Displaced

by InBound

Summary

Peter was minding his own business when some random disembodied voice started telling him that he was needed before plucking him from his home city and dropping him off in Gotham without directions or a general idea of what just happened. Now, for the foreseeable future, he's stuck in the crime capital of America with no money, resources or a plan. But what else was new?

Notes

Hey there! Thank's for taking a time to give this story a read. But before you start reading you should know that I'm not the original author of this story. IdeasGuy was the one who created this story and wrote the first 17 chapters, he was too busy to continue it, so I ended up adopting the fic after a year, and so I'll be writing from chapter 18 and forward. Here's a link to the original story.


Along with that, this version of Spider-Man is a composition of different iterations of him. The main things you need to know about this Spider-Man is that Peter is seventeen with two years of experience as Spider-man.

Anyway, that's pretty much it. Enjoy the story!
“You are needed,”

Spider-man choked as the water he had been drinking suddenly went down the wrong pipe. His lungs burned as he coughed, trying to get the liquid out of his lungs as he searched for the sudden voice that scared off a few years of his life.

He spun around but saw no one. Just an empty rooftop that he was using as a pit stop to take a break. After all, he could hardly save the city on an empty stomach.

“You are needed,” the voice repeated. Peter noted that it sounded...familiar. Like someone he knew but hadn't seen, or in this case, heard in a long time.

“Uhh, hello?” Peter questioned, still searching for the source of the voice. He was needed? For what? He hadn't heard anything on the police scanner about trouble, if anything it was a slow day, so he was more than a little puzzled by a mysterious disembodied voice telling him trouble is afoot.

“You are needed, Spider-man. Once your work is done...then you will have to choose,” the voice said in a soft whisper, and Peter almost thought she sounded sad. Peter felt a sense of foreboding at that. What work? What did he need to do? What choice was she talking about?

“What do I need to do?” He asked carefully, trying not to give his consent to whatever bout of apparent insanity he was having.

“What you have always done,” The voice answered, except this time it was much closer. Directly over his shoulder. A cold chill raced down his spine, like someone pressed and ice cube and traced it. His body tensed and the only reason he didn't lash out was because he didn't feel his spidey-sense tingling.

Slowly, he craned his neck to look behind him. What he saw made his jaw drop in utter confusion. He stared and stared, his mind trying to reject what he was seeing but denial was losing its leg to stand on, and reality was giving it a nice, hard shove. Eventually, after minutes, Peter managed to pick his jaw off the floor.

"I am not in NYC anymore," Peter said flatly. In the past two years he's become very familiar with New York's skyline, he knew it by heart, both day and night. What he was looking at was certainly not his home city. The skyline was all wrong; the Avengers tower was missing, the only skyscraper with a letter on it was one with a giant W. Unless half a dozen skyscrapers were torn down and twice that number had been erected in the past five minutes, he wasn't in New York.

So, where was he? Clearly in another big city, but which one? San Diego? LA? Boston? Chicago?

Suddenly, Peter realized he was absolutely freezing. He crossed his arms and rubbed his biceps in a vain attempt to warm up before blowing out an annoyed breath, making a cloud of fog form. He could cross LA and San Diego off the list because they never experienced winter, so he had been told.

What about this made any sense? He hears a disembodied voice telling him that he's needed for something, and when he looks around, he's been teleported or something to a different city entirely? One that had to quite the trip away because it was nearing Summer time in New York a few minutes ago.

What was the purpose? It clearly wasn't to keep him out of the way for any baddy and their
villainous intentions because he found himself on a rooftop in the middle of somewhere. It would be smarter just to lock him in a hole somewhere. He didn't have any letter of demands or threatening blackmail because if someone kidnapped him, Peter assumed the first thing they would do was take off his mask.

If he was drugged, then the question was of what and why. Peter felt fine; no grogginess or any kind soreness. Unless it was a tasteless hallucinogenic, Peter hadn't been drugged. Teleportation was more likely because he didn't think he lost any time. He was just in one place and then another with the blink of an eye.

That voice and what she said were the only clues that he had.

“What did she mean? 'I'm needed?'” Spider-man questioned, cradling his head in his hands and trying not to shiver. For what? Why was he here? What situation was so desperate that he was the go-to-guy instead of Captain America, or Iron Man, or any one of a thousand heroes?

Why was he, Peter Benjamin Parker, needed?

Peter's thoughts were interrupted by sirens going off. Snapping to attention, all thoughts of his current problems being shelved, he used his enhanced hearing and realized that they were police sirens. Peter tapped his ear, flicking on the earpiece that was tuned into the police radios, wanting to know what crime he could expect to stop. However, he only heard static.

Peter groaned again in annoyance before clicking it off. He didn't have a way to change the frequency in the field because he never expected to fight crime outside of New York.

"Guess I'm doing this the old fashion way," he commented to himself before he shot out a web and swung off the building. Idly, he tried to pay attention to names of streets as he swung by, hoping to luck out and recognize a famous one. It was also in the effort to take his mind off of just how cold it was. Spandex was not meant to keep the cold out, and it cut right through Peter like a knife.

'I should know better by now. The only luck I have is the bad kind,' he thought to himself with a self-deprecating grin underneath his mask. You would think that karma would throw him a bone considering all the people he's saved but the universe needed a chew toy, and that seemed to be him on most days.

Peter followed a cop car racing through the streets for a couple of minutes before it reached its destination. Surrounding a bank, there were half a dozen cop cars parked in front, blocking the exits and setting up a perimeter. A quick glance at the writing on top as he landed on a gargoyle gave him his first clue as to where he was.

'Gotham's first national bank, huh?' Peter thought, trying to think if he had ever heard the name of the city. From his birds-eye view, he saw that the city was a big one and on an island. So it was a major city based on size alone, and there were only a handful of cities that were built on islands.

Peter wasn't an expert in geography, but he couldn't recall any other major city in America that was on an island. He would have assumed that he was out of the country, Canada maybe, but he saw an American flag flapping in the wind on a flag post.

"What's going on here," he asked aloud, getting annoyed by the slowly increasing number of questions he had while the answers weren't budging from zero.

One of his questions was answered a moment later when the doors of the bank were suddenly thrown open, and a flood of people came running out.
Spider-man's eyes narrowed, all of the people running out of the bank were dressed identically. They all wore masks of a smiling clown, a purple suit with an orange vest and black dress shoes.

However, what was more eye-catching was what they wore over their clothing.

Suicide vests.

For a brief moment, Spider-man thought that they were terrorists, but that was quickly disproven when he heard all of the people screaming for help as they ran towards the police. A man with a mustache that looked like he was in his fifties was calling out over a megaphone for them to stop where they were until they called a bomb squad.

Naturally, the small horde of people didn't listen and continued to rush to the police line.

Spider-man sprung into action. He leaped off the building and swung over the small plaza. With a little flare, he landed in between the mob and police. That seemed to give them some pause because most of them slowed before Spider-man held up his hands in a reassuring gesture.

"Hey there folks! I know you've had a bit of a scare but try to take a deep breath," Spider-man said to the stunned crowd in a friendly voice. The small mob stopped in their tracks, either because they listened to him or they were surprised by his sudden appearance. It didn't matter because it gave him the opening he needed.

Unfortunately, thanks to the...Goblin..., Spider-man knew a thing or two about explosives. He wasn't an expert, but after giving the vests a critical look over, he saw that they weren't as complicated as they appeared. Sure, there were a lot of wires and flashing lights, but absolutely nothing was attached to the deadbolt lock that prevented the victims from taking them off. Meaning, that if he ripped them off, the vests wouldn't go boom.

Taking a deep breath, he took a step forward, “I'm going to get you out of those vests, okay?” He said in a voice that he hoped sounded reassuring. “But I need all of you to stay very still. I have to do this fast, and I can't do that if you're running around. Please...just trust me,” he said as he took another step forward.

Normally he would have let out a quip to put himself at ease in the tense situation, but these guys seemed on the edge of hysterics. Some of them were crying, begging for help while others looked like it was taking all of their self-control not to rip at the vest to get it off. The rest looked like they were going to make a break for it.

Peter couldn't see their faces but a long moment past, everyone holding their breath, and he took that as consent.

Kicking forward, Peter approached the first victim and grabbed the two deadbolts and yanked them off with his super-human strength. The steel crumpled underneath his grip before he dropped them to the ground. Reaching out, he attached his hand to the vest and slid it upwards and once it was clear of the victims head; he threw it upwards as high as he could.

Thankfully, he was right, and there wasn't an explosion, so there was nothing holding him back from brushing past to the next victim with the speed of a bullet. Doing the same to the woman, he tossed the vest into the air before sending up a web, connecting the two in mid-air.

As he moved through the crowd, moving as fast he could, the other vest joined them before the final one was in the air. Once all of them were in the clear, Peter shot out a strand of webbing and grabbed onto the vest of explosives before throwing them towards the entrance of the bank to make sure they
got clear of the crowd.

It was then that he noticed another person dressed in a neon purple suit sneaking off with a very large duffel bag on his back in a window of the bank.

Spider-man glanced back at the stunned circle of police officers, "you take care of these guys. I'll go deal with the clown college rejects," he said to the man with a microphone and a mustache. Unlike his colleagues, the older man was pinning a soul-searching gaze on him that almost made him squirm.

Without another word, Spider-man attached two webs to pillars in front of the large entrance door and launched himself through them. The door was knocked open, slamming into the wall as Peter sailed through and a loud bang echoed in the large lobby.

He landed on the front desk, but he didn't see anyone. They shut off the lights, leaving the sizable building pitch black. The only light source were the red and blue cop cars from outside, making the shadows dance but Peter couldn't peer into the dark shadows even when he tried. However, tilting his head to the side, he heard the faint sounds of footsteps and a door closing.

With an inhuman jump, Spider-man launched himself across the lobby and made his way to the back of the building. He made sure to stick to the walls and ceiling, just in case the bank robbers left him a little surprise.

'Though, at least they're being smart about it and not charging through the front door.' Spider-man thought to himself, feeling a little conflicted about the signs of increased intelligence in criminals. On the one hand, smarter criminals meant more work to him. On the other, he wouldn't have his faith in humanity chipped away every day by the stunning lack of common sense.

Spider-man sighed as he disabled a claymore mine by snapping the trip wire and sealing it in a bubble of webbing. These guys definitely knew what they were doing, and he was willing to bet that they weren't just packing explosives.

Sticking to the ceiling, he made his way to the back door and heard voices through the door. Rolling his shoulders, he webbed the sides of the door before launching himself through it much like before. His feet hit the push lock with enough force the door was almost knocked off its hinges and sent one man flying.

Spider-man skidded to a halt in between the remaining three, all of them looking at him with wide eyes beneath their masks. Peter was looking right back at them, a quip on his tongue but it died on his lips when he noticed something.

These guys were wearing suicide vests too.

Feeling a more than a little panic, Spider-man realized that he didn't have time to yank off the vests before one of them had the chance to detonate. Instead, with a fury of fists, Spider-man struck out.

While one of the bank robbers was recovering from getting slammed with the door, Spider-man punched the closest one to him in the jaw. The bank robber's head snapped to the side, the tension leaving his body as he dropped like a sack of potatoes.

His spidey-sense flashed, warning him that danger was coming from behind him, so he jumped upwards. He nearly jumped two stories high, giving him more than enough room to do a tight half back flip, so his head was facing the pavement. Right when the bank robbers started to point their guns up, Peter used two webs and covered the barrels.
He was too late to pull the weapons out of their hands because one of them pulled the trigger, making a loud bang ring out in the alley. While the bank robber managed to fire off his gun, the bullet failed to get past Spider-man's webbing. It was as strong as steel while being stretchy like elastic to those that had enough strength to tug at it.

A bullet didn't, making the gun barrel explode outwards in the man's hands. The other bank robber was either smart enough not to fire off a shot or was too busy watching his friend stumble backward, his eyes wide as he looked down at the ruined weapon.

It made it so very easy for Peter to close the distance between them once he landed. He planted a fist in the bank robber with a gun's stomach, making all the breath in his explode out of his mouth in a rugged gasp before he slid past him and slugged the shell-shocked bank robber in the temple, dropping him.

Looking around, the alleyway was now filled with groaning bodies; he let out a breath of relief. Now that he had a moment, he gave the vest a look over and saw that they were different than the victims on the other side of the bank.

These bombs were more complicated. Wires were wrapped around the deadlocks in a messy knot, and the wire was connected to the bomb by...by...oh man...by a single, oh so very thin stripped wire.

If that wire had slipped out during the fight...boom...

Peter had uncountable close calls since he put this mask on, but it still got his heart pumping away knowing that he had been one move away from meeting the reaper.

Walking over, he grabbed the nearest bank robber that he hit with the door and lifted him, so they were eye to eye. The man seemed terrified, but he quickly schooled his emotions before taking a swing at Spider-man. He didn't even look away as he caught the man's fist with a grip of steel.

Just like that, the fight left the man's eyes.

"Now, I'm going to go out on a limb and say that you didn't strap on those bombs because it's the newest winter fashion," Spider-man began as he lifted the man into the air with ease, holding him by his jacket. The bank robber couldn't see it, but Peter's eyes were trained on the wire connected to the bomb. He wouldn't do anything to put either of them at risk, but the bank robber didn't know that he knew about the thin wire.

"N-no," the man said, struggling to keep the fear out of his voice. "That whack job Joker put them on us! Told us to rob the bank and-" the man cut himself off with a click.

Spider-man sighed theatrically as he shook his head. "Ahh, don't be like that! Don't stop when you're getting to the good part," he said, making his voice go higher like a child whining. He gave the man a little shake, not enough to hurt him but enough to remind him that he was dealing with someone that could squash him. Also to give him a little dose of fear that they might explode.

Not that he would, but what the guy didn't know wouldn't hurt him.

"Okay! Okay! H-he told us to meet him at the docks! We were supposed to rendezvous with the others and then he would let us go! That's all I know, I swear!" The man shouted, starting to squirm in his grip.

Spider-man's eyes narrowed beneath the one-way mirror lend, "others?" He questioned, pulling the man closer to his reflective eyes.
“Y-yeah! Others, he grabbed like twenty of us and said that we had to rob a bank or he'd kill us!” The man shouted, doing his best to seem as pathetic as possible. However, Spider-man saw right through that. He caught a glimpse of the bank vault, everything about this heist was clean.

He didn't know who these guys were, but they had experience, and nothing about them screamed civilian.

“How many teams are there,” Peter demanded to know, and the man whimpered in response. Peter gave him a little shake, scaring the daylights out of him as he told him to stop or they’d blow up.

“Then tell me what you know! Which banks, how many groups and which docks you're meeting the Joker at,” Peter demanded to know, cutting to the chase. He did not have time to be gentle with this guy right now, not when there was a string of bank robberies to stop.

“F-Fine! Ah, I, I think there're four teams of five, except us since we only use four guys! I don't know which banks they are robbing- I swear! Me and the boys were told to rob this one or he'd kill us! And, and, I don't know where we were supposed to bring the money to! I just know we were supposed to bring it to the docks! That's all I know; I swear it! I swear!” The man cried out, and the cogs in Peter's brain were turning furiously.

He didn't know this cities layout and his radio wasn't working, so it would be a little more challenging than normal, but he already had a couple of half-baked plans turning around in his head. One of the perks of being a genius and impulsive. He needed a map of the banks to start...

“Now let me go,” the man demanded, breaking Spider-man from his thoughts.

“Hm? Oh, sure,” he dismissed by throwing the man up lightly and webbing him by his hands and the wire so it wouldn't explode even if it was jostled. As the man cursed Spider-man, Peter reached in and grabbed the bank robber's cell phone. He needed it more than him right now.

He walked over and did the same to the other bank robbers, securing both them and the bombs. Spider-man also made sure to leave a nice note in the snow about how his webbing dissolves into a powder after a few hours and to be careful when disarming the bombs. He even added a little smiley face for good measure.

“Now, adios muchachos,” Spider-man said in a goodbye, jumping up onto the fire escape and using the extent of what he learned in Spanish class. However, before he could swing away, a voice called out to him.

“Wait,” a single word from a rough, scratchy voice and Peter obeyed instantly. He heard it over the bank robber's cursing and the groans of the others, so Peter looked over his shoulder and saw someone walking into the alley with two others at his side.

At first, he thought it was some villain that wanted to pick a fight and get their teeth kicked in, but he saw that it was the guy with the mustache and a microphone from before. He was flanked by two police officers, both their guns aimed at his chest and Spider-man resisted the urge to sigh. It really got old being treated as badly as the criminals that he helped the police catch.

The man stopped some feet away and pinned that soul searching gaze at him. Spider-man had to remind himself that he was wearing a mask because the look just cut right through him. It felt like he was standing before Nick Fury instead of a police commissioner.

“Who are you,” the man demanded in a gruff voice, and Spider-man stood a little straighter in response.
“I'm just your friendly neighborhood Spider-man. Well, not this neighborhood, but I was in town when I saw these jokers stealing their tuition for their next semester of clown college.” He responded in a flippant tone, but he was on edge. Jeez, what did this guy go through to earn a stare like that? He's met gods that were less intimidating.

The man stared at him for a moment longer before he raised his hand. Spider-man tensed but relaxed when he saw it was a gesture for the police officers to put their guns away. Both of them looked unsure for a moment before they followed the man's orders.

“You're not with Batman,” the man declared and that made him pause for a moment.

Was this 'Gotham' already being protected by a hero? He didn't know every hero on the planet, but he heard of most through the grapevine and he liked to think he would have heard of a hero who's name was so similar to his own. That and the fact that Gotham was a sizable city, so Batman would be one of the more well-known heroes simply because his actions would affect a larger number of people at their hometown.

Thus, like him, he would be a more widely known hero. New York had nearly twenty million people in it, so when they would send out a tweet or post a video on Youtube, it generated more attention because people in New York would look at it and share it with their friends that were out of state. Then it would spread across the nation if the news was crazy enough.

“No. No, I am not. More of a solo guy myself, but I'm sure he's a swell guy.” Spider-man said absentmindedly, trying to think of a reason why he wouldn't have heard of Batman. He was having some trouble, and that wasn't a good sign.

'Where am I?' Peter questioned, he brow scrunching up beneath his mask. The more he learned, the less everything made sense.

'I'll figure it out later,' Spider-man decided. He still had some robberies to stop and bust the mastermind.

Surprising the man with a mustache, Spider-man webbed the radio strapped to his belt and caught it. Both of the police officers whipped their guns back out, but the man lowered them by placing a hand on their wrists as he watched the teenager.

"I'm going to borrow this for a bit. The fashion disasters said that they were told to rob the bank by some guy that put suicide vests on them. Though these guys put them on the guys and gals I saved, but he also said that there's going to be another three robberies tonight. I'll bust them, you cuff 'em," Spider-man said as he leaped high and was about to swing away, but he paused when he heard the man call out to him again.

"Why are you doing this?” He asked barely raising his voice, but it seemed to carry in the alleyway. Spider-man paused, knowing the meaning behind the question.

Luckily, it was a question he had asked himself hundreds of times. When things were at their darkest when being Spider-man meant nothing but pain and heartache, why would he put it on and save others? Even when it came at his own expense.

"Because...with great power comes great responsibility,” he answered simply. He didn't know how else to explain it but that to use uncle Ben's final words. Spider-man knew he was failing epically to explain what that phrase meant to him, but he just couldn't put it in words. Yet again, he became painfully aware of the burden that was placed on his shoulders due to a freak accident.
However, he had to bear it. It was his responsibility.

To his surprise, the man’s face showed some elements of approval.

Standing a little straighter, Spider-man swung off into the night and within seconds he was gone.

James Gordon took a cigarette out of the box and lit it with his old lighter. Taking a deep breath, savoring the feeling of the smoke filling his lungs before he let it all out in a long, weary, sigh.

"Sir," asked the officer on his right, looking helplessly confused. Gordon idly realized that he was the new transfer from Boston, so he probably wasn’t use to men in masks doing the police’s job for them. It was a very different experience from seeing it on your tv screen compared to seeing it in real life.

“With great power comes great responsibility, huh,” Gordon mused to himself, taking another drag. He turned over the phrase in his mind for a couple of seconds, and he decided that he liked it. It was a good phrase; a good code. One that would steer whoever followed it in the right direction.

It said a lot about the kid if he followed it. Hell, it said a lot about him that he had those powers and the first thing he did has become a hero instead of another villain that only cared for himself, or desired to see everyone around him dead or worse. Especially in this city that just seemed to breed the worst kind of villains.

“You heard him; tonight’s going to get even busier than we thought! Alert all units and I want the addresses of every bank in the city, and I wanted it yesterday. Also, arrest these clowns; these are the Rosso brothers; they’ve been robbing banks since you were in training.” Gordon barked at the officers, making them spring into action, as he turned to his car.

Even though he knew he had a long night ahead of him, he couldn't help but think about how unhappy Batman would be when he hears that someone's in his stomping grounds.

"Hello there! License and registration please," Spider-man asked, holding his hand out expectantly through the window that he just punched in. The driver let out an impressive string of curses, the rude fellow.

"Do you kiss your mother with that mouth? Sheesh, I'm at an impressionable age you know," he said as he grabbed the man's shirt and slammed him forward. His head bounced off the steering wheel, and when he leaned back to hold his broken nose, it gave Spider-man the chance to web the loose wire so it wouldn't blow up.

"Excuse me, beg your pardon," he said as he pulled him out of the vehicle. The man let out a shout as he flailed helplessly into the air before being suspended by a web. With that done, Peter slid into the truck and slammed on the breaks. The car lurched, and the tires skidded, trying to comply with the demand, before coming to a stop nearly fifty feet later.

After turning the truck off, he strolled out, clicked the beeper to lock the doors before tossing the keys to a cop that pulled up. The man fumbled with the keys for a moment before giving Spider-man a helpless look. Peter responded by giving him the fingers guns and clicking his tongue. That was still cool, right?

Yeah, finger guns were always cool.
After making his exit, he swung upwards onto a building and pulled out the iphone he lifted from the bank robber. He pulled up the map function and entered in the name Gotham and searched for banks in the city.

Spider-Man looked at for a moment, trying his best to ignore how much the island looked like New York...wow...it was on the east coast and everything...No, no! Deal with that later! Focus!

'Alright, just one group left,' Spider-man thought to himself, shaking his head free of the stray thoughts. The police already caught one when he was scrambling to figure out just where he was going. It was for that reason he found this police chase and stopped his second team of bank robbers.

'Just need to nab these last guys and find out which docks they're bringing the money to.' Unfortunately, there were a few different docks in Gotham, and he already knocked out the other bank robbers so they couldn't point him in the right direction. That was a mistake; Peter needed to work on that.

He turned the radio up as he climbed onto a vantage point, listening for news of the next robbery.

"We have gunshots on Main street-"

"Suspicious activity in-"

"Requesting backup-"

"Car chase on Wayne street, in hot pursuit-"

"Alarm tripped at antique store-"

"Wow," Spider-man, sounding a bit dazed. Was it just because he was here or was it always this crazy? From the sound of it, there was enough crime going on tonight to fill up his quota for the week.

"Agh...I'm not getting any sleep tonight...or figuring out where the hell I am," he said with a sigh as he straightened out from his crouch. He looked down at his new phone and saw that it had finally finished loading all the banks. Parker luck struck again; no signal when he wanted to use a phone for something other than candy crush.

He saw nearly a dozen dots.

Pursing his lips, he thought about it for a moment. He couldn't swing by every bank and check if they had been robbed, while he was at the wrong one the right one could get away scot free.

Putting the radio near his mouth, he pressed the button and said, "Spider-man here. Just busted some guys that were robbing, uh, Welsfargo. Can someone tell me which banks are being watched?" He asked and with that question he heard the chatter on the radio cease.

He stared at it for a few moments, waiting for an answer. When the silence stretched on and on, he started to wonder if the thing was busted.

"We're stretched thin right now, but we can have a squad car outside of every bank if you take the upper half of Gotham," Spider-man heard a familiar voice say.

"Roger, roger," he said, taking a glance at the phone and saw that he had seven banks in his half.

With a destination set, he swung off the building.
He swung by the first two, giving them a quick look over. From what he saw, things seemed relatively normal. People went in then they came out clutching their purse or man-purse/satchel. It was really telling at the level of crime this city had when people's first instinct when having money was expecting to be mugged.

He swung by the third bank and saw it was much the same if a little more dead than the others. From his window seat, he saw the teller playing bejeweled on her phone, the heathen, and the security guard struggling to stay awake. There weren't any customers, so they could afford to slack off a little.

Spider-man was about to leave, going to check his other banks, but paused when a woman walked through the door.

And boy, was she a woman.

Short raven black hair with bright blue eyes. Her skin was white, with a healthy tan to it, but she seemed more of a night owl. A strong jaw that lead to a pointed chin. Kissable lips that were painted black matching her eye shadow. A cute as a button nose that was flanked by cheekbones that most girls would murder for. He couldn't see her body underneath the black trench coat she wore, but she moved with a cat-like grace that seemed familiar to him.

All in all, 10/10. Would stare creepily through a window again.

She strode across the lobby, earning the attention of both the teller and the security with her high heels clacking on the floor with confidence. He watched in some amusement as the security's guards mouth drop and the teller just turned green with envy. Not that Peter had any room to talk, but he was a perfectly healthy teenage boy. It was his excuse, and he was sticking with it.

"Hello, I was hoping to open up an account, if it wouldn't be any trouble," the woman said with a sly grin that would make most men go weak at the knees and, judging by the air of confidence she carried herself with, she knew it too. The teller, Amy based on her name tag, stammered out that it wouldn't be any trouble at all.

However, with his enhanced hearing, he heard the security guard telling his mate to check out the beauty that just walked in. While he couldn't make out the response, he managed to guess that it was agreement when the security camera moved towards her.

It was as he straining his hearing, trying to hear the conversation between them that he heard something else entirely. It almost sounded like a...blowtorch? It was a steady 'foosh' that was accompanied by little pops.

'What...ah!' Spider-Man wondered before it clicked. The old distraction technique! He almost, totally, fell for it.

Slowly, Spider-man pushed on the window using his adhesive ability to keep his grip, and slowly he opened the window. After a few seconds and a mini heart attack when the window made a squeak, earning a glance from the black haired woman, it was open enough for him to crawl through.

He was grateful for the change in temperature. Most of his body was starting to go numb from swinging around the city in this weather.

After making note where the security cameras were, he made his way behind the lobby by crawling on the ceiling. Spider-man followed the sound of the blowtorch that was slowly growing louder. Finally, he found the source of it in the vault room. Peeking through a little window above the door, he saw exactly what he was expecting to see.
Four men were in the room; two had guns pointed at the door while the other two were working on getting through the door.

It was a different approach to the usual heist, that much he would give them. Waiting until the had a skeleton crew, using a distraction and putting up a photo in front of the security camera to make the cameraman think nothing was wrong. They entered through the floor, probably through the sewer. Because there was always a sewer beneath the vault. Why no one saw that design flaw was just beyond him.

Cracking his neck and limbering up, Spider-man gripped the door frame and jumped up lightly. "Maximum effort," he said, quoting a friend, before he swung himself into the door. The plywood door exploded into a shower of splinters, earning a surprised shout from the gunmen before they thought to pull the trigger. By the time the room erupted in gunfire, Spider-man was already in the room.

His foot connected to the chest of one gunman, knocking the wind out of him and sending the man backward. As Spider-man was carried forward by his momentum, he grabbed the barrel of the gun that the second man carried.

The man pulled the trigger, and Peter felt like he just put his hand on a stove, but he ignored it in favor of pulling the gunman towards him, ripping the gun out of his hands but carrying him by the strap around his shoulders. The gunman was pulled off balance by Spider-Man grabbing the gun, and he started to follow him with his momentum. Once the gunman was close enough, completely off balance due to Spider-man's momentum, Spider-man lashed out and socked him in the face, rattling his teeth.

Spider-man landed on his feet and looked over his shoulder at the last two men. Both were looking at him with a stunned expression, clearly unprepared for a man in tights kicking the door in and incapacitating their guards in seconds.

Popping out the magazine, Spider-man spin on his heel and threw both the gun and the magazine at the men. Both smacked them in the face, breaking them from their stupor to let out cries of pain, but as they went to grip their faces, Peter webbed their hands together. To make extra sure they didn't get away, he webbed their hands to the ceiling along with their two unconscious friends.

"Well, that was easy," he commented to himself as he turned the blowtorch off. Perhaps it was just the gap in strength thanks to his spider-like abilities, or it was just a matter of perspective since he's been dealing with highly trained soldiers or jerks in super suits recently. Guys like these just seemed so...easy in comparison. He almost felt like a bully.

"Now, just gotta arrest that woman," he said, dusting his hands of splinters. He knew he was going to be picking them out of his suit for days.

Spider-man started to walk out of the room when he saw the security guard running down the hallway with his pistol out, frantically calling for backup. Knowing what was coming, Spider-man just held up a hand and pointed at the room that he just left, "just stopped a bank robbery. You're welcome," he said a little more patronizingly than he had intended.

The man just blinked and, surprise surprise, he didn't believe him. Sometimes having a mask was just a pain in his butt; who knew it would make him seem so untrustworthy?

"Put your hands in the air freak!" The man, Jim, screamed as he gestured pointedly with his gun.

"Hey, words hurt! And I did your job for you, take a look," he refuted, gesturing to the room again.
Unfortunately, Jim wasn't having any of it, assuming that it was a trap. Very smart of him, Spiderman would have been proud of it wasn't so terribly inconvenient.

"I don't have time for this," he said, webbing the guards gun before he had a chance to react. The man just gaped at him, but Peter jumped over him and ran towards the lobby. Unsurprisingly, the woman was gone.

Knowing that he couldn't waste any time, he launched himself out of the building. A quick scan of the dark, snow covered streets told him that the woman was gone. Cursing to himself, he ran up the building, sticking to the walls with such strength that duck-tap would be jealous.

With a flip with flare, he landed on top of the bank and searched for a clue from his bird's eye view.

"Agh...she got away," he said, not seeing any tell-tale signs of someone fleeing. It seemed she was smart as she was beautiful because he didn't have a clue which direction he needed to head to now.

Now he had a bank robber with a suicide vest running about. She was smart, or at the very least clever, so hopefully she would go to the police to get the thing off before the mastermind found out she failed. And hopefully, she wouldn't be in a public place in case-

Spider-Man felt a tingle in the back of his neck, warning him that danger was behind him. It was faint, so it wasn't a bullet, but Spider-man rolled out of the way all the same. The moment he did so, he heard a loud crack that left his ears ringing. It actually took him a moment to realize that someone was talking to him through the white noise.

"-managed to dodge that," a woman's voice said with a...seductive edge to it. It sounded very familiar.

