. He'll hunt for some of the most efficient and unattached (government-wise) people in the world to make up her personal guard. Tony Stark will manage to convince her to take it as a gift from him to his goddaughter and as a way to keep anyone from suspecting Penelope Parker of being anything other than an incredible Omega.

Tony Stark is a business man with experience. He knows how to sell a deal. He also has a good read on Penny after knowing her for a few months. He knows exactly the kind of pros that will sway her to accept the deal.

When she moves in, she does not hesitate to add her own personal touch. Which means family photos, snapshots from her camera, two hanging potted plants, and her own Anansi altar sitting cozy on a corner on her mantle. She places several pictures of Tony up as well. (Including a certain picture that managed to capture Tony's outrage properly). Everything is modern and clean and cozy. The teen especially loves her new bedroom and adds the final touches to make it home.

Tony will convince her to meet the protection detail he has for her. She won't argue or fight him on this or ask about how much everything costs. Penelope will smile fondly and thank him before giving him a hug and run off to meet her new personal security.

(Tony will pretend to be angry and put upon to hide the warmth her hug left him with).

Tony will have done his homework of course. With Jarvis help, finding and contacting the type of people he wants for her doesn't take more than a week.

Tony Stark will make them an offer better than any they'll ever get. Some more than others. Especially since her guards will include men whose names have made intelligent agencies and governments flinch and hesitate.

They'll include people like Jason Bourne, Robert McCall, Bryan Mills and Clyde Shelton. All dangerous and skilled. All of whom are also considered "lost" or "retired". It doesn't take much to get them cleared for "duty". He even offers a generous family package. And if he lets JARVIS loose on the government's "secure" database to do so, well...maybe there is something to be said about being Merchant of Death after all.

Later, Tony Stark will have them sign a near mile long NDA about anything Penny might show them or what they discover about her because Tony knows men like these don't miss things. And it's always the little things that give away the game. Being so close to her, to his goddaughter (and since when did he care about things like that he doesn't even know!), and he isn't leaving anything up to chance. They'll find out the pretty, genius, Omega they're guarding is a lot more than she lets on.

And just when Tony thinks he's got Penny all figured out, she offers him one of her blueprints as a
thank you. He only has to glance at it once to know how valuable and profitable it is. It leaves him reeling and wrong footed. Penelope just smiles.

"I trust you, Tony. You're my hero, after all, and for everything you do for me, the least I can do is give you something to let you see the good in you too."

Tony will choke on his words and give her a brief hug (oh gosh hugs everywhere!) before beating a hasty retreat to his own penthouse with a semi-complete workshop. He'll look over the blueprints, a non-radioactive scanner for deep tissue and bone analysis, and patents it...under Penelope's name. Because even though she trust him, he doesn't quite have the nerve to trust himself or the Board of Directors.

Later, Tony will improve and make corrections and notes about other applications for the tech she's given him. He'll make sure a hefty sum of the profits go to an account also in her name. But for the moment, it will be the first invention to come out of Stark Industries to not be a weapon. While there will be a few critics, there will be few willing to bad mouth an invention that helps so many.

But all of that is later. Right now, they sleep waiting for tomorrow.

Unfortunately, not everyone sleeps as they do.

T’Challa knows he is dreaming. He does not panic when he can not see his surroundings. A vision or a warning of something, he is sure. Perhaps, he thinks hopefully...even a hint as to the identity of his true mate.

A hope that is answered not long after.

Fog surrounds him. It is everywhere, thick and condense. There is grass beneath his feet and his toes flex dirt, soft and earthy. His senses sharpen and pick up the sound of movement directly in front of him. Someone was here. The prince tenses, ready to fight and defend himself. The person is on the ground and for a moment he is hesitant. What if they were injured? He erases the thought as quickly as it comes, because the shadow darkens into a shape. They lay in the grass on their back. As they sit up, leaning back on their arms, the shadow slims down and settles into a familiar shape. A woman's shape and from that shape, a pair of hazel blue eyes stares back at him.

He feels the breath leave his body. Feels the icy chill run down his spine. Feels nerves light up in pained pleasure. The fog shifts and starts to fall away, like satin, falling from luscious curves and creamy flesh. It left all of her bare to his gaze. Instantly, all he wants to do is taste her. To run his hands over every expanse of her unmarked skin, like a blank canvas waiting to be painted. Heat pools in his loins. He wants to mark her, to claim her. To rut and mate and Bind her soul to his. To make her his Queen with a ferocity that would scare a lesser man.

The Prince of Wakanda is not a lesser man.

T’Challa embraces his desire and he cannot even see her face. A mask obscures the upper portion of her face. Her eyes lock with his own as she gives a breathy sigh and arches her back. It brings his eyes to her breast, supple and full, firm and pert. To her thin waist and strong hips, all smooth curves and toned muscles. The prince licks his lips and prepares to leap, to hunt. To grasp his true mate, who was well within his reach.

Abruptly, he is thrown back. He rolls with the attack and is on his feet again in seconds. Above
his mate, an impossibly massive shadow pierces the fog. Yet, he cannot perceive what or who it is. T’Challa struggles to move, a force of power keeps him still, immobile. He can do nothing as his mate rises to her feet and turns away from him. Oh, but did he try. He struggled. He fought. He could not lose her. He refused the very idea.

Miraculously, the Wakandan Prince manages to move a step. But a step is not enough. He can no longer see his mate, lost to his sight due to the fog and just as he feared each step would take his mate leagues away, a surge of heat surges through him and the power that held him in place is expelled. Above him a figure starts to form, a hard body corded with muscle, feline and massive. Its pelt is a brilliant gold. The gold melts to a red more explosive than fire. Just as quickly it fades to a thick black. The color of the pelt continues to shift. Claws and fangs shine with a crisp sharpness that human hands could never possibly craft.

He knows who this figure is before it even finishes forming.

“Bast.” He says in a breathy whisper.

The Panther God.

They stand, massive and lean and powerful, above him. Abruptly, a deep growl like rumble fills the air, tail twirling, as the fog starts to retreat further. He sees beyond the field lay a sprawling forest, dark and immense. Bast does not turn to him, focus on the looming form at the forest edge. The same form that kept T’Challa from his mate. Muscles coiling with tension and claws flexing into the earth. A predator eager for the hunt. That eagerness takes on a contagious energy. T’Challa cannot ignore the thrill that runs through him.

That thrill sends him rushing forward. He can see his mate, and rushes to catch her.

Above him, Bast clashes with their opponent. It is fierce and primal. It is a battle that, had the prince cared to look, would have been one to sing odes of for generations.

Alas, he has eyes only for the Omega fleeing from him. Her laughter, carefree and playful, prompts him to move faster. To win.

He can see her. Bast roars and spews fire from powerful jaws.

He is gaining ground, mere feet away now. A shriek answers in retaliation, shadow and fog rising from the earth to pierce divine flesh. To rend. To kill!

He surges forward. He can see her clearly, can see her sweat and dew covered skin. He focuses as tendons flex and stretch with every leap and jump she takes.

He reaches a hand to grasp his prize!

He wakes abruptly, hand still reaching out.

He missed!

Chapter End Notes

Let me know your thoughts on Penny or Spidey meeting T’Challa first?
(I like both plots but input would be nice...)
Chapter Summary

First Contact, of any kind, is critical.

Chapter Notes

Some of the Lore for the Omega verse is borrowed from the IronPanther Collection by Oky_Verlo, Chapters 22 and 23: What You're Made Of, Parts I & II.

Also, this chapter got away from me. But I'm not upset about it because its better than I had planned.

“This is the lesson: never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.”

~ Winston Churchill

2005-Last Week of May

Year of the Spy and the Spider

Year of Transition and Identity Fails...But Oh! What a Way to Go!

As Spider-Woman, she's come along way with being comfortable with police. That includes having the gull to walk into a police station. She doesn't do it often. In fact, she's only done it about one or two times before. This makes it three. So it makes sense that people, all types of people, would stop and stare. She pays them no mind and keeps her head high, shoulders relaxed. Until she's not.

"Hi Beccs!" Then she's waving her arm in the air like a maniac at the receptionist. "My gosh you look gorgeous today. Did you highlight your hair? Get a facial? You're practically glowing!"

Rebecca, the receptionist for this shift, doesn't bother to stop the grin making its way along her face. Several of the cops nearby and behind her, who are familiar with the hero's antics, grin and watch on bemused. It wasn't uncommon for Spider-Woman to meet and greet some of the staff at the station whenever she stops by to visit Captain Stacy, even if she doesn't always use the front
door. Of course, the hero's version of meet and greet is something that hasn't failed to put a smile on someone's face.

(Some days are hard. They drain you out, leave you tired and a little more brittle than before. Some days leave you wondering if you can keep going. On those days, you search for a little light, a little hope. It doesn't always show. But when it does, it comes from strange places and unexpected forms. Even in red and blue.)

"The Captain's in his usual spot. But I'm pretty sure you already know that. Stop playing matchmaker and get over there."

"Ugh!" Spider-Woman can't help but cringe. "That was one time! And I didn't even do it on purpose!"

"Yeah, yeah, tell it to the judge, spidey."

The Accidental Matchmaking of '03 is a very cherished memory of the NYPD. To Spider-Woman’s embarrassment.

Moving away from that memory, the masked hero gave her thanks and waved to a few familiar faces. Then she's making her way to the prosecutor's office.

As she did so, her spider sense gave a faint hum.

"Well now, took them long enough."

It was time for lunch anyway. The soon to be nineteen year old hero couldn't help feeling a little excited. Just a little. Its not everyday she had an advantage over secret government spy agencies. Time to play the Spy Game. SHIELD vs Spider-Woman.

Fight Start!

Jacob Henderson isn't anything special. He is a particularly average agent and Beta. But he gave SHIELD the best that he had to offer. As a Beta he is often overlooked by the scant few Omegas he's ever come across. But he has also been mature enough not to let it get to him. Besides, there was a rather pretty Beta in accounting he's managed to ask to lunch tomorrow once the current mission is over.

If he makes it out in one piece.

Situated in a SHIELD mobile command base, he should feel safe and secure. He doesn't. And if the other agents with him say they are then they're lying, to him and to themselves. Because the target is someone SHIELD has had a hard time locking onto for the past three, going on four, years!

Henderson is referring to the vigilante/hero, Spider-Woman.

The obviously enhanced-superhuman-who-may-pass-Captain-America Spider-Woman. Yeah. That one. The same ”hero” who may or may not be former military because there is no other explanation for why or how she's managed to out maneuver SHIELD so far. That or she's formerly a SHIELD agent gone rogue. But Henderson doesn't like to think about that. It sends chills down his spine.

"Target's on the move, Sir."
"Let's get started. Game faces on people. We might not get another shot."

Henderson straightened his back and focused everything he had on his assigned task. Alpha Phil Coulson didn't pick incompetent agents after all.

"The Widow is in position, sir."

"Audio and visual clear."

"Retrieval team on standby."

Coulson said nothing. His eyes fixed on a single point in one of the surveillance cameras around the prosecutor's office. Granted, a mission as high priority as this called for a bit of excess. So, cameras littered the surrounding buildings and at least a full street block outwards. The one he was looking at showed their target. She was just standing there, head cocked to the side like a dog or a cat.

"Report." the Alpha commanded. "Anyone on that street?"

"Negative, sir. All agents are out of sight."

Henderson made a quick pursuit of the street the subject was looking over. None of his fellow agents were present but there were a number of shops along the street. Maybe she was looking for someone else? It took an excessive amount of surveillance over the past year to even set this up. Spider-Woman didn't keep to a set schedule and often had lunch or dinner or even breakfast at odd times. The only reason they even set up at this location is because it is the only location that the subject semi-frequented. Other than that, her abilities made it difficult to track, let alone keep a visual of.

At this point, any unknown variables could send the whole operation crashing like a house of burning cards. For a long moment, the entire M.C.B. sat on edge. Waiting. Anxious. There was no telling with the subject what she will do next. Fortunately, she didn't leave them waiting long. From her place on the building's edge, she jumps and swings away.

Privately, Henderson can admire the curves that her suit doesn't hide. Unlike the SHIELD issued suits, the red, blue, and webbed design works to highlight and emphasize every aspect of her body. When she flips, spins, and throws herself into the air, legs aloft and arms spread, its like watching an exotic dancer putting on a show. A dancer capable of breaking bones with just a flex of her hand. Beautiful but lethal. In a way the Black Widow isn't, wishes she could be. The Widow can kill a man, or twenty, with her body to be sure. But there was no hiding her aura, no mistaking the Widow as anything than a figure to be feared. Even when she's pretending, deep undercover, that lethality is still present, just sitting beneath the surface.

Spider-Woman is on a whole different level.

That lethality was there. But it was muted. All Henderson could see was bright red and blue and mischief and fun. The danger was still present but covered up by the lure. Yes, that's what it was. The lure and bright fun hide away the danger. That is the distinct difference between the two spiders. One you knew was dangerous on sight, even through its attempt to camouflage itself. The other blinded its prey to the danger it presents until it was far too late. It was the difference between a trained attack dog and a lone wolf.

Henderson couldn't help but shiver at the thought.

"Contact in ten seconds."
The Beta took a shaky breath and focused back on his task.

The Widow, undercover of course, sat in the prosecutor's office with ADA Casey Novak, Captain Stacy, and Captain Cragen.

All they needed was for Spider-Woman to agree to take Widow's statement and open a window of opportunity for some light interrogation. A few minutes is all they needed. As Spider-Woman neared the ADA's office, the Beta could not help but notice her confidence and her relaxed posture, shoulders back and head held high. He can't help but think, with wary trepidation gnawing at his gut, that they weren't going to get their way. That maybe, maybe, they're the ones walking into a trap.

(He's not wrong)

(She knows this game)

(He's not right)

(She's playing with them)

The tension starts to mount. Henderson finds his eyes falling to the Widow and the others in the Prosecutor's office. Her cover is good. A visiting Russian businesswoman who was assaulted and willing to testify against the suspect Captain Cragen and ADA Novak were aiming to indict. Evidence from another case was replicated and presented to solidify the Widow's cover. There is no way that Spider-Woman or the others could see through it. Yet...it feels like its not enough. That curl of dread grows when Spider-Woman shows up and sits down for lunch with the others as the Widow starts to spin her web.

The target just sat there, eating the Chinese food laid out in front of her by Captain Stacy.

"Something's wrong, sir." One of the others agent whispered. "She's too relaxed."

Agent Coulson says nothing but there was no mistaking the intense look on his face. There was no mistaking the way his eyes tracked the target's every move. Spider-Woman sat in her seat, relaxed, laid-back, and, zooming in close, with a slight upturn to her lips. That dread trails up Henderson's spine. It grows and grows until finally, the target reacts. From the comms, the video and audio comes her voice, melodic and smooth and confident.

"As convincing as that story is, what does the Black Widow really want?"

From the comm links, Henderson can almost feel the collective horror and the question: how?

"Black Widow?" Stacy doesn't react other than frowning at the SIEILD agent across from him.

"Natalia Romanova, an agent of SIEILD." Spider-Woman starts after taking a bit from her boneless chicken, "And a former assassin from the Red Room...among other things."

The silence grows heavy. She shouldn't know that. Agent Romanova goes still as stone. Agent Coulson reacts before she can do anything.

"Do not engage. Repeat. Do not engage."

At that same moment, Spider-Woman cocked her head to the side. She put her food down and
stared at the Widow even as Cragen and Novak grew agitated at her silence.

"I don't like it when secret spy organizations mess with the guys in blue." She starts slow, threat clear, before a slow grins makes it's way along her face. "But since you went to all this trouble to meet lil' ol' me, I'm sure we can make some kind of deal, right Coulson?"

In times long forgotten by most of man, there were tales told of meeting ones true mate, of meeting the soul that completed ones' own, that called to the Beast inside as much as the man.

It mattered not if the color of pelts were not aligned, for ones placement is only a single part of ones soul.

What mattered was if the chill of Winter slid down the spine whenever eyes happened to meet.

If fire and lightning danced through the body, setting fingers and toes alight.

And if upon sighting them, never do they leave ones' awareness.

The tribe room was large and earthy. The communal area had a seating area and even a bar while leaving a number of entrances and exits available. It was a room that encouraged relaxation without confining the warriors who enter. T'Challa sat on the floor in the middle of the tribe room, meditating. The warriors and other members of his tribe did not disturb him but they did stay close to their future Chieftain, eager and nervous in equal measure. All of Wakanda knew of his vision, of his true mate, of the Omega that he chased relentlessly and of the shadow, that could only be a god, that sought to deny him.

Before, if someone asked him if he was well, his answer would have been diplomatic, at best. But he could not say that all was well. No. It has not been for some time. Not since his return to his beloved Wakanda. That is not to say that he does not enjoy being home. He loves his country and his people. That does not mean it is difficult to return home without his mate, his true mate. Above all, he had hoped to have found them by the time he was of marriagable age.

Oh, there was plenty of time until he had to take the throne. His father's health was good and the fledgling ties they were making with the world, while fragile, were not hostile. But that did not stop some of the more conservative of Wakanda's people to look at T'Challa and see opportunity. The prince is unattached. He is without a mate. Without a wife. Without a potential Queen.

It was...frustrating. To live at home and feel as if a part of him was still out roaming the world. Having earned the mantle of the Black Panther did not make it any easier. To be certain, there was some leeway made, out of respect but it also came at a cost. The expectations were just as high and the demand for, at the very least, a potential bride were astronomical. To say nothing of those who sought a way, not only to weasel their way to his side but also into his bed. His people loved and trusted him, however, so such attempts were not done maliciously.

T'Challa was infinitely grateful to his father's teachings and his studies because it has taken nearly every ounce of his patience not to lash out at those around him. He focused that extra energy into his training and was immensely grateful for the Dora Milaje and other warriors who allowed him to work through his anger. As knowledge of his vision of the woman with whom his soul called out for, of the Omega his every instinct demanded he claim, spread, so to did the attempts to seduce him decrease. They did not all go away but many enough respected the significance of having a true mate to subside their plans.
He inhaled deeply and exhaled, focusing on dispelling negative energy from within. He has been meditating more often since his vision. The same vision that has haunted him for close to a year. Some nights he is closer to his prize, centimeters, even less, away. In others, the looming shadow cuts him off and she escapes. Recently, the number of visions of the latter have lessened. Every night it feels as if he is closer but they leave him restless.

The prince has heard stories of true mates. Of the power of them, of their bond. He has searched tirelessly for any information on them. From rumor, to history and even myth. He left nothing out in his research. In some, the pair shared a telepathic bond. In others, mates were capable of sharing power between them and there are recounts of mates gaining abilities. All of it, fantastical, and utterly irrelevant in assisting T'Challa's search for his true mate.

He cared nothing for power, he didn't need any more. He is the prince and future King, Chieftain, of the Panther Tribe, of Wakanda, the most technologically advanced country on the planet. Superhuman abilities he had from training and gaining the title of the Black Panther, earning him the honor of consuming the heart-shaped herb which enhanced his strength and senses. No. What T'Challa wanted was his true mate. What he hungered for was the one's whose soul completed his own. What he desired was the Omega with whom his inner beast, the panther he emulated, craved.

Since the visions continued, the twenty-four year old made time to meditate as often as he could. Every night he tries to outsmart the creature that keeps him from his true mate. Every day he envisions new ideas and strategies that may allow him to outmaneuver the shadow that stands in his way. The other tribes and people while respectful were also wary of this new development. If the Black Panther, the future Chieftain of their country, cannot reach his true mate is he worthy of the mantle he carries? And if the Black Panther cannot overcome this task, can any of them?

T'Challa did not want such thinking to pollute his people. So, while he ached to find his mate and make her his own, he also wanted to find her and ease the mounting tension and fear growing within his people.

"My son."

The voice of his father arises his attention.

"Father."

"Deep thoughts, I see."

T'Challa does not deny it. He cannot so he sighs and stands smoothly from the floor.

"Yes. It is as if every day I am both closer and farther away than before. Every path I have taken has returned me to the very beginning. It is almost maddening if I didn't know that is something the shadow would relish."

A low growl escapes him before he can stop it. His father's deep laugh startles him and most of the others in the tribe room. He cannot stop the disbelief and confusion from coloring his expression.

"Perhaps that is where you have gone wrong, hmm?" There is an almost glowing look to his father's eyes, a knowing look. "Instead of taking a path, you must make one."

"I do not understand." T'Challa frowns.

How can one make a path when the battle one fights is in the realm of spirits? How can one forge a path when a god stood in your way?
"Come, my son. We leave within the hour."

"Leave? To where? Father, just what are you planning?"

"You have hunted, careful and with purpose. But sometimes, one must *leap* to catch their prey."

T'Challa submits to his father's wisdom and follows him.

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"It's done."

Coulson's expression did not change from mild politeness as he sat across from Spider-Woman. The Alpha took in everything about the enhanced woman across from him. For the first time in almost four years, SHIELD would get answers. While it was unsettling how much she knew, he also had the opportunity to find out how. The Black Widow stood slightly behind and to his left. The Beta stood rigid and tense, ready to lash out if need be. But Spider-Woman had gone back to eating, relaxed and utterly unconcerned for the assassin standing at attention. ADA Novak looked over her computer, waiting for the files Coulson promised, and Captain Cragen answers his phone.

"You should print that, Casey." Spider-Woman calls out to the woman.

Coulson watches in interest as the prosecutor doesn't raise any questions and prints the documents and evidence. Cragen gets off his phone and nods in Novak's direction. With the documents and whatever policy or directions Captain Cragen gave, the other two sit down and join Spider-Woman and Captain Stacy for lunch. Coulson notes how relaxed the other three are with the superhuman, the ease they have with sitting down to lunch with someone who showed capable of inhuman feats. Even the wary looks sent the Widow's and his way were done sparingly. It tells the SHIELD agent that they were more concerned with the danger he posed but were also confident that Spider-Woman would not let harm come to them.

"The bare facts," Novak's voice cuts through the short silence, cold and unyielding. "Nothing more. No more details than they need."

"Course, Casey."

"Nothing that can hint at your identity. No names. No addresses." Stacy adds.

"You got it." Spider-Woman is smiling now.

"And no phone numbers. Not even the burner phone. No changes in schedule or routine, either." Cragen stares Coulson and the Widow down but his expression is also carefully blank.

"Guys, come on," She says after taking a long drink of her soda, "I've got you, and me, covered. Let's enjoy the rest of our lunch before it gets even colder, yeah?"

With that the others finish settling in and the hero gets back to the consuming the large amount of food still on the table. Coulson takes everything in, making assumptions and deductions based on what he sees. With the large amount of food she must have more than a large appetite, an accelerated metabolism to be sure, maybe even an accelerated healing factor. Given the amount of authority and deference the officers and prosecutor give her, shows an incredibly reliable Alpha or someone with remarkable charisma. Well no time like the present to find out.

"Don't suppose we can begin?"

"Sure. Ask away." Still relaxed and unconcerned with being surrounded by SHIELD. Curious.
He started with the basics.

"Are you enhanced?"

"I am." An honest answer.

"Are you physically enhanced? I'm referring to you, yourself, and not the..." He purposefully ran his eyes over her suit. "...rather impressive suit you're wearing."

"Yup. All me. The suit is pretty awesome. Don't knock it." The eyes of her mask narrow, showcasing an engineering marvel.

"Of course." He mentally adds engineering assistance and/or expertise to the file growing in his head. "Are you an Alpha?"

"Nope." She's grinning now. She's grinning as she just so casually sends any and all preconceived notions they've had tumbling down and into the proverbial trash heap. He can feel the intensity of Romanova's gaze as they stare at the Omega sitting, unrepentant, across from them.

"You're an Omega."

He doesn't bother disguising his statement as a question and she doesn't answer him. Content to finish off another carton of Chinese noodles. A quick glance to the other three shows that while they didn't know, they suspected, and all they're hearing is confirmation of what they already knew.

"I see."

They'd have to re-evaluate all the evidence they have of her. Every aspect of her behavior and all the actions she's taken since she's put on the mask. Omegas are generally seen as caretakers but also as pioneers of the future, as those who contribute and further society by various means. Granted, those perceptions are a bit different now. The idea of contributing to society can be done through a number of different avenues such as modeling or acting or taste testing. Careers and behaviors that do not directly place them in harms way. There are a few outliers who go into healthcare but to date, no Omega has ever willingly put themselves in harms way. Ever.

For the one in front him, enhanced none withstanding, to do so with the knowledge that she could be gravely injured or even killed...Well it made the Alpha within him stand up and take notice. Take notice and fear and wonder. Why? Why do this? Does she truly understand the ramifications of her actions?

"How were you enhanced?"

"In a lab accident."

"Did that accident have other repercussions?" Here, she finishes off her drink and frowns at him.

"What are you talking about?"

"Did the accident change anything else about you?"

Coulson doesn't want to directly imply the accident, if it even was an accident, may have changed her orientation. He does not want to know if someone, even if it was truly an accident, could have their orientation forcibly changed. He doesn't want to think about the implications that could mean for SHIELD or the world at large. He's almost afraid of her answer.
"None. Ten toes and ten fingers. No hair falling out or bleeding from the eyes. There are a lot of nice bonuses but I'll keep that to myself. Even if you are a level eight agent."

"You have us at a disadvantage." Complete understatement. Everything he is learning about her was both horrific and terrifying. "How do you know that? How do you know anything about our operations?"

"Well, I hacked your systems." Spider-Woman pulls down her mask to cover the rest of her face before she quickly and carefully cleans up her space. "It wasn't very hard. By the way, you should probably do something about that."

"Of course."

A person, an Omega, with computer skills advanced enough to hack a multilayer system with multiple servers and not trip a single alarm. Noted. Coulson could not even begin to formulate or guess at her level of intellect but he could say with reasonable certainty that she was on the high end of the spectrum.

"Lunch is almost over." Stacy cuts in and stands up to throw out his trash. Impending dismissal very much clear.

"I don't supposed we can continue this another time?"

Coulson stays neutral and calm. Not a hint of anything remotely like he desperately wants to push for more time and more specific questions. They need more information. A lot more because there is just no conceivable way they missed someone like this. If they did than they need to find a way to do better.

"Not any time soon. I'm going on vacation for a few weeks."

"I already let the boys and girls at the station know." Stacy points out, pushing his chair back, and very much ready to leave.

"Same. I worked in a few extra patrols and put in a word at the M.E.s office and passed it along to a few friends with the E.M.T.s." Cragen buttons up his jacket and cleans his hands.

"We'll be fine while your gone. Enjoy yourself and try to stay out of trouble."

"That means sticking it out and using the bus if you have to."

"Oh, come on, guys that happened once!"

"On about two other continents."

"I had my passport and everything! I mean I didn't show it to them but I explained to the cops I was just passing through! They let me go and everything!"

Coulson watches the byplay with something like disbelief. He's aware that Spider-Woman has been seen outside of the US but he did not ever fathom that the NYPD and other affiliates would be so deeply involved with those situations. To hear them speak so casually about preparing for the vigilante to leave the country added an entirely new dimension to the relationship between New York City and the Omega in red and blue. The Alpha wasn't sure if it was humbling or terrifying. Maybe a bit of both.

"Perhaps when you get back, then."
"I don't see why not." The Omega's gaze locks onto his own even as the other three Alphas stare him down. "So long as you uphold your end of the deal and the evidence that you sent is legit and admissible in court."

"Of course. Miss Novak, if you need anything else, please don't hesitate to contact me." He placed his card on the table and stands up. The meeting is clearly over and trying to drag it out would do him no good in the long run. Besides, he needed to get back to base and report to Fury about alternative ways of approaching this "hero" because it is very clear that their usual approach will not work.

"I will. Thank you." The blonde prosecutor takes the card and moves back to her desk. "Alright people. Its time to clear out. I have work to do."

"Bye everyone!" Spider-Woman than turns to Coulson and the Widow, "Hope you have a safe trip home, Agent Coulson. You, too, Widow. Bye now!"

They part ways, Coulson taking his team quickly and efficiently, Spider-Woman, through the open window and the others, back to their daily lives. The Alpha turns down the request to pursue the target. They'd get nothing more than they already have. Coulson was willing to be patient and wait for the rest. They had more then originally and they still had to go back and start over, too. Coulson laments to himself that Spider-Woman is unlike any hero he's ever seen. Her sincere farewell threw him off kilter and he's almost unsure how to take it as anything but genuine good will. It makes him curious about what else he might learn from the brightly colored Omega.

The jet lands smoothly and without issue in London, Europe. The drive to the embassy is without conflict or hardship. Nothing seems wrong and yet, he is restless. He paces his rooms and despite his meditations, he cannot find his calm. The Doras and the guards start to grow restless the longer his behavior continues. T'Challa knows this and he cannot stop himself.

Until a week later, he dreams, again. The fog, his Omega, and the looming shadow. But this night is different.

_Bast faints to the left, quick and deft. The shadow stumbles and suddenly it is no longer a shadow but a massive spider. Shadows cling to its legs, power and might cording along flesh and fangs. T'Challa knew this god's name. The moment his vision became clear, he knew, and like that he had his answer. He knew, this time, he would win. His mate turns back, a breathless gasp escapes her lips and then she is rushing for the forest beyond. The prince gives chase._

_The fog is gone. Bast is once again relentless and fierce and just as cunning as their adversary. T'Challa will not lose, will not falter. He runs faster and still, his mate keeps pulling ahead. A thrill runs through him. She is close now, closer than ever before. He does not reach out a hand. He does not try to grab her, does not attempt to hold fast to her._

_No._

_He leaps!_  

T'Challa falls out of bed, panting. Okoye and Nareema rush inside and quickly assess the room for threats. They do not get half way when T'Challa surges to his feet. He is flushed, breathless and a grin makes its way along his face. With his blood still surging through his veins and his cock half hard, the Dora hesitate to approach their prince.

"She's here." He gasps out loud. A long silence fills the air and even when he repeats himself, his
elation does not fade.

"Who?" Nareema asks at last. They needed to know. Everyone knew of the prince's true mate, of
the Omega that taunted his dreams. All knew of the shadow the Panther God fought to aid him. If
the prince implied that he had finally overcome the beast that stood in his way, the whole of
Wakanda would rejoice and celebrate.

"My true mate."

T'Challa, finally takes a deep enough breath to regain some sense of calm and rationality.

"A woman blessed by Anansi. For it is the Spider God that guards her. She. Is. Here."
First Contact (Part Two)

Chapter Summary

So. Things heat up.

Just looking at this Alpha, and oh sweet bananas is he an Alpha alright, makes her blush to her roots. On the other, she kissed him to hide from Harry.

(This is without a doubt, the fastest identity fail in the history of secret identities)

Chapter Notes

Mini rant:

I cannot wait to get to CA:CW. The plot I have planned is glorious and sad and just all kinds of things that you guys may love and hate in equal measure. I already do and I haven't even gotten there yet!!

Now. Fair warning. This is Steve Critical. Very much so because I am a huge fan of Iron Man. And as many holes in the plot to CW as there is...that ending!! Ugh!!

However, Penny is a bit of an outlet for me here. I hinted at future issues in a previous chapter. It wasn't a big deal then but that will change as the rest of the verse comes together.

Remember Penny is still capable of mistakes but instead of the clusterfuck that was CW, her mistakes give others a look into her character and into the legend she is, again unknowingly or more subconsciously, growing.

Captain America is an icon of the Perfect Soldier.

What I aim for is, not just a PantherSpider fic with plot, but the Evolution of the icon for a True Hero.

Because not all heroes are soldiers. It could be your neighbour or the cheerleader or the biker or a passing waitress. A hero is anyone willing and able to help someone else. They can be anyone and come from anywhere. People tend to forget that. Marvel heroes tend to forget that and Spider-Man has always gotten flak for not being good enough. For being mediocre.

Well, this is my Answer.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I will cover you with love when next I see you, with caresses, with ecstasy. I want to gorge you with all the joys of the flesh, so that you faint and die..."
It takes a considerable amount of effort to keep T'Challa from gathering a hunting party and running off. Into the middle of all of London. After that, it takes a while longer for the Alpha to regain control of his impulses and instincts enough to convey his new vision. Everyone is pleased with the new direction his hunt has taken. For there is only one blessed by Anansi in the entire world. The American who wore his sigel against red and blue, the one called Spider-Woman. She who has been seen around the world. She who is hero to those saved by her. She who is stronger than the average man but who does not lord that power and faces danger for the sake of other's with a warrior's courage.

If it is indeed Spider-Woman to whom T'Challa's soul is bound for than the whole of Wakanda will support him. After all, what greater honor is there than to welcome one whose blessed by The Great Spider? Who represented cunning and rebellion against injustice and oppression? Who represented acceptance of all culture and who knew the stories of all the world? Of the One said to have created the sun, the moon and all the stars in the sky.

The same Spider who once trapped a great Panther. It would be an immense honor.

Furthermore, were the implications not just culturally or spiritually but politically as well. Many still paid homage to the Spider God. More than many realized. Should T'Challa succeed in winning Spider-Woman's favor, succeed in proving himself a worthy mate, than Wakanda would become a literal fortress upon the African continent. There were few who followed the Panther God outside Wakanda but many who followed the Spider. To know that one blessed by Anansi chose a mate from Wakanda would gain the country immense capital along with an equal measure of allies and enemies. However, those enemies would find, not a few scattered countries, but an absolute continent and then some to contend with. T'Challa, while he did not wish to think it, knew such a bond would greatly benefit Wakanda and silence many of the more conservative of his tribe and country. Those still in disagreement with opening themselves to the outside world, would find comfort at such prospects.

After all, The Spider God's influence spread just as the demand for African slaves did across the Atlantic.

The Spider God's influence is not a trifle thing. For it was Anansi, one among the many, to survive the transition to the New World. It was Anansi, with his many names and his many stories, that survived and thrived within the hearts and minds of the slaves. At the time, the stories of Kwaku Anansi were the most preserved, the most remembered. The stories of his cunning, of his wisdom and power against those stronger and faster, gave many hope when all seemed lost. Such influence has only grown as the people expanded and grew out to settle.

For a mortal to be blessed by him, to carry his symbol, and to be seen by all...it was as if that same hope was given life. As if the Spider God had finally heard centuries of prayers and his answer, his response is her. A literal manifestation of his will and power, living and breathing.

Spider-Woman's very presence could unite many of the African nations together for peace...or war.

All she had to do was ask.

Though, Chieftain T'Chaka is certain she would never choose the latter unless there existed absolutely no other option except death. Her forays abroad, while sporadic and sparse, are always nonviolent. Further research showed her willingness to work with police unless proven hostile. During those encounters, Spider-Woman continued to act nonviolently. Sometimes she left and
others, where she disarmed the officer, tied them to the nearest flat surface and then called in for another officer for a "pick-up" before leaving, were also nonviolent. Humiliating to be sure but she is Anansi's so trickery is to be expected.

That she was in London is a good omen. That they knew she is in London is a boon.

Now all that remained was for the Black Panther to catch the Spider.

Captain Britain, secretly Brian Braddock, did not ever expect to ever meet Spider-Woman. But here she is standing in front of him, helping him take down a group of bioterrorists. Her moves are fluid and graceful. No move is wasted and every action shows a lifetime, or near enough, of experience. The team up was unexpected but not unwelcomed. They work well together but the Captain can tell its more because of Spider-Woman. He picks up how quickly she reads his moves and adapts to his fighting style. He's looking at an experienced hero in the field and he cannot help feeling a little awestruck.

In fact, everything about her makes his admiration for her grow. Her skill, evident of multiple teachers and experiences, her abilities, obviously superhuman but carefully controlled, and her personality, so open and inviting and human. Captain Britain has only worn the mantle for a few months whereas Spider-Woman is internationally known for years. Braddock is self aware enough to know he is a little (more like a lot) star struck by the heroine. In the papers and the news, Spider-Woman is this larger than life figure but up close, she's more than that. She's witty and full of energy. Looking at her, Braddock cannot help but see the brightness of her soul and admire it. She feels warm and safe.

She feels like family and hope and second chances.

He may stand a little close, just a little, to soak in that warm, that light. He almost wants to cry whenever she moves away. He isn't the only one effected by her either. The fight had escalated to a major city street near central London and several civilians were almost killed. Spider-Woman takes her time going around making sure everyone is okay and even takes a moment to give a statement to the police, which Captain Britain is grateful for. Even though most of them have seen her flip a trailer carrying several tons of stolen goods, many of them relax in her presence. He wonders if he'll be able to do that one day. Hopes he can emulate the brightness of her soul and become a hero that the common man can relax, utterly, at the mere sight of.

"Okay, Cap. I think we're all good." She says to him while looking around, "I've got somewhere to be so I can't stay much longer. Will you be okay?"

"Yes, of course." He can feel himself start to flush and falls back on his training to control himself. "Thank you for the assistance. I appreciate you making time to help me."

"No prob." Abruptly, she stops and turns around, every line of her body relaxed but alert.

"Trouble?" He asks because he's noticed how good and spot on her instincts are. If she thinks there's trouble, chances are there is.

"It's... nothing." Slowly, she lets out an annoyed huff. "Just someone getting a little...too intense. If you get my drift..."

"Ah..." Captain Britain had noticed the large number of Alphas around but had not taken into account how they might act with Spider-Woman around. "Because of the rumors I suppose?"
The rumors Spider-Woman is an Omega. Rumors the heroine did not rebuke or deny. If they were true...if she is an Omega, one willing and able to help others while putting herself at risk...it would completely change the world's outlook on Omegas for centuries. It would set a precedent that Omegas are more than just pretty breeding stock or submissives in need of care and are, in fact, more than capable of excelling in the same occupations and careers as Alphas and Betas.

She gave a noncommittal 'hmm' in reply but she turns to Braddock and the Alpha can just tell she's giving him a smile, bright, teasing, and genuine.

"Well, its been good Brit but this American has somewhere to be."

"It was a pleasure, Spider-Woman." He quickly offers his hand and something inside him relaxes when she returns the gesture, firmly and sincerely. "Take care."

"You too, Cap. Later!"

Captain Britain watches as she swings away with a small smile on his face. He turns away and instead of flying away, heads over to the officer Spider-Woman gave a statement to. If she can take the time to help his countrymen it only makes sense that he does the same. He notices the way some of them tense up at his approach and gives a silent vow to do better. They are his countrymen, after all.

The Prince and future King of Wakanda walks leisurely through familiar halls and corridors. It has been a few years since he graduated from Oxford but not long enough to forget or relearn his way around the campus. He was fortunate that his father's business had ended early. It gave the young prince a chance to attend a lecture at his alma mater.

He could have taken the shuttle to the Hall to make quicker time but T'Challa preferred to walk with his mind in turmoil.

Earlier he had caught sight of his true mate, of the woman who haunted his dreams for nearly a year. While they were not at the epicenter of the disaster, they were close enough to see it as it occurred. Fortunately, they managed to prevent themselves from being caught in the crossfire. T'Challa had a team dedicated to finding and compiling all available information about his intended prey. He has seen pictures and video of her but it all failed in comparison to the real version.

Spider-Woman is beautiful.

There are not enough words in any language in the world for the Alpha to further explain. The moment he set his eyes on her he knew she belonged to him. She is his true mate. Fire and ice and lightening and were it not for his father's grip on his arm, he would leapt toward the fight to stand at her side, to prove himself to her. To fight. To rend all opponents inferior. So intense were his primal emotions and thoughts she turned in his direction, alert and wary. It was enough to shock him back to his senses. Never did he ever want his true mate to look at him as if he were a threat. Never did he ever want her to look at him, even his general direction, as if he were an enemy she must face.

But, oh! Did she look even more gorgeous to him. As he reigned in his deepest impulses, he took her in, back straight and muscles coiled, ready to leap and fight. Her eyes sought his, though she knew not who or what threat, alert and unafraid. Yet, her hand flexed, willing to fight but not kill, a well of superhuman power tightly controlled. For all that she was ready for combat, she remained utterly relaxed and unassuming, evidence of a veteran warrior. One who has faced untold danger and can seamlessly transition between combat and peace, no matter the time or place.
She looked every inch the Warrior Queen he envisioned.

And yet, at that same time, for a moment the Black Panther wondered if he would be worthy of her. Of this woman who is a Queen in her own right.

T'Challa sighed deeply, exhaling his frustrations and fears. As he continued forward, the Prince could hear the tell tale sounds of someone running. A woman by the sounds of heels on tile floor. Most likely someone late for class or a meeting. T'Challa frowned when his hearing picked up the distant echo of shouting. A fight? He hurried his steps just a bit and made to turn a corner when someone nearly crashes into him.

Nearly because the woman, petite, short and wearing a rather flattering red dress and leather jacket, catches herself at the last second. He catches her with one arm around her waist and on hand on her hip. Something he would normally consider inappropriate.

Normal does not apply here.

She meets his eyes, only for a second, but that's enough. It's different this time. Like the tales say and more. It was more than a chill that slide down his back. It was more than fire and lightening that coursed through his veins. He was hyperaware of her, of her curves, of her heat.

It took everything he had not to take her there in the corridor.

Then, she's looking back at him, panic set in her eyes. *He will eviscerate the reason for such a look on his true mate's face.*

With a tug and a twirl, T'Challa could feel the power within his mate normally hidden from view. She is strong. Stronger than she let on. For T'Challa, he knew without a doubt this was the woman he had been searching for. No baseline human could ever move him if he did not wish to be moved.

"Don't freak out."

Anything he might have thought or said disappears in the next instant. Her lips met his. A kiss.

His control snaps.

Penelope doesn't know who this guy is. She honestly doesn't care at this point. He is big, a good five inches taller than her, and built.

She glances back in panic before yanking the man-an Alpha (good grief, he's an Alpha alright!) around so that the bulk of his body covered her. She notices the two woman moving towards them. A slight hum from her spider sense tells her they're not students but she only needs a second.

"Don't freak out." She whispers hurriedly and kisses him. She really only needs one to three seconds.

That's all she needs to lose Harry. That doesn't stop her from feeling a smudge of regret and resentment to her former friend. Because it's come to this. She had rushed to the campus and made it before her security detail. That turned out to be a mistake. She didn't know Harry was going to be here but she didn't want to start a fight. So she ran and now, this.
She's giving her first kiss to a stranger.

It's supposed to be a chaste pressing of lips. Enough to throw Harry off her trail, hop out the nearest window and make a mad dash to the lecture she waited nearly two months for.

Penelope was not prepared for tall, dark, and mysterious. Because one second she's giving her first kiss to a stranger in a bid to outsmart Harry, without exposing herself preferably, and the next she's in a heated lip lock that is without a doubt the most passionate and arousing kiss she's ever had in either of her lives. There is heat curling in her belly and then he pulls her flush against him, enticing her with his tongue and his hands and his passion!

(Harry who...?)

He pulls her flush against him. Eager to touch, to taste. The panther within him roars, it urges T'Challa to bite her, to claim her.

The kiss started off light, chaste. It wasn't enough. He deepens the kiss. It surprises her, he can tell. But she does not fight him, doesn't fight back. He jumps at the chance, eager to show her what he can offer, to prove himself a capable and pleasing mate.

He pours every bit of his hunger, his desire, his absolute need for her into their kiss. He knows he should stop, pull back, but to have her in his arms after a year chasing after her leaves him weak to his instincts.

She gives a low moan and while rewarding, it also brings T'Challa back to his senses. He pulls back and takes in her flushed cheeks, slightly glazed eyes and breathless expression in delight. T'Challa did that for his mate. Him and no one else. He cannot help the low rumble that comes from within.

"Hello, Ntanda, my spider."

Chapter End Notes

Comment and tell me what you think!! Please and Thank You!!!

Ntanda means 'beloved' in Xhosa.

Also, I have no idea why the update dates are wonky. It might be because I start with a draft and the work my way through it bit by bit until I'm satisfied but I have no idea.
Of Flying Cats...And Monsters...

Chapter Summary

In which a Cat learns to fly.
A Spider is Distracted and Gwen is Greatly Amused.

And other things happen back stage.

Chapter Notes

T'Challa wins this round.
Gwen shows her love.

And Tony lets the Merchant out to play.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You know you’re in love when you can’t fall asleep because reality is finally better than your dreams.” ~ Dr. Seuss

2005-Summer

Mistakes and New Heroes

Misunderstandings and Memories

T'Challa has trained his entire life to take his father's place as King and Chieftain. He has strived to be the best he could possibly be in all areas of study. He excelled at his academic studies, mastered a number of fighting styles, and showed a talent for tactics. The Prince is considered a model warrior.

That does not mean he cannot be surprised. That he does not make mistakes.

All that T'Challa sees is the slight widening of his mate's eyes before he is airborne. The fact it takes him several seconds to realize he is flying is, he acknowledges, impressive. Then he is bodily crashing into the Doras. The air is knocked from his lungs but he is a warrior as are the Dora. Barely a second passes before all three are on their feet and catch sight of T'Challa's mate throwing herself out the window. T'Challa hurries to the window to catch sight of her and watches as she dives for the ground and tucks herself into a roll before pushing herself to her feet.

She barely takes two steps before she's running into a man, a warrior no doubt from T'Challa's observation, and then both are leaving his view, with the man sparing T'Challa and the Doras a
passing glance. T'Challa turns on his heel and makes his way to the direction they are heading. The same direction as the lecture hall that the prince had originally come to visit. His stride is powerful as it is confident.

His hunt has truly begun and he has every intention of winning.

Gwen glanced around the hall looking for a familiar face. The Alpha knew a certain Omega was in London but Gwen knew she wouldn't be late unless absolutely necessary...or she ran into trouble getting here. Before the blonde Alpha decided to leave the hall to look for her friend, said Omega nearly barrels her over. Thankfully, she turns on her heel and grabs Gwen into a bear hug, forcing her face into Gwen's shoulder to whisper frantically.

"Gwen! Gwen! I'm in trouble! Soooo, so, much trouble! Help me!"

Gwen, however, has known Penelope for a few years now. There are two kinds of trouble. The first includes arms flailing, which means Penelope ran into Super trouble and needs someone to vent to and sound off ideas to figure out how to subdue the latest villain. These are not very often. But when they do happen, Gwen is usually there so Penelope can vent about the weirdness and strangeness of the villains. Gwen, thankfully, has yet to see her friend truly hit her breaking point against anyone so far, and that included the time Electro almost killed her.

The second kind of trouble makes Penelope go quiet. This is the trouble that worries Gwen the most because it means that Penelope needs help and she isn't sure how to go about it. Honestly, sometimes it makes Gwen want to cry because the reason for that confusion is due to how excluded Penny was from her peers before she presented. Then, when she did and it became public knowledge, Penelope just accelerated in her classes, leaving many of the other students behind. It was a harsh wake up call for many of the students and staff. The one they excluded and pitied and ignored turned out to be this amazing person. This same person who others ridiculed or turned a blind eye to was moving on and making something of herself, all without a backwards glance. There was no chance for anyone to earn her favor or try to become her friend or include her because she was past caring about any of it. Penelope had become so used to not being included that she took it as normal but when normal things happened, like Alphas trying court her, she sees it as something abnormal and treats it like trouble.

Of course, Alphas like Harry turned out to be didn't help things either.

Gwen was sure she'd gotten better. She'd been helping her friend as best she could even showing her videos from YouTube to help explain things. (And it is the best thing, ever. Penelope agrees.) But now Gwen can't help but worry. When Penelope pulls back from the hug, the Alpha catches a familiar pair of Betas a few steps behind her, McCall nods to her and turns back to lookout. The other Beta, Webb, makes himself an immovable object at Penelope's other side a foot, at best, behind her. Seeing them so close makes her anxious. Not because they're Betas but because they're on alert enough to allow themselves to be seen. Gwen knows for a fact that the Alpha and Betas that make up Penelope's security detail do not show themselves so close unless they think there is an actual threat, leaving Penny room to maneuver on her own.

Gwen is pretty sure the other agent was waiting in the car, tank full and ready to bail at a moment's notice. But a careful glance at Penelope's face confuses her because it's a mix between her "Harry" trouble and her social awkward "trouble" with Alphas trying to hit on/court her.

"What happened?" the Omega bites her lips before dragging her friend to an unused corner away from the door. Not that being discrete would help here. Penelope's two shadows were not being very subtle. Not that Gwen cared because they were damn useful when giving off the "fuck off"
vibe and then any though Gwen had about being spotted flies out the window as Penelope talks about her run in with Harry and a strange Alpha in one of Oxford's corridors.

An Alpha that she kissed...and kept kissing! Holy crap. She needed to tell Aunt May. With details.

"Did you like the kiss?" Gwen focuses on her friend and notices right away when she starts to blush and before the Omega can come up with a defense, Gwen lets the sly grin slide across her face. She knows she looks a bit demented but she doesn't care. "You did, didn't you."

There is an Alpha out there that has Penelope blushing like a schoolgirl on her first crush. There is an Alpha that Penelope found interesting enough to freak out over. She desperately wishes she had some idea who this guy is.

"That's beside the point, Gwen! He knew who I was and I threw him!" Penelope whispers furiously. Gwen frowns, that could be a problem.

"Any idea how?"

"No! I mean..." the Omega starts strong before she starts to trail off, thinking. "I've been extra careful and I've never seen him before. Ever. So, I mean, technically, the only way-"

"Penny." Gwen loves her best friend but she has a tendency to stumble over her words when she's taken by surprise and trying to solve a problem without scaring whoever she's talking to. "How?"

"The old man." There's only one person, being, that Penny refers to as the "old man". The same person who gave her the pendent she's worn for the past few years.

"Well, shit."

"Yeah." Gwen's brain actually stalls on her. She doesn't know what to say. Getting caught because a god is your godparent isn't something she's ever had to plan for. Its not something she's ever thought she would need to plan for. And what does it say about her that her issue centers around her not having a plan versus how she's on friendly terms with the god that her best friends has a literal familial tie to?

"Did he say what he wanted?" Penny gives her Alpha friend a weird look.

"I threw him into his two bodyguards or whatever they were before throwing myself out the window. So, no, he didn't say."

"Was he cute?" She had nothing about the whole identity bit but if all he did was kiss her (and didn't Penny start that kiss?) and kiss her good from the sound of things than Gwen is willing to go on a limb and say he can't be too bad.

"He is actually." McCall chimes in lowly, still alert, but fixing his gaze toward the Hall entrance doors. Penelope must have spotted him because she turns a burning scarlet and Gwen wonders if she noticed how pretty it makes her look.

"Pretty sure everyone else here noticed, too." Webb adds helpfully.

Its, then, that Gwen spots the trio as they saunter into the room. An Alpha, without question, of African descent in a tailor designed black suit with dark blue highlights. There are two woman, Betas both, also of African descent, barely a step behind him. Cute, is not the word Gwen could think of looking at the man. (And he is definitely a man, an Alpha). He is absolutely drool-worthy
"That is the Alpha you ran away from?" Gwen says looking back at her friend, incredibly.

"You don't have to say it like *that!*"

Gwen stares at Penny. Holds her gaze before very deliberately, very slowly, turning to look at the Alpha, up and down. Just as casually, Gwen turns back to the Omega and raises an eyebrow, speaking a thousand words without saying a word.

"Why are you looking at me for?" Penelope tries to sound insulted and for all that Gwen can tell, she is a little bit, but that's overshadowed by the blush working its way along her cheeks again. Gwen manages not to coo at her.

"Did you at least catch his name?" The Omega quickly shakes her head, blush growing.

Gwen looks back just as the Alpha's gaze falls on them and the blond can see his eyes go straight to Penelope. Just like his gaze, his stride takes him in their direction, every step sure and confident and determined.

"Well, it looks like the Princess found her Prince Charming."

"What?" Penelope, finally seems to notice the Alpha heading for them and whispers frantically into Gwen's back, "What?! No! No! Oh for the love of...! He's coming this way, hide me!"

"Too late!" Gwen *may* have said that a little too cheerfully. *May.*

She bites the inside of her cheek to stop herself from giggling out loud like a deranged teenager. Aunt May will love hearing about this. She kind of regrets not getting a new phone yesterday after her screen cracked. A recording of this would be worth tons on Penny's fan site and its not like she can convince the two Betas to record for her. They wouldn't do it, she tried once. The Alpha stops just within arms length and greets them cordially.

"I am Alpha T'Challa, Prince of Wakanda. This is Beta Okoye and Beta Nareema." His eyes stray constantly to Penelope, who is still trying to hide behind Gwen. Trying because Gwen is at least half a head shorter than her friend. "I wanted to apologize for my behavior, earlier, Miss...?"

Gwen bites her cheek even harder to keep from screaming or laughing in delight. A Prince! A literal freaking Prince! She was never going to let Penny live this down. And her fans will probably die from shock. She has to elbow Penelope to get her to answer. Its only fair after all since his use of old address for an introduction.

"Omega Penelope Parker, Student and Inventor. Alpha Gwen Stacy, Student. Beta David Webb and Beta Robert McCall. And it's fine. I mean so long as you don't mind that I almost threw you into a wall."

She squirms under T'Challa's intense gaze and Gwen can practically see the Alpha fight to keep from outright seducing her right here and now. His eyes take her in, soak up every inch of Penny, and then refuse to leave her. The Betas of the group eye each other like a pair of lions debating the merits of tearing each other apart with each casual look hiding (projecting the promise of) lethal intent. But Gwen is super proud of her friend for managing not to stutter through her own greeting. It has been incredibly hard for her friend to remember some of the more traditional protocols for Omegas. Never mind the power an Omega has just from walking into a room. Gwen doesn't think Penelope realizes just how much power she has and Gwen knows she won't be able to protect her friend for much longer. Penelope may not care what it means to be an Omega,
especially one as successful and as unique as she is but Gwen does.