Turning around, he saw the woman behind him. The most notable difference was that she shed the overcoat and revealed a skin tight leather suit with a pilots cap with cat ears and goggles. Unfortunately, a suicide vest blocked his view, and he noticed it looked significantly more complicated than the others. More wires, more locks, three different timers...he had no idea what most of it did, but he was willing to bet that they were redundancies. She also had a whip in her hands.

"Huh...you know, I think I had a dream that started off like this once..." Spider-man said absently. He had, except it had been Black Cat instead of whoever this knockoff was. The resemblance was there, but it was mostly in the cat-like mannerisms and the skin tight clothes that revealed a rather...impressive figure.

However, once he looked past that it was clear that they were different people. For one, this cat person hadn't tried to shove her tongue down his throat. Yet.

The woman let out a laugh that sounded like a purr, "cute. But this won't be ending like your dream did," she said before she drew back her hand and Spider-man felt his spidey-sense tingle. Turning slightly, he dipped out of the way of the whip that was trying to hit him in the chest.

The crack sounded again, making his ears ring but he didn't press the attack. He angled his body sideways to provide a smaller target, but he didn't attack because the woman seemed faintly surprised.

"Ohh...I'm going to go ahead and assume you can keep doing that," the woman said, sounding thoughtful. She tilted her head to the side, considering him lightly. If he was anything like every other hero in this crazy world, then he either had superpowers or spent his entire life training on some
island somewhere. She was going to bet on the former simply because it takes serious reflexes to dodge anything like he did.

Selina Kyle didn't like taking risks as much as one would think. Sure there was a thrill jumping off a building without a plan, or getting in a good fight, or ripping off a gang boss for the fun of it. Those were risks, but they were the fun kind of risks.

Fighting an unknown hero when she had a bomb strapped to her chest did not sound like a fun kind of risk.

"You...are the first person to realize that," Peter said, sounding a bit surprised. “Usually, they just start screaming for me to hold still like I'm going to help them kill me.” he continued and earned a chuckle from the woman.

"Now then, how about we end this before anyone gets hurt? I'll take that bomb off you, and you go do whatever beautiful women do while dressed up in cats costumes. That way, everyone wins!" Peter said, putting as much enthusiasm as he could into the sales pitch.

"Sounds tempting, but that madman Joker was very through with me,” she said, scowling in distaste. Spider-man idly made note of the name of the man who did this. With the ones before, he thought the name was an insult.

"I pick a lock, I explode. I pull a wire, I explode. I tamper with the bomb; I-you get the picture. The only way this thing comes off is if I deliver what's in this banks vaults," she gestured underneath them before she pinned a glare at Spider-man. "Not that I can anymore, thanks for that by the way," she added sarcastically.

"No problem, being a menace is what I do," Spider-man shot back as he turned over the woman's dilemma. Unlike with all the other goons, he couldn't just secure a wire so it wouldn't explode. It sounded like he was right, the bomb was full of redundancies. The only way to deactivate it was to know how or...

"Okay, how about this. I take off that vest, and you tell me which docks this Joker guy is at,” he offered, crossing his arms over his chest.

That gave the woman something to think about. She gave him a long look, consider him.

Based on his voice, he was a teenager. What age exactly, she couldn't tell, but she guessed around seventeen or so. His suit did nothing to hide his physique, so she saw that he was well muscled, despite his scrawny nature. He held himself well enough. There was that awkwardness that every teenager had when they saw her, but there weren't any rookie jitters, which was very reassuring.

She didn't know how much experience he had being a hero, not much since she never heard of him before and she made it her business knowing every hero and their sidekick, but he gave the impression that he knew what he was doing.

Not only that, but he dodged her sneak attack. She made sure her approach was silent, only Batman and a handful of others would have noticed her. Based on how Selina didn't see any kind of reaction until she was attacking, she figured he wasn't on that short list. Which meant that he was just that fast and his reflexes were that sharp.

"Hmmm, tempting offer but what makes you think I'm going to trust my life to a punk kid who's trying to be the next Batman?" She asked, trying to rile him. Just trying to get a read on the kid.

'There's that name again,' Spider-man thought. He really needed to Google, this guy.
"You don't have to trust me. If that thing blows up, I'll die with you. And I like living. A lot. Now that I think about it, living is probably my second favorite thing to do." He said, knowing that there was nothing he could say that could gain her trust. If she was anything like Black Cat, which she was, then words were next to worthless.

"Second favorite?" The woman asked, sounding thoroughly amused. This kid was interesting.

"I'm an awkward bundle of hormones known as the teenage boy. You get three guesses."

The woman threw back her head and laughed. It quickly died off into chuckles, but she looked at him with a fond expression, "you're no Batman, but you are a treat. Fine, what's your plan to get this thing off me?" She asked, walking to him with a sway in her hips.

'Doc Ock in a speedo. Doc Ock in a speedo. Doc Ock in a-' Spider-man resisted the cringe from the mental image before he began explaining. 'It's simple really; we just disarm the bombs at the same time.'

"Ohh...is that all," she said drily, sounding like she didn't think much of his plan. She stopped in front of him, uncomfortably close. She leaned in, checking her appearance in his reflective eyes and brushed some snow that gathered on her shoulders, flicking her hand down towards her breasts. She didn't even need to see his eyes to know where they were looking.

"Er-yeah. Just give me a minute, and I can figure out which wires will blow us up and which won't. Then we pull them at the same time," Spider-man said, with a shrug and raised his hands to start messing with the wires. A gesture asking for permission and once he received it in the form of a quick nod, he began fiddling with the wires.

He was going to deduce which wires did what by his spidey-sense. It acted on a simple principle; the more danger he was in, the stronger the tingle. It even warned him which direction the danger was coming from.

Peter learned to put a little more faith in the ability, considering it his greatest power. He lost count of how many times he took a hit because he failed to act on the warning, or had been too slow. He was still miles and miles away from mastering the ability, but he was getting a better grip on it.

At first, he looked for red wires, because that's what it always is in the movies but he quickly saw that there weren't any. The bombs were a mess of yellow, orange, green, purple and white. All of them were hooked up to various clocks that housed the explosives. He traced each wire with his finger, acting like he was going to pull it and the tingle in the back of his neck would intensify.

Spider-man was so absorbed in his task that he nearly jumped out of his suit when the woman spoke.

"If we're going to risk death together, you can call me Catwoman," she introduced herself suddenly. Spider-man took a moment to calm his heart that threatened to punch its way out of his chest before responding.

"I'm Spider-man, but most people call me annoying," he introduced, deciding against his usual introduction. He already used it once tonight.

"Yeah, you definitely aren't with Batman. Though, the whole assuring me with mutual destruction was a step in the right direction," Catwoman said thoughtfully, moving her arms so Spider-man could reach a wire. He humphed before he realized that the wire was one that controlled one of the bombs.

"Found one," he said before memorizing the wire and continuing his search for the other two.
"Really?" Catwoman questioned, making note that he just lightly touched the wires before moving on. Despite how casually she was acting, she had some reservations about letting a kid disarm a bomb that was strapped to her chest. Spider-man's reassurance of mutual death and their mutual love of life was the only reason he was letting him near her.

Spider-man made a noise of agreement, but Catwoman wanted an answer.

"How," she pushed.

"Because I know everything not counting all the things I don't know," he responded carelessly. He grabbed another wire, and he felt the tingling in the back of his neck intensify. "Found another," he informed before searching for the last wire.

Catwoman rolled her eyes and scoffed, "wow. Dodging questions. You sure Batman isn't your role model? No need to be ashamed about it, there are worse people to look up to than one of the founders of the Justice League." She commented in a dry tone, giving Spider-man a dull stare. It was then that she saw his pause.

'Justice League,' Peter silently questioned. Did she mean the Avengers? He's heard some weird names for them before; freaks and show offs being the chief among them, but never the 'Justice League.' He doubted she meant the Fantastic Four or the X-men, but who else could she mean?

She mentioned it so casually that he doubted it was some secret group of heroes...or maybe it was a group so small that the media just overlooked it? That sounded plausible but when he added up all the other evidence...

Peter shook his head, trying to get rid of the thoughts. He could deal with later, preferably when he wasn't disarming a bomb.

As if fate agreed with him, he found the last wire.

"Three wires for three bombs," he stated after going over all the wires again, just to make sure he hadn't missed one or misjudged. Catwoman looked at him with some hesitation and Spider-man caught the look.

"Don't tell me you're getting cold feet?" He asked and earned a small glare for his teasing tone. Taking the hint, Spider-man switched lanes, "look, you aren't going to die here. I'm going to take this bomb off, you'll tell me where to find the Joker, I'll introduce him to thunder and lightning before I wrap him up with a bow for the boys in blue. It'll be fine, I promise. Pinky promise," he reassured, holding up a pinky.

Catwoman looked down at the kid for a moment before a slow smile tugged at her lips. Yeah, this kid was a real treat.

"You're a good kid," she admitted before she wrapped her pinky around his. It was rare to see in this city. Most kids went one of two ways; they learned only to care about them and their own and those that learned only to care for themselves. It was rare, too rare, to see a kid care about someone that they don't know.

Peter grinned beneath his mask. She really did remind him of Black Cat, a few rough edges, and criminal intentions, but there was good in her. It just needed to be brought out.

"Alright, let's do this." He said, grabbing two of the wires. Catwoman grabbed the last one. They made eye contact, and Spider-man felt his heart try to jump out of his chest. Taking a deep breath, he calmed his nerves.
"Three...two...one!" Spider-man said, yanking the wires with Catwoman. For a brief moment, he worried that he had messed up when he heard a beep, but let out a long sigh of relief when there was no following explosion. He heard Catwoman let out a sigh at the same time before she all but jumped out of the suicide vest and throwing it away from her.

They watched it for a moment and relaxed when it didn't explode.

"See? Told you," Spider-man said in an 'I told you so' tone, placing his hands on his hips. "Now, where's this Joker guy?"

Catwoman let out a soft sigh before she shook her head, "Sorry kid, but I'm not going to send you to that psychopath. Just wait for B-" she started, but she was cut off when Spider-man threw his hands up in exasperation.

"We had a deal-"

"I never shook on it."

"You pinkie swore!"

"Look, kid, I'm grateful that you got the bomb off me. I am. That's why in not letting you anywhere near the Joker! If you lose then, death will be the kindest thing he'll do to you! Just find Batman. He'll deal with him. He always does," She said, sounding frustrated. She also left out that Batman would sit him down and rip him a new one for being a hero in Gotham. He had issues when it came to sharing, not that she had any room to talk.

"I'll be fine," he implored sounding just as frustrated. He knew he was young, even though he was seventeen, but it was downright annoying when people used his age against him. He got it. He was still, technically, a kid but he saw enough and did enough.

Peter Parker put the man in Spider-man.

"You-" Catwoman began before she bit her tongue and huffed out a breath. Really, why was she even getting worked up about this kid? Yeah, he was a good one, but she wasn't exactly known for her altruistic nature. Half her mind said it was because she knew how much of a lunatic the Joker was. The other half said it was just...wrong to send this kid off to his fate after what he did for her. Seriously, did he not know what kind of monster he was trying to pick a fight with? The entire graveyards the Joker filled as collateral damage in his fight against the Dark Knight? How could he live in Gotham and not hear all the horror stories about this murderous psychopath?

Catwoman let out a groan, throwing her head up to the night sky in exasperation, “Bats, you’re a terrible influence.” She muttered to herself before looked back at Spider-man, who just stared at her with those creepily large reflective eyes of his.

"Fine, I'll tell you on one condition. I'm going with you," she stated before he had a chance to protest.

"Why," Spider-man demanded, thrown off by the sudden shift in tone. One moment she's stonewalling him and the next she wants to tag along, he didn't get it. Girls were just so confusing.

“Because I'm, unfortunately, developing a conscious and sending a kid to his death goes against it. I'm sure you've racked up a nice amount of experience with dealing with thugs, but the Joker...he a different kind of monster. You're just stubborn enough that I'll know you'll go find him anyway, but at least this way I can pull your ass out of the fire.” She stated as she curled up her whip that she
dropped.

Spider-man opened his mouth to protest that he could take care of himself, again, but he closed it. It was pointless, she clearly wasn't going to budge on the issue. Her tagging along was the best he was going to get.

“Okay. Where are we going?”

“I'll give you directions. Wouldn't want you trying to leave this cat behind,” Selina said, her teasing tone returning. She looked thoroughly pleased with herself when Peter froze, caught planning to do exactly that.

"So, do you have a Spider car? Bug mobile?" She questioned, and she could feel Spider-Man's annoyance roll off him in waves.

"First off, spiders aren't bugs; they're arachnids. Secondly, I have something so much better than a car," he said before walking towards the edge of the building. Out of curiosity, Catwoman followed.

"Hold on tight," he instructed, and Selina did so with some reluctance. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she idly noted that Spider-man felt solid. Everything about him was corded muscle, and she felt it shift underneath her hands; the kid was lanky, but God, every inch of him was dense chiseled muscle.

Before she had time to really think about it, Spider-man jumped off the building. The familiar sense of vertigo rose in her gut before she heard a 'twick' and felt the ice cold wind hitting her face instead of plummeting down to the pavement. When she opened her eyes, she saw lights of the city pass her by.

With a grin, she began telling Spider-man where to go.

... 

Batman picked up a thug by the throat before slamming him down on a crate, making it explode in a cloud of dust and splinters. Turning on his heel, he turned around and grabbed the pipe aimed at his head before yanking it out of the man's hands as he planted a fist into his stomach, almost lifting him off the ground. The second thug fell to his knees, gasping for breath but Batman didn't hesitate to hit him in the temple with the makeshift weapon, knocking him out.

Silently, he turned around and observed the building filled with bodies of groaning men and women. Most of them had arms or legs jutting out at unnatural angles, making sure they couldn't use the guns that laid near them even if they wanted to.

"Just finished up at warehouse thirteen," he heard Robin say over his com.

"Same here with the Gunners," Batgirl reported.

"Regroup at the clock tower," he commanded, tapping on his ear. Both his apprentices confirmed before the line went dead.

Stepping over the groaning bodies, dropping a tracker for the police to pick up on, his mind turned over the last few hours. Thanks to the bugs he planted in every major gang's hideouts, he knew about the gang war that was about to be sparked tonight before it could get started.

It was going to be a mess. A war zone in the streets of Gotham.

Italian crime families fighting amongst themselves. The Irish against the Ukrainians. The Mexican
cartel against the Colombian drug runners. Countless of smaller gangs that smelled blood in the water and saw the opportunity to expand their power.

Thankfully, Commissioner Gordon acted on the information he received. They busted and arrested quite a number of Italian gangsters and the Bat-family stopped the Irish, Cartel, Colombians and numerous other gangs along the way. They couldn't stop everything, not with so few, but they avoided the worst of it by stopping the major crime factions.

Dozens of arrests were being carried out, several criminal families being busted on gun charges and reckless endangerment. Before the night was over, more than a few criminal families would put where they belong for a good, long, while.

Unfortunately, a number of gangs, such as the Penguins, Yakuza, Hanoi Ten and the Bloods attacked their rivals and expanded. Dozens were dead all across the city, and more would continue to die because this battle wasn't going to end tonight. The balance of power was collapsing, and there was blood in the water.

Then he hears that there have been numerous bank robberies all across the city.

Batman didn't believe in coincidences. This was planned. While he and the police were distracted with trying to stop the city becoming a battlefield, someone was trying to rob several banks across the city. Hundreds of millions of dollars if his estimates were correct, and he knew they were.

What's more, all of the bank robbers were wearing suicide vests yet every one of them were professional thieves.

'The money is a means to the end,' Batman deduced as he hopped into the Batmobile. 'Too much work is going into this for money to be the aim. The question is, what's the money for?'

"Just got a report from the police; all of the bank robberies have been stopped," Batgirl informed over the radio. Batman's eyes narrowed, the police were stretched thin as it was and the only way the robberies could have been stopped was if the police were already outside the door.

"Some guy named Spider-man stopped three of them," she continued, answering Batman's question before he had a chance to ask.

That made his eyes narrow even more. A hero operating in his city without his knowledge or, much more importantly, his permission?

"Is he crazy?" Robin asked, sounding a mix of impressed and exasperated. Even Superman knew to stay out of Gotham.

"Don't know, I'm not finding anything on the web about him so he might be a new hero," she continued, and Batman listened intently. He knew he never heard of a 'Spider-man' before so he had to be either a new hero or a very well kept secret. He was betting on the former.

However, if he was a fresh hero, then how had he managed to stop three bank-robbing that had bombs stopped to their chests? Likely a Meta-human. Based on the name alone, Batman deduced spider-like powers.

"But Commissioner Gordon seems to put some stock in him since he put him on patrol on several banks," Batgirl summarized, feeling a little awkward calling her father by their last name. No matter what identity she took, he was always dad to her.

That gave Batman a pause. There were precious few that he trusted as much as James Gordon.
While it could be because the police were stretched too thin, but Batman knew for fact that if Gordon thought 'Spider-man' would get in the way, he would arrest him in a heartbeat. So, he had enough skill, or talent, that he could handle professional criminals.

"Find out what you can, but it's not a priority for now. Let him take some pressure off the police while we find out who's responsible for all this chaos." Batman ordered before he sped off into the night.

"This the place?" Spider-man asked as he touched down on a tall yellow crane that overlooked the docks. He felt the death grip on his throat vanish before Catwoman gave the affirmative.

"Yeah, we're supposed to meet up at dock six and inside a container to exchange the money for getting the bombs off us," she explained, glad to have something solid beneath her.

Selina was no stranger to heights, but Spider-man flipped and twisted enough that her stomach was in knots. She was sure he did it on purpose.

"Neat, but before we do this, is this guy just a regular human?" Spider-man asked and earned a risen eyebrow from Catwoman.

"He has a couple dozen screws missing and a penchant for mass murder, but yeah, I guess so." She answered, "why?"

Spider-man shrugged, "just making sure I don't hit him too hard." With that, he jumped off the crane towards dock six. A quick web to slow his fall and pull him to his destination, he landed with little sound. He focused his hearing and heard footsteps on metal; hoping that it was the Joker and not some security guard, Spider-man crawled through a window and up on the ceiling.

"Puddin, it's past the deadline," a woman's voice reached his ears. He tried to find the source, but it was difficult with all the metal containers. It was high pitched so it carried and Peter could only describe it as bubbly.

"Haha! I suppose it is..." A man voice responded and Spider-Man thought it sounded...unhinged. One of the downsides of putting on a mask and fighting crime was that he dealt with crazy on the regular. He could spot it a mile away, and this guy's voice just oozed crazy. There was just this constant chuckle in his voice like he thought everything was funny in a horribly deranged way.

"You going to push the button, puddin?" The woman asked, and Spider-man heard a loud smack. His head snapped to the source, the woman falling down made enough noise that he knew which container it was.

"You...!" The man's voice started before he paused, "Harley, my sweet, no I'm not going to press the button just yet. Haha, they're just running a little late is all! It would be a shame to blow up all that money," he continued in a less angry voice, but Spider-man could hear the fury building up beneath the surface.

The woman, Harley, apparently couldn't.

"Yeah! Sorry Mista J, I got a little excited," she apologized, and the Joker let out another laugh.

"Quite alright my dear, I know how you get with red buttons."

As they had their conversation, Spider-Man made lowered himself above the contained. Then, with a flip with some flare, he jumped in front of it and went to grab the handle but stopped himself. The
only things he knew about the Joker was that he was crazy and liked explosives. For all he knew, the
guy placed a claymore or something at the entrance.

Raising his hand into a fist, he lightly rapped his knuckles against the door, "room service!" He
called out, throwing on a Spanish accent.

The two went silent before the Joker let out a laugh.

"See Harley? I told you, just running a little-" he said as he opened the door. He was cut off by
Spider-man's fist flattening his nose.

"PUDDIN," Harley screamed as the Joker stumbled backward, blood dripping down his stark white
skin. Spider-man walked into the container, and he took a moment not observe his newest
opponents.

The Joker was dressed like those he coerced into working for him. The only difference he noticed
was that his hair was a moss green and his lips were a ruby red, making his white skin stand out even
more.

Harley was wearing a one piece dress that cut off mid thigh with several layers of frills. It hugged her
torso, cupping her breasts but exposing a fair amount of cleavage before the deep red and blue
reached her shoulders and puffed out into white sleeves. Her face was heavy with white makeup,
though her lips were painted ruby red and her eyes had black eyeshadow. Her blonde hair was in
pigtails; one dyed red while the other was black.

There was also an angry red hand print on one of her cheeks.

"Ohhh...sorry, I got my job mixed up again. What I meant to say is surrender now, so I don't have to
wash your blood out of my suit," he said in a light tone, but there was anger building up in his chest.

It wasn't because Joker hit a woman. He believed in equality and, man or woman, if Peter thought
you deserved it then you got hit.

It was because he hit her when they had some kind of relationship based on the conversation he
overheard and her nickname for the man. Most likely they were lovers-or, at the very least, Harley
was in love with the Joker.

And the Joker knew it. He had to. He wasn't a romantically inept teenager like Peter was. The Joker
knew that Harley loved him and he hit her.

You...you don't hurt the people that love you. Sometimes it was unavoidable, like how he lied to
aunt May to keep her out this dangerous part of his life because if she knew, then she'd be at the front
of every crowd, trying to help him when he was being beaten, just like... However, physical abuse,
or emotional, was just...reprehensible. There was no reason for it. No excuse.

A relationship was based on respect, trust, and love. To twist that, to use violence to...

In the two years that Spider-man existed, there were few crimes that haunted him more than domestic
ones. Those were the ones that kept him up at night. He came to expect cruelty and evilness from his
villains; it became all too clear how far they were willing to go just to hurt him or reach their goals.

But domestic violence was different. It was normal people, people he was trying to protect and...it
was hard sometimes. There have been times that he saves someone from a mugging or falling debris,
but he sees them a week later while they're beating their kids. That's what made it hard.
Peter glared down at the Jokers rising form, cupping a hand over his broken nose.

"You're not Batman," the Joker noted as he rose, his voice muffled by his hand.

"No, I'm not. He sounds like a swell guy though if he kicks your sorry ass," Spider-Man said as he clenched his hands into fists. "I'll be sure to buy him a soda or something after I throw you in the loony bin where you belong."

The Joker laughed at that, removing his hand and revealing a crazed smile with blood stained teeth. "Who are you," he demanded to know, raising a hand that stopped Harley from marching the war path.

"Does nobody watch the news in this city? I'm Spider-man, for crying out loud!" He said, feeling confused and exasperated in equal measures. Not to toot his own horn, but he was nearing the top ten of the favorite superheroes in gossip magazines. Maybe the people he spoke to tonight just didn't enjoy trashy literature, but it was becoming increasingly disturbing that no one knew who he was. If not by name then by his iconic costume.

"Never heard of you! Now go away!" Joker commanded before he pulled out a Tommy gun from absolutely nowhere. His spidey-sense gave him a moment's warning and he jumped backward as he let his instincts guide him.

The Joker pulled the trigger, cackling madly, and Spider-man contorted his body. He dipped his shoulder out of the way of one bullet while leaning to the side to dodge a bullet that passed under his armpit. He felt the wind hit him from the bullet, but he was otherwise unharmed.

He jumped into the air and started twisting his body out of the path of the bullets. Even in the beginning, gunfire had been more of an annoyance that a problem thanks to his spidey-sense and superhuman reflexes.

However, he couldn't dodge every bullet from a machine gun firing this close, especially with so little room to maneuver, and he felt a sharp stinging pain across the side of his thigh and a similar, though more painful wound, above his hip. His hand dipped down, feeling hot blood against his palm and a growing wetness on his back told him that the bullet had gone all the way through.

Knowing that this couldn't go on else he'd be shot in a more vital area, he shot a bullet of webbing at the Joker. He was aiming for the barrel of the gun, but his missed because he was moving around so much. Instead, it hit him in the chest, knocking the wind out of him.

"PUDDIN," Harley screamed again as she charged him with an oversized hammer, apparently uncaring that she was walking into gunfire. Luckily for the both of them, as the Joker was knocked back, the barrel of the gun was pointed upwards.

Spider-man tensed, ready to dodge the swing aimed at his head but he didn't need to. Before Harley could close the distance, Catwoman entered the container and kicked her in the stomach, sending her sprawling with the Joker.

She let out a grunt before looking up at who attacked her. Her jaw dropped, and an unexpected emotion entered her eyes. Betrayal.

“Cats?! What are you hitting me for?” She demanded as she rose, the Joker behind her. He touched the webbing that splattered across his chest and onto the biceps of his arms. He looked a little panicked when he couldn't move his hand away from it.

“I don't want to hit you, darling. I want to hit that asshole behind you for strapping a bomb to me,”
Catwoman answered in a hiss. Harley looked shocked at that, hesitantly giving a look over her shoulder.

“Mistah J?” She questioned meekly, but she didn't ask the question that was on her mind.

“I told you, I needed the best thieves in the city! Of course, I included Selina,” the Joker responded, and Catwoman went stiff at the mention of her name. A quick glance and Spider-man saw that she had paled, her suspicions confirmed that he knew her identity. He couldn't see beneath her gloves, but he knew that she gripped her whip with white knuckles.

“But she's my friend!” Harley argued though it sounded more like a child making a stand for herself than an adult.

“She would have been fine,” the Joker said, dismissing the issue entirely.

“But...,” Harley tried to speak up, fidgeting from one foot to the other, “Cat's is my friend.” She repeated, glancing at Catwoman and missing the thoroughly annoyed look from the Joker. His eyes narrowed, and Spider-man didn't even need his spidey-sense to warn him.

The Joker reached into his pocket and withdrew a small ball. Knowing what he planned to do, Spider-man reacted with superhuman reflexes and webbed his hand to the ball so he couldn't throw it on the ground.

The Joker looked a bit shocked by that as he glanced at his web covered hand but he simply changed plans. Since he couldn't throw it on the ground, the Joker slammed his fist into the side of the storage container, cracking the ball and smoke flooded the room. Spider-man shot forward before the Joker could escape and reached out blindly into the smoke.

Spider-man grabbed the Joker by the collar through the smoke and punched him in the stomach before he had a chance to flee. He caught air for a moment, folding on the punch, and Spider-man tossed him out of the container. He rolled on the ground, getting his arms and hands even more caught up in the sticky webbing.

“You! You ruined a perfectly good plan,” Joker accused as Spider-man walked out of the smoke filled container. “I barely even got started! I made sure Bats was busy and everything...” he trailed off, the last part sounding like a pouting child. He even stuck out his lip to complete the image.

“Ohhhhh, man, I am so not sorry. Plus, being a menace and stopping the bad guy's plans is kind in the superhero handbook,” Spider-man replied flippantly before he webbed Joker's legs together.

“Well, Spider-man,” Joker spat the name out with surprising venom, “I'll make sure my next plan involves dealing with you once I get out of Arkham...again!” He threatened dramatically before he threw his head back and laughed. “It’s going to be so much fun! You joke around unlike Bats, always so serious that one. I-” He continued but was cut off by Spider-man webbing his mouth.

“Sorry, my hand slipped,” he said before turning back to the container. He couldn’t say he was too shocked to see that it was empty of both smoke and the girls.

‘Man, I need to tell Cat that I found her twin or something,’ he thought to himself as he shook his head. They had so much in common, including their love for the ninja disappearing act. He was still learning how to pull that off himself.

‘Now that's over and done with, I can finally figure out where I am,’ He thought to himself as he notified the police that the Joker had been captured. With his work done here, Spider-man swung off into the night in search for answers and a first-aid kit.
"Ahh," Peter groaned more out of annoyance than pain. The air was so cold outside that once his blood cooled down, it started to ice over. Pulling up his suit was uncomfortable and painful, but it needed to be done to make sure his insides weren't becoming outsides in some dingy alleyway.

Some hours ago Peter used his webbing in mist form to stop the bleeding, so there was a fair amount of the white powder mixed in with his icy blood. Other than that it looked roughly like all the other times he had been shot. Little round hole leading to a tunnel through his body and hurt like a mother. Reaching back, he winced when he lightly touched the matching hole on the other side of him.

“It didn't hit anything important, at least,” Peter muttered as he pushed his suit back down. He was shot in the fleshy area above his hip, so none of his organs had been harmed. Though, it was fairly annoying that a single inch to the right and he'd be fine.

“I need to get better at dodging bullets,” he muttered to himself before he let out a loud yawn. He pulled out the phone that he lifted earlier and saw it was nearing five in the morning. Not counting the long hours in New York, he's busted bad guys for about seven hours, and dear lord did he bust bad guys. He burned through three separate capsules of webbing tonight alone just from stringing them up.

Looking down at the phone, he frowned slightly before tilting his head to the side. A few seconds ticked by and he couldn't hear anything nearby, so with a flick of his thumb he brought the main screen up. Naturally it needed a password and, naturally, it was 1111.

Bringing up Google, he muttered underneath his breath as he typed away, “who is Batman?” The spinning wheel of death spun around and a few times as Peter tapped his foot impatiently. His face was numb from swinging around the city and he was anxious.

This was fine, right? Could he multitask for a few moments? There wasn't anything going on nearby...hmmm...maybe if he patrolled and Googled at the same time...? No! No, that would send a terrible message to the kids! J.J. would rip him a new one on the front page.

He could see the headline now; 'Spider-man, texting and swinging instead of protecting citizens!' Gah, the jerk...

Shaking his head of stray thoughts Peter clicked on the first link that he saw. He didn't get a good look at it, but it looked like it was some forum. He was proven right when a familiar looking front page popped up.

Peter's eyes nearly fell out his head when he saw that his question had well over five thousand pages worth of others trying to answer it. The threads were long, filled to the brim with what the posters thought was evidence that supported their theories. The forum was overfilled with information, even if someone did guess correctly then it would be lost in a sea of wrong guesses. It surpassed Spider-man's similar forum by several thousand pages.

“Uhhh,” Peter got out and for once, he was reduced speechless by what he was seeing. Batman wasn't some small time hero. Based on this alone then he was several hundred times more popular than Spider-man. Not that he was jealous, or anything.

'Then why have I never heard of him before,' Peter asked himself, a sinking feeling forming in his gut. Adding this to the fact that Gotham was where New York was supposed to be, no one having
heard of Spider-man, the change in season...

A picture was being formed and Peter didn't like it one bit.

Letting out a haggard breath, Peter clicked on a link that one of the posters attached to a thread. Two words jumped out at him; Justice League. Like Se...Catwoman said; Batman was apparently a founder of the organization that he's never heard of.

A web page appeared and Peter's first impression was that it was very generic. He remembered being similarly let down when the Avengers created their own website. They really should have taken his offer to design it. He had plenty of practice on the Bugle's and traffic to the site went up twenty percent because of him. Their loss.