Gwen sees what her friend does not. And if the Alpha didn't know her friend as well as she did, she'd be worried. There is heavy debate about what defines an Omega. Of course, they are pioneers for bettering society, but what that means has changed so drastically since Penny presented Gwen is almost scared society won't be able to keep up and crash in the attempt. But Gwen is hopeful. Tony Stark set the foundation for being unpredictable, for breaking the mold and society weathered that change just fine. But Tony Stark didn't do anything with that upheaval, content to let the world try and fill the cracks.

If Tony is the sledgehammer (and Gwen is sure he'd love that comparison), than Penny is the glue, the concrete or whatever, that takes the broken bits, the empty holes in the ground and builds something from the broken mess, the battered foundations, left behind. All of that isn't counting the influence from Spider-Woman. Already, the rumors of the New York hero being an Omega are gaining more ground, gaining more power and credibility. All that's needed to blow the entire situation is one official comment, from her father or the hero herself.

Once the world had that, the very definition of what it meant to be an Omega, to be someone who strives to better society and further the world's future, will be changed forever. The very idea sends shivers of both fear and anticipation down the blonde's spine.

"Her fans also call her Princess Penelope." Gwen quickly chimes so that Penny doesn't try and worm her way out of the Hall. Of course, by this point she doesn't bother to hide her smile, even as the Omega behind her manages to strangle her own scream.

"Do they?" T'Challa starts to grin but keeps his eyes on Penny. The fact he is able to pick up the subtle warning that even if Gwen isn't serious she still expects him to respect Penny and her reputation, wins him major brownie points. "Well, Your Highness, may I request the pleasure of your company as recompense for my rude behavior?"

Gwen recognizes the look in her friend's eyes and quickly slaps a hand over her mouth. She turns back to the prince smile in place as smooth as melted butter.

"She'd love to!"

"Mmhpf!" Penny's eyes go wide and her hands grip Gwen's jacket.

"I'm glad." The prince gives Gwen and Penny a quick calculating lookover before speaking again. "Tell me, Your Highness, Miss Stacy, what do you make of the possible applications of Lorentz force and Faraday's law in regard to the lecturer's proposition for today?"

Well if that's not a good distraction and hook, Gwen doesn't know what is. The Omega and Alpha immediately straighten up and practically invade the prince's personal space. After a good ten minutes sunk in science talk, the lecture begins. Penelope and Gwen accept T'Challa's invitation to sit with him, completely forgetting to ask the prince how he knew Penny's alternate identity or noticing the prince's pleased grin.

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Alpha Bryan Mills is a former CIA agent, retired, and current Head of Security for, who is without a doubt, the world's most interesting Omega. Mills had originally retired to spend more time with his ex-wife and daughter. But that was difficult. Things have gotten better and working for Tony Stark to look after his goddaughter is a lot better than he thought. It's been a large help especially after his daughter's disastrous trip overseas. But she's better and the bonds have since started to heal.
Working with the others is an interesting experience. Beta Robert McCall is also a retired black ops operative who used to live in Boston, Massachusetts, before Intelligence started to kick up a fuss about him being "Active". With nearly the same amount of experience as Mills, McCall is placed in "command" of field operations. Something made infinitely easier with how open and trusting their charge is. Beta Jason Bourne, formerly David Webb, ex-Delta Forces and elite assassin for the CIA is the quietest of them all but the most skilled. Sometimes, he stares into the distance and Mills can tell the kid (he's the youngest of them all, too, Jesus) is looking at ghosts that aren't really there. He's surprised Bourne stayed around so long but then again Mill's is attributing that to their VP more than anything else.

Beta Clyde Shelton is, without question, one of the most dangerous men Mills has ever had to work with. A former weapons developer for black ops gone rogue after the death of his wife and child. He's also cunning enough to use the man attempting to prosecute him as a tool to fake his own death. Mills is glad Stark recruited him because Mills is too old to have to deal with a sociopath's vendetta against the U.S. Justice System. As it stands, having him using his skills to fortify the building being used as a home and base of operations for an Omega who would be the same age as his daughter if she had lived and who is also Spider-Woman, has gone a long way in keeping him on the right, maybe even heal some of the trauma inflicted on his damaged psyche.

As the operative with the most experience, he was placed as the Head of Security which left the others to field work on a rotating basis. Something they all agreed was the most beneficial especially after recruiting Frank Martin, another Beta and an ex-Special Forces operative who specialized in transport and vehicular warfare. Stark has, jokingly, referred to the field operatives as the Four Horsemen. Shelton loved the idea of being War and so the others took names to follow suit. McCall took the code name Strife, Martin became Famine and Bourne became Death. Ms. Parker was not amused and decided his code name would be Buddha, "to balance out the crazy."

At the time, Mills silently preferred if they just kept it simple. Honestly, what was wrong with a boring code name?

Now, he thinks the code name is aptly chosen because there is a male model/pilot on fire flying around New York and he's needed every ounce of his Buddha-like patience not to let Shelton murder the reckless asshole.

"JOCASTA, sit rep. What the hell is going on?" He has never been more grateful to Stark for deploying one of his A.I.s into the building.

"It seems the newly dubbed "Fantastic Four" are subduing the last of Dr. Doom's bots."

JOCASTA's voice is smooth and warm. She reminds Mills of his ex-wife when Kim was a child.

"Clean ups going to be a fucking mess." Shelton says not lifting his eyes from the stir fry stove.

"That doesn't count if Stacy rips them a new asshole."

"From analysis of previous interactions between Captain Stacy and other heroes, that assessment is...quite accurate." Mills goes back to chopping the lettuce and tomatoes for tonight's dinner. Normally, Mills would be home making his own meal but since the other members of the team who normally live in the building are overseas, those left behind have to keep lookout. Today is especially different since they're having company over. Tony Stark. Mills is certain the man will be walking into the penthouse soon enough.

"Do I need to make a few calls?" He says this, sharing a quick and understanding glance with the Horseman next to him, because Mills cannot help but see how appropriate their names are. Still, the Alpha wonders if he should have this new group looked into...and if possible, removed.
"No. They are on Miss Parker's list of allies. They each have a short profile attached. Of the Fantastic Four, the Human Torch is reckless, arrogant and immature. However, he is also known for moments of clarity and ingenuity. In short, he is a young adult who is taken with his new found powers...or a child with a new toy. The dear really is quite young."

"A list?" Shelton finishes up at the stove, frown in place and Mills knows he's the same. If Miss Parker had a list of who is friend than reason stood that there was also a list for who is a foe.

"Yes. There are quite a few." Interestingly, she doesn't offer to show them. Which means that Miss Parker probably had JOCASTA not say anything unless she is directly asked. Well, then...

"May we see, please, these lists?" The two men methodically set up the dinner table. Shelton's expression takes on a hyper focused and intent look, one Mills knows that means that the War aspect of the man will soon make an appearance. That's not including the special kind of hell that Tony Fucking Stark will rain down in hate and fury. Not that Mills doesn't understand. He did the same for his daughter, Kim, not too long ago.

"Since you asked so nicely I don't see why not." JOCASTA speaks slyly, like a fox who just won a big fat hen for dinner. It almost makes the Alpha shiver. Almost.

The flat screen on the adjacent wall lights up and the lists start to appear. And there are a number of them, close to a dozen, but what catches his attention is one list in particular.

"That list," Mills points one out of the rest, "enlarge it. Short brief on everyone on it. Who are these people?"

"This is Miss Parker's Rogue Gallery. All of her enemies that have appeared and those yet to make an appearance."

"Yet?" Shelton goes still. Mills cannot say he is unaffected.

There are more than just names of this lists. There are dates, too. There are a startling number of enemies slotted to appears five and even ten years from now. What catches both of their attention, however, is one name in particular.

"Am I looking at Steven Captain America Rogers?" Mills tries to hide his disbelief and fails.

"Yes, you are."

"The fuck?" Shelton stops eating to stare at the screen. "Did she say why?"

"Thinking your right is not the same as actually being right. That's what makes him so dangerous, because he's never been proven wrong, Rogers believes he must be right. I don't know what SHEILD or anyone was doing but...but I refuse to accept that this man is the perfect human being. Perfect Soldier, sure. But the world isn't made up of soldiers. It's made of people and...and I-"

The recording is Miss Parker, no doubt. The sharp intake of breath worries the two men because they've been around her long enough to know there more to this. More than a clash of ideologies. More than some misunderstanding or a soldier going rogue.

"I'm sorry. I can't...can't get it out of my head. I shouldn't be biased like this but! But! I can't J, I can't. It's probably not fair to him because he hasn't even been defrosted yet but I just can't bring myself to trust him. And I doubt I'll be able to change it because as kind as fate can be, it can also be a bitch when it doesn't get its way. Make sure JARVIS knows? To be careful when he shows
up? Please?"

"Of course, Miss. Its no trouble."

"Thanks, J."

"Who is she talking about?"

Mills and Shelton turn quickly, weapons drawn. Tony Stark stares them down without flinching. Mills would be impressed if he didn't recognize the look in the man's eyes. Its the same look Mills got when he hunted down the ones responsible for kidnapping his daughter. This is the Merchant of Death standing in front of him. This is the man capable of turning the world to dust and ash and utter ruin if given proper motivation. This is the man that makes Shelton look like a barking puppy and the man that Alpha Bryan Mills is afraid of. But he doesn't show that fear. Mills holsters his gun and pulls out the extra chair for the Merchant to sit.

"A friend of your father's." Shelton's answer is simple and cuts straight to the point. Which is good. The Merchant hates bullshit. "JOCASTA play the recording from the beginning and show the entire list."

It only takes a few seconds for the Merchant to take it all in and even than he doesn't say anything. Mills and Shelton get back to eating, knowing when he was ready he would question them. Mills takes a moment to add a bit of salad to the Omega's plate and pouring a bit of wine in all of their cups. The Alpha takes his time and rolls his shoulders back to release some tension. Shelton doesn't look like a single feather was ruffled. Since War and the Merchant follow roughly the same thought patterns that's not a surprise.

"Norman Osborne is a monster. Business wise." The Merchant says at last. However, he also starts eating, so Mills isn't too worried about being sent out on clean up duty. "But he's also terminally ill. What's this "goblin" and the question mark after his name? A code phrase?"

"Each villain is matched with a corresponding title. Osborne is the Green Goblin, Tony. The question mark is in reference to the date. She doesn't know since her falling out with Harry Osborne."

"Do they all have this bio, too?"

"Most, yes. Would you like to go through it?" They don't actually have to say anything since she's already bringing the bios up on screen. "Shall we start at the top?"

"Start with Osborne. I want the one I know I can crush before they get a foot out the door."

Mills and Shelton say nothing to contradict the Merchant. They all know Miss Parker would not approve but that is mostly because Miss Parker is someone who values life. All life but who doesn't shy away from violence. Honestly, it's like living with the second coming of Nelson Mandela, or his American female Omega clone. Still, for every knight of virtue there must be the rogue assassin ready to strike down the monsters that prowl just out of view. If the Merchant wants the Horsemen to do the same in defense of one Omega, which would benefit untold hundreds and thousands from suffering, who are they to deny him?

"And the Captain?" War glances at the Merchant, silently eager. "Will you let him wake up?"

"For now, let him be."

Even as he says this, the Merchant frowns in distaste. Buddha understands, really, the need to
eliminate all threats to family but blatant and overt actions can be just as dangerous. Better the evil you know so as to bait the ones still hiding in the dark. And for Miss Parker, who is both Omega and the superheroine Spider-Woman, there are Monsters everywhere.

But, she has Monsters for friends, too, and if keeping her safe means reminding the world Monsters exist...

Well.

It's not like anyone will ever suspect them.

Chapter End Notes

What do you think?
Yes. I'm officially messing with canon. Not too much. But enough to give certain characters pause.
Interlude: Of Gods And Men

Chapter Summary

T'Challa is estatic.

Until he realizes there is more at stake.

So much more...

Chapter Notes

So. I was on tumblr when I came across this post about how someone was blasted by a writer for leaving a small comment on their story.

Let me just say this: I LOVE every comment I get. Every. Single. One. No matter how long or how short. I enjoy them all. I get excited for every comment and every kudo I get. They keep me going on really bad days, too. When I doubt if I'm doing okay or if I've struggled to stay positive against those around me, your comments brighten my day.

So, if someone gives you trouble for leaving a one line comment or try to hassle you for more, ignore them, delete whatever they send you. You do not need that kind of negativity. To my writers, please, please, Please! Be considerate to those who comment. Be grateful for every one you get. Sometimes, the only offer of appreciation is that one line or a kudo.

The world can be harsh and cruel enough. We don't need to add to it. Please, be kind. Spread compassion and empathy. Not hate. I believe we've had quite enough of hate.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"The smell of her hair, the taste of her mouth, the feeling of her skin seemed to have got inside him, or into the air all around him. She had become a physical necessity."

~George Orwell, 1984

T'Challa is certain there has never been a greater challenge than the one laid before him.

His mate sat across from him in the booth they share. Miss Stacy had, after ordering a lunch to go, politely (and intentionally, if the grin on her face is anything to go by) excused herself after agreeing to lunch on her friend's behalf. He made a note to himself to give the young woman something nice for her support and obvious assistance. It was obvious he had pounced too soon in the hallway and there was a high possibility that the Omega in front of him would not have given
him a second chance otherwise.

Yes. Miss Stacy's gift will have to be suitably appropriate for someone thought of in such high regard by both the Omega and her god, as the protective charm she wears declares.

Still, she is wary of him and he struggles to stay seated. He startled her horribly before. He knows that now. To rectify that the prince must be cunning and seductive. Strong and good. However, his blunder earlier ensures he will not have the time to show his worth in a short lunch. No. He will have to prove he is someone worth meeting, someone worth her time and attention. This woman, this princess *(he is not sure Miss Stacy realizes how true that statement, even in jest, is)*, could have anyone she wanted.

T'Challa must prove he is the best and most worthy mate for her.

It will be the hardest task he must ever complete.

"This café has an excellent menu," he starts, keeping his body language relaxed and open, as non-threatening as possible. "The staff can also be discreet, if that makes you comfortable."

"It does. Thank you."

T'Challa relaxes a little on the inside. If he can put some of her fears to rest there is a chance she will consider his proposal. But he must not push to hard. The prince also knows he will have to give something in return to prove his sincerity. He must entice and yet, show how much he desires her. That he is willing to prove his cause to her, his devotion and worship of her. It is a difficult balance he must walk.

Fortunately, the small café and its staff have been vetted by the Dora before their arrival and from the brief look shared by Penelope's guards, they are just as aware. T'Challa is rather impressed with her choices. Both men are incredibly skilled and T'Challa would not discount the driver as just a driver. He can tell that all the Betas around her are fighters, warriors, at heart and they care for the one they protect. It is a feeling heavily guarded and were it not for his own experiences with the Dora Milaje and the other warriors of his tribe and country, he would completely missed it. They take their preferred places around the restaurant and leave the couple to their lunch.

They place their orders, both large and full of carbs. Essential for individuals enhanced in some manner.

T'Challa has seen Spider-Woman lift tracker trailers and heavy support structures. There are videos of her leaping into burning buildings and coming out unscathed. Episodes of her fighting a man made of electricity, taking the full brunt of his power *(enough to fully power an entire country's electrical plants or reduce that country's population to lumps of burnt mush and brain matter)*, and standing back up when the fighting was done.

It makes sense that she would need a large carb intake to stay in peak condition. Not that T'Challa is complaining. At all.

They start lunch slowly by sticking to the lecture for a short while. Small talk to break the ice. She eats careful and methodical through out. But T'Challa notices how some of her manners are forced. There is a moment where she seems to remind herself the food isn't going anywhere and moves one of her arms away from guarding her plate. It tells him many things.

T'Challa makes sure to keep the conversation light until she is more relaxed about the food. He recognizes some of the behavior from his own warriors. Those who have suffered but who
continue to fight on because the compassion they carry far outweighs their fear and discomfort. He lays all the power he can at her feet so that she may move the conversation on when she is ready.

It is the right choice. After a time she changes. They are not big. Easily missed if one were not paying attention but easily noticed if one knew to look.

She readjust herself. They are micro movements. The careful rolling back of her shoulders, smooth and relaxed change in her posture, and even the look in her eyes differ. It takes no more than a few seconds. But it is enough to transform the shy Omega with a love for science into a formidable Queen with the power to crush armies at her disposal. Its breathtaking and he has to fight with himself to stay still at the arousing sight.

To know that his true mate in an individual who is not only blessed by such a revered god but also one who is compassionate, good, intelligent, and powerful, brings an insatiable heat and rushing desire thorough his entire being, his very soul. This is not a wall flower though she has some of those tendencies. This is a woman well aware of who she is and what she is capable of.

This is a woman who was born to be Queen.

T'Challa fully intends to make her his Queen.

"How did you know?"

It begins. His task, his journey, his hunt and he will win.

"Your God is familiar to me." He stays carefully relaxed and takes a sip of his wine. He notices how she little she likes the taste. Which is understandable, from what he's is aware of, the Spider God had very peculiar taste. Next time, he will make sure the selection to more varied. He fully intends for there to be a next time. "He is familiar to many of the people from my country and of Africa. He is one of many that the people of Africa still worship."

"Bast, the Panther God of my people, helped me see that it was Anansi who you are tied to. I truly must apologies for my actions. My instincts can be hard to fight against in certain situations. You are a powerful Omega and have a bond to a god not too dissimilar to myself. The...companionship that I craved took hold and I acted rashly."

"I'm not sure I follow." she frowns. "Are you saying you were nearly feral because of your desire for companionship I was just a trigger? Or are you saying I just caught you at a bad time?"

She doesn't refute his notice of her bond with the Spider God. T'Challa wonders about that for a moment before dismissing it.

"No. Not quite. My bond with the Panther God is similar to what you have and that comes with certain...perks." she nods in understanding. "It has been an adjustment. Some of my control is constantly tested. It was not a problem before. However, I am a prince of a powerful nation and there are certain requirements that my people would like to see for me. A mate for one. I cannot say I disagreed. The idea of a mate, of a companion I can rely on is something I have wanted, desired greatly. I have not fought against my instincts to find one and then, there you are."

He tries to give her a sincere smile but he can't mute the heat coiling roughly beneath his skin.

"You, who is strong and cunning, and who approached me without fear or desire for influence. All you wanted for was a distraction and forgive me for being so forward, but it was a rather heady feeling having an Omega in my arms that did not seek a way into my bed."
"Oh. Yeah. I see what you mean." she blushes prettily but retains her composure. He barely manages to refrain from lunging across the table and kissing her blush until they were an even brighter rose red. Did she blush the same shade all over, he wondered, and quickly moves away from the thought at the sharp heat that spikes from his loins. "So, it was because of the old man you figured me out?"

"I...yes," he cannot hide the befuddlement from his face at the though of anyone referring to the Spider God as 'the old man'. It was like calling the Pope or the Queen of England an old person you meet at the corner store every Saturday for a pop soda, pie and not getting punished for the blatant disrespect.

"Yes. It is an open secret to followers of the Spider God that Spider-Woman is his envoy, his voice, and his daughter. It is refreshing for many to see that their god has not left them wanting."

"And to you?" Penelope asks carefully, eyes intent. "What does that mean to you? What do you want?"

T'Challa is almost caught off guard by how blunt and straightforward she is. But it is also refreshing and understandable. She wants answers. There is no doubt she has a way to ascertain if he speaks any falsehoods. However, to speak the whole truth will risk scaring her away. For any other, there would be no victory. T'Challa is not anyone.

"I will be frank." He places his wine to the side and meets her eyes. He will give her as much of the truth as he can and hide nothing. "I want you. I desire to have you as my mate. I want you to stand at my side as Wakanda becomes apart of the world once more. To speak plainly and honestly with me. To protect my people as you would your own. To call my home your own, as well. I want you to rule with me, to be my Queen."

Here he takes a pause to take her in. He can tell he's surprised her. The disbelief and wariness is still prominent. But while all that he has just admitted is true, it is true only for his kingdom. Not for himself. That, is a different but no less important matter.

"I desire you, utterly." T'Challa lets the rumble pass through him and does nothing to hide the heat and complete want from his gaze as it that burns through him. "I wish to see you, all of you, as you truly are. I wish to learn all about you. The power as you fight to protect those around you. The brightness of your eyes as you debate and discuss with me. I want you, to taste you, to drown you in kisses and rapture. I want to take you to bed and ruin you, that you may know only the finest of pleasures."

The longer he speaks the heavier his voice becomes. Thick with arousal and hunger. She shivers and her blush begins to spread again. He doesn't know if he should stop but he decides he doesn't want to. She hasn't looked away in disgust or horror. She hasn't run away. T'Challa can tell she's being effected by his words, by how his gaze holds hers.

He keeps going.

"To see you laid out beneath me, no-" T'Challa's gaze darkens because that is not the image that haunts him, that nearly drives him feral with need, "To have you above me, to see the absolute bliss as I take you to the highest plains of euphoria, is enough to drive me mad with pleasure. Tell me, the kiss we shared earlier, did you enjoy it?"

His gaze is piercing. Now, he intends to make his move. He's already halfway to victory. She isn't unaware of his meaning. No, the slight haze that settled over her eyes is proof enough that he isn't alone in how they respond to one another.
"Well it was fine." She struggles to stay composed, to remain unaffected and put her words together. He understands. It is only because he had a taste earlier that he is able to think so clearly right now. "I mean as far as first kisses go. It was better than...well...a lot of the weird things I've been told. Just saying."

T'Challa feels the ground beneath him drop. His mind turns blissfully blank, void, of thought or reason.

Her first kiss.

Her. *First.* Kiss.

A hard shiver runs down his spine and his mouth is suddenly too dry for words. If that was her first...what else is there? He exhales harshly. Forcing himself to feel the rough movement of air as it passes through his lungs.

T'Challa has oft been told he is a good man. He does not wish to be a good man. Not this moment.

He has taken his mate's first kiss. Now, he *has* to succeed. Because he will not accept anyone else taking his place and he has no intention of surrendering any other of her firsts to another. Ever.

"Then, if you will permit me the opportunity, I would endeavor to shower you with many kisses for the rest of our lives."

They are both young, there are many new experiences they may undertake together.

"When you accomplish great deeds I will enjoy the pride and dedication you'll wear like a badge of honor."

There promise to be many new joys to be had. To share. Life is not meant to be lived alone after all.

"And when we bond," his voice deepens becoming closer to a growl, "when we come together, I will place you in positions of such power, you'll never ever fear letting go."

He just needs her to agree.

And, watching as the blush once again races across her cheeks, as her gorgeous eyes glaze slightly with heat, he is certain no one else in the entire world has ever felt as victorious as he.

Immediately, T'Challa notices how tense the Wakandan embassy is. He seeks out his father in his study, worry and fear carefully controlled behind a face of calm. But he is diverted from his task by the Doras of his guard left at the embassy on standby. They guide his party to the tribe room. When he enters the hall, the Doras that guard his father are on edge and its a feeling that starts to spread to the newly arrived Doras and T'Challa. They are uncharacteristically, do not attempt to stop T'Challa from entering the tribe room. They also do not, wordlessly, offer information that he is obviously seeking.

He enters the tribe room and freezes in place. The room is spacious and includes a seating arrangement in the center with many pillows and couches. Across from his father, sits a being, for there is no possible way the energy, the aura that he gives could ever come from a mortal man. T'Challa is familiar with this power. He's spent much of the afternoon with one whose entire presence is soaked in it.
"Kwaku Ananse." His tone is respectful and just a touch awed. It is impossible to hide.

When the god turns to look at him, eye to eye, for a moment it feels as if he is looking into the dark void of space. An endless darkness where the beginning and end are nonexistent. The feeling is gone quickly and replaced with cold judgement. A deep rumble, like thunder, coiling lightening, and the shifting of continents, fills the silence. T’Challa found himself at the mercy of the Spider God. His fury. His wrath.

T’Challa is helpless.

He manages, barely, not to fall to his knees.

"Brat." the god’s voice is dark and unforgiving, they form a noose around his neck, "Don't bring yourself to kneel. It might tempt me to kill you faster."

This is also the god he insulted. This is the god of whom he stole from. He feared. He worried but he did not regret. T’Challa took a seat on the other end of the couch from his father in the hopes that whatever comes next, he will be spared. The prince is quick to note the ceremonial offering set at the table, as is proper. Still, he is certain the expensive and well intentioned gift does nothing to soothe the enraged god.

"Tell me," the Spider God's eyes hidden in the shadow of his fedora. T'Challa takes the small consolidation that the god had not shed his human skin to exact his vengeance. "Child of my enemy, why have you crossed me?"

The prince recognizes the tone the god's voice takes. It is familiar to him. A predator playing with its prey.

The prince never gets the chance to speak.

"Your quarrel is with me, Spider." Bast. Powerful and beautiful. Fierce and graceful. She has taken a more human form but there is no mistaking her for what she is. She emerges from the rays of the setting sun. "And it is with me whom you shall speak."

"You are not the one who seeks to bed my daughter."

The Spider God and the Panther God meet eye to eye. They do not flinch away from one another. Each is an entity beyond mortal comprehension. Both capable of setting civilizations to ruin and both sat within the tribe room on foreign soil more than ready to lay waste to any who stand in their way.

T’Challa could feel the heat rolling off of the goddess as she sat in the vacant seat between them, placing herself directly in front of the Spider God. He tries not to relax and finds it difficult. She reminds him of home, of the protection and warm trust of his tribe. He is sure were he to close his eyes, he would see Wakanda in all her splendor and glory.

He does not close his eyes.

He does not look away.

"Are you implying there is another more worthy? Another more honorable for your kin?" Bast scoffs. "You would insult us both, your kin, too, if you believe that to be true."

"And that makes your brat cub the best choice? This untested whelp wouldn't know the difference between a Kree and a Skrull."
"Oh?" Bast voice lowers to a raspy drawl. "And your spiderling does? If memory serves, no mortal should know of them. How does she?"

The Spider God grins, fangs gleaming an unholy white. It sets the hairs along his arm on end. Even more so when he sees Bast frown.

"My child is a Warrior, tried and true. A Hero immortalized through Time. A Champion who has Traveled the Stars and bested those with more Power than she. What can he possibly offer her, hmm?"

Understanding lights his goddess' eyes. Understanding of something deep and profound. It shows in the pride pouring from the Spider God's lips and slight envy from the Panther God. Still, she does not waver.

"What she has always wanted. What she has not be able to gain on her own. What you cheated for on her behalf."

The Spider God snarls. It sounds like the rumble of boulders crashing to the earth. Of men's bones breaking and thunder roaring over fire.

"You have no place accusing me giving a boon as cheating." Suddenly he smirks, the shadows cast by his fedora making the god look more demonic and monstrous than he truly is. "Especially when you stole more than a few strings for your little pet."

She does not scream or roar her fury. But enraged, Bast ignited in flames. Armor melting and features disorting. Bast is no longer composed but furious.

"You dare...! They who follow me are mine to protect. To guide! Do not compare me to the like of them!" Here, her temper just as quickly, suddenly cools. "I merely guided my chosen to the mate destined for him and him for her. Do you deny it? Deny them?"