Scanning the top options he clicked the info tab. Roster seemed appealing, as did Help, but Info was what he was looking for. The spinning wheel of death circled on and on as if it knew Peter was on edge and it relished in his suffering.

“Come on...,” Peter muttered, tapping his foot. “I did not kick Ultron's ass just to lose to you. Go faster, you little...!” Peter trailed off and as if the phone heard his threats, the info tab appeared. Wasting no time, he scrolled through it. With practiced ease, he picked through the important information while ignoring the rest.

Things like dates, names, names of treaties, or in this case a charter, and important events.

The pit in Peter's stomach sunk lower and lower as he read on. By the end, his stomach felt like it was resting in his shoes. He stared at the screen, the cogs trying to move in his head but they were clogged with disbelief. He felt numb, but it wasn't the cold.

“Shit,” Peter said. The word just slipping out of his mouth. He sucked in a ragged breath as he managed to look away from the screen, only to put his hands on his knees and bent over. “Shit,” Peter repeated, letting the breath out. If Aunt May could see him now she'd wash his mouth out with soap.

'Except she's not here...I'm...I'm...,' Peter thought, dragging a hand down his face. This didn't make any sense. Not at all. How...why...he knew the answers to both those questions. That voice and apparently he was needed.

“Shit,” Peter breathed as he tried forcing the cogs to turn. Taking him from...his home and dropping him off here, just for tonight seemed like a bit much. Sure, it had been a crazy night but it wasn't worth yanking him from his home when there were plenty of other heroes to choose from. Most of them could do what he did and do it better.

That much was confirmed when he clicked on the Roster. A space alien that's embodies the American way? A woman from the Amazon that could punch through mountains and fly? A man that was a part of an intergalactic police force that used a ring to create anything he could imagine? A green man from Mars that could read minds? A Speedster that could run as fast as the speed of light?

“I'm in a different universe,” Peter said, finally saying it aloud. He knew of their existence, that cat got out the bag when Thor announced where he was from, but he never expected to be sent to one! He had no idea how he was supposed to even get back!

Peter clenched his eyes shut and let out a long breath. Taking deep breaths always helped him when something stupidly crazy happened to him. Like getting superpowers from a spider bite or being bonded with an alien parasite with rejection issues.
Counting to ten, Peter opened his eyes as he took in another deep breath, “Okay.” He said, trying to wrap his head around this. It was a struggle, a real one, but he could do this.

“Okay, I'm in a different universe,” he said, trying to break up any denial that might try to cling on. He had to face the truth and he needed to face it now, no matter how much he didn't want to. He was alone, with no money, in a city smack dab in the middle of winter and the only thing that he had was his suit. To top that off, his web shooters were running low, on their next to last capsule, in a city that had more crime by the hour than New York had in a day.

“Okay. Okay. Okay. You got this! I got this. I'm Spider-man, I totally got this,” Peter said, wishing that his little pep talk had actually worked before he looked back down at the phone screen. His eyes honed in on the Help tab and acting on an impulse, he clicked on it. Peter was never one to ask for help but if he ever needed it then it was now.

A drop box fell and revealed a list of common complaints. Impossibly, the pit in Peters' gut went deeper and didn't stop until it hit bedrock. With a shaking hand, he pressed on one of the complaints and a screen appeared. It was a basic form asking for things like his name, birthday, and so on. It was the basic stuff. Nothing that he hadn't seen a thousand times before.

The only thing that made it different was the large text box towards the bottom. A simple sentence above it and asking for him to provide his reasoning below.

Why do you believe you are in a different universe/dimension?

Peter gripped the phone so tight that the screen cracked making him stop instantly. This was his only tool for gathering information. He couldn't break it just because he felt like screaming his frustration to the heavens and throwing a tantrum worthy of legends.

Counting to ten, just like aunt May taught him, Peter filled the boxes with random nonsense before clicking enter. As he expected when the next screen appeared it was a box telling him that his form had been received and that the Justice League would be with him in a few short YEARS!

In a way, Peter could understand. Life sucked and when it sucked, it sucked hard. So, when someone was down in the dumps for whatever reason and they just don't have the strength to undo whatever mistake or injustice was done. Then they hear about an alternate reality; what do you think goes through their mind?

Most would dismiss it altogether in favor of wallowing in their self-pity. However, some would see a glimmer of hope. After all, there had to be a them in a different dimension, right? With how utterly awful things are here it can only be better, right?

Naturally, they cling to that hope and they go bother the Justice League about it in the hopes that they'll be believed. In the hopes that when they're dropped off in the new reality whatever bad decision wasn't made or whatever injustice done to them can be avoided. In hopes of a clean slate, they try to abandon the one that they have.

Enough of them did this that Peter was going to have to wait two fucking years for his case to be heard if he went through the normal channels.

'Either I don't go through the proper channels or...what, built a cross-multidimensional portal,' Peter thought to himself. He didn't have the money nor the know how. He was a lover of science; chemistry and biology being his areas of expertise. Engineering became a necessity considering the kind of tech his baddies had and the need to make the most of what he had.
However, crossing the universes required math. A lot of math. Unholy amounts of math. Pages and pages and pages of math. Enough math that Mephisto himself would turn away from it in disgust, saying such vile amounts of math was simply too cruel.

Peter could understand high-level physics, far better than most, but there was a line and building that kind of portal passed it by miles.

'I could find someone...,' Peter thought, reaching for options but he shook his head again. In his experience, there were two kinds of people that had access to cross-multidimensional portals; heroes and villains. He was far better off trying to skip that stupidly long line.

Or ... he was dropped off here for a reason, right? Because he was needed...Peter doubted that it was just for tonight. There was no way that he was plucked from his universe just to bust some thugs. So, he was needed for something big, something that was worth all the trouble of bringing him here because he was the only one that could deal with it.

'Then I just need to do whatever it is,' Peter thought, feeling hope well up in him. 'There's just the problem of finding what it is ... and doing it ... and...,' Peter continued to think, the flame of hope was flickering as he thought about all the problems with that plan. He didn't know the who, what, when, where or why. Standing around Gotham and waiting for something to kick off was impractical considering that it felt like it was sub-zero temperatures and he didn't know how long he'd have to wait for.

Then a thought struck him like a truck. It knocked the wind out of him, expelling the breaths he took, and he couldn't focus on anything other than that one thought.

“What if I can't get back,” Peter asked the alleyway, looking up at the night sky. The stars were beginning to dim and the pitch black darkness was starting to ebb away to show that morning was coming. The longest night of his life was almost over but the longest day was about to begin.

What if he couldn't get back? What would he do? What would aunt May...

“I can't deal with this now,” Peter said, sounding resolute to push that issue away. He would get back to aunt May. No matter what. He was not leaving her alone, not after she lost uncle Ben. He turned and began walking towards the exit of the alleyway.

“And I need to stop talking to myself. Someone'll think I'm crazy,” Peter said to himself, trying his age old trick to help him cope with the stress. It didn't work.

What he wasn't expecting was an answer at his lame attempt to keep himself from having a mental breakdown.

“I'd recommend that, but running around dressed in spandex and fighting criminals already isn't doing you any favors,” noted a woman's voice from in front of him as she stepped into the exit of the alleyway. Peter's attention snapped up and he saw that it was an older woman around sixty or so. Short hair that was a deep silver, pale skin with wrinkles around her eyes. Her lips were pressed into a grim line so it made it look like she was scowling at him.

He didn't think that she was because her eyes just seemed so sad. Like she was watching one of those 'donate to animal shelters' commercials that used all those cats and dogs...god, and the music...if Peter wasn't broke as a joke he'd throw money at the screen until he stopped crying about the unfairness of it all.

“Er-yeah, but at least I don't talk back to the voices in my head,” Spider-man shot back as he took a
step back. Was everyone in this city half ninja or something? Based on that coat he was guessing she was either a scientist or a doctor, both of which he needed so Peter stopped in his tracks.

“Funny,” the woman said but her tone indicated she thought it was anything but. Her eyes dipped down to his hip and her eyes narrowed. “You've been shot,” she deduced as she walked into the alleyway with a sense of purpose.

Spider-man took another step back, “uh, it's a flesh wound?” Good to see that mere bullets and world-shattering events can’t stop him from making Monty Python references.

The woman stopped right in front of him and with precisely zero hesitation she grabbed his hand and pried it away from the wound. His spidey-sense wasn't acting up so Peter lets her examine the wound. Didn't mean he wasn't eying her suspiciously.

She made a humming noise before she turned him around by the shoulder and Peter complied with some hesitance.

“So, are you a doctor?” He decided to ask after a moment. He was in a new city and if Gotham was anything like New York, it was chalk full of wackos. Best to make sure. That and it was highly suspicious that a doctor was around when he, kinda, needed one. Most would just call that lucky but Peter Parker knew for fact that the only luck he had was the bad kind.

“Yes,” the woman said curtly before letting go of Peter. He was quick to turn back around and put a little distance between them. “You're lucky. The bullet didn't hit anything important.”

“So, it was just a flesh wound,” Peter said a bit smugly, glad that she was mirroring his thoughts on the new tunnel through him. The woman let out a huff that could have been a laugh if she hadn't nipped it in the bud.

“You...,” she let out a sigh and the sadness in her eyes grew more intense. She opened her mouth to say something before shutting it with a click. Peter was about to ask what she wanted to say but she shook her head, displacing some snow before she looked into Spider-man's reflective eyes.

“I run a clinic a block from here. Follow me,” she said before turning around. It didn't take long for her to glance over her shoulder when she didn't hear Spider-man following her. Her eyes narrowed, a question in them and Spider-man gave a shrug.

“My aunt said never go anywhere with strangers,” he said with a grin in his voice. The woman looked at him for a long moment before she shook her head.

“My name's Leslie Tompkins,” Leslie introduced herself before pinning a glare on him. “Now hurry up before you bleed out,” she commanded as she exited the alley. Peter hesitated a long moment, weighing to pro's and cons of following.

In the end, he needed to get patched up before he went back out. Thinking that he'd get a quick stitch or two, Peter followed the doctor.

It was a short walk to the clinic, but time seemed to stretch on for Peter. The city was eerily quiet. The kind of quiet that belonged in a sleepy town in the middle of nowhere, not a grand city like Gotham. If...if it was like New York then there were around twenty million people in this city.

Yet, it was quite. He couldn't hear the familiar sounds of cars honking, people shouting over each other, or even the footsteps of hundreds as they went about their lives. New York was awake and loud no matter what time it was. Gotham...it was like Gotham was holding its breath, waiting for the chance to breathe again.
Spider-man's attention snapped up, homing in on the direction of the gunshots. They weren't close but he could still bust the perp. Hopefully, no one had been hurt but Spider-man knew better than that. He took a step in the direction, his wrist out and his fingers in position to fire off a web but he felt a hand on his shoulder.

“You've been shot,” Leslie pointed out. “Let Batman and the police deal with that,” she ordered gently.

“Um, no way,” he dismissed the thought instantly. He didn't know this Batman guy and the police can't be everywhere. Plus, he was already right here and Peter's never been one to look away from a crime.

With ease, he shrugged off her hand, “I'll be back in a second. I might bring a guest so-” Peter said, shooting off a web and preparing to swing off. However, persistently, the hand returned and Peter let out an exaggerated sigh of exasperation.

“I'll be fine-” Peter turned and began to snap at the woman before he felt his spidey-sense tingle. It was light like someone brushed their fingertips against the back of his neck and the source of it was coming from in front of him. Out of reflex, he jumped backward, trying to put some distance between whatever it was but it didn't do any good.

A mist hit him in the face and it burned. Not the kind of 'my face is on fire' but more of 'jalapeno pepper juice in my eyes' kind of burn. Thankfully, his reflective lenses protected his eyes from the offending substance but it got in his mouth and nose.

He coughed, trying to do...something. Anything that would make the burning stop and it was for that reason he missed it when his spidey-sense acted up again. He felt a sharp prick in the neck, the uncomfortable pain of a needle, and Peter smacked the hands away before backpedaling.

“You...!” Peter began but he trailed off as another coughing fit kicked up and silenced him. He noticed that his tongue felt numb and heavy like it was made of lead. He took another step backward and nearly tripped as his head suddenly felt so light.

‘A sedative,’ Peter deduced, his thoughts moving sluggishly.

“I'm saving your life you, stupid child. Running around with a bullet wound...! I'm taking you back to my clinic, patching you up and then I'm going to beat some sense into your thick skull.” Leslie snapped at him and he saw she was drawing nearer.

“I'mmmmm...” Peter drawled out but whatever he was going to say was lost when the darkness overtook him and he slipped into unconsciousness.

…

“I want a sitrep,” James Gordon said to the police officer to his right. Renee Montoya barely missed a beat even though she was caught off guard by the demand.

“Sir,” Renee began before she had to pause, pain flashing in her eyes before she squared her shoulders. “Sir, the Beretti, Cassamento, Inzerillo and Panessa families on the east end have all been destroyed tonight. Officers James Cuttie, Samantha Rose, Joshua Stone, Jacob Calleyway, Richard Smith and Tommy Gustus were killed in action. There were members of SWAT that were killed, and others that were injured but … but most of them look promising.” Renee said, swallowing her discomfort.
Gordon clenched his fist hard enough that he bled, but he simply took out another cigarette, his tenth tonight. Barbara was going to kill him. However, he took a long drag from it all the same. Looking up at the night sky, he nodded to show her to continue.

“We've busted a lot of the Falcone crime family, but Carmine isn’t in custody yet. If we flip some of his guys, though...,” she trailed off before refocusing. That could be dealt with later. “The Ibanescu family and the Maroni family are in custody. The Riely family is going strong, but we've arrested a few high ranking officers. The same with the Yakuza,” she continued as she followed Gordon.

“How many were killed,” Gordon asked as he walked to his police cruiser. Renee didn't comment on it but Commissioner Gordon, for a brief moment, really looked his age.

“Another ten on our side, sir. I-I don't have their names yet,” Renee said, praying to whatever twisted god in that sky that her partner wasn't on that list of names. Harvey was a damn good man with a family. He did not deserve to die tonight.

“I think around fifteen or more were killed for the crime families. A lot more were injured and are being treated but I'd expect for that number to go up higher.”

“Civilian casualties,” Gordon said as he slid into his police cruiser. He grabbed the ice cold coffee that's been sitting in it for the past five hours and drained it. It was a chore not to cringe at the taste, it was bad coffee when it was made and now it was cold and old. However, it did its job and gave him the kick he needed.

“...More than there should be, sir,” Renee said after a moment and said nothing when Gordon gripped the wheel with white knuckles. Managing to pry his hands off the wheel he turned his car on and threw it in drive.

They drove in silence for a few moments, the city unusually quiet, before the silence was broken.

“Sir, this isn’t over...is it?” Renee asked, watching the ruined buildings go by. Gordon glanced over at her before looking back at the road.

“No,” he said, drawing the word out and sounding utterly exhausted.

“...The bottom feeders smell blood and they'll go into a frenzy,” Renee said voicing her theory. Her eyes snapping to the side as she heard gunshots in the distance. The gunfire continued for a few long seconds before it stopped abruptly. Then, the only thing she heard was Commissioner Gordon cursing underneath his breath.

“They are,” Gordon said before taking another drag of his cigarette. He was going to need to buy a new pack before the night was over. When the night began it had been a scramble to make as many arrests as they could to put a dent in organized crime. Most would be brought up on illegally owning guns, resisting arrest, attempt of murder and whatever else they could get to stick.

Naturally, Gordon would cut some deals so he could get something on the criminal family leaders. With the help of Batman, they've managed to cut the heads off several snakes. Their bodies were thrashing now but soon they would stop … and then the vultures would come and pick the corpses clean.

This was just round one. This fight was far from over.

Almost of third of his forces have been killed or injured and things were only going to get harder. It would be a total upheaval, the balance of power in the underworld was shattered and every idiot with a gun was going to try to pick up the pieces for themselves. This calm … this quite … it wouldn't
last. This last hour before dawn was the quiet before the storm and James Gordon didn't know how he could brace his city against what was to come.

The only good that had come out of tonight was Spider-man and that psychopathic monster was well on his way to Arkham. Hopefully, he'd stay there for awhile. At least until all of this was sorted out.

Speaking of which, “any word on Spider-man?” He asked, with a flick of a button, his siren was on as he turned down a road in the direction of the gunshots. Renee used the radio to let the other officers know that they were heading towards them.

“No, sir. Last we heard, he webbed a couple of gangs on his way towards Crime Alley. I'm guessing that he's taking a pit stop to patch himself up,” she guessed. Say what you want about hero's; some of them were self-centered show offs that were more concerned with publicity than saving people, but they were built tough.

Commissioner Gordon put Spider-man somewhere between mid teens and early twenties, so he was likely a teenager. Renee could honestly say if she had been shot at that age then the last thing she would be doing would be swinging around the city and knocking heads together.

Gordon frowned, “no. He's too stubborn for that,” he deduced, Spider-man's phrase ringing in his ears. “That kid's only going to stop when something kills him,” he said and, despite only meeting him once, James was really hoping that wasn't anytime soon. There were too few good men in Gotham city.

“Doesn't matter,” he said, shaking his head of stray thoughts as he sped through the empty streets of Gotham. Thankfully, the curfew was being listened to for once. The civilians were off the streets and probably barricading their doors. He blew through red lights, putting the pedal to the metal as he glared at the road.

“He can head in for tonight … but come tomorrow, we are going to need his help. Whether Batman wants to admit it or not.”

...

POP POP POP!

Gunfire erupted in the condemned building, flashes of light illuminating the darkness for brief moments. However, it was long enough for the thugs to catch a glimpse of the cloaked figure they were aiming at. It looked little more than a shadow that darted between the gaps in the ruined wall; they might have even thought it was just a figment of their imagination if said figment hadn't already taken down most of their gang.

Barbara Gordon kept running, bullets impacting her makeshift cover in random places, making splinters of rotten wood rain down upon her. She ignored it, even as she internally growled how tedious it would be to get them out of her hair before morning. Barbara just kept running until she reached a door and, not slowing down in the slightest, she slammed her shoulder into it and all but knocked the thing off its rusty hinges.

The sound drew the attention of the gangsters and bullets punched through the decrepit walls as if they were tissue paper. Barbara was just out of reach from where they thought she was and she didn't wait a moment to spring into action. Tapping her visor, the thin translucent membrane that covered her eyes colored as she activated her inferred function.

'Five gunmen,' Barbara observed, noting their locations. All were clustered together but there was enough room between them that it would be difficult to subdue them in time if she just tossed in a
flash-bang since they would be likely to shoot at random. Tapping her visor again, the bright red of the men faded and everything was replaced with darkness. All except the weapons in the gangster's hands.

'Three AK-47s, one 9mm pistol...and one desert eagle,' Barbara observed. From the text boxes that flanked the weapons, she saw that the would have to reload soon but it would be best to end this before someone was killed by a stray bullet. Tapping her visor again, the membrane faded back to a clear, translucent color.

Reaching to her belt, Barbara pulled out a laser pen and aimed it at the hinges of the door that connected the two rooms. The hinges glowed bright red for a moment to let her know they had been cut. Taking a breath, she pulled out her grappling gun and aimed at the door before she pulled the trigger. The grappling hook punching through the door as if it wasn't there and continuing to punch through the wall on the far side of the room.

The gunfire came to a halt and Barbara didn't even need her infrared vision to know that the gangsters were looking at it the cord stupidly. With no hesitation, she pulled the trigger again a second before she let go of her grappling gun. The gun smacked into the door with a heavy thump before the door was drug along with the gun.

The door flew across the room before it came to an abrupt stop on the faces of two gangsters. The door exploded in a shower of splinters, knocking the two men out. While their attention was diverted to their fallen comrades, Batgirl dove into the room and let two batarangs fly free. They collided with one AK-47 and the desert eagle, knocking the weapons from the gangster's hands.

As the guns clattered uselessly onto the floor Batgirl dashed forward to the closest one, who still had a gun. The gangster didn't manage to fire off a shot before Batgirl closed the distance, batting his hands aside while she delivered a powerful uppercut to the man's chin. The gangster's head snapped back before it knocked forward as Batgirl followed it up with a knee to the stomach. To finish him off, she punched him in the temple before grabbing the back of his pants and shirt so she could throw the unconscious body at one of the gangsters.

She lacked super strength, but after years of intense training Barbara's muscles were like cords of steel; taut and powerful. The gangster collided with his friends, knocking him off his feet, and giving Barbara time to move towards her next victim.

Unlike the gangsters, her eyes had no trouble seeing in the darkness so, while a gangster scrambled to find his gun Barbara jumped up and hit him with a flying knee to the nose. When she landed and as the gangster stumbled backward, cupping his flattened nose, she continued her onslaught with a shot to the liver. The gangster dropped his hands, either to lash out at her or cup his injured side, but it didn't matter when Batgirl delivered a left hook that snapped his head to the side and dropped him.

Groaning filled the dark room but Barbara ignored it as she spun on her heel and dashed at the last standing gangster. He was blindly lashing out, just trying to hit something, and only succeeded when Batgirl caught his punch before slamming her elbow into his chin. As the gangster slumped forward, she heard scrambling behind her.

Pivoting, she raised her leg as she dropped the gangster before dropping a heel kick on a gangster that took a dive at her. However, the same moment her foot made contact a device shot across the room and hit the gangster in the chest. A short scream filled the abandoned building as several hundred volts arced through the gangster before Barbara silenced him with her kick.
A beat passed and Batgirl didn’t see any of the gangsters making any moves to get back up. Seeing that her work was done, she grabbed a few of her zip-ties and began cuffing the criminals. Thankfully, she had enough but she was down to her last two.

“I had it,” Barbara said into the darkness as she worked. A second later she heard someone drop down from the ceiling. She didn't even need to turn around to know that Nightwing stood behind her. He entered the room without that cocky swagger of his and gave a single shoulder shrug.

“I'd just figure that I'd help out a little,” he said coming to a stop behind her. Based on the soft squeak of the floorboards, Barbara knew that he was shifting from foot to foot.

“What are you doing here? There's still a good hour before dawn,” Barbara replied as she tied up another gangster. To those that knew them both, they would note the lack of any fondness in her voice. She wasn't as cold as the chill of winter, but she wasn't exactly an inviting fire.

“It's gotten real quiet outside. Real quiet. I think this will be it for the night, but tomorrow...,” Dick Grayson, or Nightwing, trailed off before he shrugged again. “I came to check up on you to see how you're doing,” he said, the squeak becoming more frequent as he spoke. Shifting was always Dick's tell. Even when he was Robin.

“And you have,” Batgirl said, still not looking at Dick. The dismissal was clear in her tone.

Dick rubbed the back of his neck, “Baa-tgirl,” he said, almost tripping up when she used 'The Voice' on him. “Please? I just-,” he tried to get out but Barbara was quick to cut him off.

“I know. This is hardly the first time we've done this Nightwing and I think I've heard all you have to say.” Barbara said, her voice remaining professional but she tightened the zip-tie a tad too tight. “You're with Starfire. Again. After … what, a week after you broke it off with me? Again,” she said as she finished her work. Barbara was thankful that she had her back turned to Dick because her lip quivered, though she was quick to school her expression. Batgirl was supposed to be calm, cool and collected; not a teenage girl that cried her heart out at the thought of seeing her ex with another woman.

“I, ah, I know it looks bad, but-” Dick got out but Barbara was quick to cut him off again.

“We were fighting a lot. You were acting too much like Batman,” she didn't need to look at him to know that he stiffened at the accusation. “And I was pissed that you went to Jump City without telling me. Which is where Starfire is. Who you are dating a few days after we break up-” Barbara cut herself off to take a deep breath.

“Like I said, we've had this conversation a thousand times and I'm not interested in having it again.” Again, the dismissal was clear in her tone but Dick wasn't having it. Not until he said his piece.

“I didn't cheat on you,” he blurted out forcefully. “I would never-”

“When you left Gotham for Jump city and she kissed you?”

“She needed to learn the language!”

“By sticking her tongue down your throat?”

The sound of Dicks teeth grinding was audible and Barbara almost felt guilty for enjoying the sound. She knew it was the truth but she'd be a lair if Barbara said she didn't feel a flash of satisfaction that her words got to him.
“Yes, but that was years ago,” he pointed out. He had been young and was totally taken by surprise. Plus, they had been at the age where being boyfriend and girlfriend meant you held hands and exchanged phone numbers.

“Fine. When you two were sucking faces in Tokyo,” Barbara pointed out and that time Dick did wince.

“I—we hadn’t seen each other in like a year, and you weren’t returning my calls—” Dick said, trying to defend himself. It had been a moment of weakness. He worked with Starfire for over a year and lack of any real contact with Barbara for any the same amount of time. He fell in love with Starfire and he fell hard when he was supposed to be Barbara's boyfriend.

Barbara pressed her lips into a thin line and she knew that was true. It wasn’t the first time they had this conversation nor was it the first time she used that card against him. As much as she didn’t want to admit it, Barbara knew she wasn’t blameless in Dick breaking things off with her that time. She had a lot on her plate with Jason, with Bruce and with what the Joker did to-. Barbara could admit that she hadn’t been a good girlfriend at the time and she could hardly blame Dick for falling for Kory. That time.

However, there was one card she had up her sleeve and it was a card she hadn’t used before.

“How about that one time where Batman put you in charge of the city, all your Teen Titan friends came over and she. Wore. My. Suit,” Barbara hissed, whipping around and glaring at her ex-boyfriend. It was worthy of Alfred.

Dick hung his head low, a scarlet flush creeping on his cheeks. He thought he deleted all the footage of that in the Cave. “That-Starfire, she just...-Look, I know I'm … I haven't been the best boyfriend,” he said and Barbara made a noise of agreement that he promptly ignored.

“I just – I just want us to be friends. I know that I'm the last face you want to see right now, and I get that, but...!” Dick forced out and cursed how clumsy it sounded. He had all the words in his head but none of them managed to get out his mouth the way that he wanted them to.

Barbara's glare softened before the fight let her in a small sigh. “I know,” she said, turning away from him, “I know. Usually, we have a city between us whenever this happens so we can cool off. We can't have that now. Gotham's going to become a bloodbath and we need all hands on deck,” she continued before looking back at Dick.

“Are we good then,” Dick asked a bit hopefully. He took a step forward and was thoroughly disheartened when Barbara took a step back.

“We are,” she said, her words not matching her actions. “Just … I can work with you Nightwing. I can put my feelings aside and work with you but that’s it. So, please, just … just leave me alone,” there were so many things that she wanted to say. Some were what her heart was compelling her to while her brain said different things entirely. What came out her mouth would give her time to sort out how she was feeling.

As of right now, she was torn between kissing Dick and punching him in the mouth.

Dick looked disappointed but he slowly shook his head all the same. He opened his mouth to say something but he seemed to think better of it before turning away and walking out the room.

Barbara was left alone in the darkness, only her thoughts keeping her company.
The first thing that Peter did after waking up was to immediately regret the decision. His throat burned and it felt like peppers were shoved up his nose given how clogged his nostrils were. He also woke up hours earlier than his body wanted because his eyelids felt like lead weights and the did everything in their power to remain closed.

Naturally, he turned on his side and tried pushing off the hellish nightmare that was reality in favor of spending a few more hours in dreamland. Letting out a sigh, he tried to relax his body and ignore the aches and pains. It worked for a few moments before a draft hit him with icy cold air and he shivered.

Letting out a small groan of annoyance, Peter looked up in hopes of finding a blanket. He blinked owlishly as he realized that he wasn't in his uncomfortable bed at home but in some kind of doctor's office. Then the last memories he had jumped out at him and hit him like a semi.

Jumping out of bed, his hand shot up to his face. Ice cold dread clutched his heart when he felt naked skin where his mask was supposed to be. Peter was still wearing his suit, but his gloves were missing and he saw ink in between the grooves of his finger pads. He was too busy panicking to notice that the bullet wound above his hip and the graze on his thigh were sutured neatly.

Peter's heart was trying to punch its way out of his chest yet the rest of his body was frozen stiff. The one nightmare that he never hoped to experience was happening again and he had no idea what to do. Someone, that woman that pepper sprayed him, saw his face. She took his fingerprints and God knows what else to him after she knocked him out.

'She knows who I am,' ice formed in his veins at the thought and it was a fight for every breath. What did he do? What could he do? He wasn't prepared for this. All the plans and the ideas of what he thought he would went right out the window.

Peter's panic attack was interrupted by the door behind him opening. Slowly, he looked over his shoulder and saw it was Leslie. She looked at him with unimpressed eyes as she strode into the room and locked the door behind her.

‘You're already awake,’” she observed as she crossed the room and opened a drawer. “That sedative should have knocked you out for another four hours,” she mused more to herself but her words made Peter glance up at the clock on the wall. It was twelve o'clock, a full eight hours since he was kidnapped.

That was a lot of time. It didn't seem like it, no more than someone spends at a job or school. Yet, all the same, eight hours was a lot of time for her too, say upload his identity to the internet.

Somewhere, in the back of his mind, there was a niggling something screaming at him that he forgot something important but Peter couldn't hear it. Not when one of his deepest darkest fears being realized for the second time.

“I did some blood work while you were asleep. Your DNA is a mess, by the way, but I also noticed that you're slightly malnourished. Take these vitamins and-” Leslie said as she approached but she was cut off by Peter grabbing her by the front of her coat and lifting her into the air with ease. Peter didn't even realize he was moving until he was looking up at her. Nor did he notice that the ice left his veins because they were boiling with rage.

“You,” he hissed. There were so many things he wanted to say, so many things that could only convey a fraction of how completely and utterly pissed off he was. There was fear underneath it all, a
very deep and primal fear but it was hidden underneath a great amount of anger. However, that word seemed to be all that he could get out.

“Me,” Leslie agreed. “Brat, I deal with the worst kind of scum in this city. You're hardly the first super-powered person that I've patched up and pissed off, so if you want to intimidate me you'll have to try harder.” She informed, looking very much unaffected by the snarl etched into Peter's face.

“What did you do,” Peter spat out and Leslie lets out a sigh before her eyes hardened into a glare.

“Nothing. For now,” she replied and Peter's eyes narrowed dangerously. He felt like a cornered animal and he didn't enjoy it one bit.

“And I won't do anything with it if you-” She began before Peter dropped her without warning. She stumbled slightly but when she regained her balance, she looked up and saw Peter towering over her. For so long he cursed his height because it made him awkward, but in moments like these, he relished it. He was a head taller than her, but now she had to crane her neck up to look at him.

“I'm not committing any crimes for you,” he stated flatly. His mind was turning, thinking furiously to how to turn this around. Once it got out that Peter Parker was Spider-man, his enemies were going to go after aunt May. If he could get in contact with SHIELD, then she can be moved to a safe location. She wouldn't be happy about it, but she'd be safe. Mary Jane was a different beast entirely but-

'Oh,' Peter thought suddenly. If Leslie was standing here, if he was here, then that meant he was in Gotham, right? Which meant that he was in a different universe...oh...right... Well, that solved some problems at least. Peter wasn't exactly happy that it wasn't all some crazy dream but he did feel relief flow through him when he realized that aunt May and MJ would be safe.

“Oh,” Leslie echoed, mirroring his thoughts. There was a curious glint in her eyes as she regarded him with cruel interest.

“Not even if I were to reveal your identity to the world? From what the news is saying about you, you put away a fair few gangs and the Joker. I imagine that they won't think fondly of you. They might hate you enough to go after your family to get to you,” Leslie pointed out. That was Peter's greatest fear.

It was one that was realized once before.

“No,” Peter refused instantly. She barely finished her sentence before he gave his refusal.

Leslie was expecting that answer. After all, it takes a fair amount of resolve to put on a mask dedicate your nightlife to beating up criminals. If anything, she would have been shocked if Spider-man just caved to her threat like a house of cards. However, she hadn't expected how quickly he responded nor the sense of finality in his tone.

She rose a gray eyebrow, "you seem very willing to risk your parents lives." Leslie noted as a frown tugged at her lips. Looking at him now with those dark bags under his eyes and tousled hair, he seemed so young. He had the eyes of a man but Leslie couldn't help but see a child.

"Kinda hard to risk what they already lost," Peter said flatly. There was a time when his lack of parents was a tender spot, but that void had been filled by uncle Ben and aunt May.

The harsh look in Leslie's eyes faded a fraction, "guardian?" She inquired and Peter's eyes narrowed.

"Gone," he shot down. Uncle Ben was murdered because of him and aunt May was a universe
away. Both were painfully out of reach.

"Siblings?"

"Only child."

"Friends?"

"Don't have any." Mary Jane was his last one and, hopefully, she was with aunt May.

Leslie let out an exasperated breath and looked up at Peter with eyes full of pity. "So, the only life you're throwing away is your own, huh?" She asked but it didn't sound like she expected an answer.

Leslie took a step back and before Peter could get back in her face, she said, "I'm not going to blackmail you into committing any crimes. The police have enough on their plate as it is."

Peter blinked in confusion at that. She wasn't going to blackmail him? Now that was a curveball.

"Then why did you-?" He began to ask before Leslie cocked her head to the side.

"Because I'm blackmailing you to stop being a vigilante," she answered before he could finish. Her tone was deadly serious and her eyes were trying to cut right through Peter, so he immediately tossed out the idea of it being a joke.

Wow. Waking up really was a poor decision. He didn't have nearly enough sleep or caffeine to deal with this. The past few hours had just been a wild roller coaster and Peter wanted off.

"That's not going to happen," he stated with certainty. Like it or not, Spider-man was a part of who he was now. He couldn't put up the suit any easier than he could part with an arm. Even when he wanted to, even when being Spider-man ruined Peter Parker's life, he couldn't and wouldn't stop. He had a responsibility.

"It will. You're taking off that suit and you're going to burn it. Then, you stubborn idiot, you will go to school and be a normal teenager. You'll have crushes and you'll get bad grades. You'll have a normal life without all...all of this," she stated, gesturing to Peter. There was anger in her voice and disappointment.

"No."

That seemed to be the straw that broke the camel's back because the sadness in her eyes suddenly became anger. Peter didn't move when Leslie took two quick steps to close the distance nor did he back down when she got in his face. From this close, he idly noticed that it looked like she was about to cry.

"You will," she repeated. "You-you-you will! You don't understand what this city is capable of. You're just a child playing hero and you don't have a fucking idea what it means. This will kill you, don't you understand that? Do you not understand what kind of enemies you made last night!? The Joker will torture you to death if you're lucky. If you're not then he'll unleash horrors on you that only that madhouse he calls a brain can come up with!" She screamed at him with genuine fury.

"You wouldn't be the first hero he's killed-," she clamped down on her anger with a vice grip. Pain shined in her eyes before she glanced at a picture sitting on a counter behind Peter. Looking down he saw it was a younger Leslie and a dark haired boy wearing a stained tank top a few sizes too big. He had a large smile plastered on his face that looked a little goofy because he was missing his two front teeth.
When he looked back at Leslie, she was glaring at him hard enough to burn a hole through his head. “I get that you want to do something. You, Batman, the Justice League; you want to help. I understand that, but there are better ways to do it. You're smart,” she said softly before pulling one of his web shooters from her pocket.

“You made these out of old watch parts. The formula for your webs is nothing like I've ever seen. Your smart...use that. Go to school, go to college then do something with that head of yours. Become a billionaire and throw money at charities or invent some kind of life changing product. There are better ways to help people than putting on a mask and risking your life every night.” She continued, her voice slowly growing softer.

For years, decades, Leslie worked in this clinic and helped those that needed it when they needed it. All that time, she did everything she could to help. She was a doctor, so she provided free check-ups and emergencies. When winter came in and the homeless were dying of hypothermia, she bought the building next to the clinic and provided them warm beds and three meals.

However, it wasn't always enough. As much good as Leslie did, it was outweighed by the bad. She couldn't help everyone and, at times, it felt like she wasn't helping at all when the crime rates grew until they were monstrously high. High enough that Park Row was renamed, Crime Alley. Then she could only watch as it wasn't enough.

Leslie was absolutely sick and tired of seeing good kids killed on the streets.

Peter was silent for a long moment. She was worried for him. This woman, who he's never met, was worried sick that he was going to get himself killed. This wasn't what he was expecting. He was expecting someone to blackmail him so they could get the amazing Spider-man to dance to their tune. Peter was completely unprepared for dealing with a stranger trying to stop him from doing what he had to do.

So, he did what he would have done if it was aunt May standing in front of him.

Ever so gently, he rested a hand on her shoulder and gave it a gentle squeeze. Leslie looked up at him with hopeful eyes, praying that she got through to him, and Peter took a breath.

“I'm not going to stop,” just like that, the hope was dashed. “I can't look away when someone needs my help. I won't. I'm sorry, but no matter what you do or say, I'm not going to stop being Spider-man. Ever.” There it was. The cold, hard truth.

Leslie looked at him for a long time and Peter patiently awaited her response. This woman pepper sprayed him, sedated him and then kidnapped him but she was doing it out of concern for his safety. Peter couldn't say that he forgave her what she did but he didn't hold it against her. Her methods needed work, a lot of it, but her heart was in the right place and that what Peter cared about.

“You're a damn fool. Just as big as Batman ever was,” she said after the silence stretched on and on. She scowled when Peter cracked a half grin, “fine. I can't stop you and I'll destroy the evidence but you-,” her expression turned fierce again. “You will be receiving check-ups every week, and I mean every week. You're young and you have superpowers but don't you dare get it in your head that you're invincible.”

Peter gave a very hesitant nod at that demand. He really didn't want to and he didn't exactly trust Leslie if that was even her name, but Peter saw that he wasn't exactly in a position to refuse.

“Brat, I've been a doctor longer than you've been alive. I know when someone is lying to me,” Leslie snapped, picking up on his hesitance. “What's your address? If you miss an appointment, and I mean
one, I'll drag you to my clinic by your ear. And you even think about lying to me where you live...” She gave a threat but Peter was too distracted to hear it.

He needed to give his address but Peter was seeing a glaring problem with that.

“I don’t...,” the words slipped out in shock. Peter realized that he was homeless. That realization sparked off a connection to all the other problems he hadn’t even thought of in the craziness of his first day in a new universe.

It was in the middle of winter and he didn’t have a home. The only money he had was ten dollars that were meant for lunch. He didn’t have any clothes other than his suit. Heck, Peter didn’t even have an identity! Unless there was a doppelganger in this universe than Peter didn’t exist in the eyes of the world. He didn’t have a social security number, a birth certificate, no records of any kind.

Meaning that he couldn’t get a job, he couldn’t open a bank account because he didn’t have a social security number, he couldn’t do anything. The only money he could make would have to be in cash and the list of jobs a teenager could get without any known experience were few and far between. Even more so considering that most of them would be illegal.

That was a problem.

Leslie looked stricken before her eyes narrowed into slits, “you're homeless.” she repeated and Peter had the urge to deny what he said. However, knowing better, he nodded mutely as his brain recovered from the sudden influx of problems that he now had.

Really, he had ninety-nine problems and not a single solution.

“You,” Leslie looked like she got worked up again but cut her anger off before she could begin. “What was your plan? Sleep on the streets during the day and fight crime at night,” she asked aloud but Peter got the impression it was a rhetorical question. He also got the impression that she'd yell at him if he did answer it.

“Do you even have a job?” She asked, sounding drained. Peter didn't comment because he was feeling much the same.

“I get by with photography,” he answered, thinking that he wasn't technically lying. It wasn't the truth but it wasn't a lie. Perhaps that's how he could make some money to live off of? He'd have to get his hands on a camera but it was doable. A good photo to the right buyer could triple the money he put into buying the camera.

Leslie closed her eyes for a long moment before she reached into her coat pocket and shoved his mask into his hands. Peter looked down at it in puzzlement but he was quick to put it on. Once it was firmly back over his face, Leslie shoved his web shooters at him along with his gloves.

Now suited up and feeling complete, he opened his mouth to let out a quip so he could relieve some stress but Leslie cut him off before he could begin.

“Go to the build on the right. The third floor, next to last room on the right. Go there,” she instructed before turning on her heel and walking out the room. Peter just watched as the door was closed and stared at it for a long moment. Then he glanced at the window.

'Should I run?' He asked himself, his brow furrowing in thought. She still had evidence of his identity but she didn't seem like she was willing to use it. It also didn't seem like she was luring him into a trap. Yet, Peter found it difficult to give her the benefit of the doubt when she kidnapped him.
After scratching his head through his mask, Peter pulled up the window and began crawling through it. He was hit with a blast of cold air and goose flesh rose in response but it wasn't as cold as it was last night. With practiced ease, he slipped out the window and closed it behind him. He looked at the city for a moment, idly thinking that it now sounded alive with noise before he looked towards the window that Leslie directed him to.

Making a decision, he crawled to the window and tried to peer through it before he entered but the glass was covered in grime. While not a promising sign, Peter placed a hand on the window and pushed it up using his adhesive abilities.

He slid in, thankful that it was a little warmer in here before he paused to look around him. It was an apartment and it looked like it should have been condemned months ago.

It was a studio apartment. From where he stood, he could see a dingy old bed that's sheets needed to be changed a decade ago, a small stove that was missing three grills and a microwave that was missing the door, and a toilet that looked like it belonged in a public restroom. The room stunk, a mixture of old sweat combined with general filth that was lightly marked with the smell of lemon, which only made it worse. Then there was the fact that there was just so much dust in the room. It looked like no one's stepped for in here for years.

Looking up at the ceiling, he saw yellow spots from water damage and black mold gathering in the corners. Then he realized that he could hear everything that was going on in the rooms next to him so he tried to dampen his heightened hearing but Peter quickly figured out that the walls were just paper thin. His neighbor on the left was watching the news while the neighbor on the right was playing a video game. Based on the children claiming to have banged his mother, Peter was guessing Call of Duty.

Then he heard the door open behind him and Leslie entered the room. If she was surprised that he was already here then she didn't show it in favor of throwing something at him. Peter caught it out of reflex and saw that it was a key.

"Rent's a hundred a month. Find a job to pay for it because if you don't, I'll throw you out myself," she said stiffly, keeping her eyes firmly on Peter. "I can't stop you from being an idiot but this is all the help you'll be getting from me," she continued firmly. Yet she didn't enter the room.

"Uh, right. A hundred dollars a month. Don't be late or you'll kick my ass. Roger," he said quickly, hoping to appease her. She glared at him for a long moment but sensing that her point had been made clear, she promptly turned on her heel and walked down the stairs back to the clinic.

Peter looked up at the ceiling in exhaustion. It was barely past midday and he just wanted to crawl into bed and fall asleep forever.

"I want to go home."

...

Decades of hard work...ruined. Careful, meticulous planning...for nothing. All the hard work, all of his sacrifices, all of the blood, pain, sweat, and tears...utterly meaningless. It was all for naught. All that he built, all that he crafted, the empire he forged with his hands...collapsed. Gone.

All because of a single madman's whims.

Roman Sonios, otherwise knows as Black Mask, watched the city he all but controlled out of his
window. The moon hung overhead, not a cloud in sight, the informally agreed soon signal for the criminals of this city to apply their trade. He could already hear the gunshots as the gangs he once controlled tore into each other like ravenous beasts. All eager for territory that they never had under his thumb, yearning for a few extra dollars in their pocket from an extra street to sell their drugs on.

"Pathetic," he said to himself, sipping from his glass of well-aged scotch. 1943...not exactly a good year, but the best generation sure knew how to make a drink. He took a larger sip, enjoying the burn as it tracked down his throat.

Roman antagonized over the exact moment that his empire was doomed to fall since everything went spiraling down the drain. For hours and hours, he gazed down at the city, out of this window, drinking his drink of choice and wondering where it all went wrong.

Roman sighed, "I should have killed him." There were so many chances, so many opportunities, that it honestly hurt knowing that he didn't take them. At the time, he was blind. Stupid and blind.

He didn't see how it could bite him in the ass by letting that fucking lunatic running about. At the time, Roman didn't see the harm. Hell, he had even broken the Joker out of his reserved room in Arkham because when he was out, Batman focused on the Joker and the pressure was taken off him. Sure, the Joker would kill a couple of his guys but they were stupid and easily replaceable. When the Joker was out and about, profits rose and jobs went without a hitch because the Batman wasn't focusing on street level crime.

Roman thought the reward outweighed the risk. Time and time again, he was proven right and then...

Roman drained the last of his drink and carelessly threw the glass to the side and ignored the sound of it shattering.

What's worse, he had no idea how the hell it happened.

The day his empire fell started like any normal day. He woke up, he ate, he made some calls, then his other phone started ringing. It was a mess and, at first, Roman thought it was a joke. The Russians wanted him to mediate with the Ukrainians. The Spanish drug cartels were calling about the Yakuza and how they were preparing to cut into their territory. Irish were pissed as all hell and wanted to fight everyone because they thought everyone wanted to fight them.

Roman did everything that he could. He tried to mediate, he tried to set up meetings and he tried to talk down the gang lords from doing something stupid. It hadn’t worked in the end. If he managed to convince one then he didn’t convince the other. If he convinced both then both were attacked by different factions.

In the span of an hour, his empire was torn at the seams and he was left watching as the pieces tore each other apart.

"That freaks plan didn't even work," Roman noted, torn between feeling glad at that fact or fury. His empire was destroyed as collateral for a plan that didn't even work. Whatever the Joker cooked up in that madhouse he calls a brain barely even begun before it was stopped by the new hero in town.

Spider-man...apparently the guy could dodge bullets and stop a car going eighty dead in its tracks with his bare hands. A legitimate superhero. He wasn’t working with the bat family but who knows how long that would last. Even when they weren’t working together, the heroes of Gotham were busting criminals left and right, ruining any chances that he could restore his rule. He just didn’t have the manpower anymore.
Roman sighed again, pinching the bridge of his nose. Batman was an almost insurmountable obstacle on his own but now Gotham had a hero with real powers. Time would tell if he would become a serious threat to the underworld of Gotham, but if what he's done so far was any indication...

His empire was gone. Vanished without a trace...and...he just didn't have it in him to try to rebuild it. Too much work, too much heartache, too much of a pain in his ass. It had taken him over a decade it build his empire and he didn't fancy spending his fifties redoing it all.

"I'm going to retire," Roman decided, pursing his lips in thought. He still had millions of dollars stashed away in case he had to flee. Even bought a little island in the tropics to live his life in luxury. His business would fall apart without him, but he didn't really care. It had always been a front for his real passion projects. Now there wasn't a point anymore.

Tearing his eyes from his view, he walked over to his desk and tapped on his receiver, "Jiliè, I'm activating code Black Six." Instead of the confirmation that he had been expecting, there was only silence.

Roman narrowed his eyes, repeating the order in case she was just stunned into silence but there was still no response.

'Something's wrong,' he realized as his hand dipped down to grab the assault rifle hidden beneath his desk. Jiliè knew better than to leave her desk and in the fifteen years as his secretary, she never to miss a call.

"Don't look so nervous Roman," a voice said just over his shoulder. He whipped around, gun at the ready, but he saw no one was there. He searched the darkness for a figure, knowing all too well that it wasn't his imagination, but he found none. Gulping, he turned around and saw a woman standing behind him, smiling in amusement as she leaned on his desk.

However, when he saw red hair, his eyes went to her concealed breasts. "Whisper," he hissed, fingerling the trigger. Cold sweat dropped down his spine at the sight of the woman.

He met Whisper A'Daire only once before, early in his rise to power. She was an agent of Ras A Ghul and she had been sent to kill him, along with her mutt of a bodyguard, but failed. However, thanks to the encounter, he knew her abilities rather well and he wasn't going to fall for them a second time.

"My eyes are up here, Roman," Whisper said with some amusement. She cupped her cheek as she smiled fondly at the masked man. When it became obvious that he wasn't going to look anywhere else, her hands dipped down and to the bottle of scotch and a glass.

Roman snorted, "I prefer to look at your only redeeming feature, you snake." He spat and Whisper chuckled lightly, not insulted in the slightest. She expected more venom from one of the few targets that slipped through her grasp.

"I'm wounded...Kyle?" Whisper said and a moment later, the gun was ripped out of Roman's hands and tossed to the side. He barely had a chance to shout before he felt an iron grip around the back of his neck and lifting him like a doll. Roman cursed and kicked, both at Whisper and Kyle, her bodyguard, behind him. His feet missed the woman by miles and he might as well have kicked a brick wall behind him.

"Hmmm...that's a good look for you, Black Mask. Scared and struggling...but, I didn't come here to tease you. In fact, I'm here on business.” Whisper said, walking around his desk. Roman looked up at the ceiling, avoiding her gaze at any cost.
“Oh? Who’s bitch are you now that Ras-” Roman began but he felt the grip around his neck tighten painfully. He trailed off with a gasp, clawing at his hand that held him but to no avail.

“That's enough,” Whisper said sharply and instantly the pressure eased.

“As for who I work for...I'm the manager of Gotham's branch of HSC International Banking,” she said with a grin in her voice.

“Intergang,” Roman wheezed out, his mind turning over the revelation. HSC was one of Intergang's many fronts as the world's largest, and most dangerous gang. They had high friends in high places and the weaponry the created with the help Apoklipsis, they had the edge in any gun fight.

It was one of the few gangs in the world that went head to head with upper tier heroes and survive. The fact that they were even still around, despite several heroes trying to disband it spoke just how much power the gang held.

“You bitch, I told that fat bastard that Gotham is my city. You can take your-” Roman started but the pressure returned. Slowly it grew as Kyle's fingers dug into his neck until he felt hot blood trickle down his neck. Roman let out a silent scream as he fought against the pain as time seemed to drag its feet.

“M-make him stop,” Roman managed to get out and he heard Whisper let out a low hum like she was thinking about it.

“I don't know~! You didn't ask nicely and said such hurtful things,” she said in a teasing tone before she paused. “I'll consider it if you tell me what code Black Six is,” she questioned, curious. Based on what she overheard earlier, Roman was planning to leave the city. If that was the case, then what was with the six?

Whisper asked purely out of curiosity but she was stunned by what she heard.

“I-I release all the dirt I have on everyone! To the public! That's for Gordon in case he got near to busting me but the rest is for Batman! All the plans I know about that his Rogues are going to use, where they are-” Black Mask answered before he ran out of air, and Whisper was taken back. She nursed her drink to hide it but her mind was racing.

It was ruthlessly brilliant, Whisper had to admit. He would clog the bureaucratic machine by exposing all kinds of corruption; judges, lawyers, civil servants, doctors...who knew just how rotten Gotham was at its core. To cover his own escape, Roman would shove it into the light of day and use the chaos to get the police off his back. After all, Gordon would be a little preoccupied arresting half his police force.

As for Batman, it was a no brainier to answer who he would choose to pursue; the worst of his villains or one criminal overlord?

A slow smile tugged at Whisper's lips as she reached up to caress Roman's face, “look at me, Roman.” She commanded and the man just clenched his eyes shut. The pressure around his neck increased and he let out a whimper of pain.

“Look into my eyes,” she pushed, “I'll tell him to stop hurting you...all you have to do is look into my eyes.”

It was a bad idea. A terrible one. However, it felt like his spine was going to be ripped out at his neck, his heart was trying to leap out his chest and she was speaking to him in such a tone...like a lover trying to coax him back to bed to be swallowed in her embrace.
It was a bad idea. Roman knew it. Yet, he looked into her eye’s all the same and fell under her spell.
Google is your best friend

Peter let out a groan of absolute bliss as his spine cracked like a machine gun. He earned looks of disgust from those around him but Peter answered them by turning sharply to the side and repeating the process. Once it felt like his spine wasn't twisted into knots, Peter looked at the computer screen with bleary eyes. A quick glance at the clock told him that he was on it for nearly ten hours straight. To make it worse, Peter couldn't get up because there were others waiting for a computer.

The thing was a dinosaur. Outdated by a good ten years but he expected nothing less from a public library. In the three days since he arrived in Gotham, he's learned that just about every part was the wrong side of town and the good parts had very large walls to make sure they stayed the good parts of town. So, it was no real shock that the computers were so old and busted that not even a desperate thief would think to steal them.

Didn't mean Peter was happy about it. The thing had the processing power of a toaster and paint dried faster than the Internet connection. That was before Peter took it upon himself to bounce his signal off three separate satellites to scramble his location on the off chance someone was paying attention to what he was doing. Call him paranoid if you like, but this was the first time Peter had truly broken the law. Not counting all his vigilantism and numerous other crimes he committed to bust the villain, of course. They totally didn't count.

Peter didn't like it but he knew it was necessary. He was in a new world without an identity and he had enough problems on his plate without dumping on the fact he was an illegal immigrant. As much as Peter didn't even want to think about it, there was that ever-present doubt that he would get to go home. Not counting the huge gang war going on every night, which oddly was put on hold at the crack of dawn, Peter hadn't seen anything that was worth the effort of sending him to a new universe. Considering that he still had another two years, four months and eight days until the Justice League would hear his case, Peter was going to prepare for the worst while hoping for the best.

If life taught him anything it was that when you were down, life would rather kick you in the teeth than offer a helping hand.

Thus, here he was, hacking into various organizations and inserting evidence that he existed. Luckily – well, luck was a bit of a strong word, but he got to skip the hardest part due to the fact that this universe had a Peter Parker. Key word being had.

Just like him, Peter-2’s parents died, but, unlike him, his parents had been murdered in a gang shoot out when he was five. Reports showed that Peter-2 was with them when they died. To make matters worse, uncle Ben and aunt May didn't exist so Peter-2 didn't live with them after he was orphaned. Like all the other orphans, he was sent to an over full orphanage in the inner city. Records from the orphanage were spotty, almost nonexistent in some cases. It was clear that they were overworked and understaffed, translating to Peter-2 not getting much attention. Either because he didn't need it, which was doubtful at best, or he was getting it from other sources.

He went to pre and elementary school, from the records he read it seemed that Peter-2 shared his intellect. He got good grades but slowly Peter saw a pattern. Peter-2 began missing days of school before he just stopped showing up entirely. Roughly at the same time, he stopped going to the orphanage. He found vague reports of Peter-2 hanging out with a small group of kids from the age of eight to eleven but most of those could have been anyone and Peter-2 was rarely named by name. For about three years, mentions of Peter-2 became scarce. Then, for an entire year, there wasn't any mention of him at all. He resurfaced at the age of twelve but it seemed he fell out of contact with those friends.
The next three years were rough for Peter-2. His name appeared sporadically on sign in sheets for various homeless shelters across the city. There were no financial records because Peter-2 didn't have a credit card, so Peter assumed that he paid for things in cash. That was likely considering that there were no records of Peter-2 having a job. His schooling was also nonexistent. He never enrolled for middle nor high school and no calls for him to appear before the school board was ever answered. He also had some trouble with the law.

Thankfully, it was nothing outstanding and there wasn't even a warrant for his arrest. Peter-2's name just appeared in off-handed mentions about possible suspects for various fights and one count of theft. He didn't seem to have any gang ties, at least none that the police, or Peter, could find but given the lack of a job, Peter-2 had to be getting money from somewhere and everyone doubted it was through legal means. However, it didn't last too long because Peter-2's name was found more and more often on a sign in sheets for homeless shelters. Then Peter found a report that a worker realized, or cared, that Peter-2 was a minor and reported him to the proper authorities. The next mention of Peter Parker was the last.

At the age of fifteen, Peter-2 was found dead in one of the abandoned houses in Crime Alley. The cause of death was a spider bite that he left untreated, according to his autopsy report. Despite himself, Peter found that morbidly ironic.

For the most part, Peter didn't have a lot to edit. He just needed to delete certain details, like 'his' death. His body had been cremated and stored alongside 'his' parents in a columbarium, so Peter deleted any mention on both the columbarium and cities records of how 'his' body was disposed of or where it was stored. There was physical evidence, and there always would be unless he broke in and stole the urn and files, but in the digital realm, Peter was still alive.

It was weak, paper thin. If anyone gave it even a little effort to investigate then his cover would crumble like a house of cards. However, for now, it would do. Deleting the death of Peter-2 felt wrong enough, stealing his urn was a whole 'nother level that Peter wasn't going to approach.

He covered it up to the best of his ability by changing the names to someone that had a similar name to him in the hopes it could be played off as an error but that was the extent of how far Peter was willing to go.

Now, he was securing his identity with details. Peter wasn't much of a hacker but he did know how because it was a staple skill every hero needed to have. In the modern age, everything was hidden behind firewalls and passwords. Knowing how to get that information out of a computer when the clock was ticking could save the lives of hundreds, so Peter made sure he knew the basics of hacking.

In addition to that knowledge, Black Widow once told him the biggest giveaway for a false identity was the lack of background details. Little things that most people didn't even think about, like a paper trail or mentions that correlate with a story. However, if someone gave his background a quick look over it would stand out that he suddenly had an apartment after another two years of nothing.

Which made his current task adding those little details. He couldn't do much, giving himself a credit card and a high school diploma out of nowhere would look highly suspicious. Instead, he was doing it in stages. He added his name to other digital copies of homeless shelters sign in sheets over the course of two years and inserted a few job applications for various stores across the city. Naturally, he was turned down for every single one of them but it would show everyone that he was trying to get off the streets using legal methods.

Peter let out a yawn as he inserted another fake application to a paid internship at a magazine with the time stamp of a few months ago. He exited out of the tab and looked at the generic desktop for a
moment. There were a few others that were waiting to use a computer so he hastily opened up a new tab to make it look like he was doing something.

His background was more or less secure for the moment. There were holes, plenty of them, but there were holes throughout 'his' life so it wouldn't look out of place. Once he had time, he would patch up the more glaring ones but for now, it would do. It also let him focus on the more pressing issues.

Pressing his lips into a grim line, he reached into his pocket and pulled out the remaining money he had. Three dollars and forty-eight cents after buying his only pair of clothing. They were the cheapest he could find; used sweatpants and a T-shirt with a band logo that no one had ever heard of. It still did nothing to keep out the cold but at least he could walk around as a civilian.

'Being an adult is expensive,' Peter thought with a sigh. Money was always tight growing up but even after uncle Ben died, they always managed to skirt on by. Never before had he been this totally broke. He didn't even have enough money to buy the materials for web fluid. Heck, he couldn't even spare the money to buy a toothbrush.

Somehow, he needed to turn this money into at least a hundred dollars before the month was over. More if he wanted to swing around the city instead of walking or buy basic necessities. Like food. And a space heater. Winter was officially the worst season there was.

Stuffing his savings into his pocket, he stared at the computer for a moment. The list of things he could do for money was small, especially considering he was still a minor and would have to explain why he wasn't in school. It would have to be during the day and the pay had to be fairly good to get him on his feet. Then he could focus on keeping his head above water.

'That's not going to happen. No references that I can use and no experience that I can prove,' Peter moaned internally. He couldn't even buy a bike to get a minimum wage job at a pizza parlor. The only other job that he had was as a photographer and he lacked the necessary equipment to take a decent picture. Somehow, his camera had been damaged on his trip over. He had no idea how but the memory chip was scrambled, meaning that he'd need to buy a new one or find a way to replace it. He was short by a good thirty dollars, so Peter was stuck with the latter.

Realizing that he's done nothing but stare at the screen for a minute, he was quick to type something in the search bar before someone called him out. Since he wasn't bouncing the signal off several satellites anymore, the search was much faster. He saw a long list of websites related to his search.

Spider-man.

A forum was growing, most criticizing his name, but there was a lot of praise that Peter enjoyed reading. A link here and there of him doing something super-human or busting some gangsters. From the looks of it, his reputation seemed to be in the positive. Which threw Peter through a loop, but he wasn't complaining.

Also surprising, he was rapidly becoming the hot topic. Apparently, he was the only hero in Gotham city with super powers. Rumor was that Batman chased off all the others for reasons unknown. After living in Gotham for a few days, Peter figured it was much more likely that those with powers either became villains or got out as fast as they could.

So, apparently, he was kind of a big deal right now.

'I wish it paid,' Peter mourned as he backed out of the forum trying to guess his powers and identity. What was worse, even if his camera was working, he couldn't do a photo shoot as Spider-man and sell the first clear pictures of the new hero for a decent price. The dash-cams in the police cruisers
had a decent view of him from all sides when Spider-man ripped off the bomb vests from those people.

That meant his meal ticket for so long might not work anymore. He couldn't just do a photo shoot in an alley somewhere and expect some newspaper to buy them.

"Being an adult sucks," Peter summarized as he took great care to put the money back in his pocket. He was the man of the house after uncle Ben died, but he had ways of making money and had aunt May to help him along. He didn't have either in this place.

His eyes skimmed through the text but he wasn't reading anything as he thought about how to get himself out from the pit of poverty. However, no matter how much he thought about it, he knew that photography was his only real option. He could work a nine-to-five job but it would take a week, at least, for him to get his first paycheck and he didn't have that time.

'I need to do something worth buying and fix my camera,' Peter thought as his brow scrunched up. While beating up dozens of thugs a night was exciting, it wouldn't be enough. He needed to get pictures of him doing something big, something flashy and eye catching. Something like...

Not too fond memories of J.J Jamerson screaming his head off for Peter to get pictures of a fight between Spider-man and some masked villain surfaced. The memories were so vivid that Peters' ears started ringing, prompting him to sigh.