"No. This is true." He asquinted. "However, you do not get to cheat fate, Bast. You do not get to speed things up because it convinces you." Ananse growls, eyes flashing too many colors for mortals to catch.

"Is it so bad? Hmm? They meet a little sooner. They mate and your child becomes Queen to my Black Panther." Bast purrs. "And in the end, she will be loved and praised, content to run in my fields when her time comes." A vicious grin steals its way along her muzzle. "Or would you prefer she die and spend an eternity as a servant without rest or recorse?"

"Such is a fate that was no longer viable when I accepted who she was destined for. Do not play the fool. You know better."

"I will when you do the same. Or do you believe you have everyone fooled? The Great Spider descends to faun over his mortal child? Do not think us so ignorant. We have been listening and watching."

"And if that is exactly what I'm doing?"

"It isn't. No. You chose this one for a reason. I want to know what it is and if means a little cheating than I am not above doing so. Besides, is it truly cheating, hmm?"

"For sweet honorable bast?" He scoffs. "Of course."

"I'm a Hunter. A predator." Her eyes sharpen into slits, focused. "There really is no such thing as
cheating. Not really. But that's not what has you riled, Spider. No, its because it worked and you don't like it."

"You should have left what is mine alone."

Ananse is unrepentant and unafraid. T'Challa would be surprised if he was any other way. The story of the Spider God is Legend. What did he have to fear from the Panther God? T'Challa did not know and kept his silence.

"And perhaps you should share what you know. You do nothing without a reason."

"Oh?" There is a shift in the air. A tension between the two that the mortals present cannot read, cannot understand. "And what do you know of my reasons, hmm?"

"Spider," Bast tone shifts into something T'Challa would almost say was soft, "you cling to her almost like child or a mortal adrift at sea. You teach her, strengthen her and give guidance without a price."

Her words hang heavy in the space between them and T'Challa wishes desperately he could read the things not being said. But there aren't enough pieces for him to make the connections.

What he does know is this: Something important is happening. Something that could shape the future. All of their futures.

Only the Spider God had the answer.

And he remained silent.

"These actions do not mean nothing." Her eyes almost match her voice, more of a whisper now. As if afraid if she spoke any louder he would flee to where she could not follow. "They say you are desperate. Tell me, my friend...what frightens you so?"

T'Challa feels a soul crushing cold seep into his clothes. Feels it spread to his fingers and toes. As it buries itself into his flesh, his heart, and burrows itself into his bones.

A fear unimaginable. Incomprehensible. What was it? He had to know. Needed to know. What would cause this god such fear?

Kwaku Ananse is still as stone. He does not move. He does not speak. The shadows that curled around the Spider God almost lazily, become still. Even the wisps, more smoke like than shadow, refuse to bend. Like a still life tapestry or a figure carved from marble, he remains. He holds the gaze of his counterpart.

Then He is gone.

And all the shadows and secrets he brought go with him.

Chapter End Notes

Note: this took longer than I planned. Longer than the two days I allotted which just annoys me. Sorry guys. I wanted to surprise you for all your wonderful comments with a two-for-one update.
But Anansi and Bast fought me every step of the way.
To make up for that here is a sneak peek for next chapter:

"I am Iron Man."

On Another note: I saw the trailer for Black Panther. And nearly died. I'm sure I may have screamed in ecstasy!

Everyone looks so badass and I think they're including T'Challa's brother Hunter but I can't be sure but it gives me idddeeaaassssss!!!!!!! And that cast! Look at all the beautiful people!!!

AAaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!! I cannot wait! CANNOT!!!!!!!
I Am Iron Man

Chapter Summary

And now our show continues...

T'Challa and Penny work things out. Somewhat. Tony isn't sure. He's biased anyway. He sure as hell has never seen a courtship with so much fighting. And arguing. And nets.
All is Well...

Then, Afghanistan happens.

Chapter Notes

DISCLAIMER!!!!!!!
WARNING: Implied attempted rape/con-con. Depictions of torture and spiders attacking people...and that's it. I tried to write some of this in a way that wouldn't trigger some readers but I'm not sure I was successful at that. So be aware okay guys? I don't think its too graphic but my tolerance isn't the same for most people so I did my best to dial it down.

Now. Finally, We're here!

We can start the show!!!
Oh my gosh! So excited!!!!

Where's my popcorn?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2008- The year of The Iron Man

"Survival can be summed up in three words - never give up. That's the heart of it really. Just keep trying." -Bear Grylls

The last few years have been one roller coaster after another and Tony Stark is amazed he's still somewhat sane for it all. He's been called many things. To his back and to his face. Most of the time he ignores the things said about him and it's not like he can't give as good as he gets. Of course, being called a godmother was not something he ever thought would happen. Whose idea was that anyway? Certainly wasn't his. (No JARVIS it was not. You're memory must be faulty. Mute!)

Stranger still to have said godchild ask him about relationship advice. Because really? Ask the playboy Omega about relationships? The same Omega said godchild keeps trying to set up with his best buddy since M.I.T? Tony didn't know where her head is sometimes. But still, the guy,
T'Challa is the prince of the richest and most technological advance country on the planet and he wants her. He young, too and a bit too intense or tense and needs a serious chill pill.

Tony had JARVIS pull up video from the guard's cameras to see the whole "proposal" and the genius will admit to getting a little hot under the collar.

Just a little though. Tony isn't a thief. Or easy. And at least he didn't bring up having children.

Still, he can understand where Penny might be coming from. Being torn between that impulsive "yes", and testing the waters so to speak. T'Challa is saying a lot without elaborating so that is probably where the problem comes from. Something must have struck a cord with Penny because she didn't say no and playing the video a couple times gave him an idea of what that might be. There is something about being wanted, being the focus of someone who can have anyone and anything with a snap of their fingers. There is a thrill in being chased (the good romantic kind of chase not the creepy stalkerish kind), and knowing that the one you want, wants you enough to never give up on you. Considering Penny spent much of her adolescent years being bullied, ignored, and essentially told no one would ever want her, it was probably a big shock. Pretty different from Osborn's proposal. At least the prince wants her to reach her full potential and take all that the world has to offer rather than put her up to be his trophy housewife and personal broodmare.

Still, the guy's an Alpha with some serious control issues. Tony will give him a tiny bit of leeway since Omegas like Penny are a dime in a million and he's in his twenties. But only a super tiny bit.

But Tony did his duty and gave her a long lists of questions and answers to not accept from the Wakandan. If said prince passed the questions than he isn't a playboy looking for a fix or just a prince looking for a pretty trophy. No. Tony saw enough of that with his own parents, even if his mom might have been okay with it, and he won't see it with Penny.

Of course, if all goes well Penelope will have even more protection and snivelling rat child Harry will have to back off. Tony may not have liked how honest T'Challa was being at that lunch but he can appreciate that he was, in fact, honest. Granted as far as Tony's concerned there is a big difference between "I want you" and "you belong to me". Its really easy to tell which Alpha falls into which category.

It doesn't hurt that the prince is pretty either.

But Tony is completely biased. He thinks Penny's too good for either of them.

Funny enough a certain African god is the first one to approve. Begrudgingly approve, he notices, but approve nonetheless. So Tony is leaning toward a difference in culture or something along those lines being the reason because Anansi can be an utter jackass. Tony be one too but he knows he can back up his crazy if things get dicey. Reason stands that an African god can do the same and wouldn't take second best or settle for his perfect mortal hero daughter to be someone's plaything.

Which lead to Tony discovering another god(dess) from Wakanda, Bast. Or well, that's one of her names. The internet had a lot to say about the Panther God of the country. Of Africa and Egypt and other gods.

And she is very much real.

*(JARVIS make a note to donate to whatever charity for cats. Big or small. Build good karma or*
whatever. If I die suddenly I don't want to be eaten by a giant panther or judged by a freaking jackal, okay! I'd probably die a second time. Like die while being dead! Is that a crocodile god? The hell?!

So Penny, dear sweet Penelope, agrees to give him a chance.

The first year is a hard one. More like a year and a half, if he wanted to be technical. So much so that Tony is pretty sure the only thing keeping him from swearing off relationships completely is that stupid promise Penny is making him keep.  
("Promise you'll try? No matter what happens?"

"Yes. Yes, I promise. Geez, it's like you're planning to go war and want me to save myself for you."

"Close enough.")

Tony isn't above admitting to himself he may be leaning on his goddaughter more than he should. Its not full on dependency. But, really, how can he not look at her and see a paragon of all that is good in the world. Not like the Captain his father worshipped. Not like the Alpha his father idolized along side the entire country.

So he has no issue being completely biased.

It still takes him by surprise what follows her acceptance. The entire time can be summed as a series of cat fights, of testing and pushing boundaries and just overall mayhem. ("The flowers are beautiful. But I don't need them delivered everywhere I go. Every. Single. Day.")

He's amazed they haven't accidentally started World War III. Its the greatest exercise in patience that Tony has ever seen. But T'Challa learns quickly that you do not make Penny do anything she doesn't want to. If she wants to help catch muggers and petty thieves over talking to politicians than that is what she'll do. Not to say that Penelope doesn't make time to go shake a few hands and learn a thing or two. She does. But she also knows its not her strong suit and does what she can to support those close to her who do excel at politics. Penny learns to accept T'Challa's help and occasional extravagant gifts bit by bit.

Its not perfect. But hell if they don't try. Too stubborn to quit and walk away. Too self-aware to give an inch or let insults go.

There were a lot of other things, too. Some, okay no, a lot, he's forced himself to forget with a copious amount of liquor and work in his lab. It was like they couldn't see where they stood with each other. Which, okay, is probably true and can explain why this is the strangest and most painful courtship he's ever been forced to witness. It all came to a head in Wakanda, which Tony was beyond ecstatic to be invited to see and totally lied to Obie about going, under heavy guard and scrutiny, yeah, but he didn't care, and Tony doesn't even remember how the argument started but it leaves Spider-Woman and the Black Panther fighting it out.

(Another superhero? JARVIS! Run an analysis on everyone I know see if there aren't any other secret heroes around me. What? Matt? Are you kidding me!? Is he wearing spandex? No. Just no. JARVIS pull up those schematics. The hell is wrong with him? )

It is the most fierce brawl Tony's ever seen. Neither are holding back, he can tell, and both are really good. After a while, he can tell that Black Panther has an advantage with his armor and his extensive training. However, Spider-Woman isn't deterred. She's got her webbing and an instinctive lay of the land plus the sheer level of experience fighting people faster, stronger, and
even those smarter than her. It's a fight that draws a lot of eyes and not just his.

King T'Chaka, a calm and level-headed Alpha, stands next to him and his daughter, Beta Shuri, and his second wife, Queen Ramonda, a fierce and assertive Beta, along with other members of the Dora Milaje and Palace staff watched as they fought. Aunt May gives the pair a quick look over before rolling her eyes and striding back to the kitchen. (Aunt May has an ongoing war with the dessert chef and everyone knows better than to get in between them. The desserts they make are absolutely delicious, too! Tony is pretty sure the chef is secretly trying to court the Beta but no one will tell him if that's true.)

Tony doesn't know how long they go at it. Longer than an hour for sure but it's almost hypnotizing and he loses track of time. Every punch and grab is fluid and beautiful. Black Panther moves with a grace and lethality that is completely in line with his name. His claws and armor gleam under the bright African sun. If Tony didn't know any better he would think T'Challa was an actual panther given human form. Spider-Woman moves just as graceful and powerful. She is quick and precise, every attack aimed to deal maximum damage or divert her opponent's power. Her suit hugs her body like a second skin, even as she flexes, contorts, twists, and bends into inhuman angles without trouble or effort.

There isn't a single wasted movement.

He can't look away and he knows he isn't the only one. A few others join them, other Chieftains from the other tribes of Wakanda based on how they dress and their own guards. Then this priest guy named Zuri makes an appearance and when he sees the pair fighting starts to grin with a whispered, "finally," before moving along back the way he came. Tony really wanted to ask him what he meant by that except he didn't want to have a run in with the resident goddess. Anansi gets sulky and prissy when she's brought up before leaving or blowing something up, usually a cat statue or scaring some poor corrupt soul with spiders. Tony was a genius and a little crazy but not crazy stupid to get into the middle of a pissing contest between two gods. No. He likes living thank you.

After a few more hours, where Tony managed to procure himself a large tub of popcorn and sat down to watch the two heroes duke it out. He was even kind enough to share his popcorn with T'Chaka, Ramonda, and Shuri which devolved into the weirdest betting pool he's ever been a part of. Not that he didn't get along with anyone, he did, frighteningly so and he wasn't sure how to feel about that.

Any further thoughts stop when the battle ends. Except Tony isn't sure who won the fight since they were arguing the entire time. T'Challa almost drowns from being thrown into a lake and Penny gets tangled in a vibranium mesh net trap. They were still arguing as the Dora Milaje help them out. But, everyone else seems pretty pleased with the outcome. Hell, Tony had to pinch himself to make sure he actually saw some of the other Chieftains preen like a bunch of peacocks on the way out.

He did. He really did. Tony's a genius and figured out pretty quick its a culture thing. He can make a few guesses why and how and for what. Because Wakanda is primarily a warrior culture, its possible seeing her fight the Black Panther to a draw, which is what he's sticking with, cemented her as someone not easily submissive and who won't submit to anyone she doesn't want to. This could prove to show her as someone worthy of being Queen or at the very least, a mate to the future King who won't be steamrolled.

After that the two got along pretty well. There were still hiccups here and there but T'Challa backed off a lot. The prince even admitted to Tony that he found the entire ordeal pretty damn
exhausting if it were not also very useful. He learned many things about his mate and he earnestly wants her to continue with her dreams and goals. He just had a hard time allowing himself the belief that he didn't need to smother her to prove himself to her or shield her like she was a child to be protected.

Penelope is not a damsel to be saved.

Still, she no longer tenses at the sight of him and allows him close. The prince is not above admitting it is a heedy feeling. But asked Tony to speak with him if T'Challa seemed to get out of line again, not really trusting himself just yet. Tony had no problem with that but he's pretty sure the prince has everything in hand this time around. The fact he acknowledged how messed up he was acting proof of that and now that he's aware of his actions there shouldn't be anymore trouble.

Above all, Tony likes T'Challa because he provides an excellent *distraction*.

Tony may not be a hero, not like Penelope constantly tells him, but he can protect his own when properly motivated.

And following the revelation that the actual heroine has a lists of people who can be trusted, who cannot be trusted, who can be bribed or bought, who is loyal to the government, to SHIELD, and even those who were secretly Hydra, Tony's been busy. That last list was particularly hard to stomach.

Fucking Hydra.

There are so many names, some even repeated on certain lists like Deadpool whose listed as a friend but who is also likely to be bribed because he's a mercenary. Tony isn't sure how to feel about having his goddaughter being friends with a notorious killer. But he pushes that aside in favor of other names. Names of people he can reach, who he can hurt. There are plenty of them, too.

The best part is he doesn't have to do much to many of them. Nothing beyond a few whispered words in the right ear. Oh, Osborn wanting a little extra funding? A word here and there, a scandal across the papers every now and then tore a very big gape in their reputation. The less funding the more desperate the board and its CEO become leading to mistakes and questionable choices. The mistakes they make aren't hard to uncover and even easier find once someone anonymously drops a hint or two in a reputable reporter's ear. And Oscorp's dirty secrets are aired for all the world to see. Really. It was that easy. The others were a bit...tricky but no less of a hardship to take care of.

It helps having an A.I. with almost unlimited access.

Tony's careful though. Very careful. He's a genius so he knows he can't be reckless and just end them all at once. For one, Penelope would know it was him and get all protective and annoyed. For another, SHIELD would get involved and the less they knew that he knew, the better. Nothing says victory better than having all the cards and knowing what the other guys had in their hand, too.

For example, Tony may or may not have mentioned Kraven the Hunter to several of the Dora Milaje with a drink in his hand rambling about the terrible things the man wanted to do to his goddaughter. Not like they knew if he was really drunk or not and if they did they weren't going to say anything. I mean really, it was asking the informant why they didn't want to meet in public. It just wasn't done.
Its also not like anyone would *dare* point the finger at him.

Especially since he's been doing so much to give back to the community. Slowly, Tony's been phasing the weapon's development out of the company. More and more of his designs have been geared toward safety and protection, toward improving medical practices and procedures. He even hired Penelope to head the division based in New York to help him delegate a lot of the work. He made his case to the board, making it seem like weapons development was turning more and more into a dead end business or one most likely to turn nuclear. There was a lot of dissent but they couldn't deny the benefits of what he was proposing. Of course, Obie was pretty damn furious not that Tony cared.

Well, he did care. A lot. But he also cared about what he was doing and what his legacy would look like after he was gone. He didn't like the picture or the story he saw. Change is a natural part of life he's been told and he's always been creative and adaptive. There are some rumblings that SI was phasing out of the weapons business but there was no statement confirming or denying that. Tony wasn't going to say anything until he damn well had to and there wasn't a thing anyone could say to undo all his hard work. Of course, if a leaked rumor fell here or there mentioning how SI was shifting its focus away from weapons from time to time there wasn't anything Tony could do about that.

Rumors can come from anywhere, really.

And if everyone's too busy asking if that's true then they're not wondering why he's always changing the subject and dropping a scandalous bit of gossip from time to time. Everyone knows you can't get Tony Stark to say anything he doesn't want to. You're more likely to bite off more than you can chew or just choke on your embarrassment.

So, if someone like say Harry Osborn accidently trips down the stairs during a charity gala and breaks his leg no one would ever think Tony being there as anything other then a coincidence. Honestly, who would believe that Tony Stark, who's working so hard to turn his company around would ever push someone down the stairs? Especially when he's helping a gentlewoman make her way across the floor?

Not like there is anyone, absolutely no one, at all who would notice the pleased grin of the Merchant pass across his lips for more than a second or the rather innocent excuse from one or two of the guards leisurely making their way out of the gala to check the perimeter and not come back. It was all just a bad case of bad luck, really.

Everything is going well. T’Challa is being distracting and Tony is going for the throat of a lot of people on Penelope's lists. His company is making great strides in the direction he wants and he *may* be working up the nerve to ask a certain Alpha to court him.

Then Afghanistan happens.

When he finally wakes up, aware and coherent the first thing that comes to mind is Penelope. Its her voice. Every piece of advice she's ever given. Every praise and promise she's wrangled from him. They crash down on top of him, embracing him and chasing away the chill that seeps through his rags, into the heavy weight that pulls at his chest.

Its the only thing that keeps him together as the torture begins.

("How do you do it? With the crazies and the terrorists and just...everything?"
“Are you asking me because you want to convince me the board are evil or you really want to know?”

“Bit of both. I mean. I get the whole responsible thing. But, I mean, you can do that by working on a cure for cancer or something! So, why this? You could get killed or kidnapped!”

“What makes you think I’m not doing that too?”

“I’m serious Penny. Why? How can you keep doing this? And don't think I didn't notice you try to dodge the question.”

“Well, you're asking the wrong question.”

“What’s the right question?”

“The question isn’t why. You already know that much. What you should be asking is why not? How can I not? All the suffering in the world...all the cruelty, how can anyone not help? I might not be able to save everyone but I can try. I've suffered, yes. I've been kidnapped and tortured, that's also true. But let me tell you, people like that all want the same old things and the only thing that saves you is what you chose to do.”}

He recalls every piece of advice she's ever given him about the people who hurt her. About the people who wanted her power, who wanted to own her and at the same time tear her to pieces. Tony thinks of her as they drown him in cold water, as his lungs fill with liquid and his eyes burn. He thinks of her as he gasps and struggles to breathe, choking and suffocating. He plays everything she's ever said as their eyes roam and undress him. As the other prisoner Yinsen, translates and tries to keep him alive. But most of all they stay with him as one comes in with a few friends with that look in his eyes and Tony has his hand on the cables in his chest before he realizes what his plan is.

"Careful.” He warns them, "wouldn't want any accidents to happen now would we?"

Even as he speaks, as his fear grows, he thinks of a hero an entire country away and how terrified she must have been, alone and so, so, young the first time she stood against a monster like this.

("Talk, laugh, joke around if you have to. Anything but give in to your fear. They only have power over you, if you give it to them. You are not weak or helpless or stupid. You can win. You can escape. You will always have the tools to help you, never be afraid to use them.)

"Best get rid of any ideas like bonding with me, real quick. I still have standards. You don't meet any one of them."

"He asks if you would really kill yourself instead of fulfilling your duty to the world,” Yinsen hesitates for a second before continuing, "as a proper Omega should."

("Never give an inch because if you do, you give a mile. And when you give a mile, you better have an ace up your sleeve. You've got to fight with everything you've got. Fight for what you want and you'll make it. Its that or give up and if you give up, you die. )

"To hell with being a proper Omega. I don't want to die but damn if you take anything else from me. Being alive and living are two very different things after all. So what's it going to be? You back off or I swan dive off the deep end?"

He tugs at the battery gently. A warning. They needed him alive. So its with his life he'll barter with. Yinsen's eyes go wide behind his glasses but he translates, not skipping a beat.
"What's to stop them from taking you anyway?"

Tony grins his Merchant grin.

"Oh sure, he can have his guys drug me. Knock me out and tie me up. Wait for me to wake up before having their fun. But after?" His grin grows wider, all teeth, and knows he must look one step away from insanity. "After, my hands are free. No Tony Stark, no Jericho. No weapons. Sure the company can make more and who ever had the cash can buy them but I doubt you do. You wouldn't have kept me alive otherwise. So that leaves you without weapons and nothing but my cold and rotting corpse. How pissed do you think your boss will be then?" (Most of all is this: do not give up. Ever. Not for a second or an hour. Not even if days upon days go by. Never give up. If you do. They win.)

Silence is his answer. Tony Stark will not be a victim. He's been hurt and kidnapped. He's been tortured but his last moments will not be violated at the hands of terrorists.

He tugs at the wires one more time as the silence stretches on and the terrorist snarls at the genius before leaving, his friends following after him.

"That will not last long." Yinsen tells him gently, voice barely above a whisper.

"I know."

He collapses in his cot, exhausted. When the lights go out he barely manages to keep himself from crying.

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Tony Stark never believed in God. Not like his mother. But here, in the dark and cold, in a cave an ocean away from home, he does the one thing he's never done.

He prays.

Tony Stark never believed in God. He doesn't know if he's real or not. And if he is, Tony doesn't trust whatever answer he'd give. Tony isn't even sure if he would know what to do with an answer from him, anyway.

But he prays.

He prays to the one god he believes in. In the one god he knows will hear him, who trust him to look after the daughter they share. Wallowing in fear, uncertainty, and despair, he calls out to the one god he knows never saw him as anything or anyone other than himself.

Tony Stark prays to a god much of the world has forgotten.

He prays...and is answered.

"Tony."

From dark corners and shadowy depths he comes. Regal and inhuman. Suit pressed and face paint glowing in the faint light. His eyes bore into the mortal as he lay on the cot. He glides across the room, every step soundless and powerful. This is the god that he's spent years joking, arguing, and living with. This is the being he's had dinner with, that he's shared and test tasted various desserts and made running commentaries with during infomercials. Its only now that he can see it, see the divine power rolling off of the god. The essence of it, almost like a pressure, fills the cave,
touching every corner and crevice. It presses down all others, keeping them still and silent. None will interfere. None will know he was ever there except for the one who called out to him.

Tony inhales deeply, letting the power flow through and into him. For the first time in what must have been weeks, Tony feels warm.

"Anansi." he exhales a sob and reaches for the god, his friend.

The god takes a seat on the small cot and takes the engineer's hands into his own. He warms the fragile mortal hands with his own as Tony cries his heart out. He cries his fear and terror. He pours everything into Anansi's hands. The god takes it without complaint or judgment. He wipes Tony's tears as they come, careful and compassionate.

"I cannot change your fate," he whispers when the Omega cries himself out, "I cannot save you."

"So I'm going to...this is it, then..."

"Just because I cannot change your fate," Anansi begins to smile, "that does not mean you cannot change it."

"I- wait, what? What the hell can I do that you can't?" Tony blinks rapidly in confusion and denial. "I can't take on all of them. I can't win this."

"Yes." the god's response is swift and fierce, even when the Omega starts to beg. "Yes, you can. They are searching for you. Do you understand? Will you give in now? Will you let them decide how your story ends?"

The last question pierces the fog that had settled over Tony's mind like a thick wool cloud, blanketing his thoughts in a dark depression. Stories, Tony knows, are incredibly important to the god. How they begin and end, the journey in between, and it all depends on what the people decide to do. To imply someone else has power over his story is to say someone else decides if he live or dies. It implies that the god must settle for whatever fate Tony allows others to give him. It's an insult to the both of them.

"No. No, I don't want that. But there's no time."

"There is plenty of time. The question is if you'll let it end here. Is this what you want?"

"Rhodey. I want my Rhodey." Tony's grip on Anansi tightens, "They'll...they're gonna..."

"Will you let them decide how your story ends?" The god asks again, stressing his last word so that it echoes in the dark cave.

"Don't let them take me." Tony begs in answer.

"They can try." Anansi promises with a smile full of teeth. "Now sleep, my friend, I will protect you."

After weeks of pain and agony, Tony finally relaxes into a dreamless sleep.

When he wakes up, Anansi is gone and at the same time, not. It doesn't bother him because he trust the god to keep his word. He's rested, a little worn but his thoughts run drifting. How can one man change his fate? He doesn't know. But when they come for him, he denies them weapons
every time. He holds his head a little higher, a little more defiant every day.

They try to take him. Try to force a bond and breed him. To make him complacent and docile.

But the desert is a vast ecosystem. There are surprises everywhere, even in a terrorist camp. Spiders are among those that thrive in such places with some as big as his head and as small as his thumbnail. The first attempt ends with one of the three breaking out into blisters and screaming in pain. When the others go near in an attempt to help, all three are swarmed by tiny yellow spiders. They bite and tear at any skin they can reach leaving the blisters to spread and eat away at their flesh.

Just as quick as they arrived, the spiders disappeared into the many tunnels of the camp. They leave the three spasming on the ground, bleeding and dying and the rest of the camp in an uproar. The fear starts to spread. Tony tries hard not to laugh. He doesn't do anything about his grin though. There are other attempts like the first. They end the same. Bitten or swarmed by spiders. There is one that clung to a man's back and was bitten in the back of the neck when he got too close. He died when he collapsed to the ground and his friends opened fire.

The spider got away safely.

Tony and Yinsen just enjoy the show whenever they're present to see it. The pair are mostly glad for a reprieve from terror and pain. All the while Tony's mind remains painfully blank and quiet. They try again at night, grabbing him from his thin cot, and drag him away. They don't get farther than tearing off his pants when the hissing and scurrying starts. Along the cave walls and floor, they surround the terrorists, eyes gleaming unnaturally red in the dark, and start a symphony of clacking fangs and running feet. The terrorists become hysterical and start firing into the cave. They never look up.

The spiders are huge with fangs glistening with venom.