"All I need to do then is poach one of Batman's rogues then," he mused to himself as opened a new tab. Google proved, yet again, that it was his best friend because all it took was a single search to find a decent list of Gotham's regular villains. Fortunately, it seemed that the majority of them were behind bars. Either they were in Blackgate, Gotham's prison, or Arkham asylum. From what he was seeing, there were less than half of repeat rouges active at the moment and Peter thought it was for the best. The city was an absolute mess and having one of them orchestrate another plot might just be too much to handle.

However, upon further analysis, he saw that the few that were out had also been inactive for a time. On top of that, they didn't exactly have an address so it's entirely possible that they weren't in Gotham. Add that to the fact he couldn't exactly spend the night looking for them with the whole pesky gang war going on... Peter needed to take out two birds with one stone.

He needed a notable villain that was taking an active part in the gang war. Someone just dangerous enough that a paper would pay him the big bucks for photos of the fight but not someone so tough that it'd take him out for the rest of the night.

It seemed that he was in luck because he found the perfect candidate.

Now, to deal with the problem of his current inability to take a photo. Unfortunately, he knew a way to do it and he didn't look forward to it one bit.

...

The cold air hit Peter like a brick as he stepped out of the library. He didn't have access to a thermometer, but snow was falling from the sky gently so it had to be around thirty degrees. If he had any money to bet, Peter would have placed it on being lower. However, he persevered and walked down the steps two at a time before turning down the street.

Letting out a breath of fog, he glanced down at his phone. The map Gotham was still up but there were several different other pin marks in place of the banks. Peter memorized the route to the closest
one before shutting the phone down. He didn't have a way to charge it, so the battery was a finite resource. He needed to use it wisely.

In the meantime, Peter admired the sights as he walked through the streets. It was almost like he was comparing two different cities. When night fell, the only people that were out and about were criminals. They seemed to bleed out of the buildings and alleyways because it seemed for everyone one he put away, two took their place. Even if he completely disregarded the gang wars, the sheer number of drug deals he's busted or the muggings were astounding. On more than one occasion, he saw muggers getting mugged.

During the day, it was a completely different story. Sure, it retained that oppressive rotten miserable feeling but it was toned down. When the sun was shining, there was life in the city.

Peter rubbed his bare arms to ward away the goosebumps but it wasn't much use. The air just cut right through his thin clothing and because he only had a T-shirt, he couldn't layer up. Instead, he tried to keep moving by shifting from foot to foot as he waited for the walk signal to turn. Much like New York, cars honked in protest of the red light. There was even the occasional driver letting out a little road rage.

It was almost enough to trick him that he was in his home city.

Finally, the crossing signal appeared and he, along with a few others crossed the street. Peter was quick to pass them. The sooner he got everything done the sooner he could get out of the freezing weather. He slipped between two people when he saw an opening but he still saw both of them check their pockets afterward. They almost looked confused when they saw that they still had their wallets.

Peter couldn't blame them for the assumption. He didn't even bother glancing at his appearance in the mirror-like windows to know that he looked like a hoodlum. Peter was broke as a joke and he looked the part.

'Hopefully, that changes tonight,' Peter thought to himself as he turned down another street and easily side-stepped a couple. He saw his destination at the end of the block. He increased his pace and ducked into an alley, letting out a breath of relief now that the wind wasn't hitting him. The windshield wasn't much but it was more than Peter would like.

Glancing around the alley, Peter saw that it was empty. That prompted a breath of relief from Peter because he did not want to be seen doing this. As he walked deeper into the alley, he glanced behind him and saw the few people passing by didn't even spare him a glance. Most likely because they didn't want to accidentally see a beggar and pretend like they hadn't.

Peter spotted what he was searching for a couple of yards away. A couple of trash bags along with a few odds and ends. It wasn't anything most people would give a second look at but Peter wasn't anyone. After checking both ways, and even checking for security camera's, Peter untied one of the trash bags and saw his prize.

Clothes.

Peter smiled as he pulled them out gently. Most of them were in bad condition, a hole or a tear making them unwearable to most. Either that or whoever owned them before had outgrown them. Naturally, if they couldn't wear it and they couldn't pass it down to a younger sibling, they got rid of it. Instead of throwing it into the trash, they decided to donate it to goodwill and other consignment shops.
According to the law, something Peter researched thoroughly both in his home universe and this one, what he was doing didn't count as stealing. People dumped what they didn't want here and drove off and, eventually, a worker would step out and bring it into the shop. However, until they did so, in the eyes of the law, it was regarded as 'trash.' Meaning, it was fair game.

It didn't take long for Peter to empty out the trash bag. Most of what he found was summer clothes, and worse, they were either girl clothes or a few sizes too small. However, he did find one long sleeve shirt with a few holes in it that he wasted no time putting on. Then he found...something. At first, he thought it was a safety vest based on how it hurt his eyes to look at it. Whatever shade of orange it was needed to stop existing, ASAP.

Upon holding it up, Peter saw it was an eye gouging neon orange Hawaiian button down. It was roughly his size but Peter hesitated a long moment. Right up until a breeze drifted into the alley and made him shiver.

"Thank god Flash won't see me in this," Peter muttered as he shrugged it on. Flash Thompson had bullied him enough as it was, he did not need any more ammunition.

Once he had his pick of the trash bag, he carefully put the remainders back into it and tied it off again. Just to be respectful.

For nearly thirty minutes, he searched the various bags for things he thought would be useful. Most of it wasn't but he did find a fair amount. Now, instead of just a single outfit, he had enough clothing for three outfits! A few pairs of ratty jeans, one of which he was going to have to put to the needle and thread near the crotch seam, and another he was sure was meant for a girl. Didn't matter, he would make due. A few shirts, unfortunately only one of them was long sleeved and it was a dress shirt with a large stain on it.

However, the prize that almost had Peter in tears was a black and white hoodie. It was a wreck, which was why it was being tossed out in the middle of winter. A lot of holes, a sleeve was coming off, burns marks from cigarettes and a number of questionable stains. However, Peter was sure he could fix it. Making his costume gave him plenty of experience with sewing, even more so considering how often the thing was torn.

As Peter popped his head through the hole, he threw up the hood and basked in warmth. It wasn't sitting near a hot fire levels of cozy, but it was leagues better than what he had mere minutes ago. For extra warmth, he pulled his Spider-man suit up for an extra layer of clothing. Instead of a single layer, he now had four!

Grinning like a fool, he picked up his small pile of clothes before he spotted a bag in one of the sealed off containers. Quickly popping that open, he saw it was a duffel bag. Peter was even faster to throw his 'new' clothes into it and sling it over his shoulder.

“Sweet.” Peter murmured to himself as he adjusted the strap. “I wasn't expecting to get this much,” he said happily to himself as he gave the boxes another quick look over. By the looks of it, he nabbed everything worth nabbing, so he turned on his heel in his 'new' converses and mismatching socks and exited the alley.

'I shouldn't think this,' Peter began as he pulled out his phone and memorized the route to the next pin. 'But, I think things are starting to look up,' he thought as he began his walk, a pep in his step that hadn't been there since he arrived in this universe.
Barbara grabbed another batarang before sliding it into a holster, filling the compartment in her utility belt. Next to her, Red Robin, or as the bat family knew him, Tim Drake, was doing the same. On most nights, around this time there would be a few jokes to lighten the mood. They wouldn't be funny, but it would be enough to break the tension between them.

Tonight was the same as it was the last two nights. A heavy, thick tension was in the Batcave as everyone prepared themselves for the night. On the first night, they knew it would be a long one thanks to Batman's bugs. The second, they knew that it would be a long one because the bottom feeders smelled blood in the water. Tonight, they knew it would be a long night because the big players had risen in the bloodbath of last night and, while they would try to expand further, others would try to drag them back down.

Barbara let out a soft sigh as she clicked her belt in place. She triple checked all the slots, making sure she had everything and in large enough quantities for what was to come. Once she was done, Barbara glanced over her shoulder and saw Dick glaring up at the batcomputer, well over a dozen files cluttered around a map of Gotham. Where there was once a solid black blob that covered most of Gotham, it was a blend of colors that was almost hard to look at. The black represented Black Mask's territory and spheres of influence. What replaced it represented all the other gangs that filled Gotham's streets.

It was absolute chaos. It really made Barbara wonder what the Joker had planned if this was just the aftermath of the botched scheme.

"Any new Info worth sharing?" Tim asked suddenly as he walked by Barbara. She hesitated a long moment but she followed Tim towards Dick, who was frowning at the screen.

"Depends. Half of the bugs Bruce had are still working thanks to other gangs reusing their bases, but I don't know how much of it is just talk," Dick explained before he tapped on the keyboard a few times. Most of the files were shoved behind the other half and the map. “The Yakuza split in two, half wants to attack Blackgate to get their officers out and the other half is making a power grab. They called in for reinforcements from Bludhaven and I don't know if they're getting them.”

“The Irish are banding together and they're planning to muscle into the Blood's territory. Naturally, the Crips are planning to do the same to the Bloods. Both gangs are calling for back up from-” Dick began explaining but Tim beat him to it.

“Bludhaven,” Tim said grimly. Bludhaven was Gotham's sister city and they shared many traits. Almost none of them were good.

“Got it in one. Seems work is following me here,” Dick said, his tone equally grim. They weren't just dealing with bottom feeder gangs. A multitude of other criminal organizations were trying to squirm into Gotham. As much at it pained Dick to admit it, and it really, really, really, really, really, really pained him, Black Mask did a good job of keeping outside influences out of Gotham.

Barbara let out another sigh, “anything big happening that we know for sure?” She asked, looking at the batcomputer. However, she still saw Dick glance up at her before his expression turned stony.

“Yeah. Penguin is planning to take the docks in East end and all of them on the southern island. The Falcone crime family is going to hit the Blackgaters and All-Americans for their territory on the West side. The Irish are challenging to Ukrainians to meet them in Central square to 'settle things once and for all.' The Russian's are also going to hit the Ukrainian’s. That's what I know for sure...if you want speculation then we'll be here all night,” Dick said as he flipped through the evidence. Voice recordings made up most of it but Batman's informants also passed along plenty.
“How are the police holding up,” Tim asked, turning to Barbara.

“How are the police holding up,” Tim asked, turning to Barbara.

“Not good,” she admitted memories of earlier today surfacing. Her father hadn't returned home in days and when he did it was to grab something. He hadn't even stayed for lunch, just long enough for a hug and a chuckle at her comment that he reeked of cigarettes “They lost twenty officers, including SWAT, on the first night and they lost another five last night. A few more are wounded, but dad said they were being stubborn and that they were going to show up regardless of their injuries.”

Barbara bit the inside of her cheek as she shoved dark thoughts to the side. Her dad was always a target considering his job, but, for the most part, he was behind a desk since he was the commissioner. For the past few nights, he's been on the ground with his officers, not that she expected anything less, but Barbara couldn't help but worry that she was going to get a call during a patrol to let her know her dad was...

She blinked harshly, banishing the thoughts before she gave Tim a halfhearted smirk when she caught him giving her a worried look. A domino mask did nothing to hide his emotions.

“What about Spider-man,” she asked before either boy could make a comment. Dick frowned but Tim nodded, knowing what she was doing before he gave a shrug.

“What about him,” Tim asked as Dick pulled up the available information. There wasn't a whole lot. Just some videos and a lot of speculation on the forums.

“Bruce never said anything about what we should do if we run into him,” Barbara pointed out, which was odd in itself. It was almost shocking that Bruce hadn't dropped what he was doing to bring Spider-man in for working in his city, but the fact he hadn't given them rules of engagement was just confusing.

“We bring him in,” Tim said simply, summing up his thoughts on the issue. “He's an unknown, untrained, super powered vigilante! What else would Bruce want us to do?” He pointed out defensively when both Barbara and Dick looked at him questioningly.

Barbara frowned, “welcome him into the fold?” She ventured and this time, Dick and Tim looked at her, promoting a shrug. “My dad is giving him the benefit of the doubt and he hasn't done anything to make us think that he's anything other than a newcomer hero. Neither of you can deny that he's doing good work,” she said dismissively as she tapped a few times on her PDA. A file came up on the batcomputer and it was a list of names that Spider-man had arrested.

It was a fairly long list.

“Just like that?” Tim argued, crossing his arms.

“Babs- Barbara has a point. He is doing good work and, as much as Bruce doesn't want to admit it, we’re not going to cut it. We need help,” Dick pointed out and earned a sharp look from Tim in response. Out of all of the Robins, Tim took after Bruce the most and, while willing to challenge him on some issues, as far as Tim was concerned what Bruce said was law.

“We can get it from the National Guard or the J-,” Tim stated flatly, not budging in the slightest. Another trait that they shared was stubbornness.

“No, we can't,” a new voice interrupted them and all three turned around to see Batman walking towards them. “If martial law is put in place, it allows the gangs to settle in and consolidate. They'll build alliances and make deals, and once martial law is lifted they'll act. It'll be even worse than it is
now,” Bruce said as he climbed the steps. That made a chill go down all their spines.

It was far from their first gang war and they've experienced more than a few villain plots, but the idea that the streets could get worse was almost too difficult to believe.

“Okay, so what do we do about Spider-man?” Barbara asked, voicing the question that was on their minds. Bruce's expression didn't change in the slightest, likely because he's given the question more thought than all three of them.

“He's a secondary priority. If you run into him, subdue him and bring him in for questioning. If possible, wait until dawn is near,” Bruce replied and Barbara didn't bother hiding her frown at that. So, Batman wanted to get as much use out of him before giving him the boot? It didn't surprise Barbara in the slightest but it did leave a bad taste in her mouth.

“He's not going to come willingly,” she pointed out.

“I know,” Bruce responded gruffly.

For the third time, Barbara sighed while Tim looked validated. She didn't look at Dick to see what his thoughts were. He wouldn't show it, he too took after Batman in that aspect, but she knew him well enough to-

“What happens after we bring him in,” she questioned further, shoving her thoughts to the side.

There was a pause and, when it came to Batman, it was telling.

“If he has a place on the team, then I'll allow him to continue. If not, I'll personally throw him out of my city.”

…

“I'm...I think today's my lucky day,” Peter observed suspiciously as he gazed down at his buggy full of almost random items. It was nearing nighttime, meaning that he had to cut his...shopping...short. He only managed to hit two of the places on the map, but it was for the best reason possible. He kept finding good stuff in the trash and it encouraged him to keep digging in that spot.

After getting new clothes, Peter went to a shopping market. Unlike his Earth, if a shopping center had broken merchandise, they would throw it into something called a compactor. It did exactly as it sounded. Everything went in it; broken electronics, bad food, inflatables and generally everything else that wasn't cardboard or chemicals. On this Earth, it seemed Wayne industries were a big supporter of recycling because they sorted it all out to be picked up once a week.

It was his lucky day because Peter was guessing that tomorrow was the pickup day since he hit the mother-load.

Out back there were large container bins that were filtered through several shoots. It was also guarded by a large wall to keep others out, but it was nothing for Peter's adhesive abilities. It wasn't stealing! It was trash! Just well-guarded trash.

From there, he found a magnitude of things but he made sure he got the things he needed first. Chemicals to create more web fluid from various things like soap, air freshener, bleach, Elmer glue, shampoo and baking soda. Some were kept in separate containers to be drained, but he managed to salvage them. He also grabbed a lot of containers and tubing so he could distil the chemicals into their baser components, which he would use to make more web fluid.
The first batch wouldn't be as good as the normal stuff but once Peter filtered the chemicals a few times, they'd be purer and the quality of his webs would go back up.

He also found a few spools of thread, a small tool kit for electronics that was missing most of the tools and some toiletries that were in alright condition. From there, he began picking things that were on his wish list like a blue-ray player, a broken remote control, and a broken phone charger. With any luck, he could use the broken controller to fix the charger. He also loaded up on cleaning supplies for his apartment.

Then he found the holy grail.

A disposable camera!

It was busted beyond repair like something heavy fell on it. However, Peter peeled away the twisted plastic and saw what he needed was intact. A memory card!

Unfortunately, it wasn't the size Peter's camera needed, but he made due by stripping some wires and connecting the two. His camera looked sketchy, wires visible and held together by pieces of tape that he found, but it worked well enough.

Some employee probably just tossed it in because it was cheap and most of its parts were made of plastic. Peter wished he knew which one did because he was happy enough that he could...well, kissing them would be a bit weird...and he hadn't exactly been able to brush his teeth without a toothbrush...right. It was for the best that he didn't know, for both their sakes.

After Peter had taken his pick, he just carried his buggy over the wall and hopped down. He would return it later, that way he was just borrowing it instead of stealing it.

Peter looked down at his new possessions, trying to add it up in his head how much money he had just saved. The short answer was a lot. He was walking away with a lot more than he expected and it was going to make getting his feet underneath him a lot easier. He even found the one thing that would help him make money.

Even if the quality of the pictures would be poor, if he could get a half decent shot then his worries would be put to rest for this month. Hopefully, there wouldn't be a next month but Peter was taking it one step at a time.

Peter touched the camera in his pocket, reassuring himself that it wasn't a figment of his imagination as he pushed his buggy. For a long moment, there was silence in the alleyway as most people began boarding up their windows and heading indoors for the night. He looked up at the blue sky with a tinge of orange, he let out a breath.

“Something bad is going to happen,” he mused aloud. It was like his life revolved around the rule that for every good thing that happened to him, it had to be repaid with bad. The better his life was, the harsher the fall. The happier he was, it would be returned with despair. It was proven time and time again.

He gained his powers and uncle Ben is murdered because of them. He starts dating Gwen, Harry stops being his friend. He gets a job, it's working for J.J Jamerson. He finds a friend in Mary Jane, he finds an enemy in Eddie Brock. His reputation is in the black, aunt May has a heart attack and puts them in the red. He falls in love with Gwen and then...

It was like Peter always said; the universe needs a chew toy and he was it.

Looking away from the sky, he let out another long sigh. Peter didn't know when or how life would
punish him for being happy but he'd deal with it when he could. Right now, he needed to deposit all of this and suit up. If the past two nights were anything to go by then Peter was in for another long night.

As Peter exited the alley, preparing himself for the upcoming battle, he heard a noise. It was faint, Peter doubted that he would have heard if it weren't for his super-human senses, but he heard it. It was high pitched...meow?

It took a moment for Peter to let go of his buggy, only to realize that he was gripping it so tight that his finger indented on the metal. His gaze lingered on it before he stepped away as if it would disappear the moment he took his eyes off it and walked towards the source of the noise. He heard it again and spotted that it was coming from a box.

He pulled a plastic sheet off it that was being held up by a lead pipe and saw it was...

The most adorable kitten that he had ever seen.

It was a tuxedo kitten. Mostly black but with white on the chest and feet. His fur was a little long, giving him a frazzled look as he looked up at Peter with bright blue eyes. He meowed again and Peter's heart melted.

"D'awwww," Peter cooed as he squatted down, letting the kitten sniff his hand. He glanced down at the writing on the cardboard box and saw it said 'kitten for adoption.' However, it had been covered by the tarp...

"Someone tried to keep you warm but they just put you out of sight, didn't they?" Peter asked the kitten as he had the biggest smile on his face as the kitten licked his fingers. Taking that as permission, he picked the kitten up and only earned a light meow in protest. Once Peter rested him against his chest, he could feel the kitten purring through his many layers of clothing.

"You're just the cutest thing," Peter cooed as he petted the kitten underneath his chin. He glanced down at the box again. The cogs were turning in his mind before they reached a conclusion.

"If you're up for adoption, then do you want to come home with me?" He asked the kitten and he meowed in response as he cuddled into Peter's chest and the hand holding him. "Awesome...I guess I should name you then, huh?" Peter said, speaking in a voice that should only be used on babies and cute animals.

He saw the white on the kitten's paws, “how about Mr. Mittens?” Peter asked and Mr. Mittens just purred as he closed his eyes. It was close enough for a confirmation for Peter. With his free hand, he grabbed the small bag of cat food left in the box and stood up. He tucked into his hoodie pocket so he could keep petting Mr Mittens. His fur was just so soft...!

“What you got here, punk?” Peter heard a voice behind him ask and Peter had to clench his eyes shut for a moment before turning around. As he expected, there was a small group of people standing near his buggy. Apparently, he had been too caught up in dotting on Mr. Mittens to notice them approaching.

“Trash,” Peter said stiffly, continuing to pet Mr. Mittens. There were four guys, all of them bigger than Peter, not that it meant much. However, two of them had baseball bats, one had a crowbar and the last had his hand near his belt. Likely a gun.

“Hmmmm...well, ya know what they say, one man's trash is another man's treasure,” one quoted, looking incredibly smug at saying something someone smart once said. The others remained
unimpressed before one of them pointed at Peter with his baseball bat.

“Whats that in your hands,” he questioned and Peter just kept petting his new kitten.

“A kitten. His name is Mr. Mittens,” Peter answered easily. While a gun was dangerous, it was just one. He could dodge the bullet and then take them down….wait, should he? He wasn't wearing his mask and he wasn't going to put Mr Mittens at risk.

'I'll take him out before he can shoot,' Peter began to plan as Mr Mittens purred contently in his sleep. Hopefully, he wouldn't wake up while he dealt with these guys.

“Cute. Hand him over,” the thug said, taking a threatening step forward with his hand held out expectantly. “Along with your wallet. And maybe, just maybe, me and my buddies won't break your legs.” the thug added and Peter just looked at him, looking very unimpressed.

“Wow, Mr Generic mugger man! When you put it like that, how could I ever say no?” Peter asked, sarcasm clear in his tone, continuing to pet Mr. Mittens. Really, he was exactly what everyone imagined when they thought of a stereotypical mugger and he was spouting out all the things you would expect. Peter heard that last line no less than a hundred times before in various tones. That seemed to get on the gangster's nerves because the cocky look fell and was replaced with a scowl.

“Fine. We'll beat the shit out of you, kill the cat and then we're going to kill you,” the thug stated in a flat tone as he took another step forward. That got a reaction out of Peter. His eye's narrowed in response and his hand stopped petting Mr Mittens in favor of curling into a fist. Now that was too far. No one was hurting Mr Mittens. They'd have to step over his corpse and if Peter's learned anything, he can do whatever a spider can but he has the tenacity of a cockroach.

He opened his mouth to give the thug a warning but he was cut off by a woman's voice above him.

“No. You won't.”
All of them looked up and all of them were surprised at who it was. Considering it was someone speaking above them and there was crime afoot, the knee-jerk assumption was Batgirl. It wasn't her.

It was Catwoman.

Selina smirked cockily down at the five of them, a hand on her hip that was cocked to the side. In her other held her uncoiled whip, ready to be used with a flick of the wrist.

"Bitch, aren't you a villain?" The thug with the gun asked, gripping it in his belt but he didn't pull it out. He asked the question that was on all their minds, albeit using different words in one case.

Selina chuckled but Peter thought it almost sounded like a purr, "I am, but I think I'm going to give this hero thing a try tonight." She said, her grin becoming a predatory smile. It took a moment for her words to sink in, but when they did the gangster's eyes went wide.

The one with the gun tried to pull it out, knowing that they couldn't talk their way out of this, but a crack filled the alley and he looked down just in time to see his leg get pulled from underneath him. He let out a shout, earning the gangsters attention for a brief moment and when they looked back up, Selina was bearing down on them.

The whip cracked a second time when her target lifted his bat up defensively, but her whip wrapped itself around the bat before jerking it to the side. With his defenses down, the gangster couldn't react when Selina landed on his shoulders before throwing her weight back as she clutched her thighs around his head. Using her hands to prop them up for a brief second, Selina slammed the gangster into the ground when she completed the back handspring.

The back of his head hit the ground while the breath was knocked from his lungs, putting him down for the count. Still grinning madly, with grace and flexibility few possessed, Selina sprung into a front handspring to close the distance between the gangster with the crowbar. He swung widely once she was in range out of reflex but the blow hit nothing but air. She gripped his wrist while she ducked underneath the blow. At the same time, she stuck her foot out and tripped the gangster as she pulled him forward. Once his face was on a collision course with the pavement, Selina put him in an armbar before jerking to the side sharply. A wet pop was heard, along with a strangled gasp from the gangster, before he slipped into unconsciousness.

Selina turned her head in time to see the remaining upright gangster just in time to see him rushing her. She shot off the unconscious thug and did a small somersault, much like before. Once Selina closed the distance, she uppercut the thug's groin. It stopped him cold, but just to be sure he was done, as Selina rose she delivered a nasty elbow struck to his chin. The thug's head snapped up before the tension left his body and he collapsed in a heap.

Knowing that the last gangster was still conscious, Selina rounded on him. He was scrambling to get to the fallen gun and Selina moved to cut him off. However, Peter did that for her.

“Dude, quit while you're ahead,” Peter said as he scratched between Mr Mitten's little fluffy ears. What was it with criminals and not knowing when to give up? “Do you really think a gun is going to get you out of this?” He asked and, for a brief second, he seemed to consider Peter's point. Right up until Selina took two large steps and kicked him in the head.

Rounding on Peter, she gave him a thumbs up, “nice distraction.” She commended, giving Peter a.
once over. It was a habit both born of being a thief and sizing people up for fights. After years, decades, though she didn't like to admit that, Selina could read most people like a book. Not well enough to know everything about them, of course, but with a quick glance, she could guess someone's lot in life with high accuracy.

Everything about the kid just screamed poor. His clothing was barely fit to be called as such; there were so many holes that Selina honestly wondered if they did anything to keep out the cold. About two days worth of grease build up in his messy hair, showing that he had bathed somewhat recently but it wasn't a regular thing. Not surprising considering that the homeless shelters didn't have hot water and the towels were quickly stolen to be used as blankets. He also had dark bags under his eyes, likely all the gunfire was keeping him up like the rest of the city.

All in all, if it wasn't for the oh-so-adorable kitten in his arms, he'd look like every other homeless person on the street. That, and the fact he hadn't backed down when faced with four stupid gangsters. Really, what were they thinking breaking the unwritten rule? Once it got out that they had, they weren't going to last long in prison. Selina might have even felt bad for them if they weren't kitten threatening scumbags.

Pursing her lips lightly, she gave his face a once over. He was young too, and even cute in a nerdish kind of way, but there was an air of subtle confidence that would be missed by those with a less trained eye. Then she looked over at the buggy filled with junk and considered it for a moment. Everything in it looked like it belonged in a trash can but she saw some basic useful things that she guessed could be salvaged for something.

'He's resourceful,' Selina commended. Now that was a trait that she respected. What he was using them for, she didn't have the faintest, but Selina was willing to bet money that they would be turned into something useful.

"Ah, you're welcome?" The kid said, earning her attention again. "But, why did you save me? Aren't you a thief?" He questioned and Selina considered the question for a moment before giving a careless shrug.

"All of these idiots running around is just bad for business. I can't even rob a discount jewelry store without someone trying to do the same. So, I'm giving dear old Batman a hand," Selina explained simply as she walked towards him. At first, all these morons running around had been a blessing to cover her tracks from everyone. Now, it was just flat out annoying. She couldn't get in touch with Batman because he was trying to put out every fire in the city and she needed to talk to him days ago.

Once she had invaded his personal space, Selina leaned in and scratched between Mr Mitten's ears. "Enough about that, this is Mr Mittens, huh? You're going to take care of him, right?" Selina asked, looking him in the eye and her tone changed ever so subtly. The kid nodded, not looking away, and that made her smile grow. Selina believed him.

"Can you," she pressed, making a show of giving his clothes a look of doubt. Instead of getting an offended, the kid just gave a lopsided grin.

"Yeah, I can. I have a place in Crime Alley. Plus, he came with some cat food," he explained and that earned an amused chuckle from her.

"Not exactly reassuring, but I see your point," Selina said, leaning in uncomfortably close. The kid started to blush but she noticed that he wasn't looking down at her breasts even when she was giving him a decent view. Selina knew she looked great, she made sure of it, so it was self-restraint on the kids part. Kudos to him, he had what many lacked.
"But," she said, drawing out the word, "I'm not going to take your word for it. I'll be dropping by to make check ups on Mr Mittens and if I find that's you're mistreating him..." Selina said, leaving the threat unfinished. There was a brief look of surprise but he was wise enough to not protest. Not that he could stop her even if he did. Resourceful, kind to cats, backbone, self-restraint and a decent head on his shoulders...give him a few years to ripen up, a bath, and bag full of money and she'd seduce him for the fun of it.

Before he had a chance to say anything, either protest or acknowledgment, Selina took a step back.

"It's been nice kid, but I've got people to meet and idiots to punch. Do the three of us a favor and get off the streets before the real low lives get out and about," she said as she walked backward. Flashing a grin that would give any blushing teenager wet dreams for the next week, Selina used her whip to pull herself up the fire escape and was gone seconds later.

…

Peter watched Catwoman leave, feeling faintly amused meeting her out of costume. The threat that she would visit him sometimes was alarming but he was just going to chalk that up to put him on edge. Catwoman, like Felicia, seemed to enjoy watching people flounder helplessly immensely. Shaking his head of the thoughts, he grabbed his buggy and threw the cat food in along with the rest of his treasures.

She was right about one thing; it was nearing nighttime and he needed to deposit all of this and make Mr Mittens feel at home before suiting up. He exited the alley, the city going quite again as everyone secured their business and their homes. The streets were empty and for stretches of time, the only thing that Peter could hear was the jingling of the items in his cart. Even the ever constant traffic was gone on the streets. The only cars on the road were the ones that belonged to police.

They didn't smile back at him as they drove by.

'I took too long to fix the camera,' Peter thought as he jogged down the road and ignored the red hand telling him not to cross. He glanced up at the sky again and saw the orangeish tint was turning dark far too quickly for comfort. He had minutes left before the nightlife kicked off in Gotham city.

Thankfully, Peter turned the corner and his building came into view. As did Leslie, who was leading in others into her building like she had before. Until the morning came, they would stay in the halls and lobby for safety. There were rules, of course, but most were followed simply because Leslie's shelter was their only choice to weather this storm.

Leslie must have heard him because she glanced over as he approached. Her eyes narrowed, for what reason, Peter didn't know but he tried looking everywhere but her eyes. There were a few similarities between aunt May and Leslie; one of them was that Peter didn't know how to deal with them being angry. To be more precise, angry at him.

“So, ah, I have a f-” Peter began as he neared but Leslie was quick to shut him down.

“I told you, the room was the only help you're getting from me,” she said sharply and Peter pressed his lips into a thin line for a moment, realizing that he should have expected that.

“But, you won't be helping me! You'll be helping Mr Mittens,” Peter said, gesturing to the sleeping kitten in his arms. Leslie looked at him for a long moment, clearly unimpressed by his attempts at manipulation before they settled on the cat.

“You can't take care of yourself, what are you doing with a cat?” She demanded, settling her gaze
back to Peter. There was an accusation in her tone that made Peter frown but he couldn't exactly disagree with her. Not when he just finished digging through trash.