No one touches him after that night. Still, the spiders dance along the shadows of the tunnels. Playing with the terrorists' fears. The men flinch at moving shadows and whispers amongst themselves of a monstrous laugh the plagues their dreams. They do not go near the Omega captive more than they need to. Only the truly brave lay their hands on him, now, but only for as long as they need to.

They hope to wear him down, to break him. Or they'll be forced to kill him and, hopefully, his demon shadow will die with him.

But they're too late.

It's Yinsen that gives him the answer. Its his words that show him the way. He tells them he'll build a weapon for them. He just doesn't say its for them to use.

Rhodes is beautiful and gorgeous. Tony promises to never take him for granted ever again. He's warm and real. He's been looking after Tony since he was a scrawny nothing at college.

Tony is eccentric and erratic but doesn't want Rhody out of his sight. That seems okay with his honey bear, too. The three days he's there, Tony shares a room with him and the first night he can't sleep, can't close his eyes without some assurance there's a spider hiding in some corner. It takes several hours but a small house spider scurries across the floor. Its too small to be a threat to
anyone but its there. That's all that matters.

Tony doesn't care.

But the next couple of nights, Rhodey, his Rhodey, sits up in bed with him, gun loaded and eyes focused.

Tony sleeps soundly.

Coming back is hard and painful. Its a whirlwind of one thing after another. There is Pepper, worried and resilient. Happy, concerned and protective. Obie, relaxed, confident and conflicted. Rhodey, tired and stretched thin, trying to keep the military happy and protect his friend.

There are others, too. Anansi with his smile full of pride and glee. The company and the board screeching like hawks dying in the woods. The world and SHIELD asking questions and questions and more questions.

And Penelope.

Sweet, beautiful, Penelope, who doesn't ask him for anything. Whose glad he's home and if he wants her company, if he needs her help. He tells her to buy as much SI stock as she can, so that he can keep the company from going under and that he'll see her soon.

He's got some house cleaning to do.

Tony's tired and sore but he feels good. Rhodey, Pepper, and Happy are safe. JARVIS and his bots, Penny, Aunt May, Momma Rhodes and the rest of the family are all safe. The armor took a beating but kept him alive. He replaced the damaged arc reactor and he managed with Penny's help to keep his company from going completely under.

Coulson's not so bad even if he is SHIELD. He can see why Penny doesn't mind talking to him on occasion rather than the whole of SHIELD or its director, which he hasn't meet yet. But he'll reserve judgement until later. So far they're not doing to well. Its like they don't know him at all. They give him cue cards.

Honestly.

"I am Iron Man."

The noise is immense. Lights flash and questions are hurled his way so fast there's no way to tell whose asking what. It feels like a burden's been lifted from his shoulders.

He's hasn't felt this light in years.

Chapter End Notes

Tell me what you guys think, yeah? I mean this was really hard because I know spiders freak a lot of people out and I was trying to keep the flesh eating to a
I also do not have a good tolerance for rape/non-con so I mitigated as much of that as I could but still tried to keep it flowing right. I didn't include Fury just yet because I'm not sure how I should portray him. Like...ugh, he's pretty cool but soooooooo shady! If I saw this person in a café or something and they wanted to chat I'd ask them to hold on one second, go to the bathroom and climb out the freaking window. Like, ha! No.

I can't decide if I want him to be a cool bro or a victim for intense pranking...

Anyway, Tell me what you think!! I live for constructive criticism. Until next time guys!
Chapter Summary

Pieces on the board move.

The Horsemen prep for battle. Civil Movements rise and new players join the game.

Chapter Notes

This took longer than I wanted because the character choices weren't working out.

I pretty much spent the last four months brainstorming and bashing my head against the metaphorical wall.

No joke. This chapter freaking clawed back at me like a demented cat from hell.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2008-2010

The Era of Heroes

"I think that we all do heroic things, but hero is not a noun, it's a verb."

-Robert Downey, Jr.

"Sir," an agent hurries into Coulson's office, tablet in hand. "There's another one."

He transfers the file over to Coulson's computer without much prompting. Once Coulson sees the transfer complete, he dismisses the agent. Since Spider-Woman's appearance there has been nothing but questions. Who she is and where she's from are only a few of the very basic questions that still need answers. Unfortunately, her high profile and integration with the city's police and people have made that difficult.

Even more difficult is gathering Intel. Since that first meeting, SHIELD has been forced to double their politicking just for a simple meeting because previous attempts to corner the heroine alone has ended in humiliation and failure. Police are also notorious for closing ranks when the slightest of threats is identified. To the NYPD, any government investigation into Spider-Woman is taken as a genuine threat. That includes SHIELD. It didn't help that Stark Industries somehow seemed to be in on the game. Somehow, someway, they've managed to turn out or expose any agents they assign to infiltrate the company or the police force. It is beyond frustrating. Every trick and tactic they use or attempt to deploy backfires. If Coulson didn't know any better and if Spider-Woman hadn't confessed to never having been an agent, he'd assume the enhanced woman was a former agent of SHIELD.
It is still a mess.

That's not even touching the ramifications of the heroine being an Omega. Since Stark's debut as Iron Man many have asked the same question. Is she an Omega? At first no one would give a response and no one could get an answer except one very lucky college student manages to get video of the hero admitting that she is.

("How do you do it? Be an Omega and do...this?" Iron Man slouches to the side in his suit. He's eating a plain doughnut and his other has a smoothie. His expression is part serious and part exhausted. There is a box of doughnuts between them.

"Its simple if you think about it. Being an Omega isn't too different from being a hero. It's hard though. You lead by example as best you can and sometimes it's not enough. You'll make mistakes. You will, that's a fact, and that's okay." Part of her mask is pulled up, allowing her to sip her own smoothie.

"Even if people get hurt? Even if people die? Why? Why is that okay?"

"Even then. No. Especially then. It proves your still human. It proves you still care. That you give a damn about what happens to others. Its hard, so incredibly hard at first but you learn from it. Your mistakes I mean. You learn from them and try to do better. And that's it. That's all you can do. We're not a gods, Tony, we can't fix all the world's problems and no one has the right to ask for more than you're willing to give. No one. But that doesn't stop us from doing the best that we can anyway."

"Just like that, huh?"

"It's a lot harder than I make it seem and it actually took me a long time to figure it out. But yes. Just like that." )

The viral storm that took place on YouTube and the rest of the internet following that reveal was massive. It hit the news with all the power of a runaway freight train. There were discussions about the effects extended trauma can have on Omegas using Tony Stark's kidnapping as an example and speculations on what kind of trauma Spider-Woman must have suffered to have her become the hero she is today. There were also other discussions about the implication that Omegas were taking on more Alpha-like traits and the implication that Omegas were evolving into something more because there could be no other explanation for what was happening.

Omegas started to apply for occupations that they were previously looked down upon. Police work, EMTs, ER nurses and doctors, State Police and even dispatch. It was as if a switch had been flipped and suddenly there was an entirely new group of people emerging from out of the dark. There was an almost physical sense of relief from them and in the way they carried themselves. As if a great weight had been lifted from their shoulders.

It started a movement of truly massive proportions.

Omegas and their supporters in various states petitioning and protesting sanctions against their applications for certain job occupations. Politicians and other public servants scrambling for purchase as pro-Omegas and their supporters organized marches and performed various forms of civil disobedience. If Omegas were the embodiment of the future then who were they to deny them?

As a result, entire organizations started to form in support of them and groups forming to rage against the change in status quo. Omegas shouldn't be out trying to save the world being their
argument and that an Omega's purpose was to pave the way for the future, not put themselves in danger. Ironically, the latter argument added fuel to the Omega hero supporters. As far as they're concerned, what better Omega is there than one that sets an example for the future?

It's still a mess of massive proportions. A complication of such magnitude that its found its way onto the international stage and become a serious social issue.

America is not the only country to suffer such a serious social upheaval. Well, "suffer" is up to interpretation. But there is no question that in the span of a few minutes Spider-Woman and Iron Man successfully changed the world's perception of Omega.

Forever.

Even as the world reeled from the news, the two heroes worked to minimize casualties and violence on both sides.

(The people's love and adoration for them grows...)

It was still a mess. A huge mess that SHIELD couldn't just sweep under the rug. Since SHIELD's semi-successful operation several years ago, where the existence of SHIELD was revealed to several police officers, it also meant that Spider-Woman was essentially untouchable. With such a high profile and numerous contacts that SHIELD doesn't have access to or is completely unaware of, they couldn't risk recruiting her or manipulating her to do as they wanted. Not without facing substantial backlash.

Granted, they had some access to the hero even if the meetings were not very long. It was an exercise in patience that Phil Coulson would find troubling if Spider-Woman were not so playful and honest. Granted, that honesty is laced in a shroud of mystery and vague phrases with heavy undertones. It gave Phil the impression that she knew more than she let on. Much more than someone who gains even a precursory glance at SHIELD private servers. He had theories but no way to prove any of them beyond brief glimpses from video of the hero in action. Phil is seriously considering adding it to her profile just in case but is only just holding off in case she still has access and is looking over any files about what they have on her.

Coulson is positive she is looking over all files or at least, as much as she had access to. Which they still didn't know! If Phil were any other person, he'd be cradling his head in his hands. As it were, Phil decided to take it as a both a challenge and a game, as Spider-Woman did. Playful, yet serious. Powerful, yet non-threatening and non-violent. Coulson is willing to play her game considering how painless it is compared to someone more malicious. And it had to be Coulson because she doesn't like anyone else. They sent at least a dozen or two different agents to meet with her and Coulson made sure to keep a detail report of each encounter. Its due to these encounters that he begins to find reason for his suspicions. Each one sent, gained a different reaction from the hero but those that she refused to speak with or acted with barely contained disdain or hostility were immediately investigated.

Each one proved to be a traitor in some form. The heroine's answer for knowing these things? Inconsistencies in reports they made.

Except several of those agents weren't cleared for field duty or handling sensitive documents and as such didn't have any access to reports or reports written. So, how did she know?

Coulson ran through countless scenarios before dropping to his very last bit of possibilities. Still, its a lot for the, now level ten, agent to consider.
It boggles the mind that someone had the ability to see the future. He's meet his fair share of individuals who claim to do so, mediums and psychics alike. Never, has he been the one to consider someone having the ability without them trying to convince him. He doesn't mention it to anyone else besides Director Fury.

As a result, there is now a team dedicated to observing the heroine and log her abilities as well as any and all abnormalities. There are numerous video and written logs, witness accounts and testimonies compiled over the years. With the introduction of social media, however, they aren't the only ones to pick up on the heroine's abilities. By now, the entire world's very much aware of just what Spider-Woman is capable of outside newspapers and visits outside the states.

Of particular popularity are videos of the hero with the newest celebrity, or an old favorite, depending on who you ask, Tony Stark. Iron Man. Some of them show the heroes taking down robbers or chatting with an occasional fan. However, very recently of rising interest are the few, very few, advice pieces from Spider-Woman to Iron Man, who is starting to exhibit some concerning behavior. There is much speculation about what is happening with the Iron Hero and it is compounded by the words of his friend, the Spider Hero.

Coulson watches the newest video. For certain its already gaining a substantial amount of views and still growing.

"This!" Starks words are ineligible to the viewers. The only sound to be heard are the very last of his very obvious distressing question. Spider-Woman, who is kneeling in front of him, reaches her arms around him and holds him close. Fortunately, the recorder manages to capture her next words.

"Dying is easy." she says gently, "It's the easiest thing in the world and no one realizes it until someone they know and love is gone. They don't realize it until they look back and notice who isn't there. But living? That takes courage. True courage. To live, to love and grow and exist, even when you think you can't. Even when you feel all alone and the last thing you want is to face each new day."

She takes a deep breathe and Iron Man raises a shaky hand to return the disjointed hug.

"But you did. You came back even when everyone else said you wouldn't. So thank you. For coming back. For holding on just a little bit longer. And if you need me, I'm here. No matter what. Big or small. I'm here. I promise."

Iron Man buries his head in her shoulder, face hidden and exhausted, he leans his weight onto the slimmer hero. She doesn't sway with the additional weight, armor and all, nor does she say anything about the Iron hero's refusal to move.

She stays on there with him, anchoring the genius with her calm presence and lack of judgement...

Although this video propels a large outpouring of concern for the engineer, it also adds fuel to the fire for various activist groups around the world. Some of those groups that move dangerously close to certain ongoing operations. While its this video that propels SHIELD to send someone to
look over Stark and find out what's going on, it also forces several agents to scramble for damage control, Coulson included. After Coulson make sure his ground teams and solo agents are secure does he find out about the conclusion of that assignment, when he has to stay with the billionaire on suicide watch. But as he is there, he can't help the feeling that he's being judged rather than mitigating any suicidal tendencies. Considering how close the genius is to Spider-Woman, it should not surprise the agent that Tony Stark may know more than they want him to. Still, Coulson cannot help but feel as if he's fallen for some trap that he doesn't realize was ever set. Its a feeling that doesn't change even when Stark succeeds in saving himself.

Its a feeling that follows him all the way to Mexico.

Its as easy as breathing for Jason Bourne to stay hidden in plain sight. He haunts the crowds and dark doorways, like a shadow. A ghost. Shelton sat at his post, a dark smile on his face. The sociopath drank some kind of tea from the small café he sat at. Bourne didn't know how to feel about the man. He raged against the system that Webb had gave his life to. It is the same system that Bourne nearly risked his life to bring into the light.

The assassin cannot help but sympathize with the insane weapons developer.

Both Horsemen stayed relaxed and inconspicuous. Their current mission is an easy one.

Lure in the agent sent by SHIELD and find out what she knows. It was painfully easy to get this far. The woman was driven and determined. Using that against her is child's play. Why SHIELD is interested in Penelope is both a mystery and an annoyance. Something that irritates the Merchant and the rest of the Horsemen.

Shelton played his role as bait incredibly well. Bringing her in will be easy in a few hours. Mills had a special concoction to both immobilize and interrogate her. Grabbing her will be a bit of a challenge only because there are so many eyes and cameras around now. The Omega Movement also makes the task a bit harder than the norm. Everyone's eyes are everywhere. Watching and listening. Looking for the next "big event".

Once Bourne causes a distraction, however, the agent will have no where to run. No where to hide. The Wakandan embassy they aimed to use also has is own set of interrogation rooms, all empty and one waiting just for her.

He's glad he's not used to kill anymore. That he has the option to say "no". That he has the chance to do something more than be a weapon. A killer.

That doesn't mean he won't hesitate if he need to. Penny and the Merchant have given him a second chance, a second-no- a third life. He's not so inclined to sit aside and let it all burn to the ground.

Shelton starts to whistle a wordless tune and Bourne turns his head toward his target. The Merchant's AI managed to get the Horseman a full dosser on the agent, all her abilities, skills, and specialties. More than enough information for the Horseman to use. What follows after her capture...

...well, that's still up for debate. Wakanda and the Merchant have that in common, after all. They don't like shadow organizations playing with those they consider theirs.

Bourne can't find it in him to dislike it. He's one of those people...and its a damn good feeling.

As the agent, brunette, chin length cut, moving past the bakery and street peddlers. She's pretty,
maybe, not completely blending in. A little too American for this area. Not quite tourist and not quite foreign enough. It wouldn't be enough for the long residents to overlook but for the newer and oblivious civilians, it is barely enough.

Shelton's whistling takes a sudden sharp and shrill swell as he stands to leave. Bourne moves, conscious clear and hands free.

There are no regrets.

"Doom wishes to congratulate you on your choice in mate, Dr. Stark." Dr. Doom says as way of greeting.

"Mmhmm, my Honey bear is amazing." His grin is wide and full of teeth. Its almost like the grin the Merchant would give if not for the spark of mischief in his eyes. "But you didn't ask me here to see how good my Alpha is in bed."

"No." The dictator of Lartveria took his seat across from the engineer. The room the two men occupied was non-descript and empty. Two chairs and a desk table were the only furnishings. Something that made sense since this place didn't exist. Just like the meeting they were having was not happening and the two men, have never actually meet.

Should anyone ask.

Dr. Doom places a thin manila folder on the desk table. "Complications have shown themselves. I would not wish to...overstep."

Tony Stark frowns at the ominous statement but opens the folder. It takes him only seconds to realize what he's looking at.

"Where did you get this?"

"Where you said I would."

Tony closes the folder and passes it back. Doom picks up the folder and burns it, right there. They watch as the fire catches and as the ashes fall to the table.

"You were the one to tell Doom of Hydra. You told Doom that Hydra lives and seeks to continue its foolishness. You will tell Doom what you plan. Hydra will not spread like the disease it is. It will not take what rightfully belongs to Doom."

If there was one thing that Tony did like about the dictator, probably the only thing really because Doom is an asshole, is his possessive practicality. Someone wants his stuff, they go down. Someone goes after everyone else's stuff? They still go down to keep them from thinking about going after his stuff. In this sense, Doom's country.

"Easy," the Merchant says, "tear out it's heart."

The servants moved carefully and with practiced moves. They placed various foods atop the large blanket nestled within the techno jungle, close enough to be seen by the guards, the Dora Milaje, and yet far enough to give a measure of privacy. When the servants left they quickly went about any other tasks assigned to them. But not without a considerable air of giddiness and a hint of
gossip.

The Queen of Wakanda did not relax in her seat until she heard the tell tale sign of servants giggling. When she did there was also a soft exhale of relief as well. Ramonda is a strong woman who loved her family and her country. So, it stands she feared for them in equal measure as well. When her son found the woman who would be his love, his mate, his Omega, she was both thrilled and exasperated.

She is happy for him, truly. But, and speaking as a mother, as smart as her son is, he can also be incredibly stupid.

What Alpha outright tells the Omega they wish to court that they wish to "make them one" essentially?

"Bast be praised." she whispers into her glass of wine.

She did not raise a barbarian or a fool. She honestly wished she could have been there. Maybe she could have knocked some sense into the boy before he opened his mouth. Fortunately, Penny proved to have better sense and reason. The woman, young and bright, strong and unyielding, is exactly what T'Challa needed to get the stubborn Alpha to think, truly think, before acting. It is one thing to teach strategy, tactics and politics and another entirely to use those skills.

The Queen peers out of the large palace windows to the jungle where the pair were having a bit of a lazy afternoon lunch. The picnic was her son's idea and the Queen greatly approved. She could not see a lot of the couple but that was fine. What she could see was more than enough. For not the first time, both are relaxed and languid, at ease with each other's presence.

"I don't suppose they are speaking of giving us grandchildren would they?"

Ramonda laughed as T'Chaka soundlessly took a seat next to her. She interlocked her fingers with her King, her mate, her Alpha and grinned at his playful mood. T'Chaka has many years experience leading the country and while wise and good, he is also incredibly playful. It is merely a trait that is reserved solely for family. She has many fond memories of her beloved mock play fighting with their children in between his duties as King and as the Black Panther.

"No beloved. Not quite. Although there is no doubt they are on their way. Much better than several years ago."

"Hmm. Yes. I'm beyond happy Penelope gave him a chance." He kisses the hand of his queen, grateful for her strength and presence. "He is better for knowing her, I believe. The future will be...trying."

Ramonda does not frown at her mate. She does not need to even as her gaze softens and her hand squeeze his in comfort. "They are strong and will not be swayed by promises of glory or threats to their person or their loved ones."

"That is good but I fear not enough. Together they are better but even then, they are alone. And, my love, no one can accomplish anything alone."

"You are thinking of what happened between the Spider God and Bast."

"The conversation was...not promising."

Ramonda cannot help but agree. What possible future would frighten the Trickster god? What erratic behavior did the Panther God refer to that would make them so anxious? That would make
any of the divine anxious? It had to be something more. More than taking interest in the mortal. More than walking among those same mortals. Everyone wanted to know. That is not a question. What terrified the divine father of Wakanda's future Queen and what could the people of Wakanda do to help?

"Than, perhaps, we should change that?" Ramonda starts thoughtfully.

"Oh?"

"Mmhmp."

She had no need to say any more. The Queen is well understood.

Below them, Penelope blushes brightly with a smile on her face as she smells a blooming vibrant red rose. T'Challa smiles blissfully.

Chapter End Notes

Ramonda saves the freaking show, people!! I went through so many characters and no one would fit! Ugh!

But then Ramonda. Beautiful, fierce woman rose from the depths of the crowd and said "fuck you canon characters! I'ma show you how its done!"

Like a damn Queen. Bless her and all of you for being so patient!!
Avengers Assemble...or Not

Chapter Summary

The Avengers make their debut.

It doesn't quite work out.

 Plenty of people are pissed and the NYPD has no more fucks to give for SHIELD's bullshit.

Chapter Notes

Thus the Avengers takes the stage.

Do not be surprised if I'm nice to them...for now...

Still feeling salty as hell for civil war. And Penelope is a sweet flower child. But that's okay. She's got good back up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2012- New York City

Its been so long. Penny didn't realize how fast time can go by. At least, not until she's sitting in her apartment with T'Challa wrapping an anniversary gift for Tony and Rhodes' third year being bonded and she's making a list for people she would like to see at her own wedding. Its not a long list but it is longer than she thought it would be originally. She already knows its going to be a public event in Wakanda, something she doesn't really mind so long as her family and friends are able to make it.

She's getting married.

Penelope did not envision this in her new life. It wasn't even a possibility in her old one. But after several years, there's a warmth to this, a contentment that settles in her gut at how her life has gone. T'Challa is...intense in his feelings. Especially when they first meet but after a very rocky start they just meshed. But apparently he's always been intense in anything he puts his focus to.

He's also secretly a hardcore romantic.

He's settled down a lot from before. That's not to say she wasn't flattered. Oh no. It just took her a while to accept that it was okay to be showered in gift because he wanted to. It was a balance they managed to find. Actually getting married has taken longer than it took them to learn how to fight together and they sparred more than a few times. Mostly because May and Romanda took over along with the royal event planners and Penelope has learned a long time ago that May is a force of Nature that can only be stopped by another force of actual Nature.

Romanda? Not very different except she's more like the eye of a hurricane with a benign smile on
her face as she sets everything else around her on fire. Maybe she'll have marshmallows roasting on the side.

"What troubles you beloved?"

"May and Romanda terrify me." Penelope moves from her seat and settles between T'Challa's legs with her back to his chest. "I'm almost tempted to ask if we should just elope to Vegas. But...

"They would kill us both."

"Painfully."

"Yes." He agrees as he wraps his arms around her waist. "On the other hand, should anyone misbehave, we merely need to point them in their direction. But that is not what truly has your attention."

"No." She sighs. "I was trying to distract myself."

As happy as she was with her new life, Penny knew times were going to change soon. Her spider sense gave a faint throb, like a bruise that ached. Penny tried not to think about what awaited everyone in the future. She though of Tony and Rhodes' secret wedding ceremony. About her company's expansion into the international stage and the joint contract between her company and Stark Industries for the betterment of STEM education. About the patents and numerous developments she's made for the advancement of medicine and health. She thinks about the advocacies she's spoken at and the debates she's started taking part in.

Both as Spider-Woman and as Penelope Parker.

She thinks about the conferences about policies for working with super powered people. About individual contracts made with police and government between other heroes. Its slow and careful. Many looking to officers and lawyers in the NYPD for the kind of example they have set. About the concessions and concerns Spider-Woman had when she started. About the type of policies and protections would benefit both parties. It an open debate that is talked about in blogs, vlogs, news stations, and more. Mutants have stayed silent but there's already a question of how these types of relationships might impact them. But so far, progress is good. Slow but good.

It's everything she could ask for.

It's the kind of path she wishes her old world had been able to experience.

But at the back of her mind, that ache persisted. It persisted. Persisted. And persisted. Like an itch just beneath the skin that never quite went away.

"Something. I don't know. Just a feeling."

"You're feelings are not nothing. They are never nothing." He lifts one hand to her chin and turned her to look at him. "You're instincts are not nothing. They have enabled you to do so much, to help so many. If you feel something is wrong, something we need to prepare for, I am more than willing to listen."

Looking into his eyes she can see in sincerity. Its become so familiar to her that she knows she can believe him. She knows he is serious. That he'll do all that he can to help her just as she tries for him. Being Royalty is not easy or a walk in the park. She attends meetings and other hearings with him for support and on occasion to council meetings to discuss any projects that might help them integrate better and smoother with the rest of the world. So far Wakanda has stayed close to
humanitarian and other efforts. An idea she supported because she knows just how advance the country is and she doesn't want anyone to try and take advantage of their unknown international status.

"There's something coming." She starts slowly and moves to lay her head on T'Challa's shoulder. "Its big but...not, not yet? I mean, its like when its going to rain but only because you can see the thunderclouds in the horizon."

"Can you see thunderclouds?" There isn't a hint of him joking.

"No." She lowers her voice, almost afraid to speak. Almost. "But I can hear it. I can feel it. Its coming and there's nothing we can do to stop it."

Penelope expects that to be the end of it. T'Challa surprises her like he's done since that first day and every day since.

"Then we will meet it. Whatever it is and we will be ready."

She raises her head to look him in the eyes and when he stares back, undaunted, she believes him.

The comms are a mess. But she's never been more proud of her city. Even if everything's going to hell. First responders are calm and on point. They give directions to scared tourist and civilians like they would in any other emergency. Clear and concise even as the fact an actual alien invasion is taking place in New York City. Captain Stacy's proposed training policies shining through.

Not to mention veteran cops, who've been around since she first hit the scene, taking point on the ground. There's disbelief and annoyance but no true fear beyond the usual fear of dying in the line of duty. After seeing the likes of Electro, Scorpion, and several other of her previous villains, aliens with guns seem like a walk in the park. Which Penny has to consider is pretty true. Aliens with guns are like people with guns just different...biologically speaking.

"Armor's like fucking concrete!"

"Weak points to the eyes!"

"Where are my sharpshooters? Get to covering the ground teams."

"I've got a fire at a bank..."

"Civilians trapped in a parking lot..."

"Heavy fire on..."

Case in point. The police aren't having too hard of a time with them on the ground. Hit and missing with weak points in the armor and just avoiding direct fire from whatever it is the aliens are using. Its still terrible. Her spider sense blares like an air horn at everything around her but she's got more than enough experience tuning out the pain to focus on the direction and react. There's a massive hole in the sky and aliens are pouring through faster than she can contain them. She aims to crash the flyers and push as many of them to the ground as possible so that the cops can have a fighting chance and in between it all she shouts out directions the best she can. They've got a rhythm now, familiar and tested. They don't lose as many as they expect.

"Spider's on site. Repeat Spider-Woman is on site."
"I've got eyes on her. Can we get some air support here? I don't know like the coast guard or the army?"

"Panther's here too!"

T'Challa is also on the ground. When he first came stateside with her and they patrolled together the NYPD were weary of him but its been a few years since then. They know he's her Alpha and respect him more that he hasn't abused the trust they put in him. Plus he's made it clear he isn't looking to make Penny his submissive housewife. Apparently, the police have this passive-aggressive streak to them that she never really noticed before when it came to her.

Its scary but cute. In the army-of-dangerous-older-sibling-family scary kind of way. T'Challa actually approved that they acted like that and then the cops approved that he approved. Penny just thinks they're all weird.

"Get the civies out of their way! The subway is close to your location. Use the tunnels to move them outside of the perimeter."

"Copy Captain." At least they get along.

"Any idea what these things are?"

"Aliens." Spider-Woman chirps, trying to lighten the mood if only by a little bit. "Ugly, ugly aliens. I am so disappointed. But it could be worse."

"How?!" Stacy, keeping his cool in the face of an alien invasion, was definitely not amused.

"They could be naked."

The silence from him stretches for a moment too long. Long enough for a few of the veterans on the comm line to find it funny. Even the dispatch operators working the comm line find it a little bit funny. It just goes to show how good they are at what they do that they don't miss a beat and keep doing their jobs.

"Why did I even ask?"

"No idea Stacy. You should know better."

"Roy! You lucky son of a bitch!"

"Still good. I've the south end of Stark tower covered. Panther brought in some help and damn if they don't kickass. You are a lucky, lucky woman Spidey."

"Don't I know it." She says with a laugh even as one of the lasers skim a little too close for comfort. She punches the driver in the face before crushing the controls and letting it crash into the clear sidewalk.

"Right. My guys and our back up are holding for now but we really need a plan. Tell me what you guys need."

"I've got an idea." Stacy starts slowly. "Its crazy."

"I don't know if you noticed." Roy starts. "But we're being invaded by aliens. Crazy is just what we need right now."

"Right. The fire chief still on the line?"
"Present and accounted for. Give me something."

As Stacy outlines his plan, Penny once more feels a startlingly burst of pride.

Jensen is a veteran police officer of New York but he's originally from Virginia. When he had first came upstate the last thing he expected was to have his world turned upside down by an Omega superhero. Or that, years later, he'd be helping civilians get to safety with the help of a few straggler beat cops and his SWAT team, only to be cornered by a unit of aliens and have their hides saved.

"Did you do that?"

"I-I..." Her stuttering and trembling got worse. But there was no mistaking that he just saw a teen electrictue an entire unit of aliens. With her hands.

"Lucy?" Her brother shakes behind her. "Are they gone?"

Her parents stare in shock from the ground. Disbelief and horror growing. Jensen doesn't care if they knew or not. All he sees is a young girl, who definitely has superpowers, scared for her life and the lives of her family enough to lash out in public. If it were any other situation he'd be concerned and just a little bit more cautious. But this is the situation they're in and he's just so damn grateful he doesn't give a damn if she spontaneously grew fairy wings.

(In another life, Jensen would have been so disgusted with mutants and so horrified of the power they had over the common people that he would actively work against them. He would lobby for their exclusion from public events and government benefits. He would go on to rally support for mutant registration and containment. His work would be the deciding factor against them in South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, and parts of Florida. He would not see them as people but as a threat to the existence of mankind.)

(This is not that Jensen.)

Unknowningly, the group of civvies and junior officers he is escorting look to him for how to react. The shock of the day stealing away much of their reaction and rational thought.

So when he asks...

"Can you do it again?"

They accept this new reality. One where even a scared teenager with superpowers, a SWAT team and a few police are all that stand between them and the aliens who want them dead.

"Y-yeah." She stutters, still somewhat in shock but his next questions are so rapid and said with such command they give her a bit of focus, ground her to the present.

"How far can you hit? Do you need to see the target? Do we have to worry about friendly fire? Our comms going down? How long can you keep using your powers?"

She answers him the best she can. She doesn't know much because she didn't want her parents to hate her but she practiced if only to keep out of sight. To keep from being exposed. Now isn't the time for that though. She understand but it still scares her. She knows how dangerous she can be, how dangerous her powers can be. She's seen clips of villains like Electro and Shocker. Lucy doesn't want to be like them, to be seen as anything like them.
Fortunately, no one does. Its enough for him and for her. He welcomes her and her family into the group and before they move out again, he reaches out to her.

"Hey you scared?"

"Yes." Terrified. He cups her cheeks with both hands.

"You remind me of my daughter." He says gently as he brushes away a few tears that escape. "So I'm going to tell you what I tell her okay?" At her nod he goes on. "Its okay to be scared. So long as you don't let it control you. As long as you don't give in to fear or hate, there is no limit to what you can do. Okay? Now these alien fuckers? They want us dead. They want to see our corpses and our family's corpses burnt to dust. We're not going to let the happen right?"

"Right." She calmer now. Jensen's determination and belief strong enough to give her more courage than she'd ever thought she'd have.

"Good girl. Lets go. Do as I say and you'll be fine."

Lucy believes him. So she follows.

The plan Stacy enacted was in fact crazy but effective. It involved chickens, yes live chickens, a garbage truck, a few sharpshooters, and a few fire specialist from the fire department who are more than happy to teach aliens a lesson in fire. The result is pretty spectacular. All she and Black Panther had to do was herd as many of the aliens as possible and let the fireworks begin.

Although she will not be able to see chickens in the same light ever again. On the other hand, they made a physical barricade with trash and fire that routed a lot of stragglers from chasing civilians.

By this point the fighting has lasted only about an hour before they get guest. Its a familiar black jet with a very familiar pilot. When they unload their package, Spider-Woman recognizes some very familiar faces. Hawkeye, Black Widow, and Captain America. Seeing them sends a chill down her spine but Penny grits her teeth and forces herself not to react to seeing them. Especially Rogers.

Its easier with the others, her memories of them aren't so traumatic.

Mostly, she doesn't want others to take her reaction too badly. She wants to give the man a chance. A chance to prove her wrong, to prove he isn't like the man from her nightmares. She knows if she says something there will be weight to it. She knows. Penny wasn't blind or deaf during the beginning of the Omega Movement. Even as she's helping keep the rallies from erupting into violence, she's listening. She paying attention.

When she finally worked up the courage to speak. Penny chose her words carefully, and she's glad she did because people listened. There are papers and blogs that quoted her words. Tony is right there through it all but its clear to even her that as much as he's her partner in improving and changing the mindset to something better for Omegas, Tony is also choosing to follow her lead. Its a humbling feeling, knowing someone like Tony Stark trust her enough to let her lead him.

But she knows how dangerous that kind of influence can be. How it can ruin someone. So, this chance is all she can give him. But she won't be falling over herself to appease him. Her life did not revolve around him and she had people counting on her. Rogers will get his chance but Penny will protect her own.
"Who the hell are they?"

"SHIELD calls them the Avengers." She tries to be as nonchalant as possible but she's worked with these people before. Some for years. They notice very quickly that something about the new comers makes her uncomfortable. They leave it be for the moment more focused on the immediate threat.

"Who or what are they avenging?"

"Don't know. Not my idea."

"I just had a guy in a blue flag getup come by and bash a couple aliens in front of me. He supposed to be who I think he is?"

"Yeah captain icicle. He's such a joy." A familiar voice cuts into the comm.

"Iron man! Thank Christ. Any idea how to get rid of these things?"

"The giant portal guarded by a crazy alien prince. I'll keep you posted. How's the body armor?"

Spider-Woman catches sight of Iron Man as he heads toward his tower, armor dented and sparking. Its seen some serious combat but she hears that familiar determination lacing his very word.

And a familiar rage, too.

"Saved a bunch of my guys. A few burns but they're still holding solid and holding out. Remind me to get you a damn cake after this."

"Noted Cap. Now, excuse me. I've got an insane villain to threaten." As he drops from the comms Spider-Woman jumps in.

"I've got a bridge set up to evac the people on 34th. Tell the guys in blue to watch their heads. I've also got a web set up to snag a bunch that come this way."

"Copy Spidey."

From there the next half hour dissolves into a blur of fighting and defending. Thor and the Hulk make an appearance. With the massive amount of damage to the buildings, however, Spider-Woman and Black Panther fall back to helping fortify the perimeter and covering police getting any civilians to safety. Penny steps back in only when Iron Man asks for a few nets for the giant whales but she lets Iron Man and the other Avengers take the lead for now.

She's not surprised when Iron Man comes back from the portal and stands back up.

But its a close thing. A very close thing.

"Portal's closed and the aliens are down!"

"Finally."

"Captain" One dispatcher calls out, "Daredevil is at the perimeter asking for permission to help with search and rescue."

"He's cleared you know that."
"There's a woman with him, a Jessica Jones." Another dispatcher jumps in.

"I've got Jones cleared by Captain Monroe as a consultant to the NYPD with her own PI license."

"Captain Collins is dispatching Luke Cage to the epicenter."

"All right keep comms open and make sure Daredevil, Jones and Cage have a spare radio on hand." With those orders Captain Stacy goes on the comm line himself.

"Congratulations everyone, and I cannot believe I'm saying this, you've just survived your first alien invasion." After a brief applause he goes on, "Time to clean up."

Its after that, that Captain Stacy stands in the mobile command center fuming. He's not the only one who noticed the nuke aimed at them. He's also not the only one to notice how Iron Man had to drive it into the portal in the sky. Above all, he is also not the only one Iron Man patched through to the Avenger's secret comm line to hear whoever commands them of the incoming nuke but kept them from being noticed.

A nuke authorized by people he doesn't know to kill them all.

"Someone get me the SHIELD liaison on the line. And the Chief of Police. We need to have a chat about just under whose authority a U.S. based counter-terrorism and intelligence agency is able to sanction a nuclear strike."

"Yes, Sir."

He turns to one of officers acting as dispatch, a rookie a few weeks out of training, and lowers his voice.

"Callahan."

"Sir." She turns to him, voice just as low and hand covering her mic.

"You've got a recording of everything so far, right?"

"Every second of it, sir. Even what we probably shouldn't." Callahan says, referencing the short conversation between Iron Man and an unknown person. She grimaces at her choice of words but Stacy doesn't let her backtrack.

"Good. Listen very carefully. Make a copy of what we have and then send it off. I don't care to who. CNN, NBC, or BBC for all I care, even FOX or YouTube, if you have to. Time it if you need to. But when we get on line I need you to record our conversation and after-"

"-send it out, sir?" Callahan finishes. "You think they'll stonewall us, sir? Even with so many people and all the cameras?"

"In a heartbeat." Stacy pauses for a second. "And by any means necessary. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good." He lets her get to work but he already knows how the upcoming conversation is going to go. This isn't about Spider-Woman after all but all of New York and he isn't arrogant to think they'd be intimidated by a lowly captain and the Chief of Police from a single city.

The public is a very different animal, however. Its bigger. Its got teeth and claws.
And Stacy isn't afraid to let that animal take a bite out of them.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this took so long. This was originally slotted to be the next chapter but I lost my notes and could not for the life of me remember what this chapter's original purpose was supposed to be.

I want to say it had something to do with politics or Tony giving SHIELD a hard time but I honestly don't know. Maybe some fluff with out couples? I can only guess, really.

I'm sure once I post this and wait a day or two it'll come back to me and I'll want to slap myself.

But tell me what you guys think! And I hope you enjoy!
The Wedding

Chapter Summary

The Wedding of the Century!!!

Renown Omega Penelope Parker marries Prince of Wakanda!

(Wakanda officially enters the international stage in the eyes of the world public. The United Nations experiences a dynamic but not all together negative shift in power and some very serious questions surface. SHIELD sulks in the corner while other intelligent agencies gloat at their humiliation.)

Chapter Notes

Oh gosh! The Wedding!!

And the Smut!! I tried!! *Cries in corner* I don't know if I did this chapter the justice it deserves!!

WHAT HAVE I DONE!!

*Throws self off a cliff*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2012- Autumn of Wedding Drums

"If it excites you and scares you at the same time, it probably means you should do it."

"...Lucy Walker, a teenager from the Talent Unlimited High School, one of Manhattan's performing and liberal arts, is the first mutant to be awarded the Courageous Citizen Award for her actions during the New York invasion. She will also be the first mutant recognized for her contributions by state lawmen. The New York police have issued a statement thanking Ms. Walker for her assistance in the face from tremendous danger."

"...Earlier today, Lucy Walker, a teenage mutant, was not only given an award but actually received a surprise visit from both Spider-Woman and the ever elusive, Black Panther, during the ceremony!"

"Joining us this evening is Mutant Representative Dr. Henry Philip "Hank" McCoy and Professor of Anthropology, Saba Mahmood. Thank for joining us doctors."

"Thank you for having us and for giving us the opportunity to meet." Dr. Mahmood offers her hand to McCoy which he takes in return. "I look forward to speaking with you, Dr. McCoy."

"Likewise, Dr. Mahmood."
“Now with the acknowledgment from the NYPD, what do you think this means for mutantkind? To mankind?” The speaker asks curiously.

"It shows how mutants are people." Hank answers. "Mutants, just like non-mutants, have a compensentity for good. To do good. We are not people the public need to feel threatened by. We feel and fear just as non-mutants do. In fact, more mutants are afraid of themselves than non-mutants realize. Some cannot even touch their loved ones without risking serious harm."

"Are you implying a nature vs nurture argument Dr. McCoy?" Mahmood frowns slightly in disappointment.

"Oh goodness no. Not at all." McCoy turns to his colleague to quickly explain. "Mutant powers usually manifest during puberty which is a critical time for development and can negatively impact a person’s life, mentally and emotionally. That is why it is so critical for positive external influences."

"Ah. I see." Mahmood turns to the news person, "Dr. McCoy is correct. The development he refers to is the same that baseline humans face growing up. Some experiences have a serious negative impact and others are positive. There are some that leave psychological scars and behaviors especially during our teenage years, where hormones often play havoc with reason and logic."

"That is why this situation is so important and critical for both mutants and non-mutants." McCoy picks up. "It shows a very positive light not just on mutants but on people. Ms. Lucy was no doubt terrified how others, including her parents, would have taken her exposing herself. Especially given how similar they are to known villains."

"But not Officer Jensen."

"Exactly." Hank nods. "He showed her not only positive encouragement but the opportunity to see the good in her own abilities. To use her abilities, terrifying as they are, to protect the lives of her family and lives of those around her."

"It also shows just how progressive our society has grown." Mahmood interjects. "Previously, humans have vilified anything "magical" or anything we perceived as inhuman. The Salem Witch trails and the other numerous witch hunts that saw to the death and extermination of free thinking women is only one such example. But here we are seeing an evolution of thinking. Officer Jensen chose to see Ms. Walker as a person first than some one with power. That is the key, here and it is a tremendous step for mankind. To see beyond the "inhuman" aspect of what it means to be a mutant and to have that trust returned. It is simply an amazing step in our development for mutants and non-mutants alike and I look forward to where we all go from here."

The wedding of Omega Penelope Parker to the Prince of Wakanda is the biggest talk of the year. Invitations to the wedding are currently worth more than gold. It probably did not help that someone leaked a video of Penelope asking Tony Stark to walk her to her future husband since neither her father or her uncle are able. The short amount of time that video was on the web gained it more than enough hits and views to break the internet.

After all its not every day you see someone admit they see Tony Stark as a father and even less for the genius to cry in genuine joy at the honor.

So not only is the Princess Omega marrying an actual African Prince but Tony "Iron Man" Stark will be walking her to the alter. It enough to drive fans of both absolutely rabid. Numerous chatrooms in Penelope's fan base have exploded at the prospect of their idol marrying into royalty.
But mostly, everyone wants to know what kind of wedding she'll have. It is no secret that Penelope is not very religious and would not care for a traditional wedding. Traditions in Wakanda are also virtually unknown and it drives more than a few fan groups and bloggers to infer everything based on rumor and conspiracy. There were questions about everything. Why was the country isolated for so long? What did they do? What were their traditions like? What kind of dress would Penelope wear? Would the bride and groom Jump the Broom or Cross Sticks?

The Wakanda Embassy official website received more inquiries in the short time since the summer announcement than Wakanda's introduction to the United Nations the year before and its subsequent inclusion. Ramonda is quick to capitalize on this however and in a surprising twist, had a Q & A section added to the site and another announcement posted promising that the ceremony will be aired live.

A move that many were unsure of but since the reception would not be aired, many found the move curious.

Today is the day he's waited years for.

It is the day he will take his Omega as his wife, bond mate, and Queen. He can think of nothing better than being surrounded by his tribe and his country during such a momentous occasion. There is no question that his Omega thought the same with the invitation of her friends and family. Although, for the first time Wakanda will be hosting foreigners and while many were not happy, there were just as many who saw such a decision as a test.

If Wakanda can remain resolute in the face of tremendous change then they would be one step closer to dealing with whatever worried Honored Kwaku Ananse. In theory. It is the strongest working theory currently discussed among the people. It helped that many of the guest were vetted by both Penelope and the Dora Milaje. In attendance for the bride included her tribe: her Aunt May, Tony Stark and his bond mate James Rhodes, Pepper Potts, Happy Hogan, and Gwen Stacy.

Along with their immediate family such as the Rhodes and Stacy families.

Friends of the bride and groom were other heroes that the two had encountered. Most were meet by Penelope before T'Chaka allowed the Black Panther to make an appearance. The Daredevil, Jessica Jones, Luke Cage, Fantastic Four, Captain Britain, American Eagle, Japan's Big Hero 6, Canada's Guardian and Shaman from Alpha Flight, the Banshee from Ireland, and even Hank McCoy aka Beast from Xavier's school.

A few students were allowed to attend since Xavier could not. Kurt "Nightcrawler" Wagner, Scott "Cyclops" Summers, Ororo "Storm" Munroe, Rahne "Wolfsbane" Sinclair, Roberto "Sunspot" da Costa, Robert "Bobby/Iceman" Louise Drake, and Katherine "Shadowcat" Pryde. Some were previous students who became teachers and faculty while others were some of Xavier's newest students.

For security reasons, no one was in uniform. To those watching, they are just friends from all over the world, and students being given the opportunity to experience history with their teachers. It also helped keep the other non-mutant guests comfortable and from suspecting anything.

There were other non-mutant guests as well. Several were diplomats from the United Nations such as Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Presidents of the United States, France, Ireland, and Prime
Ministers of Japan, UK, and Australia. There are also several other celebrities. Beyoncé, Rihanna, Adele, Taylor Swift, and Whitney Houston, to name a lucky few in attendance.

All the guests were seated and the stage was set. As the morning passed, the Wakandan wedding began. The front rows of the wedding consisted of T'Challa's and Penelope's family. Then in many other rows sat their beloved friends and those they considered family.

The ceremony is placed outside amongst the beautiful sunset on top a green stage, decorated with gardenias and blue irises. On both sides of the stage stood two large black panther statues. Loud drums started to play as the wedding would officially began. Many began to cheer and clap, which is expected during a Wakandan wedding. However, before the bride and groom would make their appearance, the best man and maid of honor would walk down the isle, making their way to T'Chaka.

T'Shan, T'Challa's cousin, and Gwen wore their best as they walked down the isle. Once they took their place at the stage, the drums started a new tempo, quicker from the steady rhythm they started with.

When the Prince of Wakanda appeared, dressed in a suit and an excited gleam in his eyes, no one could take their eyes off of him. But he cared nothing for his audience. When his bride appeared the rest of the world simply fell away. He had eyes only for his future Queen, his Omega. His Sun and Stars. Traditionally, a warrior member of her Tribe escorts her to the stage, representing her journey through life with them, and then she meets T'Challa on the stage, representing a continuing of her journey of her own free will with him.

Even though her tribe is an unorthodox one, the person she choice to escort her is no less a warrior from Wakanda's perspective. Tony Stark, in full Iron Man regalia, escorts his goddaughter to the stage with one arm held aloft and his armored hand carefully encased around Penny's. The bride is beautiful as she walks at his side, head held high and an excited smile on her face.

The walk is barely two minutes long but before she walks onto to the stage, Tony walks out of the armor eyes glistening (No he's not crying, there's something in his eye!), and Penny gives him one last hug before moving toward her future. T'Challa watches her every move and fights not to just gather her into his arms and serenade her with all the future possibilities laid out before them.

He thinks back briefly on the thousand kisses they've shared and the flowers he's surprised her with. (He's learned not to overwhelm her too quickly with his affection but to gradually build up until she willingly drowns in the force of his love.) He knows she dreams of the children they will one day have. Not too soon but he endeavors she'll have no regrets when they do.

She is standing in front of him, bright and alive and extraordinary. He falls ever more in love with her. The ceremony continues, the couple are blessed and vows are made. The two share a passionate kiss and seal themselves together for the rest of their lives. Everyone applauds and the drummers start up in a new song, upbeat, excited and joyous.

The rest of the World looks on...and keeps turning.

The reception is bright and colorful. The drummers are loud and the food is rich. There are dancers on the floor celebrating the bonding of the Prince and Princess. The guest start to mingle and let loose. Penelope and T'Challa share more than one dance. They eat to their hearts content, sharing the same plate. Mostly, T'Challa keeps his eyes on his Omega, soon to be his bond mate. There are a few surprises but they are all pleasant.
Gwen blushes as she asks Kurt to dance. The Omega mutant, clearly blue and very much not covering his mutation, hesitating accepts. The only one not happy? George Stacy. That's his daughter. Oh but his wife, Helen? She could care less because that is a male Omega and she wants grandbabies! For certain, her grip on her husband's arm could bend steel.

Penny is just glad her best friend is having fun and she knows Kurt is a great guy.

That doesn't mean she and T'Challa don't find Helen badgering Hank and Cyclops with certain questions absolutely hilarious. Penelope doesn't think they ever expected someone like Helen Stacy.

It's probably for the best.

For a moment T'Challa is certain Ororo will speak to him, say something. But after catching her eyes, whatever war she fought seemed to be decided, she simply smiles and nods her head in acceptance. An agreement that what they once had is where it belongs, in the past. He regrets nothing, none of their history and wishes her the best in her future endeavors.

The highlight of his night, however, is that Harry Osborn is nowhere to be found. The other Alpha had been near relentless in his pursuits of his Ntanda and even though the large scandals did the company in, that did not mean his pursuits ended. They were merely grounded to a halt as the young Osborn built his family name back up from the ground. He and his company are being carefully monitored but T'Challa does not doubt that the other Alpha will start his chase up again.

Not that it will matter come tomorrow.

By sunrise, He and Penelope will be bonded mind, body and soul. When they passed on, they will run the fields of Bast for eternity but that is not for some time. T'Challa will make sure of that.

When they retire to their rooms, they are in high spirits. The joy of the night still clinging to their every move.

Slowly, however, the energy turns more intense. They don't look away from each other but the tension isn't heavy. It doesn't suffocate them. It comes as no surprise to them when they notice they don't know who made the first move. T'Challa carefully pulls out the decorations in her hair and Penny starts undoing his tie. It is domestic and fills them with warmth.

He kisses her slowly and passionately, savoring her taste. Her dress falls to the ground and his shirt joins it. He pulls her close as she responds, arms wrapping around his neck and caressing his skin. Heat starts to rise and coil. They've danced this dance before. They've let the fire burn and consume them, take them to oblivion. But this night is different.

This night when they reach for the peak as one, they will return as one. One pair, one bond.

He lifts her into his arms and caresses her with his hands, his lips, his tongue. When he lays her down, he doesn't let her go, stripping her of the last of her garments. She isn't shy in her wants. Oh no. She divests him of the last of his clothes just as quickly and smoothly.

But they do not rush.

Hands explore whole expanses of skin, learning the secret places that take their breath away and their toes curl.

It is a heedy experience. Enough to make T'Challa high and drunk from sheer erotica. She opens
for him like a flower in full bloom and he takes his time tasting her. When she trembles and begs
he does not stop. He does not give her what she wants.

He drinks. He licks and sucks until she peaks. Then he does it again. And again. He cannot get
enough of her taste. He wants to taste her all night but his own throbbing manhood demands
attention and his Omega is losing patience with him.

He lovingly kisses his way back to her neck, licking and kissing where he will mark her. Where he
will permanently link them together.

"Please...please...T'Challa."

He eases himself gently inside until he is fully sheathed inside her tight channel. They both moan
at the sensations that bombard them. He grips the sheets around them and tries to-

She flexes around him, tightening-

-he lets go. He pulls out and thrusts powerfully back inside. She grabs hold of him, wrapping one
arm around his back, feeling his muscles contort and flex. Her other grips the sheets and doesn't let

T'Challa watches her for hints of pain and pleasure. When he hits a certain angle and she screams
his name, he hits it again.

"Yes! Yes! T'Challa! Please...oh please." Her words soon become incoherent beyond his name.

He takes great pleasure in that, in being the center of her world. Still he does not relent. He thrusts
faster and harder, lifting one leg over his shoulder to plunge deeper. Penelope tears at the sheets
beneath her and scratches at his back.

With her strength, a normal man would have had his flesh peeled away and left him bleeding to
death in minutes. To T'Challa, its no more than a paper cut and sends them both into a frenzy.

Desperate to reach oblivion together.

T'Challa glances down as his cock thrusts in and out, her lips swollen and flushed. He can feel
himself reaching his own threshold and reaches down to fondle her pearl.

"Ah...ahh...nnhg!" A deep flush has broken its way across her skin and he wants to taste it. To taste
every spot of skin its reached but he doesn't stop. They're both covered in sweat and panting in
between every moan. Time is irrelevant even though T'Challa is distantly aware that a significant
amount has passed. He lets go of her leg, wraps his arms around her waist and smoothly rolls them
into a sitting position without breaking rhythm.

"Wha...?" For a moment she's confused but her husband is quick to reach back down toward her
clitrois.

"I promised you." He growls, "To have you above me, to see the absolute bliss as I take you to the
highest plains of euphoria."

"Hahaha...ahh!" Her breathless laughter is stolen away as the pleasure sweeps through her.

Many Alphas would find the prospect of an Omega "on top" discerning. T'Challa could careless
for the opinions of others. All he cares about his Omega and the pleasure he can give her. Seeing
her like this, riding his cock and screaming his name? It is enough to almost make him feral.
They are not there yet and he growls darkly. He pistons like a machine possessed, an Alpha in rut. But he will not last much longer. He will crest soon and there is a familiar darkness encroaching at the edges of his vision. His fangs grow in anticipation and his thrusts become erratic.

"T'Challaaaaaaa!" Finally.

Finally, he can feel her reaching the edge. Her womanhood flutters around his cock before clamping down onto him like a vice and her back arcs, neck bared to him.

He strikes, aiming for a place high on her neck, and bites. His cock swells and bursts, flooding her womb with his seed. Stars burn across his retinas, scorching his skin and melting his mind to nothing.

Its bliss.

When they return to themselves they feel every ache and bruise. T'Challa falls back, taking Penny with him, his exhaustion bone deep. Penelope whimpers slightly, still highly sensitive and T'Challa reluctantly slides out of her warmth.

"So good." She slurs to him sleepily. "...have to do it again..."

"Yes."

That was his original goal but alas, their own superhuman biology made that difficult. Erotic and exquisitely enjoyable to be sure. But difficult. He will enjoy working toward changing that. For now, the presence of his Omega, safe and satisfied curled up at his side lulls him into a deep slumber.

Both ignore the coming light of dawn on the horizon.

"Who exactly does SHIELD report to? Who oversees their policies and procedures?"