“Someone just left him in a box in an alley. I couldn't just leave him! And, I'm going to make some money tonight anyway, so I can buy cat food and stuff,” Peter defended himself, making a mental note to look up what kittens needed.

Leslie let out a breath and Peter grinned hopefully. “Fine. I'll take care of Mr...*huff* Mittens, but this is the last time I'm doing this. I'm not a cat sitter,” Leslie said taking Mr Mittens from Peter. He could have sworn her expression softened just a bit before she sent another glare in his direction. Without another word, she walked inside of the building and Peter heard the door lock behind her.

Letting out a sigh, Peter saw he was alone in the street. Still, wanting to be careful, he walked into an alley before grabbing his cart and carrying it up the side of the apartment building. He stripped his clothing once on top. It was awful but it needed to be done. It wouldn't do his image any favors if he went swinging around dressed like a bum.

Spider-man deposited his clothes in the buggy and secured his web shooters before taking in a deep breath. He couldn't see the horizon from here but the sun should-

Peter's thoughts were interrupted by the world exploding in gunfire. It wasn't from the echoes bouncing around or because he was standing above it. The sounds of gunfire rang out across the city almost at once, and, quickly after, screams of pain followed. Reacting on instinct, Peter jumped across the roof and dived bombed off it. Below him, he saw one of the many sources.

Eight kids. Kids. The oldest couldn't be any older than he was but their clothing marked them out as gang members. It wasn't a fair fight either, five on three with the three hiding behind a car that had it's tires stolen in the nineties. Attaching his webs to the corners of two buildings, Spider-man launched himself towards the gunfight.

He kicked the oldest one in the chest, knocking the wind out of him and fracturing ribs. As he fell back, Peter lashed out with two other webs and attached them to his friend's sides before crossing his arms. The teenagers yelled out as they were yanked off their feet and let out 'ommphs' when they collided. As the two hit the floor, Peter jumped off the eldest and flipped in mid-air.

The remaining two fired blindly above them, but a quick barrel roll ensured that the bullets missed him. It also helped that their aim sucked. Peter landed between them and both of them tried to point their guns at him. At first, Peter did it because he thought they wouldn't shoot in their friend's direction but that was quickly proven wrong when his spidey-sense blared. Knowing he had to react quickly before they shot each other, Peter lunged at one of them before grabbing his wrist and pulling him out of the bullet's path.

They both shot at the same time, the kid that Spider-man grabbed missing by a mile but the one that he didn't would have hit him if he didn't turn his head to the side. Throwing the kid on the ground, Peter webbed his hand as he dropped down and swept the other kid's feet from underneath him. He fell flat on his back, knocking the wind out of him, and he didn't get up. Not that he could have because Peter was webbing the fallen gangsters before he turned back to the other side of this gunfight.

It was three kids and they were even younger than the ones Peter had just taken down. All three of them were staring him wide eyes and open mouths. Even as gunfire rang out across the city, there was a small beat of silence between the four of them.

“That! Was! Awesome,” one of them exclaimed as he stood. He couldn't be older than seven.
“You,” Peter began but he was at a loss for words. These were kids. Actual children! What in the fuck were they doing with gun?! “What do you think you're doing? Do you three not realize you could have died?” Peter demanded to know as he walked towards them. The kids didn't point their guns at him but the awe was quick to leave their expressions when he started yelling.

“We had to! They were going to kill us,” the one that spoke earlier defended them. He seemed to be the ragtag leader of their group. Two boys and one girl. The girl was the youngest at what appeared to be the ripe age of five.

Peter slowed and glanced at the groaning bodies behind him. It was painfully obvious that they were trying to kill the kids when they were shooting at them but hearing it really hammered it home. Those gangsters were trying to murder these children.

“Then why didn’t you go to the police?” Peter asked, keeping his voice level. Scaring them off wouldn't do any good. There was a lot on his plate right now and even more he needed to be done tonight, but he wasn't going to leave these kids unattended. Not without knowing that someone else won't try to kill them.

The leader tsked, “those pigs won't do anything! Johnny tried before and they beat the shit out of him,” he yelled angrily. Next to him, Johnny rubbed his arm like was feeling phantom pain. Peter frowned deeply under his mask. Police brutality? On kids?

‘This city's the worst,’ Peter thought to himself before taking a step forward. The girl pointed a gun at him in response, her hand shaking so badly that he probably wouldn't be hit even if he stayed still. Spider-man held his hands up in a calming gesture as he took another step forward.

“Okay, you couldn't go to the police. Can you tell me why they wanted to kill you?” Peter asked, taking another step forward. The little girl jerked so badly she nearly conked herself in the head. The other two glanced at her before following suit. Peter was taking that as a sign that they didn't trust him very much.

“I told that shithead that we weren't joining his gang but he said everyone had to! I kept saying no and he told me that if we didn't he was going to kill us! I got the guns from the Raggers stash since you put them in jail already and...” he explained before he sniffed loudly at the end. His voice had been steadily growing thick with emotion and Peter realized it was the knowledge that he was almost murdered was setting in.

Spider-man resisted the urge to curl his hands up into fists. Instead, he let out a long suffering sigh and took another step forward as he spoke. “Look, I believe you. I do, but all of you were just in a gunfight. I'm not going to turn you in,” he added quickly before they could shoot.

They shared a glance and Peter continued before they could respond, “but the police need to-” Peter went still as a bullet rang out. Like he thought, it didn't come anywhere near him and the little girl looked at him with wide terrified eyes.

“No police! We're not going back to the orphanage,” the leader roared, making threatening motions with his own gun. The little girl, on the other hand, looked like she was about to break down crying at the thought.

“Okay. Fine, no police,” Peter agreed, his mind racing. “But you three need to get off the streets. You...behind you, you see that building?” He asked and Johnny looked over immediately with childish innocence. When he looked back, he nodded. “You three need to go inside. Knock at the door and ask for-”
“We know who the Doctor is,” the leader snapped at him. He was using the universal tone of, ‘you're an idiot and here are the reasons why.’

“Good. Ask her to let you in. Explain to her what happened and go inside. I'll help you in the morning. I promise but please, get off the streets,” Peter implored and for the first time since he started speaking he didn't see anger and distrust in their eyes. Peter wished that he didn't have a mask so he could show them that he meant every word and he was just trying to protect them. However, the only thing they could see were their own reflections in his eyes.

The cogs seemed to be turning in their little heads and it was Johnny that came to a decision first. Slowly, almost like he wasn't sure, he lowered his gun.

“She won't make us go back to the orphanage?” He asked and Peter grimaced beneath his mask. Now that was a promise that he couldn't make.

“I don't know,” he said, deciding to be honest. “She's kinda mean but she does what she thinks is right and her hearts in the right place. Tell her what happened, all of it, and take it from there but just get off the streets,” Spider-man pleaded, taking another step forward. He was close now. Close enough that if they refused then he could just nab them and take them to safety himself, but he was hoping that it wouldn't come to that. He wanted them to trust him. To trust that he was trying to help him.

The little leader and the girl looked at their friend for a long moment before doing the same. It didn't escape his notice that the girl was the last to lower her small pistol. Taking another step forward, Peter held out a hand expectantly and it took a moment for the kids to realize what he wanted.

“Eat shit web-head! I'm not handing over my piece,” the leader spat.

“You will,” Peter corrected in a stern tone, “Doctor Leslie doesn’t allow drugs, weapons or fights in her building.” Peter wasn't sure if it was his tone or what, but Johnny looked sheepish as he stepped away from the ruined car and handed over the pistol. Good kid that one.

The leader glared at him defiantly and right when he was about to snatch the gun away from him to stop wasting time, he handed it over with an attitude. The girl held onto hers like it was her lifeline but, with gentle coaxing, she handed it over as well. After webbing the guns, he threw them out of reach for everyone against a building and looked back at the three scared kids.

“Go. Stay safe with Doctor Leslie. I'll come check in on you in the morning. I promise,” Spider-man reassured in a gentle tone that was almost drowned out by gunfire that started up a few streets away. His head snapped in that direction before quickly looking back at the kids. Whatever words he had died on his lips when he saw the little girl giving him a nervous smile.

“Go save them,” she ordered before taking her friend's hands. Peter smiled back underneath his mask as she tugged her friends away.

“Aye-aye, ma'am,” he saluted her before shooting a web and soaring away in the direction of gunfire. Before he disappeared over the buildings, he glanced over his shoulder just in time to see Leslie opening the door and urging them to enter. A flip with flare later and he was nearing another source of gunfire. It had only been seconds but it was already trailing off into pot shots. It wasn't until he cleared another street that he saw why.

Catwoman was standing in the middle of the street, currently punching out the last thug. Surrounding her were similarly punched out thugs.
'Guess she was serious about being a hero for tonight,' Peter thought to himself. Felicia claimed the same more than once and, while she always delivered, she was also quick to slip back into being a thief. 'The more the merrier,' he concluded before shooting another web. If she was watching over downtown then he could head up to midtown. That's where the fancier criminals liked to do their work and he could get a lead on his prey from them.

However, it seemed her ears were sharp enough as her namesake because her head snapped up the moment his web fired off. When he leap off, his spidey-sense acted up, a faint tickle that he almost missed. He looked down just in time to see the whip coil around his foot.

At first, Spider-man thought she was trying to bring him down, which was confusing but that wasn't the case. She tucked up her legs and let his momentum carry her as she began climbing up. Which didn't really help his confusion. When he looked down, she smiled up at him and gave him a wave.

"How's it hanging?" Peter asked, giving into temptation. He could hardly be blamed! The opportunity was right there!

"Funny," Selina said over the rushing wind, "pull me up!" She ordered and Peter obliged after a moment of hesitation. Catwoman didn't seem the type to take no for an answer.

The more he learned about Catwoman to more he saw Black Cat in her.

At the apex of the swing, Peter reached down and pulled her up with ease. Meeting her down as he shot off a web, Catwoman wrapped her arms around his throat and hung on for dear life. He could practically feel her smiling smugly at the back of his head.

"Thanks for the ride Spidey. You wouldn't believe how dangerous the streets are this time of night," she said in his ear and the shiver that went down his spine wasn't because of the cold.

'Doc Ock in a speedo. Doc Ock in a speedo! Curse you hormones! You will not beat me,' Peter thought to himself. That action just screamed Felicia and his body was trying to react accordingly.

"No biggie, though it looked like you can handle yourself. Decide to give up being a thief for the glamorous life of a superhero?" He asked as he turned on a street only to double back when he saw a mugging happening out of the corner of his eye. One web ball hit the muggers foot and the other hit his hand. The man that was being mugged gave a thumbs-up before running off.

"Pssh, never. Hasn't anyone ever told you that crime pays," she asked as she flipped off the mugger that was cursing at them.

"La~la~la~la~! I can't hear you~," Peter sang as they swung away. Catwoman let out a huff of laughter while she shook her head.

"I'm giving Bat's a hand for now," she said after a moment. "You too, I guess, but once this mess clears up I'm going back to my good, 'ol crooked ways," she swore and Peter just grinned away.

Yep. Catwoman might not be Felicia's doppelganger but she was darn close.

"Thanks. We can use the help," Peter admitted freely as he flipped lazily through the air. Catwoman let out a huff of laughter while she shook her head.

"I'm giving Bat's a hand for now," she said after a moment. "You too, I guess, but once this mess clears up I'm going back to my good, 'ol crooked ways," she swore and Peter just grinned away. Yep. Catwoman might not be Felicia’s doppelganger but she was darn close.

"Thanks. We can use the help," Peter admitted freely as he flipped lazily through the air. Catwoman held him in a death grip and if he didn't have the perk of super strength then she'd have choked him out.

She hummed in satisfaction, clearly pleased with herself, "yes, I am very helpful, aren't I?" She asked smugly before adding, "I even rescued a poor damsel in an alley just before you picked me up. He was adorkable, trying to protect Mr Mittens from fifteen mafia thugs. Naturally, I took care of them with ease," she added and Peter made a sound of acknowledgment.
'I remember that going a little differently Cat,' he thought to himself.

“Well, I just rescued three children, who were also orphans, from being murdered because they didn't want to join a gang,” he said, topping her story with ease.

“It's not a competition Spidey,” Catwoman said after a moment, her tone less chipper.

“I know. But, if it was, I'd totally be winning,” Peter said, having his turn to sound smug. Catwoman let out a huff but there was no heat in it.

“Are those kids going to be okay?” She asked after a moment and Peter shrugged, as much as he could at any rate. It wasn't exactly easy when he was swinging around with a passenger on board.

“They will. I left them with the Doctor, so they should be fine,” he said, using what that filthy mouth kid said to describe Leslie. He didn't want to name any names on the off chance Catwoman might know her. Catwoman was silent for a long moment after that. Spider-man couldn't see it but her face was thoughtful, mulling over what she just heard.

Little did Peter know but there was only one doctor known as the Doctor and it was Leslie Tompkins. However, she was only known as the Doctor to street rats.

Selina tucked that piece of information away for later. While it was fairly obvious Spider-man wasn't made of money based on his still damaged suit from the Joker and the fact it was made out of spandex, it was a bit of a shock to her system learning that he was on the lower end of the totem pole of Gotham city. If he was just a street rat then he was only a step above being homeless.

The silence stretched on for a couple of seconds before Catwoman broke it.

“So, who are you gunning for tonight,” she asked suddenly and Peter almost missed his next shot as he stiffened. The question caught him off guard completely.

“Uhhhh...I don't know what you're talking about?” He tried and he could practically feel Catwoman rolling her eyes in response.

“Right. I definitely believe you after that response,” she said sarcastically with a shake of her head. Doing so made her realize just how numb her face was becoming from the wind. Unfortunately, Spider-man's head wasn't big enough for her to hide behind.

“Uh,” Peter floundered, trying to back-peddle out of this conversation.

“Since you've been active, you've stuck around in downtown in the beginning and make your way to the East End.” Sticking to the seedier parts of town, Selina added mentally, “you're heading for Midtown. After your first big fish?” She deduced and Peter frowned beneath his mask.

“I-,” Peter began trying to think of one of his big bads that he's bagged but he was drawing a blank. There was...hmmm...he knew that he busted upper tier criminals before but the names were slipping through his fingers like smoke. There was that one guy, what was his name? Something-born? He dressed up in a...what did he dress up as? An imp? A troll? Wait...huh...what was he thinking about? Peter floundered for a moment before he recalled the conversation and realized he was trying to make a point. Who were the big bads he's nabbed? There was....

“The Joker,” Peter pointed out, the name jumping out at him. How could he forget that guy? He was dressed as a clown and a creepy one at that!

“True,” Catwoman admitted and she thought he had balls of steel for doing it too. There were a lot of
very good reasons why the general advice when seeing the Joker was, ' Fucking run.'

“Are you going after someone in the same league as that monster? Who are you hunting?” She pressed and Peter shelved his momentary confusion in favor of wondering if he should tell her. Catwoman was an upper crust criminal, so she might know where he could find his target. However, was it worth the trouble of what comes after. Undoubtedly, she would insist that she come along and that would complicate getting photos.

On the other hand, if she could give him a direct address then he could get there quicker, bust him and his organization and then go back on the streets.

“Two-face,” Peter said after a moment of thought. The faster he got back on the streets the more people he could save and the more fights he could stop.

“Nope,” Catwoman said, popping the P. “Were you dropped on your head as a kid? Some rare brain disease that interprets incredibly dangerous to fun and exciting? First the Joker and now you're gunning for Two-face? Do you have a death wish?” She asked and when Peter grumbled under his breath, she applied a little pressure to his throat just to remind him that she wouldn't be ignored.

“Why are you even aiming for Two-face in the first place?” She asked, knowing that there was an ulterior motive. Spider-man stuck to where the crime was at it's thickest, so it had to be a good reason.

“I thought the idiots on the forums would shut up about my name if I had a little street cred,” Spider-man deflected and Selina scoffed in response. It seemed that he couldn't dodge a question as well as he could dodge bullets, she mused.

“Mhmm.”

“If I'll keep the streets safer! I heard from someone who heard from someone that heard from someone who's brother works for Two-face and he's making moves. Gathering henchmen and all that jazz,” Peter defended himself. It almost felt like he was defending his right to stay up late to aunt May, in an odd way. Was it just an adult thing to make awkward teenagers feel dumb? He wanted that superpower...

“Oh? You're just aiming at a big name who's using this mess to further his own agenda,” she asked and Peter gave a hesitant nod. He had picked Two-face because he was a big name, thus making it more likely someone would buy a picture of his getting his butt kicked by Spider-man. However, provided he could do some good for the city at the same time, he didn't mind switching targets.

“Then you're aiming for the wrong guy. Who you really want to bust either the Penguin or Black Mask,” Selina urged, saying the last name with a hidden tone that Spider-man couldn't decipher. Unknown to him, Selina and Roman had a long, messy history and none of it was good.

Peter went down low when he spotted a car murdering the speed limit with a cop car lagging behind it. Both to stop the perp, and to buy himself some time to think, he went street level. In quick succession, he webbed the cars tires to the road, making the car jerk as it came to a very sudden stop. Apparently, the guy was too busy stealing a car to bother buckling his seat belt because he was thrown through the windshield.

Luckily for him, Peter attached a web to his back to catch him before circling back to the cops that parked next to the webbed car. Spider-man dropped him off at their feet before swinging off.

“Alright...who do you recommend going after,” he asked after mulling it over. He had read about
Black Mask and the Penguin when he was at the library. Either of them would meet his requirements. He didn't really have a plan to get to Two-face anyway. Just the basic 'beat up criminals until they point him in the right direction.' It tried and tested, but it would have consumed time. If switching targets would fulfill both his requirements and he could do it faster then it only made sense, he rationalized.

“Penguin. No doubt that little sleazeball is using this to snatch up territory. He's based in the Iceberg Lounge and he's the biggest importer in Gotham,” she explained on the off chance Spider-man didn't know. He was a new hero and an ex-, possibly current, street rat so odds were he couldn't see the bigger picture quite yet.

Peter was thankful for it because he hadn't known any of that.

“Sounds like a plan. Where's the Iceberg Lounge?” Spider-man asked as he fired off another web.

Selina was thankful that she was behind him because she couldn't keep the wicked grin off her face.
Dancing at the club

The Iceberg Lounge was a nightclub made for the upper crust and it looked the part. It was almost jarring from seeing the trash covered streets and buildings peppered with bullet holes to looking at a building like this. It was four stories tall, making it shorter than most of the buildings surrounding it but the Iceberg Lounge more than made up for what it lacked in height. Unsurprisingly, given the guy who named was called the Penguin, it had a cool ice theme.

Flanking the doors was a large glacier that almost looked real. The words 'Iceberg Lounge' were written in an icy blue hue just above the door. The entrance itself was risen up to give the impression of superiority and the stairs looked like they were carved from ice. The building itself was less impressive but looked no less posh. The large windows were blacked out and the brick walls were a whitish gray. All in all, it looked like an overpriced nightclub that Mary Jane would try to convince him to help her sneak into.

"So, what's the game plan?" He asked Catwoman, who was messing with her goggles. Then he noticed that the yellowish lenses were now a crimson red with faint outlines of something in it. Why did everyone have cooler tech than him? He wanted lenses that did...whatever hers were doing.

"Hmmm," she hummed before the lenses faded back to yellow. "Seems like Penguin is still mad at me. I'm picking up electricity reading in the vents, so I'm putting money on trip lasers. I can still sneak in but it'll take some time." The one thing that they didn't have.

Catwoman glanced at Peter, "how are you when it comes to distractions?"

"Are you really asking the guy in primary colored spandex that?" Peter shot back and Catwoman inclined her head at him.

"Point. I was thinking old school; you kick in the front door, get everyone's attention while I slip in undetected. If I can get my hands on his computer, I-we'll have a treasure trove of evidence that can put him away. I'll also keep an eye out for any kind of plan that'll tell us what Penguin has his goons doing tonight," she said and her slip up didn't go unnoticed by Peter.

However, he nodded along with the plan. While he wasn't bad at stealth, he could sneak up on henchmen with ease, but it was never his preferred method. He went unnoticed enough at high school, being the center of attention still hadn't lost its novelty.

“Alright, I like it. Are you ready?” Spider-man asked as he stood up, planning his entrance. He needed something dramatic, something eye catchy...hmm. He could go with the classic kicking down the door but just didn't have the oomph he was looking for. Going through the windows? No...may...no. Glass would get everywhere and what if some fell on someone?

Sure, they might be a minion for a crime lord but that was hardly a justification for accidentally poking their eye out.

“Hey, Cat-” Peter turned to ask for some advice but cut himself off when he noticed he was alone. “Right. Of course. I really need to learn how to do that,” he noted to himself before he webbed the sides of the door. Taking a few steps back to build some tension in his webs, he jumped up and was shot towards the doors. It wasn't what he wanted but since when did that matter?

Much like before, Spider-man's feet smashed into the opposing doors but this time, they were reduced to a shower of splinters because they were locked. However, his momentum was barely
slowed and he skidded to a halt until he was standing on the dance floor. Peter looked around for threats, idly noting that the theme inside matched outside with the floor made to look like ice, but the club was almost entirely empty.

Peter wasn’t surprised by the lack of people on the dance floor but, despite being so large, it took a second for Peter to spot anyone. There weren’t even any henchmen running about trying to look like they were doing something important.

At least, until his eyes found two people. One man and one woman.

The guy, well, Peter kinda saw why his moniker was the Penguin. His nose was almost unnaturally long and pointed downward, making it look like a beak. It also didn’t help that he was fairly short, around five feet or so, and roundish. The fact that he was wearing a suit along with a top hat just completed the image.

The girl just seemed dangerous. She wore a mostly black body suit but with orange trimming. He couldn’t see her face because of a mask that reached down to just cover her nose, but it was split down the middle. One half was orange and the other was black. Her white hair reached down to brush her shoulders and that was what brought his attention to the katana strapped to her back. In her hands were mean looking pistols. Which were pointed right at him.

Spider-man bent back parallel to the floor to dodge the two bullets that raced towards him. Uprighting himself, he webbed a table and slung it at the duo. She fired off another shot before grabbing Penguin and diving out of the way. Likewise, Peter jumped out of the way of the bullets and towards an overhanging. With his feet attached to the ceiling, he webbed his camera to it.

“Hey, I'm just here to do a little dancing and that's how you greet me? Oh, the review I'm going to give you on Yelp with be-”

“Oh god, not a talker,” the girl muttered to herself as she fired off shots at the bright target. Spider-man ran across the ceiling, dodging every bullet. He didn't fail to notice that every single one of them was aimed at his chest or head either. Whoever that girl was, murder seemed to be her first option when dealing with annoyances.

Peter let himself fall, contorting his body so another bullet sailed past him harmlessly before landing. The moment his feet touched the ground, however, his spidey-sense blared and he dove to the side in response. The moment he did so, the girl appeared from absolutely nowhere and tried to take his head off with a roundhouse kick.

“You're pretty quick on your feet,” he commented. She wasn't a baseline human. There was no way. The club was huge and he hadn't been standing anywhere close to her, yet she managed to close the distance within seconds. Now it was just a question of how far above she was from the baseline.

“Eat a dick,” the girl shot back. Based on the hostility in her tone, he was going to take a guess and say that she wasn't much of a talker. That and the fact she was trying to maim him, doing her best to not give him any breathing room. She was also a trained fighter, that much was made very apparent.

“Stop flirting you two brats! And You! You're going to pay for my door,” he yelled, pointing his umbrella at Ravager's back and, indirectly, Spider-man too.

BANG

Peter reacted instantly. Even as he dodged the swipe that nearly took his head off, he lashed out with his foot and hit Ravager in the ankles. She let out a grunt as her legs were swept from underneath her
but it was infinity better than the spine full of buckshot. When she hit the ground, she rolled with the little momentum she had as Spider-man bent at the knees so the pellets sailed over him.

“You're being a third wheel right now. Take a hint,” Spider-man shouted as he jumped backward into the air before sending two webs at the small man. Penguin managed to off another shot, hitting a web that sent it off course but he lacked the reflexes, and the fitness, to dodge the second web so it hit him in the chest.

“Ravager! Protect me! Protect-,” he yelled just before Peter yanked him upwards. Penguin yelled incoherent curses as he flew upwards but before he could descend, Peter shot another web so that he was dangling from the ceiling.

“That was easy,” he commented to himself as Penguin thrashed in his restraints. He was really expecting some kind of...something from him. Maybe a penguin based superpower or-

His musing was cut short when his spidey-sense blared and he dodged on instinct. Looking for the source as bullets passed by his head, he looked just in time to see a very sharp sword arcing towards his collar bone. Based on the slasher grin on the girl's face, Spider-man went on a limb and guessed that she was going to enjoy cutting him in half.

Faster than humanly possible, Spider-man angled his body to the side and the blade missed him by an inch. When the blade sailed harmlessly by him, Ravager switched her pistol to auto and began firing to cut off his escape to the right while her sword was coming right back from the left.

Making a split second decision, Spider-man jumped over the sword and sprung into a single handspring as he tried to web her. She returned fire, keeping him moving and bullets tore up the bar behind him. That earned some screaming from Penguin above them.

“Shut up you glorified chandelier,” Ravager hissed as she fired bullet after bullet, her words drowned out by the sounds of gunfire. Then she fired her last bullet and the gun clicked empty.

Peter seized the chance and dashed at her when he touched down. He jabbed at her but hit nothing but air as Ravager dodged to the side while counterattacking. Jerking back his hips, the blade missed his stomach and Ravager gritted her teeth in response before she rolled out of the way when Spider-man aimed a roundhouse kick at her.

“Stop jumping around and just die already,” she yelled as she rolled to her feet. Even then, Peter pressed the attack but Ravager bobbed and weaved out of the way. Sweat dripped down her exposed flesh as she narrowly dodged fists and feet.

“Right back at ya! Well, not the dying bit,” he shot back as he leaned out of the way of the sword before kicking at Ravager's exposed ribs. However, just like before, she jumped back just far enough that he missed and it was starting to get annoying. "So, does this count as dancing,” he asked with a grin before backing off once the girl slammed a new magazine into her pistol.

“Don't you even start. I'm so out of your league bug-boy,” Ravager stated as she fired away.

“Out of my league? Have you seen me in these tights?” Peter asked ridiculously before he webbed another table and flung it at her to give himself from breathing room. This was just getting tedious. Every time he got close she would dodge. Every time she fired a shot or attacked him, he would dodge. It was like he was fighting-

His thoughts were interrupted when Ravager cut the table in half before rushing him. Her gun was back in her holster so she could grip her sword with both hands and based on that furious snarl on
her face, Spider-man was willing to bet the last of his money she was just as annoyed with the stalemate as him.

For a moment Peter thought her form would get sloppy since she was so pissed, without him even making a few quips to boot, but, if anything, her form got better. The strikes sped up until the point her arms were blurs and the sound of whistling as the blade sliced through thin air replaced the sounds of constant gunfire.

“Ah! I knew you'd come around! I guess I'll get to do some dancing after all,” Peter observed as he narrowly dodged a blade to the throat before launching back into a single handed back spring when Ravager tried to cut him in half with the back swing. However, Spider-man deftly brought his legs back down so the blade missed by an inch. Once he was on all threes he retaliated with an uppercut that missed the girl's chin by centimeters.

“So, you come here often?” He asked and the girl just growled and tried to skewer him. As she did so, Peter spun around and tried to punch her in the head but his punch was stopped could when a bullet passed where his fist would have been from Ravager's pistol that she quick drew.

“Will you shut. Up,” she hissed and Peter was forced to move out the way of a bullet intended for his forehead.

“Me neither, I like the design but this just isn’t my kind of club. Too shady for my liking,” he continued the conversation as he flipped out of the way of the sword and spun so two bullets sailed harmlessly by him.

“I swear, I am going to murder you,” the masked girl vowed as her blade cut a railing in half with ease.

“You agree? Sweet! Tell'ya what, how about me and you ditch this joint? Maybe find a different club, one that's a little, I don't know, not trashed?” He offered as he back flipped and caught himself with a hand on the still attached railing before kicking out. The girl dodged and countered attacked with trying to cut his leg off. Both ignored Penguins indignant squawking.

The girl made a sound that Peter couldn't quite place. It was a cross between a scream of frustration and growl that promised murder. A slow and painful one. Really, this girl had some anger issues.

“No...no, you don't seem like that kind of girl,” Peter flipped off the railing and jumped off a few tables. The girl was behind him, sword at the ready and seizing any opportunity to slice him open.

“How about this; me and you, candle lite dinner, over-priced Italian food, smooth jazz...and, most importantly, the drinks!” Peter exclaimed as he webbed two bottles of alcohol from the bar and flung them in the girl's direction.

The girl stopped short and was quick to slice the bottles long before they hit her but she forgot to take into account Newtons first law; what is in motion will stay in motion thanks to a lovely thing called inertia. Meaning, when Peter yanked back the webs, the contents of the now open bottles were freed and continued forward without impediment right until the booze hit Ravager in the face.

She sputtered and recoiled, one arm going up to clear her stinging eyes and Peter didn't waste a second. He kicked off the bar hard enough that it cracked. The sound must have alerted her because she swung blindly at him. No. not blindly. The blade made a perfect arc towards his neck the moment he entered range as she went to roll out the way from his attack.

His spidey-sense tingled and he caught the blade with his hand, using his adhesive abilities and super strength to stop it in it's tracks. Even then it was a close thing. He could feel hot blood and sharp pain
where his fingers began and if that uncomfortable grinding was anything to go by, the blade was digging into bone.

'That's going to be annoying,' he commented to himself before he yanked the blade back as he kicked out with a foot. “Yoink,” he yelled out, ripping the sword out of her hands and his foot planted into her stomach. The breath exploded from her mouth in a ragged gasp before she was sent rolling backward.

Peter dropped the sword and tried to web the girl to the floor but, yet again, she managed to dodge one web even as she was gasping for breath and clutching her stomach. However, one web made contact since Peter noticed something throughout their fight.

'She has a spidey-sense too,' he deduced. Except she probably didn't call it a spidey-sense, which was good because it was his thing. It couldn't be better reflexes simply because she was still reacting to things she had no way of knowing about.

The girl managed to let out a shout as she felt herself yanked off her feet and sent sailing through the air. She looked down at Spider-man with hate filled eyes, her hands dipping towards her gun as she fought to keep down her lunch. However, that came to a stop when she felt something hit her on the side. Something sticky and rope-like.

“For fucks sake,” she forced out through gritted teeth as Penguin let out a scream as he flipped in the air, and almost like a yo-yo, sailed over her and she felt the web wrap around her shoulders, pinning her arms to her sides as she was flipped upside down and had a very unfortunate view of Penguin's exposed stomach.

“Ravager! Y-you-you incompetent...whore! I ignored cashing in your bounty because I thought you'd be worth more working for me than another check in the bank! My club is in ruins and I'm hanging upside-fucking-down,” Penguin roared as he thrashed, making Ravager grind her teeth audibly to Peter's superhuman hearing.

"You're useless! Useless! No wonder why your father left you high and-" Penguin continued but as soon as he mentioned her father, Ravager lost it.

"Shut the hell up you fat sack of shi-" she started, thrashing in her restraints. Luckily for Penguin, however, she didn't have the raw strength to snap his webs. It wasn't for lack of trying though because the expression he could see was absolutely murderous. He hit her with another web. Just in case.

“Hey! Don't make me separate you two! Didn't anyone ever tell you if you don't have anything nice to say then don't say anything at all?” Peter asked and blinked in surprise at the down right awe inspiring slew of curses that were sent his way. He was a New Yorker, born and raised in the Queens, but damn Ravager had a mouth on her. She also had a very active imagination when it came to death threats.

Right when he was about to web her mouth, maybe after throwing a bar of soap in it, Peter heard laughing behind him. Leaning back, he saw Catwoman aiming her phone at Penguin and Ravager. A cruel mocking smile was twisting her lips as she tapped on the screen

“Harley is going to love this,” she said to herself before she noticed that Spider-man was looking at her. She tapped on the screen one final time and gave him a thumbs up, “job well done Spidey,” she commended. Surprisingly enough, she meant it too.

“As if I'd do anything less,” he responded easily enough before he jumped towards the balcony. If
Catwoman was shocked to see him jump a story high and three times that in distance, along with a back-flip for a little flair, then she didn't show it. Spider-man landed on the railing next to her, glad to put a little distance between him and Ravagers foul mouth.

"Where were you? I thought I was just the distraction," he asked, hiding his suspicious undertone.

"I was sneaking in but then I saw Ravager. She never strays far from daddy dearest, so I stayed hidden. By the time I realized that he wasn't here, you already had this one in the bag," she explained with a careless shrug. "Nice moves, by the way. I didn't know a person could bend like that," she added, leaning on the railing and giving Spider-man a saucy wink.

To preserve his dignity, Peter chose to ignore the compliment because he knew he'd be reduced to a stuttering, blushing mess if he explored that route. Instead, he picked on something that Penguin had also mentioned.

"Who's her dad?"

Catwoman looked vaguely disappointed that he didn't rise to the bait but answered all the same. "Deathstroke the Terminator. The biggest, scariest mercenary in the world. That little bundle of joy is his apprentice-slash-daughter. Rumor is that she plucked out one of her eyes just to make sure everyone saw the family resemblance," she added sarcastically before she heard a blip on her phone. As she pulled it out, Peter was reeling.

He glanced over at the tied up girl and, even though the top of her face was obscured by that orange and black mask, he could feel her eyes full of hate on him. Great. He made his second enemy. First the Joker and now a baby terminator. He was on a roll!

"Ah, that was fast," Catwoman said, drawing his attention back to her. She was shoving her phone in his face and once his eyes refocused, he saw the forum about Spider-man that he was browsing earlier. However, what really caught his attention was a video posted to the thread.

Snatching the phone out of her hands before Catwoman could even think to react, Peter pressed play and his heart sunk. It was a video of the fight, complete with audio and a decent angle to see it all from security cameras, a few based on how the angles kept changing. It sank even further when he scrolled down to see well over a hundred posts all saying the same thing and that list was getting even longer.

"Congratulations! You're going viral! No need to thank me for the free publicity," Catwoman said smugly, very proud of herself and expecting to be showered in words of praise. It took every ounce of Peter's willpower to not crush the phone out of frustration.

'Hello again square one,' he thought to himself before letting out a quiet breath. This was a bust on making him any money, but at least Penguin was going to jail along with baby Deathstroke. It wasn't a total loss. No, it wasn't even a loss. It just wasn't the win he was hoping for, the one that he needed.

"Thanks," Peter said after a moment and Catwoman gave him a curious look. That was a lot less praise and cheer than she had been expecting. Before she could comment on it, however, Peter pressed forward with the matter at hand. "Did you find anything about his plans? This place seems pretty empty considering how big it is."

Catwoman looked like she wanted to comment but let out a huff before she nodded. "Yeah, I did. Penguin's password was penguin and I found everything. I forwarded most of it to the Commissioner but I kept out the plans he had for tonight. The boys in blue have enough on their hands as is. Anyway, Penguin doesn't think small," she gestured to the hanging man, who was turning purple.
from rage. Or maybe it was all the blood rushing to his head.

“He's emptied out his club to go full on attack. He's expanding in every direction so he can gain enough manpower to take over every dock in the city. Not a bad plan, if a little ambitious. The docks are Gotham's lifeblood after all,” she said with a hint of approval. Catwoman wasn't a fan of the arctic themed villain but she could respect ambition, especially if it didn't involve her.

Peter blinked, “he-where?!”

“Every dock on the southern island and East end for tonight after clearing out what's left of the All-Americans and Yakuza,” she informed and almost let out a snicker when Spider-man seemed to flounder for something to say. Then he went rigid and Catwoman could practically see the look of determination behind his mask.

“Uh, let's go?” Peter said as he stood up, feeling like he had just wasted time chatting away. He tossed her phone back and Catwoman caught it deftly. When he offered a hand to pull her up, however, she shook her head.

“We should split up for now. I'll handle the docks in East end while you take the southern island since you can move faster than me,” she explained her reasoning. Not to mention the lack of superpowers. Spider-man could fight all night but Catwoman couldn't.

Peter nodded, deciding that made more sense then he snatched the phone back out her hands and put his number in it. “Give me a call when you're done or if you get in over your head and I'll swing by,” he said before tossing the phone back. Catwoman's smile just ate up her face.

“My, my! I didn't know you had it in you Spidey,” she said as she memorized the new number. She went through phones like most women went through shoes and this was one number she wasn't going to loose. She heard a 'thwip' but by the time she looked up, Spider-man was already swinging away.

…

“Girls...Girls are crazy, man,” Nightwing said as he bashed an escrima stick on a thugs face. The thug let out a grunt as his nose was flattened before letting out a pained shout as Nightwing pressed the tip into his gut and gave him the shock of his life. “I mean, I know I can't really blame anyone but myself for this mess, but it's just the principle of it, you know?” He continued as he moved to the next thug.

“Sure, I'll be the first to admit that I'm not the best boyfriend. I forget birthdays, anniversaries and, maybe, I'm kinda of a little bit of a playboy,” he admitted. He could thank Bruce for that last bit. Bruce wasn't exactly a model father figure considering he spent his nights dressed in a bat-themed costume and his days sleeping with women half his age.

“But I don't cheat! Ever! Would it kill them to trust me a little on that front?” He demanded from the very confused thug before he slammed his heel into his temple, knocking him out like a light. “First Batgirl blames me for all of that crap when half of it was her fault. Now Starfire is terrified I'm going to cheat on her since I'm working with my ex!” He growled in frustration as he kicked a thug in the stomach before whacking him in the back of the head.

“Do I come off as a cheating scumbag to you?” He asked another thug before kneeling him in the face. The grunt of pain didn't really satisfy Nightwing as an answer. “I don't think I do, but apparently everyone else does. Gah, what a pain in the ass,” he groaned as he threw his escrima stick into another thug. As he fell, his finger was stuck on the trigger so he fired into the air.
“I tried telling her that I would never do that to her. Even if I was that kind of scumbag, which I'm not, I couldn't do it if I tried! Batgirl won't even look at me, much less...! But of course, she still doesn’t believe me. To make it all worse, I have to shut her down every time she tries to come over to help the city all because dear old Batman hates sharing,” he continued before delivering an elbow to another thug.

“That sure doesn't help my case,” he complained as he scooped up his escrima stick. He looked around at the numerous groaning bodies and let out a sigh. “Thanks for listening guys. It means a lot,” he said to them as he put his weapons of choice back in their holsters.

“Ahhh, the complain-about-your-problems-while-beating-up-bad-guys shtick. Much cheaper than therapy,” Nightwing heard someone quip. Out of reflex, his weapons were in hand and he glared up at the source of the voice. Of all the things he expected, seeing the newest vigilante of Gotham wasn't one of them.
“Oh no, this is hero therapy,” Nightwing said as he made a show of putting his escrima sticks back in their holsters to put him at ease. “We bust criminals and talk about our problems. Don't get much in the way of advice, but I've gotten every epiphany I've ever had when I'm breaking someone's nose so I guess it balances out,” he continued in a conversational tone.

He took a step forward, trying to get a better look at Spider-man. The new vigilante was perched on a warehouse, looking down at him with an unreadable expression on his face thanks to the mask. However, Nightwing saw Spider-man tense once he began to near so he stopped after taking a step over a groaning criminal.

“I'm surprised you recognized it so easily, practice?” He ventured, trying to get a conversation going. Not that he had to try very hard.

“Of course! It was one of the first things I started doing when I went out,” Spider-man said, trying to recall his first night on the job. His costume was barely good enough to be called as such, his web shooters malfunctioned and the first baddy he stopped was...a...bank robber? It was some kind of thief.

"So I'm not the only one with issues that need to be worked out in this city? Color me shocked,” Nightwing commented with a chuckle.

"I dress up in spandex and punch bad guys in the face all night. I think it's a given that we have issues," Spider-man admitted with a shrug of his shoulders. Nightwing made a face at that, agreeing with him on that point. There were a few ticks of silence between them before Spider-man stood up. If Nightwing wasn't going to talk then, he didn't have any time to waste.

"Hey, wait," Nightwing got his attention before he swung away. “Look, I just met you, and this is kinda crazy, but I appreciate what you're doing. It's kinda awkward since we just met and all, but I think it would be best if we worked together,” he said, gaining more confidence as he spoke. In the beginning, it was somewhat awkward, almost like how Peter talked most of the time, but as he continued it became charismatic, in a way. His voice reminded him of the few times he got to speak to Captain America.

Spider-man paused for a moment before he nodded slowly. He was a solo hero through and through, but he could see the benefits of a team up.

“Okay, I guess. Well, the first thing you should know is that I just took down the Penguin and Ravager with Catwoman,” he started, and he saw Nightwing blink slowly beneath his domino mask.

“I'm sorry, what? Ravager as in,” he started, but Peter nodded before he could continue.

“Baby Terminator with anger issues, yeah that one,” he confirmed, and Nightwing let out a snort of laughter.

“And when you say Catwoman helped you bust Penguin...” Nightwing trailed off, letting Spider-man finish the thought.

“She hacked into Penguin's computer, which had a password so stupid no one would guess it, made a video of me fighting Ravager and uploaded it to the internet. When she was done with that, she sent a bunch of evidence to the police and found Penguins plans,” Spider-man explained, squashing any annoyance he felt about that. There were other ways to make money.
Maybe someone would buy the photo of him and Nightwing talking? He could see the headline now: Heroes make small talk!

“Are you sure that’s all she did?” Nightwing asked, sounding suspicious.

Spider-man shrugged, “No,” he admitted easily enough, “but she said she's giving the hero thing a try until all of this settles down. I believe her, for what it's worth,” he defended his...partner? It wasn't like Nightwing's concerns weren't unfounded. Catwoman was an unapologetic kleptomaniac.

Nightwing seemed to accept that answer, and Peter took it as a sign to continue. “Penguin's moving to take all of the docks on the southern island and a couple on the East end. Catwoman is dealing with them, and I was going to take care of the ones here, but it seems you've beaten me to it. Have you done all of them or...?” Spider-man trailed off, prompting Nightwing to answer.

"This was the last one on the island. Robin hit the other three on the southern half while I took these four. We had bugs in the Iceberg Lounge, so we targeted the docks first. Say what you want about the Penguin, but he has bold deeds to back up bold words," Nightwing said with a shake of his head. Despite himself, Peter felt annoyed. While meeting Nightwing was all fine and dandy, he had just wasted a lot of time.

“That's good, I guess. Is there anything you haven't already taken care of that you know about? Me and Catwoman were going to regroup and gun for Two-face or Black Mask but if there’s anything else,” Peter ventured, gesturing to Nightwing, who's eyebrows were rising higher and higher.

“You don't aim small, do you?” He asked, sounding more amused than worried that Catwoman had been. “But, yeah, we have some stuff that you can help out with. Do you know anything about the Irish?” He asked and Peter gave a shrug of his shouldered before he gave a mental shrug as well.

He hopped down, landing lightly and walked over to Nightwing, “not counting the stereotypes, no, not much.” He admitted as he walked forward. Nightwing seemed like a decent enough guy, even if what he overheard during his 'therapy' session was a bit telling, so it just seemed a little rude talking down to him.

“Ah, well, the Irish live up to their stereotypes. Batman took care of a gunfight in the central square, but a few splinter groups either didn't fight or ran off. Last that I heard they were gunning for the triads territory Old Gotham,” Nightwing explained, and Spider-man nodded along.

“But, do you have anything on Two-Face or Black Mask,” he pressed. The night was young, and there was still plenty of upper crust bad guys he could bag.

“No. Black Mask hasn't been seen, or heard from since his little criminal empire fell apart and there’s nothing confirmed about Two-Face,” Nightwing answered easily, and Peter ignored the pang of disappointment. He needed to make money somehow and; he never thought he'd say this, but he really wished a super villain would just attack him.

That hadn't been the answer Peter wanted to hear.

"Any other rogues that need a bustin'," he asked, and Nightwing narrowed his eyes in response.

"Any particular reason why you're aiming so high up," he questioned, and Peter hesitated. It wasn't like he could just tell him that he was going to take pictures of him beating someone's butt and sell them. He quickly recovered and just gestured around him, the men on the ground groaning helpfully to prove his point.

“Rule number one of being a criminal overlord is to have henchmen. Rule number two is to use said
henchmen to further your nefarious agenda when it's inconvenient for the heroes. Rule number three,
always install a self-destruct button,” Peter ticked off before he gave a half-hearted shrug. “I figured I
could bag more bad guys if I aimed for the top,” he half lied, giving himself a mental pat on the back.

Peter always had an odd relationship with lying. When it came to lying, like making something up
entirely, his attempts were laughably bad. That was proven when he was once caught by aunt May
coming home at two am after a patrol and his excuse was he was getting milk. Which he didn't have.
It got progressively worse from there when he tried to cover his tracks.

However, twisting the truth? That was where he thrived.

Nightwing cracked a grin at the mention of self-destruct buttons, fond memories drifting back, “you
seem well versed in the handbook of villainy and evil. Should I be worried?” He asked, gesturing for
Spider-man to follow him. While they spent time chatting, there was crime being done.

“Oh-oh, you won't get me that easy. I'm definitely not going to start monologuing my evil plans to
take over all of Gotham by posing as a superhero! No-sire-bob! I'm too smart for that,” Spider-man
shot back easily. Now that they started to move past the somewhat awkwardness of sizing the other
up personality wise, it was easier to make jokes.

“Don't even get me started on monologs. I mean, I'm not going to complain. I really don't want to
count the number of times I would have died if the villain would have just pulled the trigger or
pushed the button but it's just the principle of it, you know? It's just...why? Why do you feel the need
to lay out your plan in detail to the person that you're about to murder, who also has the greatest
chance to stop your plan,” Nightwing lamented as he pulled out his grappling hook and launched
himself onto a warehouse.

He looked over just in time to see Spider-man pulling himself up as well. Once they landed, Spider-
man didn't notice that he dropped a small black disc near where the web like rope was attached to the
building.

“It's like they've never seen a movie. Look, I'm not advocating competent criminals but it really hurts
my faith in humanity every time I see something so stupid I just want to start banging my head
against the wall,” Peter agreed. In the two years, he's been a superhero, the things he's seen would be
down right awe inspiring if they weren't terrifyingly stupid.

Like those guys that would stand around and cheer when he was fighting Rhino or...uhh...one of the
other guys he fought on the regular. For the life of him, Peter couldn't understand why people would
just ignore every self-preservation instinct they had just so they could record a half decent video on
their phones.

“Finally! Someone understands my pain! Red Robin just made fun of Batman and me,” Nightwing
made a noise of annoyance before he flashed Spider-man a grin. He left out that Batgirl just scolded
him for tempting fate.

Both heroes of the night jumped across an opening and landed on the next warehouse. As they
touched down, Peter realized something. He glanced at Nightwing in confusion, replaying the
conversation in his head before he asked, "Uh, are we teaming up?"

Nightwing looked faintly surprised by the question, "yeah? I mean, we don't have to if you don't
want to, but I just figured since you're a newbie...” He trailed off with a shrug and Peter just blinked
in response.

A newbie? What? He's been doing this for years now! Then Peter realized something. This guy was
Nightwing, the once upon a time sidekick to Batman according to the forums. So, shouldn't he be able to give him an in to Batman?

He opened his mouth to do exactly that, but the words died in his throat. Peter blinked owlishly as whatever he wanted to say just left him high and dry. He paused for a moment, trying to recall what he wanted to say before he eventually gave a half shrug. If he forgot then it couldn't have been too important, right?

"Fair enough," Spider-man agreed with some reluctance. Peter was self-aware enough to know that he wasn't much of a team player. He didn't mind them, not when it got the job done, but, in his heart of hearts, Spider-man was a solo hero. "Wait, shoot," he cursed as he sailed over to another warehouse.

"Something wrong?"

"I have to text Catwoman and tell her that we teamed up. Since I'm not at the docks, I don't want her wasting time and heading here on accident," Peter explained as he took out his cracked phone. After making sure that no one was looking, other than Nightwing, who seemed so very amused.

“You have Catwoman's number,” he questioned, fighting the smile on his face. He'd, well, he was going to say that he'd love to see the look on Bruce's face when he found that out, but Nightwing knew the Dark Knight well enough that he'd do nothing but a scowl.

“No. That's the problem. I gave her mine, but I don't have hers,” Peter explained as they leaped to another warehouse. They only had a few left and Peter wasn't sure how Nightwing intended to get around. You can only use a grappling hook so many times in a row.

“I know it,” Nightwing said, holding his hand out expectantly. Peter glanced back at him before handing his phone over. Nightwing tapped on the screen a few times before handing it back. When he did, it took all of one second for Peter to notice what Nightwing decided to name Catwoman as a contact.

“Really, dude? What's it like having the sense of humor of a five-year-old?” Peter grumbled as he deleted the name that wasn't user-friendly. Nightwing just snickered in response, clearly proud of both himself and his sense of humor.

Once he replaced the word with Catwoman, Peter started to text. Well, he tried to at least. He was hit right in the face with writer's block as soon as his fingers hit the keypad.

Hey, it's Spider-man. I got you're number-.

Peter glared down at the screen before deleting the word number entirely. Hmm...on second thought, he deleted it all and tried to start from scratch only to put it all back once he realized he had no idea how else to start the text. It didn't seem too stiff, did it? Or maybe it was too familiar...Catwoman wouldn't mind, he didn't think so at least, but if seventeen years of life taught him anything it was that he didn't girls very well.

He deleted it all again and rewrote it, except this time he took out the comma, so it didn't look like he was trying so hard. Then he put it right back because it offended his inner grammar teacher.

“Are you writing a poem or something?” Nightwing asked as he tried to peer over Spider-man's shoulder, only for Spider-man to hide the screen. He didn't like it when people read over his shoulder.

“No...but do you think I should write the word number or should I just go with that tic-tac-toe board
thing instead? Do you think she might mistake it for a hashtag?” Spider-man questioned, glancing back at Nightwing. The older hero just stared at him before he let out a low chuckle.

“Just give it here,” Nightwing said, holding his hand out again and Peter obeyed. From what he overheard, Nightwing seemed to be the kind of guy that was capable of girl trouble. To the point that more than one girl was interested in him, at the same time too.

Now that was a problem he was entirely unfamiliar with. The only girl he's ever dated-

It felt like someone reached into his chest and squeezed his heart, that's how intense the pain was. Spider-man almost missed a step, but he recovered quickly so that Nightwing wouldn't notice. By the time Nightwing handed his phone back, the pain had faded enough that he could be properly annoyed when he saw that Nightwing had sent the text without his approval...and for what it said.

...

Selina looked down at the phone and just smiled when she saw what it said.

“Awww, don't be like that Bats! Are you afraid that I'm going to trade you out for a younger model?” She asked as she slid her phone back into its pouch and walked towards the Dark Knight. Gotham's silent protector just scowled in her general direction, but that wasn't anything different.

“I mean, he is flexible, something you're sorely lacking, and he just texted me a little heart. I think we're already dating as far as teenagers are concerned,” she continued, smiling widely when she saw his jaw twitch. It was always so much fun getting reactions out of the caped crusader. Mostly because she knew that she was one of the few that could.

“What are you doing Catwoman,” Batman demanded in that rough voice of his that always sent shivers down her spine. He didn't come closer, but he did block the view of the few semi-conscious gangsters behind him.

“I'm taking a page out of your book,” Selina said smugly, striding across the floor like a ghost. “I'm being a hero! Already bagged Penguin and even nabbed myself a sidekick,” she continued until she was close. Real close. She stood up on her tippy toes and just smiled at Batman and, at this close, she saw something change in his bright blue eyes.

“How long will it last,” he questioned, not backing down.

“Just until things settle down and the new players rise. Then I'll give myself a pat on the back for a job well done...mhmm, maybe I'll celebrate by stealing that necklace I've had my eye on,” she teased, placing a hand on the black bat emblem on his chest.

“Then why are you here,” Batman shot back, and Selina let out a huff and turned away from him. He really did just ruin any fun that she had.

“You have a city to save, do you really have time asking questions you already know the answer to?” Selina asked, turning back around and cocking her hips. Despite her words, the tone that she said them was guarded. Flat, even.

“...The Joker knows who you are,” Batman said after a moment, almost like he was unsure how to phrase it gently. He saw the recording from one of the banks that was almost robbed and spotted Selina Kyle. He didn't belive in coincidences and knew the Joker wouldn't treat her any differently than the others he kidnapped.

“He knows a hell of a lot more than that! He knows who I am, he knows all my fake identities, he
knows where I sleep, and he knows all those that I know,” Selina said, nothing in her tone indicating
the pure fear she felt at the thought. The Joker made it very clear when he murdered Jason that he
was more than willing to hurt others if he thought it would hurt Batman.

This...whatever it was had put her in his cross hairs, and she wanted out.

“You want me to erase his memory,” Batman concluded, his hand tightening into a fist behind his
cloak but he knew Selina could see his anger.

“Yes,” Selina all but hissed. “Maybe while you're at it, you could fix whatever it was that made him
a complete and total fucking monster in the first place,” she added, trying to cover just how badly she
wanted this done. She let out a breath when Batman didn't respond, his face as hard as granite.

“Look...I know how much I'm asking you...but...I'm scared,” she admitted, a crack forming in her
mask. “I'm terrified that I'm going to wake up in a chair like last time and the first thing I'm going to
see is his face. Harley swears she doesn’t know how he found out, and I believe her, but the idea that
he could find me at any time just...,” she pressed her lips into a thin line and cut herself off. Crying
would ruin the charming seductress image she had going for her.

Silence blossomed between the two of them, the only sounds being faint sirens and gunshots.

“I-” Batman began before his communicator piped twice. An emergency.

“Batgirl,” he barked, pressing a finger to his ear.

“Firefly and Grundy are rampaging through downtown,” she replied instantly, and his stomach sank.
The streets were empty because everyone was indoors...if Firefly set a house on fire...if Grundy saw
them running out...this was a mid-level threat he planned for, but they were happening during the
worst possible time.

“Who is the closest one to them?” Batman demanded, any trace of emotion vanished from his voice
like smoke. He felt a faint breath on his chin, and he didn't even need to look to know that curiosity
had gotten the best of Selina.

“Nightwing, but-” whatever Batgirl said was drowned out by Selina catching his attention.

“Spider-man is with Nightwing. They can handle those two losers,” she pointed out and his eye's
narrowed into a glare.

“You know Spider-man,” he accused flatly, and Selina gave him a wicked grin.

"I did say I got a sidekick...or is the term minion more politically correct?" She wondered aloud,
tapping a finger against her chin. Her eyes danced with amusement as Batman sent his patented bat-
glare at her. She had long since been immune to its effects, curtesy of being aimed at her so often.

Selina waited until he opened his mouth just so she cloud cut him off, "and no. I won't tell you a
thing about what he can do. What I will tell you is that he and Nightwing are going to be the best of
friends and drive you up the wall."

Batman scowled, "not even if it could influence my decision?"

"Nope! That is a personal favor, and this is business. You can't last long in my line of business if no
one trusts you," she said as she stalked back towards Batman. His glare intensified but that was cut
off when she gave him a quick kiss on the cheek.
"What was that," he asked softly, a hint of something that once was in his voice.

"A bribe for the favor. And this," she kissed him on the lips. A peck at best but Selina felt herself try to linger. As usual, Batman just received the kiss. When she pulled back, she gave him a cherish grin, "is for the kid. Go easy on him when you do your thing. He's just a kid trying to do the right thing in the only way he knows how."

Silence was her answer, and Selina back peddled, knowing that it was a fruitless endeavor. “It's been fun Bats, but we both have a long night ahead of us.” She said as she entered an alley backward, the thick black shadows consuming her.

“I’ll do it,” Batman said a moment before she disappeared entirely. Selina didn't even slow down before she vanished from sight.

“I know.”

...

“What? Firefly and Grundy,” Nightwing barked as he pressed on the communicator in his ear. Someone must have been talking on the other side but Peter couldn't make it out. There was a pause and then Nightwing continued with, “so it’s not so much as a team-up but Firefly buzzing around Grundy wherever he goes?”

Regardless, Peter snapped to attention as he recalled everything he read about the two villains. There wasn't much on either of them. Firefly was a C class arsonist while just not much was known about Grundy. The only things that were facts were that he appeared every once and awhile to mess up the city, each time appearing with varying levels of intelligence and strength before he was ‘killed.’ Wash, rinse, repeat.

“Why does anyone live in this city,” Spider-man asked himself. Really, he was hoping it was just internet garbage, but he read that Grundy once reincarnated with strength comparable to that Superman guy. The crime rates were through the roof, corruption was rampant, it seemed like more people were homeless than not, and, to top it all off, they had a raging zombie stop by every couple of months? Yeah...no.

“Spider-man, we have a situation. Grundy and Firefly are terrorizing downtown Gotham,” Nightwing informed as his face looked like it could be carved from granite. All the amusement and jokes were gone, leaving grim determination. Spider-man nodded, standing straighter as he pinned his gaze on him.

“Got it. Do you want me to handle it while you take the Irish?” Spider-man offered, but Nightwing was already shaking his head.

“No, Batgirl's taking them. Me and you can focus on the dreadful duo,” he said before the mask cracked and he sent a smirk at Spider-man. “Consider it an audition,” he added. An audition for what, Peter didn't bother asking.

“Fine then. How do you prefer getting carried,” he asked suddenly, and Nightwing almost missed a step.

“What?”

“Fireman? Piggyback? Underarm,” Peter sent a leery look in his direction as they ran. “Bridal,” he ventured, and the glare he received was worthy of legends. It didn't get the intended result because Peter wished Nightwing could see him smiling.
“Spider-man...no.”

“Spider-man yes. I'm faster than a car by half, and I know downtown like it's the back of my hand.”

“You can go ahead. I'll meet you there.”

“Dude, really?” There was something in his tone that made Nightwing grimace before he let out a sigh that belonged to a man facing death rather than a little embarrassment. However, all the same, once they reached the end of the last warehouse, Nightwing threw his arm over his shoulder.

Then, with a quick web, they were swinging through the night in the direction of trouble.
Peter heard the chaos long before he saw it. He could hear the roaring fires alongside the sound of bending metal and glass shattering. The panicked screams of citizens as they cursed and raged at the loss of their homes. The sounds of dozens of footsteps, a stampede of terrified people echoed through the mostly empty streets.

Then, when he saw it, it looked like a scene right out of hell.

Fire was everywhere and his mask did nothing to filter out the smoke. It billowed upwards, making thick black clouds as the fire raged and burned everything in its path. Entire buildings were up in flames and, if nothing was done quick, the entire block would burn to the ground. The firefighters couldn't do anything about it. Not when so many gunfights were taking place in the streets and no one cared enough to stop when they heard sirens.

So, the fire was just going to burn and burn until it burned itself out or morning came.

At least it would if Peter didn't have anything to say about it. Fortunately, he did. He had lots of things to say about it and even more things to say to the arsonist prick flying around like a bug, laugh all the while, as he burned people's homes and...and if the smell of burnt hair and flesh were anything to go by, people as well.

“I'll take down Firefly and then focus on rescuing everyone in the buildings. Can you handle Grundy?” Peter asked as he pulled the two of them higher into the air with all of his considerable strength. The sounds were getting closer and Peter just gritted his teeth when he heard laughter. He knew who it was and, despite the cold, his blood was boiling.

“Yeah, I can manage that. I'll have Batgirl clear a path so the fire department can do their job,” he informed with a nod.

“Good,” Peter said curtly before they curved and cleared another building. Once they did, they saw the sources of the chaos and the reckless destruction. Grundy was huge, eight feet tall easily and he was half that as thick. He reminded him of the Hulk in that regard. However, instead of being a Christmas green, Grundy was a mess of rotting skin and palish gray hair that was balding...no...nope, skin was just missing. Lovely.

It took Spider-man a moment to spot Firefly because he was fast. He zipped around the open air, laughing like a child on Christmas, as he paused before sending a spray of fire into the windows of an apartment building. As he flew, setting an entire floor alight, he just laughed.

His costume was mostly black but the trimming was an angry red, like fire and passion. On his back was a jet pack, or something similar. Two large things stuck out from it over his shoulders, they looked like helicopter propellers in a way but the steady stream of fire told him that they didn't use air to stay afloat.

Also connected to the jetpack was a flamethrower, however, Peter didn't think that was all it was. Across his chest were grenades, the kind that you use in a grenade launcher and more than a few were missing.

Peter tracked him with his eyes as he loosened his grip on the web and they descended downwards. When they got low enough, Nightwing jumped off and rolled to his feet. His eyes found Grundy's before he charged the monstrous man but Spider-man passed him by. Though, he did make sure to
web his eyes as he flew overhead. It might not be much of an advantage but if what he read online was true, then Nightwing would be able to make the most of it.

Spider-man shot off another web and turned a tight corner, the heat from the flames warmed him right up until he started to sweat. He couldn't bring himself to be glad that he felt something other than the bitter cold of winter. He saw Firefly zipping down the street, oblivious to him as he sang aloud.

"Burn baby burn baby, burn baby burn baby," he sang out into the night as the flame danced in his flamethrower. "Oh, oh, oh," he continued before Firefly hummed, his head bobbing from side to side to the beat inside his head.