"This World Security Council. Who is on it? Why is is called the World when its an American based organization? These are just a few questions we have and no one is answering the public."

"What is their end goal? Global security? Then why not work with the U.N?"

"Exactly who gave them the authority to work as they do? Across borders and without supervision? I mean can we even trust an organization we know nothing beyond its name?!"

"Tony Stark didn't seem surprised they sent a nuke to New York. Oh he was angry for sure but not surprised. What else have they done, morally questionable by the way, that makes Tony Stark, former weapons manufacturer and Merchant of Death, angry?!"

"Why has no one stepped forward to address the public concerns?"

"The FBI and CIA have expressed the same concerns of the public and have at this time been unable gain even a comment from the erstwhile SHIELD organization."

"How long will SHIELD try to keep the public out? How long will they remain silent? The World demands answers and if the World Security Council really cared about global security than they and SHIELD should be willing to give those answers. That they haven't said a word, says a whole lot, don't you think?"
Chapter End Notes

Chapter 8 has been edited because I was looking back and realized I'd left the ending with Bast unedited...so there's that.

On another note: Penny's fans are a rabid bunch of creatures who've lost their minds at this development. Because Penny is a troll who told no one she was engaged to a Prince. Just that she was "seeing someone very sincere and committed to their relationship."

Now their Princess is Legally an actual Princess. Internationally. And her Prince is one hot piece of Alpha! (In other news, the Prince and Princess make a rather striking Power Couple don't they?)

It does not take long for the fans to catch their second wind except Fanfic Writers make an appearance and No One is prepared for them.
Honeymoon Time

Chapter Summary

T'Challa and Penelope enjoy their Honeymoon. Trying new things and meeting up with friends...sort of.

Meanwhile, SHIELD faces some hard questions.

Chapter Notes

UnBetaed!

This chapter was a hard one. But I'm proud how it turned out. Tell me what you think.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2013- A Year for Friends

"A Real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out." -Walter Winchell

Following their wedding, the Prince and Princess of Wakanda, T'Challa and Penelope, begin their honeymoon first by traveling all over Wakanda, allowing the people to see their future King and Queen. It is also a chance for the couple to get back in touch with the other tribal leaders and people. Although this is a practice that the couple have taken every so often since the courtship started, it is a practice that the Royal family have done for generation.

After they travel the world, carefully sampling all foods and drinks with the Dora Milaji at their backs. They also meet new people and gently expand the influence of Wakanda.

It doesn't take long for pictures of them to hit the internet with all the power of a runaway freight train. Although, no one is allowed to take pictures with them, they are out in public often enough for onlookers to snap a picture and post it online. There are the traditional tourist pictures with national monuments and there are more non-traditional pictures of the couples at events such as galas, museums, restaurants, university festivals and fairs. They are also spotted, in black, as they attend Whitney Houston's funeral a little over two months later.

While respectful of the passing of a iconic woman, the couple do not stay long in the states and after giving their condolences to her family, they move on. But many make note of how nice it is to see foreign dignitaries take a moment to pay their respects to another international icon.

The couple are in India when they see the news about Tony's mansion crashing into the sea below. They try everything to get in contact but all that Pepper could say for certain is that he's alive. Tony's Alpha? Nearly gone feral if not for whatever recording Pepper got her hands on. Still, they make plans to send out a few agents and trackers out into the field. The number is kept small
because Tony was in the suit and the possible trajectories he could have used to get to safety are near limitless.

No one is happy but they brace themselves. SI is in good hands with Pepper and War Machine is guarded and can only be used by Tony's Alpha. Penelope and T'Challa know they can't rush over to the states to help because there is nothing they can do. But it doesn't stop Penny from calling Tony's personal number every half hour or as close to as she can. They leave voice messages each time until the mailbox rejects anymore due to having reached max capacity.

They keep calling.

It's not until three days later that they get a call from Pepper. It takes Penny several long minutes to get the fiery red head to calm down from her angry and frustrated rant. They only get bits and pieces from her but everyone is okay and Tony's bruised but alive. Pepper is still angry with him but it's a relieved anger. The kind reserved for those occasions people you love make you so frustrated and afraid at the same time. They call him and there are no words to describe the utter relief at hearing his voice.

"Tony is everything okay? I just got off the phone with Pepper and she swears you almost got yourself killed on purpose."

"Lovebirds! Hey! How's the honeymoon?"

"Anthony." T'Challa's low voice manages to convey just how utterly unimpressed he is with Tony's poor attempt at deflection and his worry, at the same time.

"Okay. Okay. Let me explain. This guy called himself the Mandarin..."

What follows is a tale so controverted and terrifying that it can only be real.

"Tony you should have called us! We would have come in a heartbeat!"

"My friend, this was not a battle you should have had to fight. Especially one alone."

Their conviction and care is powerful. It reaches across the miles and miles between them. As much as Tony hates having scared them he's also kind of glad to hear it, to hear proof of how much they care for him. To know that there are people who would miss him if anything were to happen to him. It makes him a bit giddy.

"Sorry guys. I know that. Okay? I know but I wasn't thinking really. I was just...just so absolutely pissed. On the other hand it feels like I can breathe again."

"I think that's the only good thing to come out of this."

Rhodey growls over the phone, arms wrapped possessively around the younger man's waist. The Alpha nuzzles his mate's neck to reassure both of them that they are okay. Tony, feeling better with both his Alpha and members of his family showing they care, finds himself finally relaxing after the pass few stressful days.

"Um excuse me. No. The absolutely amazing angry make up sex counts too!"

Just like that tensions disappear and they laugh. One of their own was attacked and the family was hurting. But not anymore. Now they're alive, all of them. Their wayward engineer made it back to them with all his pieces intact.
"And the amazing iron kid you meet?" Penny teases.

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

"That's adorable. You found yourself a sidekick." T'Challa joins the teasing with a grin.

"Oh shut it."

The insistent giggling over the phone doesn't bother him as much as he pretends and his honey bear simply hums into his neck. Cuddling and warm. He's glad he has so many good friends and he considers meeting Harley a blessing. Although the kid gives him ideas...

"Anyway!" Tony speaks up over the laughter, "JARVIS where's my brucie bear? He's around here somewhere. He helped me get some preliminary work on Extremis done."

"Need some more brain power?"

"Well since you so graciously volunteered, pull up a tablet and I'll send you what we've got so far." Rhodes sighs before speaking loudly.

"All baby geniuses do not forget to eat and sleep. Bruce is the only one who seems to get this."

"He's sleeping?" Tony mocks offense.

"Actually Sir," JARVIS interrupts, "Mr Banner is currently in the kitchen making lunch. He request I remind you that no science is to be had until you've eaten."

"Knew there was a reason I liked him."

"Indeed Sir Rhodes."

"What am I? Chopped liver?" Penny's mock outrage makes her husband and her god(mother) laugh.

"You're no better missy!"

Penelope reaches for something and suddenly, the pair is on a screen looking back at the couple in the lab. She raises her hand with half a blueberry muffin layered with jam in her hand.

"Excuse you. I eat. I eat so much I need the science time to work out." Rhodes response is cut off by an (un)surprising voice at the door to the lab.

"Should I come back?" Four pairs of eyes turn to Bruce with a tray in his hands, complete with his lunch and a large glass of green tea.

"Right on time science bro!" Tony cheers and Rhodes turns back to the couple on screen.

"No science after five hours. For all of you."

The smothering glare he gives the geniuses would have been intimidating if they weren't so use to his mother henning. But they are familiar with his methods of ensuring they took their breaks and took care of themselves. They know better than to push their luck with him. Besides, with the four of them working in tandem, they're confident that it should only take half that time to get work done.

"Loud and clear Colonial."
"I expect better from you, your Highness."

"I make no promises." T'Challa cheekily responds.

After helping Dr. Banner and Tony stabilize Extremis for Pepper and Tony's surgery. The royal duo stay for a short while. They get to spend some time with Bruce and make sure Tony is recovering. Of course the latter is quickly derailed when said hero trapezes off to help Dardevil get into a high end party in an effort to track his latest target. By the time they arrive the charity gala is in full swing. There are politicians and other people of influence. T'Challa and Penelope have greeted several well wishers and even a few upcoming prodigies. As interesting as some of them are, they are not the main reason the new world power couple are currently in Philadelphia. Among the attendees are Tony Stark, Matt Murdock and Franklin "Foggy" Nelson. The real reason the new married couple have not left the states.

Fortunately, Tony had managed to drag Matt and Foggy into a conversation, making it seem both natural and spontaneous. They mingle and socialize but always come back together, making them an odd group. But they have fun, trading stories about some of the people and their experiences at previous galas. Like the time Justin Hammer almost created an international incident when he made the daughter of Australia's Prime Minister cry.

They don't stay long, thankfully, and each makes a discreet exit from the party. Foggy turns in early while Tony, in a move to dispel any type of scolding, pulls Penelope to Science! with him at his nearby flat and T'Challa and Matt hit the streets.

"How is everything?" Daredevil asks quietly. "No one's making a fuss?"

"No. Everything is blissful. My country is safe and making stronger ties everyday. My wife is happy and...satisfied."

"I did not need to know that last bit." Daredevil growls as Black Panther chuckles from the dark. Its a throaty laugh, full of mischief and humor. "I should have left you with the science duo."

"Peace, my friend. It has been some time since we last hunted together."

"I'm surprised Penny didn't join us."

"She has missed spending time with Tony and she worries for him. His recovery from the invasion and the mandarin is slow. His struggles with the government have not helped."

"He's getting help at least. And Penny's pet spider just loves to help."

Black Panther burst laughing out loud, scaring a few straggling gang bangers below them in the alley. They scatter and Daredevil watches them while his partner for the night composes himself. The red armored hero gestures away and the duo parkour over the rooftops.

"Yes. Ashaki is a very spirited familiar and she's taken an immense liking to Tony. Does he still have her crash his board meetings?"

"No. Potts put a quick end to that after party crash number four."

"That many?"

"It took her that many to figure out what he was doing and catch him in the act. She wasn't happy and pulled out the big guns."
A smirk flickers across Daredevil's face and his partner chuckles again. The big guns involve Aunt May, James or, if truly necessary Mamma Rhodes with Aunt May. A scolding from both women is a terrifying sight and more than enough to cow a billionaire and his spider accomplice. The pair eventually make their way to their target's location, a bar in the more seedy part of town.

They have a good night.

(Their target? A sex trafficker whose name isn't very important, regrets waking up that morning.)

Several months later, Penelope and T'Challa turn up in Tokyo, Japan. They buy out the entire Lucky Cat Cafe for the night with the Big Hero 6 team and opt for a night in with good friends. They enjoy the fresh made sushi, chahan (fried rice), and Yakitori (skewered grilled meat) while the group catches up since the wedding. Its just after Hiro calls Tony Stark to join them via video chat that The Call comes in.

"Pardon the interruption." JOCASTA interrupts, placing herself on speaker, "There appears to be an alien presence in London. Captain Britain is on the line."

"Put us through."

Hiro and his team send the couple bewildered looks but are quick to understand how serious the situation is. Honey mutes the television but also starts flipping through the channels, looking for any coverage in London. Tony mentally shifts gears and turns serious.

"Bloody afternoon this is." the British hero growls, "Iron man is this one of yours?"

"No. Absolutely not. I have no idea why Thor is in London. Hell, he didn't say when he would be back! What can you tell me?"

Iron Man's voice is hard but also a touch anxious. Something he would normally never allow to be heard but he knows the people he's talking to. He's worked with them on various occasions and he knows they won't give him a hard time. They won't criticize him for not having all the answers. Captain Britain starts rattling off everything he knows about the alien elves. Space elves.

At this point Hiro and his team have pulled out their own gear, tablets and computers. Honey stops flipping to a local channel where the elves are pouring out of a portal. But not the same one as from the New York Invasion.

"These readings are insane."

"Its like one giant loop!"

"Infinte loops? Like a tunnel effect?"

"Well its not a permanent one. A few fighter jets just disappeared and reappeared."

The Japanese team are geniuses in their own right. Its hard to tell who says what. Each one bouncing ideas off each other and following the other's trains of thought along with their own. Tony cuts in every now and again between answering Captain Britain. To an outsider, it would seem a chaotic mess. But these are heroes and friends.

They get it and each other. There is no confusion here.

"So he's working alone? Right then, just wanted to be sure I wasn't walking into some plan or
ambush."

"No problem. I'm getting clearance to send the Iron Legion for search and rescue operations. You need some help?"

"Captain Marvel is only thirty minutes away. He should be here soon. Between the two of us and the legion, we should be able to handle it. Could use some damage control and help getting the civvies out of harms way but these elves aren't armored like reported about those chewy bastards from New York. But I'll keep you posted."

"Be careful Captain Britain." Penelope cuts in before he hangs up. "If you end up on the other side of any of those portals when whatever is happening ends, you'll be stuck there."

"Of course your highness."

Penny huffs. Friends are great in tough spots, she knows this, but they also know how to get on her nerves. Maybe its all the karma coming back at me for being a snarky, smartass.

Her foul mood quickly evaporates in the face of her husband's sharp focus and the in-depth analysis of the aliens and the portal. A fond smile graces her lips as the science talk soothes the mounting anxiety. They're too far to make a big difference in the fight. No doubt Tony will make his way to London to help with the clean up like the rest of them but for now they do their part. Surprisingly, its enough.

Despite their best efforts, SHIELD is still facing heavy scrutiny. Director Nick Fury remains impassive. As if the ramifications of the world turning against SHIELD doesn't move him at all and in a way, it doesn't. Standing at the helm of the Helicarrier command center, he turns to Maria Hill.

"How bad is it?"

"We've still got inquires from all over the board. We've managed to deal with most of them here at home. But the ones overseas? That's a different story. They are not happy."

"Not surprising. We have stepped on a lot of toes."

"Our agents in New York are still clearing out the archives and they should arrive in D.C. in a few hours. But our agents in California and Missouri are reporting issues with reporters and agents from others bureaus. Its not harassment but its making them nervous."

"Of course it is. We have any free agents in the area? Send them in to help out. This storm is going to get a lot worse before it gets better."

"And the Council, sir?"

"They have bigger issues than how I run things."

"Of course, sir."

At that moment, Fury's phone rings again. He knows who that is and simply silences it. But like an annoying chiwawa, it goes on and on. Its to be expected of course. One does not ignore the head of the CIA and MI6 without good cause. There was also the issue of the media storm that practically decimated SHIELD's standing as a covert ops organization. Fury expected the fallout to
heat up enough to drag him into a meeting with the Council sooner rather than later. But until they manage to come up with something on their end, Fury ran SHIELD like he owned it.

Considering all the effort and work he's put into it, he practically did anyway.

As things stood, Public Relations for SHIELD was scrambling for cover. The best they've managed to do was throw the Security Council under the bus and blame everything on the Chain of Command. Essentially, the answer to every question anyone asked boiled down to "we were following orders." It was a shitty excuse and Fury knew it. However, since the Council's identities were unknown to him and Fury is bound by his oaths, he and his most trusted were safe for now.

That safety would not last long. The neared screen flashed, Priority One. Fury didn't keep them waiting. In the end, however, he really wished he had the willingness to bash his head against the nearest wall.

"We've determined the leak. Spider-Woman. It was only after contact during the invasion with her liaison that such sensitive information was leaked. It is a known fact that the woman is protective of her city and its people, even when she isn't there."

"As a result of her interference with a government sanctioned organization, we find her guilty of treason and she is to be brought it or terminated."

"It is our preference that she be brought in alive. Her unique biology would be a boon to this organization in the face of such controversy."

"You know that's not going to be possible right?" Fury cuts in before they get off focus. "She's got powerful friends including Tony Stark. That's not including her fans with your regular joe and law enforcement. Any action against her would make it impossible to cover up, from making it look like an accident or an act of random revenge. We'd become persona non grata."

"Regardless it is a risk we have to take. SHIELD cannot afford anymore mistakes."

"There has been far too much talk in the press. We need to contain the fallout. We're barely holding it together as it is. Its a miracle non of our covert missions have come to light or that any agents in the field have managed to keep their covers thus far."

"That does not change the objective. Spider-Woman has eluded SHIELD for far too long. She cannot be allowed to hide any longer."

"Find the leak. Find Spider-Woman."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this took forever. RL is kicked me pretty hard but I'm bouncing back! So no worries!

Note: Captain Marvel is male, yes. As in he is Mar-Vell and that will be expanded upon later. But do not be alarmed Carol will make her debut! So hold her rage for...another chapter...later. I promise it will be worth the wait. (Oh gosh, so worth it.)

Anyway, just wanted to show how some of the other heroes interact and interconnect.
And yes, this year had IM3 and Thor 2. Its a busy year all around.

Hope you guys enjoyed it and see you next chapter!!
Chapter Summary

SHIELD's plans go awry.

But our heroes pull through...mostly. Some are better off than others.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

2014- In which plans never survive contact with the enemy.

"A hero is someone who voluntarily walks into the unknown." -Tom Hanks

T'Challa stared down at an anomaly. A man out of time. Captain America. Steve Rogers. The future king of Wakanda watched his every move and wondered at the discrepancy between history, legend, and truth. The man he stares at is not the same as the one in the tall tales told about him. Not at all.

The body at his feet, shifted and he struck quickly, hitting the nerves that would keep the Widow unconscious. It is a sign of unquestionable change where the Black Panther stood to the side and watched his wife work. Iron Fist stood two buildings over with Hawkeye likewise unconscious. It is not the first trap that they have helped thwart. This has been going on for months and has started to annoy a large number of people around the world. The first trap, Spider-Woman outmaneuvered beautifully and that T'Challa, sadly, had missed. At the time the attack did not include the Captain and the fact he appeared now showed an interesting change in dynamic.

Just what is SHIELD doing?

It is something that many of her friends and family are very interested in finding out. Captain America is not a trained spy so it is assumed he would be more likely to drop something important during the heat of battle. His primary target is Spider-Woman for "treason", according to SHIELD. For some reason SHIELD has decided to blame his wife for their new and exposed state to the world and claim it is treason. That is all they knew so far but the insistence that Spider-Woman be brought in made many anxious. For what purpose would they seek to attack her now? On whose orders did SHILED believe they have the authority to do so?

And did they honestly believe that Spider-Woman would fall to Captain Rogers?

The man may be the first American super soldier but he is not the absolute peak of humanity. He is not the best mankind has to offer. Spider-Woman is proof of that even now as she dancing around Rogers punches and haphazardly thrown shield. The Black Panther glares at the stolen vibranium but otherwise keeps still and silent. Tony already had a plan in the works to bleed SHIELD dry, including the theft and illegal seizing of someone else's property. A tactic they seem to enjoy like an overly fat cow.

Still, he keeps sharp eyes on the pair below him. His wife may be holding back but he can tell
Rogers is not and it is showing. He is tiring himself, putting all his effort into his useless endeavor and the only reason he still stands is because of the serum coursing through his veins. A serum that is grossly misused and unrealized.

"Pathetic." Black Panther is not surprised to hear the Devil of Hell's Kitchen appear at his side.

"So you noticed as well?" That is good. "I feel like I've seen this story before. Something about a bat trying to be a bird."

"Stellaluna."

"That was about a baby bat if I remember correctly." Iron Fist drops his...package next to T'Challa's prey. "I doubt Rogers would appreciate being compared to a baby bat."

"I doubt the bat would appreciate Rogers being compared to her either." Daredevil snips back.

The harsh sound of a body connecting to a brick wall distracts them from their conversation. Rogers' body leaves an indent in the wall behind him and his shield is nowhere to be seen. He shifts his center of gravity and raises his fist like a boxer. Which is ridiculous to the other heroes since Spider-Woman is a balanced fighter, being about to fight long, mid and even close range. Although she preferred mid to close range combat that is not to say she cannot to long range if she wanted to. It was a simple fact among the heroes and villains of the day, fighting Spider-Woman was like gambling with dice. Long range left you open to quick capture with webs and the laws of physics and gravity with little to no bruising but mid to close range left you open to a whole plethora of pain or worse...humiliation.

She is a trickster after all.

There is still no shortage of people who have been taken by the police still webbed up and their pants around their ankles. Its very different being brought in with your underwear on display for all to see. Its usually enough to keep many would be criminals from going over the edge. No one wants to risk that kind of humiliation before being booked after all. Unless its winter. No one has to worry about being pantsing during the holidays and the winter times.

Still, any one of them would have groaned at the walking American flag that prepping for close combat with Spider-Woman was plain dumb. Alas, none of those people are here.

Suddenly, Daredevil is leaping over T'Challa and diving for Rogers, a snarl usually reserved for certain denizens of his hunting grounds. Iron Fist and Black Panther do not hesitate to follow. Daredevil gets two good hits in before T'Challa has to wrestle him away from attempting to cave in the other man's face. A quick strike from Iron Fist and Rogers is joining his comrades in unconsciousness. Spider-Woman takes less than a minute to tie all three together in a web before turning to help calm the Devil from what looks to be a near apocalyptic fury.

"What he said doesn't matter." She cuts off his senseless tirade.

"He-

"Excuse you, since when do I define my life by the words of a seventy year old relic?" The eyes of her mask narrow on the other red clad hero. "Since when do I care for the opinion of someone from the 40s? Since when do I bow my head to anyone, be they Alpha or otherwise, including my own mate? Since when have I ever allowed any Alpha to use my status as an Omega against me and put me down?"

Her own temper is controlled but no less powerful. It works to cool their friend's temper at Rogers'
no doubt careless words about his mate's status as an Omega. He is curious and cautious about what the exact words were. Curious about what could have set Daredevil off but cautious because T'Challa is aware of his own faults. Had he heard it as Matt did, there is no question T'Challa, wrapped in the garb of his Tribe, would have torn the man's throat out without hesitation.

Knowing that, he does not ask. He glances at the helpless American tied with a copious amount of webbing and flexes his unsheathed claws carefully. He will not ask...but he can guess.

"No." Daredevil answers calmly, finally relaxing. Black Panther turns back to the pair, grateful for the slight distraction. He does not think he will ever be unaware of the man from now on. No, he refuses to be unaware of him. "That doesn't mean you had to hear something like that."

"True." she relents. "But I have friends and family who tell me something very different. Every day and every time I see them. There maybe people who think and agree with him but there are also an equal amount of people who think and agree with me. So long as there are people like that, I won't have to worry about his opinion mattering to me."

"That is good." Iron Fist bows his head slightly to Spider-Woman. "A positive mind is a powerful force but I believe it is time we vacate the area."

One last glance at the American super soldier, T'Challa follows the others and leaves. With the exception of the human size dent in the wall, no one leaves a trace that they were ever there. This round, once again, belongs to Spider-Woman. But the Black Panther finds he tires of this game with SHIELD. Tony has a plan in place but perhaps it is time that plan received some expedited help.

...Shame they never get the chance to execute said plan.

She's exhausted and jet lagged. Penelope had just returned to the States for interviews for a few Executive Assistants for her company so that she could live in Wakanda full time in between her other responsibilities. That's not to say she doesn't regret the reduced time spent in her home city. She makes sure to stop by the precinct and greet some of the rookies. She had just finished checking up on her New York headquarters before heading out to California.

The moment she lands it all goes to hell.

She's running around with JOCASTA in her ear reporting about this home invasion or this attack. All of them are agents or families of agents from SHIELD. She has no idea what's going on. After Coulson died, the liaison with Spider-Woman went down the tube. Any relationship she did have with SHIELD vanished when they sent Rogers after her and then kept sending him paired up with either Widow or Hawkeye. One would think after the last incident with Daredevil in New York they'd get the hint but nope. Not a one it seems.

It's a mess. Even the comms are a mess. Its worse than the invasion of New York because she's too busy to pay too much attention to what's happening. There are nearly two dozen people on the comms. Hero friends, cop friends and police chiefs from various cities. There are also agents with Interpol and the U.N. that she is vaguely aware of.

"Dr. Stark, what's going on!"

"I don't know!"

"I've got people going crazy out here. Let me know if you've got any intel I can use!"
"Stacy! I need a patrol on the bridge asap!"

"I've got a hostage situation in the embassy in Nigeria. Second floor, west wing, male assailant and a two hostages..."

"The United Nations has sent a relief forces to take back embassies from Brazilian, Finland, and German nationals."

"What the hell is your spangled friend doing? Did he and his friends really go belly up?"

"Not my friends and apparently so."

Iron Man sets off from his penthouse in New York just as Spider-Woman is seen hurling herself into a third floor apartment building. The comms is a relay point for everyone at this point. A massive influx of information coming and going in the face of such an unprecedented show of arrogance and neglect. Thousands of families and legit SHIELD agents burned on the internet...many will be saved. But for many, help will come too late.

Black panther sighted through out Luanda, Angola in Africa. Units of the Dora Milaje hit parts of Kenya and Wakanda, working in part with the United Nations establish a working system for search and rescue for parts of southern Africa.

War machine as well as parts of the Iron Legion are seen in parts of China coordinating with local law enforcement. Likewise, heroes from all over the world join in the effort to minimize casualties. Some are assisted by the Iron Legion, providing relief and safe houses where is possible. Where they cannot, they are directed or, in some cases, discretely shuffled to branches of Stark Industries.

The massive conglomerate of information and communication is handled by a number of dispatchers world wide, JARVIS, and JOCASTA. Its barely enough to hold everything together, let alone in some semblance of order. Universally, it is understood that the ones responsible for this clusterfuck must be either complete morons, absolute sociopaths or both.

"I've got Xavier on the line! Putting him through...now."

"Professor!" Tony's voice isn't the only one relieved to hear from the mutant over the already traffic heavy comm lines.

"Hey doc."

"Hello everyone. The X-Men are ready to assist. What do you need?"

"Everything. Anything."

When the mutants from the X-Men show up no one blinks so much as an eye at them. Law enforcement is simple grateful for the support and back up for the chaos that's been unleashed upon them. Interpol scrambles to grab the Hydra agents trying to fall through the cracks. When Dr. Jean Gray shows up with several other mutants capable of telepathy or powers similar, they're more than happy for the help.

"You have to go" Gwen whispers, worrying over Kurt, her Omega. The news is just background
noise to the couple, holding each others hands while the world goes insane all around them.

"I am one of the X-Men and they are needed. I am needed." His glittering orange eyes almost glow in the low light of their apartment. "I need not fear the ones I will be working with. Your father for one is not someone I need to fear. I have faith in him just as he has faith in me."

"I know."

She did, truly, she did. Her Omega's faith in people is resilient and a sign of the quality of his character. Not once did he press her to believe as he did and not once did he make anyone else feel uncomfortable with his faith. For an Omega, Kurt could be incredibly unassuming. It almost broke her heart if he didn't find his anonymity to be something tranquil. All he wanted was a good family, friends and a good purpose. But that didn't mean she wouldn't worry for him.

"You will be careful. You hear me? Mom will never forgive you if you don't."

"Da, of course." He pulls her close, inhaling her scent. "Would you like to me to take you somewhere? I do not like the idea of you here alone. Not with all this madness."

"Home. You can take me home. So I can make sure you're okay when you get back."

"I would like that."

Field and directors of said agents work with the mutants to grab those attempting to use the info dump to their advantage, while agents of the legal department work double shifts back to back with HR to cover the use of mutant telepaths. Dr. Jean Gray and her peers, some students even, are suddenly given consultation badges during the middle of rotations. Thus, legally marking them as assets to Interpol, complete with all the protections that entails.

In between working with Interpol for catching Hydra agents on the run and helping police locate missing family members of actual SHIELD agents, even the X-Men are feeling the stretch. (At this point, Dr. Doom's excessive use of Doombots is pointedly not looked or acknowledged due to various reasons.)

It will be three days before the worst of it will be over. Three long, horror filled days for heroes and police, the mutants and mundane. Three days before Penelope collapses in the Wakanda embassy due to stress and exhaustion.

Other heroes, even those working in shifts or pushing their enhanced bodies to the limit like Captain Britain, Captain Marvell, Jessica Jones, Logan, and even Deadpool, who joined the efforts later, would soon join her.

(No one is surprised when the Black Widow steps forward, tells the world what happened between SHIELD and HYDRA, essentially taking the blame, before telling the world to f**k off).

Chapter End Notes

So. My original idea had something humiliating happen to SHIELD but I lost my notes
about what that plan was...sooooo I'm sorry but SHILEDRA happened a whole chapter early...

But that's okay!!!

Because we are not done with SHIELD. Oh no. We'll come back to them. Tony and Dr. Doom have some unfinished business.
The Avengers Falter But Not the World

Chapter Summary

SHIELD feels the hurt and keeps its head down. Tony gives no shits but stresses anyway.

Chapter Notes

Oh gosh this took so long! But I SAW BLACK PANTHER!!!! OMGOSH! SO GOOD!!!!!
Shuri and T'Challa are my new dynamic duo! xD
They cracked me up.
But the entire cast was great! I cannot wait to get my hands on the director's cut.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2015- So much Change

"Different denotes neither bad nor good, but it certainly means not the same." -Cheshire Cat

Tony wondered if karma was finally catching up to him. After all those years wasted partying hard on drugs, alcohol, and sex, karma was finally taking her pound of flesh.

"Black Out mode, J."

"Of course, sir." Bless his AI's coded heart. He's had to reinforce his entire lab, even the vents were upgraded with laser defenses. He picks something off his worktable without actually seeing what it is and just starts to fiddle with it.

After SHIELD fell, Tony was asked to house the remaining members of the Avengers until all other agents and staff were processed. It was to be a temporary measure until the United States was ready to evaluate and process the other members.

Those being Captain America, Black Widow, and Hawkeye.

The only members affiliated with SHEILD at the time. Tony didn't mind. His job was to keep them occupied and out of the way. If the group got antsy, the United States would sanction a few missions here and there without making it seem like they were watching the team's every move. Or that Tony wasn't having JARVIS send any and all recordings to the FBI, CIA, and Wakanda just to be safe. The entire team, minus Bruce of course, was under surveillance until they could be assimilated into other agencies. After the Widow's performance at the hearing? They were essentially under house arrest until other means of containment could be made in the worse case scenario. It was at this point that serious discussions regarding enhanced containment started.

Its not like they could put them in with the regular inmates.
...Or could they?

It was a hot topic that made the rounds and that was delayed by numerous questions of humane treatment and definitions of "humane" or "human". Penelope didn't hesitate to make her opinion on the matter very well known. She also threw in a few ideas like a suppressant anklet not unlike those used for house arrest. Of course there were other debates pertaining to the use of suppressants and dangers of such things.

(No one forgets the Omega Massacre in Ohio. Two students held twenty of their classmates hostage made them drink homemade suppressants that crippled and than killed them. Almost all of them were Omegas and all of them died wreathing in agony. The few that were rushed to the hospital didn't make it. They all think about it though. Tony's pretty sure Penny worded it that way on purpose.)

Still, Tony is confident that with so much discussion and debate making its rounds that it will only be a matter of time until a solution is found. Until then, he'll hold the fort and the keys to the castle.

Of course, that is when things go wrong.

Everything started out okay. He even hired Maria Hill as a means to manage both the new security division and liaison for the Avengers. It is supposed to be a temporary position before all, Avengers included, are turned over to the new Director of what ever the United States plans to call the new SHIELD. Tony doesn't care so long as no one tries to drag it out. He's more than prepared for two years at the most of playing babysitter.

Its been almost a year since the Info drop. He's known the other Avengers for far longer, sure, but its the same as one knowing a neighbor. Aware and some what comfortable with but not family.

And Rhodey has been called in a lot more and had to spend time away from his Omega. As a result, Tony has had to deflect a lot of unwanted interest from a certain Alpha whenever he does stop by the tower. Apparently, the good and true Steve Rogers doesn't understand why the Omega housing him won't put out. So the big blonde goes about his way attempting to court the lonely Omega. (Note the sarcasm). It gets worse when he gets the other two roped into his stupidity. "How the hell?" he curses to himself. "How the hell did she not notice?"

He biggest issue is that he knows for a fact that Romanova was sent to spy on him during his time struggling with palladium poisoning. There should have been no way for her to miss the fact he was an Omega already being courted. Or did she just assume it was Pepper and with how busy the two of them were, think the courtship ended? Following that assumption, even if its wrong, knowing there was already an Alpha in the picture should have made the blonde hesitate or at the very least ask about it.

That has Tony's brain raise so many red flags he can't even begin to count them.

What kind of Alpha ignores another's courtship claim? Not a very good one that's for sure. What kind of spy fails to follow up a lead on a target? A rookie or a very bad spy. ...Unless its intentional. Unless Widow did go to town with her original lead, assume Pepper was his new Alpha and just encouraged Rogers to keep up the pursuit. But why? To separate them? That wouldn't work even if they were a couple because he made her his CEO. He sees her every time he goes to any board meeting, SI branch meeting, or just a night with the tribe.

There is literally no way he would not see her.
This is assuming the Widow is behind the scenes playing her games. But what if it was Rogers? Could Rogers play the Widow? It's possible with his USO tours and earnest good boy attitude...maybe.

Maybe?

"I need a drink." he whines before heading over his suit. "Let's go JARVIS. I need a break from this place. Is Penny at the penthouse?"

"She is, sir. Along with Prince T'Challa, Queen Ramonda and Dr. Banner. Shall I place an order for you and your party?"

"Yes, please. The usual from that Italian place." With Tony fully encased in his suit, he heaves an exhausted sigh. "And make sure the wonder trio don't come knocking on my door."

"With pleasure sir."

Penny is at the penthouse making dessert with T'Challa. Bruce is napping on the couch and Queen Ramonda is speaking with Miller about his daughter, curious about how the American education system has changed. The other horsemen have taken up post around the loft and sitting areas. Cleaning, assembling a gun, reading a piece of classical literature, and even playing a game of chess. Protective, aware and calm, the frantic, nervous energy bleeds out of him.

It's a relief seeing family. Happy and Pepper will be around later in the afternoon and his Rhodey won't be long behind them. Some of the Doras are also present and even though he doesn't recognize them he does wave and greet a few with the Wakandan salute. Interestingly enough, they return it. At the sound of the Dora Milaje moving, Bruce wakes up from his nap, sees Tony and offers a drowsy smile. Tony wants to coo at him.

"Are they really living in your tower?" Shelton turns to him with a crooked grin from his game.

"Temporarily and I'm not there all the time, thank Ananse. I check in from time to time. Make sure they haven't died."

"But being there is tiring." McCall notes glancing up from his book.

"Oh, its fine. I think of them as the roommates I never wanted. Some of them. Clint's pretty cool except when it comes to UNO or Mario kart then things get deadly. But I could also really do without the shitty flirting."

"The what?" McCall frowns and Bourne turns to look at him. Tony waves Death away with a hand as the suit folds away from him. It doesn't wipe the concern from Ramonda's face.

"Yeah, so not everyone knows about my honey bear."

"I doubt anyone outside our tribe knows of it." Ramonda nods to Miller before walking over to Tony to greet him with a hug.

Tony might not be a kid anymore but he's come to appreciate the open affection from Ramonda, May, and Mrs. Rhodes. He relaxes into her hold and smiles at her.

"Cap McCaptain doesn't miss a chance to propose at least a dinner or two every time I stop by. He's got the Widow helping him out with leaving gifts at the door to my lab. Its starting to get creepy."
"The..Rogers? Really?" T'Challa's surprise is shared by several of the others in the room.

"Oh you should have seen my face when I figured out he was serious. I'm pretty sure a picture of that would be worth thousands and made in to a meme in seconds."

"Why would he pursue you if its clear you don't want his attention?"

"Pretty sure it's just because I'm an Omega. I've resorted to telling him I've already got someone courting me but that hasn't stopped him."

"He's still pressing!" Ramonda is scandalized and turns to her son in disbelief. Miller's expression is carefully neutral but he shares a glance with Shelton that Tony is quick to notice. McCall gives a short 'hm' before closing his book and taking a seat at the table. Once McCall moves, Bourne follows and while he doesn't sit at the table, he sits closer than he would at the loft. Bruce closes his eyes and starts his breathing exercises. The food will be here soon anyway and there is more than enough for everyone, even the Doras.

"Unfortunately. You have no idea how badly I cannot wait until the compound is done."

"So you can finally kick them out?" Penny grins.

"Well that and I can finish spicing up their new profile pics from the safety of my own penthouse." Ramonda chokes in an surprisingly undignified way.

"Was that you than?" She raises a hand to her mouth, failing to cover up that she's trying to laugh.

"Oh you mean SHIELD's profile gala? Yes I did. You like? I meant to use it before that stupidly massive info dump but after works just as well. Even better actually."

"It was beautifully done." Miller praises with a small sincere smile on his face. "What gave you the idea?"

"Miss Congeniality. The film not the actual pageant."

Penelope frowns as some of the others start to laugh and grin.

"Wait wait! What did you do?" Tony grins and gestures toward the sitting area. Incidentally, two of the Doras arrive with the food and place it on the nearest table.

"What do you say about a show JOCASTA?"

"My pleasure."

"JARVIS give me a heads up if the pests start up with something serious."

"Of course, sir."

As the holograms open up, Tony separates the food between everyone. Penelope brings out some plates and utensils. T'Challa and Bourne brings out several cups while Miller and one of the Dora, one Tony definitely does not know, get drinks. As they settle down they take in the various profiles of SHIELD and Hydra agents. The agents chosen are picked from a very specific line up that Tony calls "The Asshole Line Up." The original purpose was to embarrass several of SHIELD's agents and operatives by "fixing" their profile pictures and sharing them with various intelligence agencies like the FBI and the CIA.
With the SHIELD info dump however, that wasn't possible until months later when all the personal were sorted. Some targets stayed like Rumelow. Others were cut in the final production but sweet revenge is well...sweet. The pictures rotate once and reveal those same agents in bikinis. They rotate again to agents in various pageant outfits reminisce of the film. Then they rotate again into pageant gowns with tiaras. Of course, Tony being himself could not resist keeping it so contained. There are animal costumes, magical girl costumes and for those that really ticked him off, backdrops that make them look like they were actually wearing them on location.

The original plan was to also plant a virus into SHIELD's systems that would allow Tony unfettered access to the entire mainframe of SHIELD. Unfortunately, that didn't happen. Shame. With the remains of SHIELD underground, Tony's Trojan horse is useful in tanking several spy reputations and pissing off some Hydra operatives. Not that he had to do much of anything anymore.

When the info drop went so did a lot of missions including the one targeting Spider-Woman. Any capital or favors SHIELD might have had were sunk very quickly once that got around. Plenty of agents that would have had an easy time slipping into other branches were suddenly turned away. These incidents were geared toward those unlucky few who were assigned to assist in that mission.

Rogers popularity also took a harsh hit. No one likes anyone picking on the World's favorite sweetheart. Especially America's old WW2 ex-sweetheart. Not even Captain America could escape bad press. Thankfully, Tony didn't have to deal with any of that.

The next two hours are spent relaxing, safe and sharing laughs. Alas, it does not stay that way.

"Sir, Miss Hill request your attention at the early convienence. The subject matter is about another Hydra target and if you would be so inclined to bring Dr. Banner with you it would be appreciated." He sighs and Bruce gives a sort of whine groan from the other couch.

"Location?"


He isn't so sure how much more of this cowboy rodeo show he can take but he quickly pushes the thought away. But a glance around tells him not quick enough.

"If you need anything," Ramonda starts, placing a hand beneath his chin, "anything. You call us."

"Always. The rest of you stay safe while I'm gone."

Tony will never be more glad for his family, his tribe, following the disaster that strikes next.

Everything goes to hell.

Hydra becomes the least of their concerns and Tony has a hard time remembering when it all went wrong. Unfortunately, Bruce is gone and Tony can't ask him for his opinion. On the other hand, Tony is finally able to wash his hands of his parolees. They were someone else's problem now.

"He has no appreciation for lawn maintenance. You're gonna miss me though. There will be manly tears."

Tony quickly makes his way to his car but Captain America, stubborn and annoying as always, does not take a hint.
"Tony." He calls when the billionaire opens the driver door. "Will you..

"No can do." Tony cuts him off, not willing to hear anything the walking flag has to say. The sooner he can get away the better off he'll be. "Got a lot of work to do now. Clean up and all that."

"Maybe I'll catch you later than?" Tony doesn't have to look to know the blonde is pulling that kicked puppy forgive me routine.

"Maybe." Because outright denial will not help Tony here. Nope, it will just make the super soldier an even bigger nuisance than before. He closes the door, gives a half hearted wave and drives off.

It's only when Tony is safely in the penthouse of his tower that he relaxes. Its been a hard seventy-two hours and he isn't too sure what to make of the rapid changes that have happened in such a short span of time. His Alpha joining the Avengers now rather than before was a careful move to monitor the team without Tony having to be there to provide witness testimony.

Especially now, when his position is so tenacious and his bond threatened with the unwanted pursuit of an unattached Alpha.

There were a number of lawyers, including his own, making amends to the future Avenger Accords to account for such things.

But that doesn't make all the hell he's been through any easier. Fortunately, the United Nations has made a number of concessions and compensation for enduring such "flagrant abuse from someone in a position of power and leadership". Of course once he gives his report on everything that happened during the Ultron debacle there is no question some of the more conservative hitters will be pressing for some more restrictive clauses.

Not that a lot of them will pass or get much more than a few days debate. As the only Omega of the team, Tony made sure every interaction was recorded no matter where he was or who he was with. If the Avengers were involved it was recorded passed on to his lawyers, Pepper, and T'Chaka before being used as evidence before the United Nations. The entire purpose is to show the need for oversight.

Tony liked having a team. He did, but that team was not the Avengers. At least, not the hair brained SHIELD sanctioned version of it. Tony was part of a much larger group before the Avengers came along and the difference between how they treated him is massive. Originally, he was their discrete parole officer and than after a few carefully held negotiations, Tony allowed himself to be used as the focus of a somewhat controlled experiment.

There are clear differences between how he was treated as the only Omega of the Avengers and as Iron Man, who just so happened to be an Omega, as part of an international organization of heroes. The former had no oversight while the latter worked in tandem with local law enforcement and even took orders from high ranking personal on sight in certain situations.

It really doesn't take a genius to notice the differences between the two groups or the effects and consequences those differences had on Tony. Most notably the body count, damages to infrastructure, and Tony's own health.

"Six blessed months of freedom." he sighs. "FRIDAY how are things?"

"Stark Industries stock is holding steady, boss." Her Irish accent sending bouts of grief and anguish
curling into his gut and throat. "The representative from the U.N. has sent all calls and inquires pertaining to Iron Man to Legal while anything Avengers related has been immediately forwarded to the Avengers Compound."

"Hallelujah." After everything that's recently happened, Tony was infinitely glad that he was given such a long reprieve. "What about the others? Everyone okay?"

"Yes boss. Miss Potts has set a clear schedule for next week and has requested that you join her for a getaway. Its the spa resort in Germany." Tony moans at the idea.

"I could go for that. Book it. Next." FRIDAY prattles on about his family, whose okay and where. Its as she's going down the list that Tony realizes his "family" has grown pretty big. It includes several of the other heroes, many of whom he meets outside of the costume, and who he spends actual time with not working but bonding with. Its a good realization, a good feeling.

"Also, Mr. Rhodey would like to know if you wouldn't mind the Vision stopping by for dinner." Tony makes a shaky inhale before asking FRIDAY to clarify why his Alpha wants to do that. "He says so the Vision can get to know his grandfather."

"Oh." His eyes turn glassy. "Yeah. Sure." There is no way he's ready for something like that so soon.

The AI pauses before going on, "Princess Shuri and members from Big Hero 6 have forwarded inquiries about a project they think you might like. Most of it is in a separate server in Wakanda but they wanted you see the proposal."

"Pull it up." Anything to keep his mind off...

"What is this." Tony's breath hitches in disbelief. The attachments aren't a regular document for a proposal. They're a copy of code, very familiar code. "This looks like...like..."

JARVIS.

"Hey Tony!" Penelope's voice abruptly cuts out into his penthouse. "Did you get it?"

"This? You mean this proposal?" He runs his hand over the hologram and reads through the short summary, not even minding that his goddaughter called him the moment he opened the email. "You all...this is..."

These guys were going to make him cry. Full on, bursting tears crying, from joy.

"Well, the original idea was to make a safe haven for your AIs if anyone or anything managed to break in and terminate them to get to you or your suits. Like a bunker. An AI bunker. JARVIS had been making an occasional stop to help test it out and leave a back up of himself. I knew how much he meant to you and after a few more kinks were ironed out we were going to show it to you. T'Challa and I figured we'd surprise you for your anniversary. Didn't think we'd actually need it."

"And Hiro and the others?"

"They helped Shuri build the bunker platform so when they noticed bits of very familiar code on the Internet, they picked them up and you know the rest."

"That's," Tony chokes on a sob, "I can't even."
There are no words to describe what he's feeling. JARVIS was his baby. His baby and than he died.

Without a moment to grieve or take a breath the engineer was back in a fight with the one who made Ultron so corrupted in the first place, her brother, and the entity that was essentially his grandson.

There are no words in the human language to express the horror at losing a child just as there are no words to describe the complete and utter relief that his son is still there, a little broken but alive.

Its only right that the first person JARVIS sees when he wakes up is his father.

"How long until Rhodey gets out of debrief with the Avengers? I mean, you are taking him with you right?"

"A few hours." Tony takes a deep breath but Penny has known him for a long time and she's right. "My honey bear wouldn't miss this for the world. He's still pissed Ultron put him down in that little scuffle during the party. We never got down to the fun stuff."

"Well now you and your big, bad Alpha can have something to celebrate." Her snarky reply gets a full blown laugh from the billionaire Omega, something he thought he wouldn't be able to do for a long time. Its good to have such good friends. Speaking of...

"Right, thanks for that. So, besides the absolutely fantastic news that I'll be with my baby in a few hours, what gossip can you spill while I was away in exile with the other ducklings?"

It would be more than a few hours, he knew. The suit had some serious mileage and it would take about eight hours even with his own personal jet. But he knew Shuri, they were family after all and he trusted the bright spunky teenager wouldn't let anything happen to his JARVIS.

"Oh I'm sure you already know the basics. Everyone is okay. No one was injured or killed during the Terminator Wannabe's temper tantrum. But! And you should brace yourself, here. Carol Danvers? Captain Marvell's girlfriend? She got into an accident with alien tech and is now Miss Marvel."

"What?" his voice turns unnervingly flat even to his own ears because more aliens? Why did it have to be aliens? The hologram in front of him changes to a new file, one transferred from JOCASTA.

There goes his good mood.

"Mar-Vell is actually an alien known as a Kree and he was sent here for...genetic scouting. Long story short, until about three years ago the Kree took orders from a supercomputer that was going insane and giving conflicting orders like killing of about half the entire newborn population of Hala, their homeworld. A fight happened and now the new Emperor of Hala is a blue Kree who has no idea why a spy scout was dispatched to our little backwater planet."

"Oh." Tony blinks rapidly. Backwater what now? "Is that all?"

"Well I got to thinking..." and now he's worried because when Penny uses that tone it usually means something utterly outrageous...and potentially fatal. He only needed to hear it once to know to be extremely concerned and incredibly paranoid. "I asked him if the Kree didn't mind entering in an alliance with us, especially since we suspect the Skrull masqueraded as a rogue sect of the Kree, sabotaging a logical and infant race in a bid to destroy a strategic planet, isolate the Kree from the rest of the galaxy and start a Kree civil war."
What? No, seriously what the fuck? This is what happens when he's out of the loop for more than forty eight hours. His goddaughter goes trying to negotiate an alliance with an alien race. How is this his life?

"Do we? Suspect the Skrull, whatever they are?"

"The Skrull are a shapeshifting alien race. We have evidence, well, Wakanda has evidence they were here along with the Kree thousands of years ago. There's no question the Kree were into something shifty what with being here so long ago and sending in a spy to look over what we've been doing recently but!"

That tone again! And how the hell does she know so much about these aliens! Tony was going to shake the answers out of her fluffy head!

"Here's the kicker, were the Kree here under orders because they went rogue or did they go rogue because a Skrull, under disguise, gave them an order that would have made the Kree sect, go rogue? Mar-Vell mentioned his new orders included finding that out. It also helps our case that we have second genders, too."

"Let me guess. Anyone from the "mission" is dead and having a second gender is a big deal to the Kree."

"Yup. They have records of the rogues but not what set them off according to Mar-vell. Bringing up the fact that a certain shapeshifting species of aliens also stopped by around the same time? The same aliens the Kree have gone to war with before and who maybe causing problems in a bid to absorb them as a client race? It all sounds very possible the Kree have been manipulated and pulled around by the nose. The new Emperor is none to happy about that."

"I bet." Tony resolutely does not go for a drink. "What's stopping them from just, I don't know, coming here in force and taking over?"

"They're also genetically stagnating due to excess gene manipulation but second genders are the only reason they haven't breed out or resorted to interbreeding. However, their situation is the opposite of ours, placing value with Alphas over Omegas because they are so few. Culturally, an Omega proves themselves differently soooooo...."

"We don't have to worry about an in pending invasion for breeding stock. For now. At least due to cultural reasons."

"Pretty much. I may have also mentioned a way to detect Skrulls for a price and that the Nova Corps may also be interested in it."

"Nova Corps?"

No. Seriously, how the fuck does she know all of this?

"Nova Corps are the military arm of the Nova Empire under the leadership of whoever holds the title of Nova Prime. The biggest flag with these guys is that they actually managed to breed their second genders out of society norms."

"Shit." Tony swallows drily for a second. "I didn't think that was even possible."

"Neither did I but the Kree really despise them for...well a lot of reasons. The low handed tactic to get them to sign the treaty last year? That's just icing on the cake. But an intergalactic hegemony empire made up of multiple alien species that willingly breed out a biological aspect to them that
the Kree see as "superior"? That's a huge reason."

"I bet Mar-Vel nearly had a heart attack at the very idea of us getting into bed with them."

"Oh you have no idea. He might not be a noble or anything like that but he's still a Kree and the reason he hasn't been executed for fornicating with Carol is because she's an Alpha from a family with a long history of Alpha dominant genes."

"So the Emperor isn't going to chance we jump ship to side with the Nova Empire. He makes sure we don't have a reason to want to join them and he gets an alliance with a second gender species plus tech that'll turn any current Kree resentment on another target else where."

"Making the Kree back home very happy. Apparently the news convinced some guy called Ronan, Kree extremist, to go back into their fold. I think that's a big deal or at least that's what Tivan tells me."

"Well that's one problem on hold. Never mind the idea of letting any human, second gender or not, off planet anywhere near the Nova Empire, would cause riots in the streets. But who the hell is Tivan? And what's this about detecting the Skrull? Last I checked we don't actually have what you promised."

"Tivan is a friend. A very eccentric alien friend that you will absolutely not meet because than he might try to keep you."

"What?!"

The hell kind of friends does she have!?

"Moving on. We also don't have any tech to detect a shape shifting alien." she agrees, "But we do have me."

"What? What are you talking about?"

Why were they ignoring the alien friend? The thought is dropped however at her next words and the promise of science.

"I can tell when a shape shifter is near me. I figured between us science bros and gals, we could come up with something while using my ability as a base...and make the rest of the galaxy a little more...something. Hesitant?"

"That's fucking brilliant."

The idea is beautiful, concept ideas flicker across his mind. Blueprints and outlines for a frame, something small and portable like a cellphone. Shape shifters need to use something to change don't they? Conscious use of their own molecular structure? The awareness to rearrange their own mass? How could they be able to detect it? Vibrations? Sound waves? Why did Bruce have leav-

"We need Susan Storm and others, everyone plus a test subject. There is no way we can guarantee success without one and a patent. There's also a different form of currency in a galactic setting so we need a comparison model. Pepper will kill us both if we accidently rip ourselves off."

"That's what the alliance is for. They can get one or two Skrull for us. We test out to make sure the prototype works and that it can't be copied without self-destructing or whatever and get paid with credits, influence, etcetera, etcetera. You know how these things goes."
"Do we market them as single use so they keep coming back for more?"

"Not sure. We don't want too much attention but having the Kree and the Nova Corps in our pocket would be a huge deal. Cost Assessment time?"

"Definitely. We'll need Pepper and Ramonda too."

"Great I'm on my way to see you now. I'll be there in twenty. I want to introduce you to someone."

Tony doesn't really think much of it when she says that. Mentally he marks Tivan and the weird alien things she gets up to while he's busy as something to talk about later. But not to scold her. She's not a child anymore but worrying Tony is a Bad Thing and he wants her to know that.

Still, he's already excited and nervous in equal measure. There's work, challenging work ahead of them but also new possibilities! Science time! His good mood gradually comes back to him and he picks up a tablet to start making a rough outline of some of his ideas.

When she lands on the balcony to his penthouse he instantly regrets not asking about that guest she was bring with her. He isn't expecting a shadow with a familiar web design. He feels his heart stutter in his chest.

"Wait, what is that? No seriously, what is that following you?!"

It was a person, a short person. About the age of a teenager with a terrible suit, obviously homemade from a sweater of some kind, black and red. It has goggles of all things!

"Whose the kid?" Tony asks, slightly hysterical because he can see another Penny.

Penelope, beautiful and haunted at age fifteen. It was only after Afghanistain that he was able to recognize that the shadows in her eyes reflected back at him were the same shadows he saw in the mirror. It was hurt seeing the same hurt in another. It was Penelope young and bright, so strong and worn. As if she'd been carrying the weight of the world on her back for so long and Tony suddenly wants to cry because its happening, again.

The teen takes off his mask and Tony's brain shorts out. He can't be older than fifteen and he wants to break something. Why?! Why is this happening?!

"Hi. I'm Spider-Man. I mean Miles! Miles Morales. Its really nice to meet you."

Chapter End Notes

*Takes careful look around*

*Quickly exits the stage And through the backdoor.* *Whistles innocently*

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