Then his head was snapped to the side when both of Spider-man's feet slammed into him.

Peter wasn't an angry person. Not anymore. There once was a time when he was just a boiling pot of resentment and angst, but that was a long time ago. He matured, in some ways. The ways that counted, at least. He stopped taking himself so seriously, he learned that things that seemed so important in high school meant absolutely nothing in the real world.

As he matured, as he learned what it meant to be an adult and he gained more experience as Spider-man, Peter noticed that anger was something that he felt less and less every day. That wasn't to say he didn't get angry. He did. It was just that the things that would have left him seething before were barely noticed now.

However, right now, Peter was angry.

This was his fault. Every burning building and every injured person...every death was on him. If he hadn't left downtown to go to the docks, a place he wasn't even needed, then he would have noticed what was happening long before it got to this point.

Then he had stood around and chatted with Nightwing when he knew, he knew, that there were dozens of crimes happening. He wasted time taking when people were being robbed, murdered, or worse.

This was his fault just as much as it was Firefly's.

Peter was angry. He was pissed beyond belief. All of it was aimed at himself.

"I guess as far as battle music goes, a classic like that would be a decent enough choice but I think 'You're Going Down' would be much more fitting," Peter said between clenched teeth as Firefly struggled to correct his path. Unfortunately, the musically inclined arsonist made the wise investment of a helmet so he wasn't knocked unconscious.

Firefly kicked off a wall and straightened out as he turned around and aimed his flamethrower at Spider-man. Acting fast, he sent a web at the nozzle of the weapon but he was too late to seal it. Firefly pulled the trigger and liquid fire rocketed to him, burning his web in the process and proving that he was using something with a little more kick than gasoline.

Peter felt the heat race towards him and he pulled himself out of the way by shooting off a web above them. It took a moment for Firefly to notice that he hadn't fried him to a crisp, but when he did the stream of fire tipped upwards into the sky after him. In response, Peter shot off two webs, one for each building that was across the street, before pulling and sending himself back down towards Firefly.

As he raced back down, intent to knock Firefly out of the sky, Spider-man felt his spidey-sense blare.
He knew exactly why so he clenched his jaw and continued forward into the flames. For the briefest of seconds, he felt himself burn.

Once, a very long time ago, uncle Ben had an old gas powered grill and he told him to light it so he could make hamburgers. However, at the ripe age of ten, Peter would be more than willing to admit that he might have been smart for his age, he was still an idiot. When he turned the dials up and they still weren't lighting, he decided that it would be a good idea to crank it up to ten and stick his arm in and wait for the gas to hit the flame.

It hadn't hurt when the flames consumed his arm for a moment. If anything, it hurt more when he scrambled backward and tripped over a chair and bumped his head. His burns hadn't even been that bad, they were comparable to a sunburn at best.

What he was experiencing now was roughly a thousand times worse.

It was hot. Unbearably so. He was burning. There was no other way to say it. It was a searing hot burn that just hurt and hurt, making the split second he was inside the flame almost unbearable.

Then he felt his feet make contact with something and he heard a grunt. The flames vanished as Firefly jerked his weapon out of the way and the moment his vision cleared, Peter continued his attack. He grabbed the barrel and squeezed. Steel crumpled like tissue paper and he bent it upwards for good measure.

“Bro! Fuck you-,” Firefly spat before Spider-man hit him with a left hook, which was quickly followed by a right jab. His head snapped backward twice, his mask warping under the blows and shattering an angry red lens to his gas mask. With him reeling from the blows, Peter turned his attention to the jet pack. It was both his weapon and his only method of getting around.

“Ohhhhh! This looks important,” he observed as he reached out and grabbed one of them and pulled. Firefly jerked in response and they were spent flying out of control as the steel wing was bent. As Peter reached out to grab the other one, his spidey-sense tingled and he caught one of Firefly's arms.

Alongside his glove was an orange glow that radiated heat. Firefly struck out with a fist, purposely missing so that the edge would scrape against Peter's forearm when he blocked it before he batted it out the way. Firefly tried to attack again, but Peter wanted this fight to end. Now.

“Night-night,” he said before he grabbed Firefly's hand and shoved it against his chest and webbing it to his chest. Firefly tried to burn the web away, but Spider-man seized the chance and punched him in the face. Again, his head bounced back but his other arm flailed at Spider-man, so he punched him again. And again. And another time, just to be sure.

When Firefly's other arm stopped trying to cut him into pieces, Spider-man looked up when he felt his spidey-sense tingle. Just in time to see his reflection in a skyscraper. With wide eyes, he grabbed onto the two wing-like things and pushed down on Firefly's stomach as he pulled up. They sailed into the air in response and missed the glass building by inches.

“I don't have time for sight-seeing,” he commented to himself before he started plucking the grenades from his bandoleer. He webbed them into a ball that he set off to the
side so it was falling alongside them. The next target was to thoroughly destroy his gloves but he paused for just a moment.

He looked down at the red hot edge before he glanced down at his arm. He wasn't bleeding, though there was yet another tear in his suit, but the wound was seared shut.

Pressing his lips into a thin line, he let out a sigh and took them off before he webbed them into a ball. Making a split decision, he threw them in the same direction as his camera. Then he turned his attention back to Firefly, who's pitiful groaning was all but silenced in the whipping wind.

He webbed him into a rough cocoon, careful not to use too much of his webbing, and he felt the musical arsonist hanging upside down on the edge of the building. Someone would pick him up sooner or later, but now his focus was seeing if Nightwing needed any help. If he didn't then there were people trapped in the burning buildings that needed to be saved.

He shot off another web and raced down the streets. The sounds of chaos told him that the fight had moved while he was dealing with Firefly. That was made abundantly clear when cars were thrown around like confetti and the already burning city block looked like it was a stray breeze could topple it. Spider-man heard a deep wordless shout that was followed by a loud crash before he turned the corner.

When he landed on a bent lamppost, he saw it was Grundy throwing another car at Nightwing. The kinda-avian based hero flipped out of the way gracefully before he launched three...were those boomerangs?

No. No, they were not.

This incarnation of Grundy was smart enough to cover his face with an abnormally thick forearm, where all three of them landed before they exploded when they made contact. Grundy roared, but it was born from frustration more than pain.

“Stay still dancing man! Let Grundy squish you,” Grundy screamed and Spider-man let out a breath.

“Seriously doing the third person thing, huh? Whatever,” he muttered before he jumped off the lamppost and flipped through the air as Grundy rushed towards Nightwing. He landed on his shoulder, shocking the massive man before he shot webbing into his eyes, causing him to roar in anger.

However, Spider-man followed it up by flipping off him when Grundy reached up to rip him in half by sending a few web balls at his feet. He also seized the opportunity and webbed Grundy's hands to his head before he touched back on the ground.

Spider-man turned to Nightwing, who was looking at him owlishly and said, “take it from here. I'm going to rescue everyone that's trapped in the buildings.” He waited a moment for Nightwing to say anything to that, but the older hero just nodded at him, his face set in grim determination.

As Spider-man turned around just as Grundy roared. The webbing that covered his hands and feet started to pull and strain. Then, like a firecracker going off, the webbing snapped. His hands were freed, though Peter saw more than a little flesh had been torn off along with the webs. Grundy's feet, however, tore up chunks of concrete before giving out.

“Go,” Nightwing ordered as he twirled his escrima sticks while Grundy was tearing at his eyes. “I've got the big fellow. You save the civilians.” he continued as he began rushing the large zombie.

Spider-man didn't waste a second; he turned away from the fight and shot off a web at the nearest
building before he flung himself into it.


’He dealt with that quickly,” Dick thought to himself as he charged the hulking mass of rotting flesh. Firefly was a C class criminal, but he could hold his own. That jet pack was a real pain to deal with and it didn't help it was connected to a flamethrower. He was an annoying mixture of packing enough long range firepower and evasive enough that he was hard to hit when in air.

’He got in close,’ Nightwing deduced as he threw an escrima stick to the left before his now free hand dipped down to his utility belt. That would nullify most of Firefly's advantages since he knew from experience that Spider-man was more than mobile enough to keep up with the arsonist. From there it was a battle between fists, Nightwing figured as the wing-dings flew free. They raced through the air towards Grundy, who was still clawing the webs out of his eyes.

Nightwing tried to visualize their fight as he jumped into the air a moment before they exploded, making Grundy scream out in annoyance as he was forced to take a step back from the force. Firefly was a decent fighter. Not good, but he could land a decent punch on Batman and that was more than most could claim. From the little information they had gathered about the spider themed vigilante, he possessed superhuman abilities.

’The fight ended quick, so he dealt out as much damage as he could right out the gate,’ Nightwing theorized as he flipped once through the air as his escrima stick slammed into the back of Grundy’s head. Ten thousand volts of electricity flowed through the giant zombie, and it had an effect.

This time, when Grundy cried out, it was of pain. Electricity flowed through him and scrambled the already broken impulses from his rotting brain to his rotting body.

“Stop! Stop! Grundy can't see! Not fair bird-man,” Grundy hollered and Nightwing frowned as he flipped over Grundy as he caught his escrima stick when it bounced off his head. It seemed this incarnation of Grundy had some basic level of intelligence. Not much, but it was more than the usual grunts and broken sentences. Ahh...he hated fighting him when he was like this. When he was a scream rage monster or smart enough he could speak in complete sentences, Dick didn't have a problem beating him down.

However, when he was like this, it was just sad. Just smart enough to be sentient but zero control over himself. It was like beating a very large, very undead, very strong child.

Grundy fell to his knees as Nightwing landed, and he turned a quick 180 before throwing another two wing-dings. When they hit the back of his knees, both of them exploded into a whitish gray foam before it quickly became solid. Grundy roared as he gripped the pavement, his thick fingers passing through it like it was made of play dough. Nightwing watched the zombie strain the restraint foam and his lips pressed into a thin line when he saw it start to crack.

Dick gave his escrima sticks a twirl as he rushed the fallen zombie. The restraint foam was cracking and fracturing, letting Grundy kneel as he struggled to stand up. As he approached, Grundy proved that he wasn't deaf because he lashed out with an arm and forced Dick to jump over it before having to jump back when Grundy lunged at him blindly.

“Grundy will get you bird-man! Grundy will crush you for hurting Grundy,” Grundy vowed and Dick bite back a sarcastic retort. It just wasn't any fun bantering with someone that like this. There just wasn't any fun in it and Grundy was already mad enough.

’Now I'm taking too much time with him,’ Dick thought to himself. His eyes darted up towards a red
and blue blur that dove in and out of the burning buildings. Sometimes Spider-man had one person, sometimes he had an entire family on his back. He was moving fast but was he moving fast enough? Could he get everyone out of the burning buildings, or was it already too late for some? Dick didn't know but it was just too dangerous to assume the former.

When his eyes went back to Grundy, they went wide when he saw a manhole cover aimed and ready to take his head off. He started to lean back so it would fly over his head but a lifetime of acrobatics gave him an unparalleled eye for distances and he knew it wouldn't be enough. So, in an effort to save his chiseled chin, Dick placed his escrima sticks in front of him and angled them ever so slightly.

The impact threatened to rip them out of his hands and it knocked him off his feet, but it did the trick. His head was spared when Dick managed to knock the disc off course just enough that it sailed over his chin by an inch but it came at a cost. When he straightened back out, he saw both of his weapons were bent badly. One more than the other because he saw that his taser still worked.

“Shoot,” Dick muttered to himself as he dropped the broken one. He replaced it with another wing-ding as he ran towards Grundy while he was still struggling to peel off the foam. His eyes were still covered by Spider-man's webs, so he didn't see Dick running towards him even if he did hear him. Grundy lashed out with another arm but, like before, Dick jumped over it before he jabbed his escrima stick into Grundy's forehead.

Grundy screamed as he went ramrod straight but that was quickly muffled when Grundy's mouth became clogged with restraint foam. If expanded quickly, going down his throat as it fizzled out of his mouth and covered most of his head. Including his ears.

Grundy tried to say something, or scream in rage and hate, based on how his chest vibrated and Dick realized his mistake. He kicked off Grundy in an attempt to get away from him, but now that his only method of knowing where his attacker was coming from he just started attacking wildly. Dick saw something blur out of the corner of his eye and he raised his hands up to protect his head while he relaxed the rest of his body.

Then it felt like he was hit by a truck and in the brief moment, he felt the wind rushing by. Then he slammed into hard concrete. He bounced once and Dick grunted before he angled his body so when he touched down, he rolled uncontrollably. Dick didn't come to a stop until he hit the curb, earning another grunt, and even then he was knocked into the sidewalk. He landed on his back and looked up at the night sky for a brief moment, taking stock to see if anything was broken.

'My ribs are going to be sore tomorrow,' Dick thought to himself as he sucked in a painful breath. Nothing was broken, surprisingly, but his entire side felt like it was one giant bruise. Nevertheless, he forced himself to two feet and saw that he somehow managed to keep his grip on his escrima stick. Straightening out, he cracked his neck and loosened out his body before he started walking towards a rampaging Grundy.

'I need to restrict his moments,' Dick thought to himself as he rolled out of the way of a chunk of concrete that was thrown his way. Grundy didn't know where he was, so he was destroying everything around him just to make sure that he got him. Dick rolled to his feet and his free hand grabbed another wing-ding. Grundy could break through the foam, but if he couldn't get any leverage than even his super strength couldn't help him.

'I could just kill him,' Dick mused as he waited for a shot before he quickly dismissed the idea. Killing Grundy was always a gamble. His strength and intelligence had such a stupidly large range that it could do a lot more harm than good when a few months went by.
No, the best thing to do right now was to restrain Grundy. His body would expire in a month, whatever magic or whatever would leak out of it until he died but that wasn't the point. Gotham was going to need time to rebuild after all of this. Time to mourn and time to for things to go back to normal. Maybe even better than normal.

In a few months, with the help of Wayne Enterprises, Gotham would be good as new and Grundy attacking wouldn't be kicking the city while it was down. Hopefully.

However, if he killed Grundy now then Gotham wouldn't get that time.

“Why can't anything ever be easy,” he wondered to himself as he let a wing-ding loose when he saw an opportunity. The weapon slammed into Grundy's elbow as he smashed a car, keeping him from extending it fully. Grundy tried to roared in response before he started to claw at the hardening foam and let out another when a second wing-ding hit his hand and glued the two together.

Then Dick let out a loud sigh when he reached to his utility belt and found the slot for that particular and vital brand of wing-dings was empty. Of course, it was empty. Why wouldn't it be empty? That would make things far too simple and easy! Everyone knew things couldn't be simple and easy when lives were at stake!

“Right. Of course,” he said sarcastically as he twirled his dented baton and once again charged Grundy. His side hurt and, despite what some would think, this zombie was anything but slow. More often that not, super strength meant super speed so Grundy's arms were just a blur as he slammed them into the ground to get the foam off.

Dick was all too aware that it would only take one good hit and he'd be out for the count.

He pulled out his grappling gun and fired it off at Grundy's knee and it passed right through it in a shower of old blood and rotting meat, right into the demolished car behind the zombie. Grundy tugged at it, nearly yanking Dick off his feet, but he managed to connect the wire to the second grappling hook. That one, he fired in the opposite direction into an overfull dumpster.

As he loaded another shot, Dick pressed the tip of his escrima stick into the connected cables. Electricity danced along the cable and right into Grundy. The zombie's body seized underneath the constant current and he fell to the ground. Dick ran jumped onto a car and then into the air to get a better shot, and when he had it he fired another grappling hook into Grundy's elbow and pinned him to the broken street.

However, being undead, Grundy barely noticed in his rage. He awkwardly pushed himself back up and, to stop that, Dick tased Grundy again but Grundy powered through. As stupid as he was, Grundy knew he was losing this fight.

Rising to his feet, Grundy jerked the leg with a cable running through it and Dick saw the dumpster screech in response. Finding the lighter of the two, Grundy grabbed the cable with his one free hand and pulled it.

“This is just annoying,” Dick muttered as he abandoned his attack and used the grappling hook to pull himself out of the flying dumpsters landing zone. Capturing Grundy was a lot easier said than done. It was just the fact that he could take so much damage and keep going on top of actively trying to not kill him.

The dumpster slammed into the ground, the metal crunching upon impact, but it didn't stay still. Grundy whipped it around in a spiral to build up momentum before he let go in a random direction. It missed Dick by a mile but, as the dumpster sailed down the street, the cable moved and the car was
launched towards Grundy.

Dick watched with faint amusement as what once was a pickup truck slammed into the back of Grundy's legs and knocked him over. Grundy slammed back into the ground and Dick tased the zombie one more time before he fired off another grappling hook through his chest and connected it to another destroyed car.

Dick waited a long moment and saw that Grundy wasn't getting back up. His face was covered in restraint foam and the same for one hand that was connected to his other arm's elbow. His other elbow was connected to the ground and a far building, his chest was connected to a car and a lamppost. His knee was connected to a destroyed dumpster and an equally destroyed car.

Say what you want about Grundy, but he didn't go down easy.

“Better safe than sorry,” Dick decided before he connected his escrima stick to the cables and sent a continues shock into the zombie. He didn't want him getting any ideas about getting back up.

“So, uh, I clearly missed something,” Spider-man noted as he touched down on a lamppost. Dick looked up and idly noted that a decent portion of his suit was burnt. Especially at the feet. Other than that, he only noticed a few other injuries on spider-man, meaning that his fight with Firefly had been pretty one-sided. His skin, from what he saw, looked a little pinkish instead of burned, so Dick made a mental note of enhanced durability.

Dick looked back at the scene and let out a sigh, “yeah, not my best work.” He admitted with a shrug and it was a lifetime worth of training to keep the pain off his face when he did. “But, I worked with what I had. It's not exactly easy restraining a rage zombie, you know,” Dick defended himself.

Spider-man's head bobbed, “fair enough,” he said, but Dick got the feeling that he had more he wanted to say. Instead of saying it, Dick watched curiously as Spider-man stretched out a hand and shot a few bullets of webs that hit Grundy while he was down. The expanded upon impact so Grundy was all but glued to the ground.

Spider-man gave a half-hearted shrug when Dick gave him a pointed look, “just making sure.” he said simply before he gave Dick a quick look over, “are you okay? You looked a little banged up,” he observed and Dick put on his game face.

He aimed a smirk at the younger vigilante, “and you looked like you were barbecued.” He shot back and earned a chuckle out of him. “I'm good, though. Just need a-” He continued but he was cut off when he heard a voice in his ear.

-I must disagree Master Nightwing. I watched the fight from a security camera. I suggest returning to the Batcave for immediate medical attention and to resupply- Alfred said, his voice implying that it wasn't really a suggestion. Dick grimaced before he tapped on his ear.

“I'm fine,” Dick stated and felt like he was a child again when Alfred made a humming noise. The one that a parent made when they didn't believe you, but were humoring you just so they could amuse themselves with your embarrassment.

-I must disagree Master Nightwing. I watched the fight from a security camera. I suggest returning to the Batcave for immediate medical attention and to resupply- Alfred said in a crisp British accent. He didn't sound angry, annoyed, or...anything. It was like he was talking about the weather.

“I...,” Dick let out a sigh. Time had proven time and time again that he just wasn't a match for Alfred.
“Fine. I'll come in, but only for some first aid and a quick resupply. I'm heading back out after,” He said quickly but he had no idea if he just lied

-Very well. I shall prep the sutures- Alfred said before he ended the call.

“I don't need stitches,” Dick muttered before he let out a breath and glanced up at Spider-man, who was shifting his weight. Reading body language was on of the many skills that Bruce all but beat into him, so it was easy to tell that Spider-man was impatient to get back out in the city.

“Are the civilians okay?” He asked, just to make sure. Dick didn't miss that Spider-man hesitated for the briefest of moments and he wanted to sigh again. It really was too much to ask that they saved everyone, but it was hard to accept when they didn't.

“Most of them,” he answered curtly, confirming Dick's fear. “Is our budding partnership coming to an end so soon,” he asked suddenly, the underlining...anger(?) vanishing like it wasn't even there. He knew better, but Dick decided to humor him and pretend he hadn't noticed.

“I'm afraid so. Mom's telling me I have to head back in, but I'll be out later tonight,” he explained and he could practically hear Alfred's sigh of exasperation. Spider-man chuckled before he stood up.

“It was fun while it lasted but I'll see you later?” He ventured and it was Dicks turn to hesitate. Batman's words were still fresh in mind and he could only wonder if it would be on the same terms if-when they saw each other again. Dick didn't really know Spider-man, not enough for him to trust him or even give him the benefit of the doubt, but if he really was the kind of man he was acting like then Dick figured they could be friends. Anyone who enjoyed banter was okay in his book.

“Yeah,” Dick nodded, keeping his voice neutral. “I'll see you later,” he said before he started to turn away to get patched up but he was stopped by Spider-man calling out.

“Before you go, can you point me in the direction of anything big? I don't mind swinging around the city, but-” he started and Dick was nodding along with the words.

“But you want to hit organized crime to take out the players,” he continued for him. They had talked about this on the way over and Dick didn't think he was wrong. Not when Batman was doing the same thing while he and Red Robin focused on street crime.

'I'm a horrible person,' Dick thought to himself before he took out his earbud and whipped it on his costume before he tossed it over to him. Spider-man caught it and he saw the questioning look underneath his mask.

“Put that in and the Batcave will keep you in the loop,” Dick explained. He left out the fact that it was also a tracer. Batman wanted to use Spider-man as much as he could before morning. Then, knowing Bruce, he would corner Spider-man when he least expected it and have a conversation with him.

Dick didn't trust Spider-man, not yet, but he would be willing to vouch for him. How much that would sway Batman's judgment, he didn't know but Dick hoped it would be enough that he wouldn't throw the younger man out of the city by his pants.

Regardless, in the end, they were Batman's orders and, as much as Batman pissed him off, he was rarely wrong.

“Sweet,” Spider-man said as he lifted his mask just enough that Dick saw his chin so he could put the ear bud. “Thanks. Enjoy your fifteen. I'll hold the fort down,” he said, giving him a quick wave before he swung off into the night.
Dick watched him disappear around a corner and only then did he let his shoulders slump. Spider-man's phone was bugged, they were going to get a sample of his webs and they had an active tracer on him. He did his part in all of this. Now it was just a matter of time before Spider-man got a visit from the Dark Knight.
"Uh, hello, is this thing on?" Peter asked as he pressed down on the ear bud. He was overlooking the firefighters that were dousing the flames on the off chance one of them needed some help. From where he was sitting, he could also see the police scratching their heads about what to do with Grundy and he saw Firefly in the back of an armored car. He didn't see Nightwing though since he took off shortly after he saw Peter swing away.

However, little did he know that he doubled back to snag his camera and the gloves he took from Firefly. When he did, he noticed something on the ground and it was something he recognized. One of Nightwing's escrima sticks. It was badly bent, almost to the point it broke in half, but Spider-man snagged it anyway.

He couldn't use it as a weapon but the things packed a punch if what they did to Grundy was any indication. It must have some kind of battery and Peter wanted to see if he could salvage it from the broken weapon.

It wasn't stealing! Nightwing left it, so he clearly didn't care about it enough to search for it! It was fair game! What was that saying; finders keepers, losers suck? Something like that.

Regardless, the end result was the same. It was now his as was the lovely battery it contained.

-Ah, you must be Master Spider-man I've heard so much about. A pleasure to make your acquaintance- a crisps British voice responded, breaking Peter out of his thoughts.

"No, no Master Spider-man. Just Spider-man, or Spidey," he corrected as he stood up. His goodie bag was in a safe place and it looked like the firefighters were going to let the fire burn itself out but stop it from spreading. "Who are you," he questioned.

-I am Butlerman- Butlerman said as if his name wasn't completely ridiculous. Not that he had any room to talk. Hindsight was twenty-twenty after all, and he caught enough grief over the years to learn that maybe Spider-man wasn’t the most creative choice. In fact, he sounded so serious that Peter blinked in disbelief. At first, he thought he was joking but then he realized that he really, really hoped that he wasn't.

"Nice to meet you Butlerman,” Peter greeted, smiling underneath his mask. The anger from before was fading, though it was still there, but no matter how angry he was he couldn't not laugh at a name like that. Then his smile fell when he heard the sounds of gunshots echo out and he felt another flash of anger at himself. He was still sitting around, doing nothing when people needed help.

“Not sure if Nightwing said anything, but he handed over the mic and said you could point me in the direction of some bad guys that need to be punched?” He asked as he jumped through the air and shot off a web towards the sounds of gunshots.

-Yes, Master Nightwing did mention something of the sort. Very well. There are some ruffians callings themselves the Fallen and they’re insisting that they control Old Gotham. Naturally, others are protesting this and are fighting back. However, I've heard very disturbing rumors that they have built numerous chemical-based bombs and they intended to use them on those that protest their hostile takeover- Butlerman said in a professional tone but Peter could hear the judging undertone.

"Got it. Heading there now," Peter said as he stung up the gunman that he found while Butlerman was speaking. Luckily no one had been shot but he couldn't find who the guy was shooting at.
Maybe he picked up a gun for the first time and decided to test it out or something. It was a nice one as far as guns went. He picked up an eye for them even if he didn't use them because more often than not, they were pointed at him. Regardless, Peter saw that no one was hurt so he quickly took off in the direction of Old Gotham.

-Do you require assistance, Master Spider-man? Master Nightwing mentioned you sustained some injuries with Firefly- Butlerman questioned and Peter started to shake his head no but stopped when he remembered that Butlerman couldn't see him.

"No thanks. With Nightwing taking a fifteen, I don't think grouping up is a good idea when there's so much going on right now. Plus, it's nothing I can't handle," Spider-Man said confidently. "And the name is Spidey. Drop that whole Master nonsense," he ordered without any heat and was answered by a gentlemanly snort of annoyance.

"Very well, Master Spider-man," Butlerman stated, not budging an inch.

“Thanks, Butlerman,” Peter said, holding down on the ear bud just so he could hear him snicker. He wasn't going to go there on account of it being childish and immature but then he realized that he was both childish and immature. Butlerman let out a soft, exasperated sigh but Peter decided that he was enjoying their banter.

-I suspect that nickname shall persist until I call you by your preferred name?- Butlerman ventured and Peter grinned away under his mask.

“‘You betcha,” he confirmed.

-Most unfortunate, Master Spider-man.-

“I concur, Butlerman.” Spider-man agreed as he swung through the streets. He didn't know Gotham like he did New York, but he was getting a hang for the city. The city seemed to operate underneath the principle of the farther North you went, the better neighborhood you found yourself in. The further South, the worst.

Naturally, Old Gotham was settled on one of the southernmost islands. It wasn't the worst part of the city. Crime Alley had that title, though he was trying to work on that, but it wasn't far off. As the name implied, that part of the city was old. He couldn't say for sure, but from what he gathered most of Old Gotham was almost unlivable. Meaning, it had a large homeless population.

For the most part, they would be shacking up in the numerous abandoned buildings and warehouses. The rest would, and were, using the chaos to get their feet underneath them. Robbing stores for money and in some cases food and water.

All in all, it was a bad part of town filled with plenty of people that had been dealt a bad hand.

“Any idea where they are exactly?” He asked in a more serious tone. He wasted enough time tonight and if these people had chemical weapons then they needed to be taken down sooner instead of later.

-I am afraid not. However, they mark their territory with a large T with a small dash on the right side with angel wings to mark their territory. I would assume to the more graffiti you find, the closer you are.- Butlerman said and Peter nodded to himself. He could work with that. The locals weren't going to help him so he didn't have a choice but to work with the little information.

“Roger, roger. Spidey out Butlerman,” with that he tapped on his ear to hang up. With a hard tug, he sent himself flying over a few low buildings and saw his destination rapidly approaching. All he had to do was cross a small bridge and he'd be in Old Gotham.
Pursing his lips, he took out his phone as he slowly descended and brought up the screen with a cringe-worthy message that Nightwing sent. That guy was such a dick. His banter was his only redeeming feature. He typed out a quick message to Catwoman.

Going to Old Gotham to deal with gangs. Grundy and Firefly taken down but Nightwing took some lumps.

Peter looked down at the message and, once again, he was struck with indecisiveness. Was that too formal? It sounded formal. He wasn't going to go crazy with hearts and smiley faces like Nightwing, but maybe he should reshuffle the wording a bit?

Peter let out a sigh as he crossed the bridge, murdering the speed limit as he did so. He never managed to master the art of texting. Emojis felt like he was trying too hard, using incomplete words or acronyms were either lazy or so misspelled that he wanted to smack the sender of the head and send them back to kindergarten. That went doubly so with girls.

Then his self-consciousness was dialed up to eleven, so he always ended up doing what he was doing right now. Thinking about other things and trying to avoid sending a harmless text message because he was the teeniest teenager that had ever teenaged before.

As he crossed the bridge he just pressed send with the same ease he would volunteering for torture. Right when he was about to put his phone back in his belt, trying not to wish that there was a 'stop send' button, his phone vibrated. Swinging himself into the air, he saw Catwoman had already responded.

"That was like a half second," Peter said in muted amazement. Was that a superpower that all girls had? Texting at the speed of light? MJ did the same as did-

Peter stopped the train of thought with a crunch and looked at the message. Catwoman was asking if Nightwing was okay and he was in the process of saying yes since that was always a good, safe option when texting, when his phone vibrated again.

Look up ¯\_(ツ)_/¯:rolleyes: :eek:

At the same time, Peter felt his spidey-sense tingle and he looked up just in time to see Catwoman's grinning face before she slammed into him. She knocked him off course, almost making them hit a building, but he managed to fire off another web as he felt her wrap her arms around his neck yet again.

"Hey'a there Spidey," she greeted, sounding very proud of herself. "Things didn't work out between you and Nightwing," she asked and Peter's surprise quickly faded and he let out a dramatic huff.

"No, there just wasn't any trust," he said, turning his head to the side and letting out a long sigh. "That, and the fact he took a hit from Grundy. He's fine but he was walking with a limp so he went to get patched up." Peter explained and Catwoman made a noise of acknowledgment. He decided to leave out that he needed to stock up on weapons since Grundy cleared him out and Peter totally didn't steal his stick thing.

"Hm, he'll be fine. As long as his face is okay, Nightwing will always bounce back," Catwoman said with some amusement and, despite himself, Peter wondered what kind of relationship Catwoman had with the Bat family. She was listed as one of Batman's rogues and, by her own admission, she wasn't a hero. The only thing he could think to compare it to was his relationship with Black Cat.

However, Peter quickly realized that it wasn't important and moved on to what was, "What brings
you to Old Gotham?” He asked, thinking that it would be one hell of a coincidence. “Did Buttlerman send you here too,” he asked with some annoyance.

He had this handled and there were too few heroes in Gotham for them to have partners when there was so much crime happening. He didn't need the help and Peter couldn't help but feel annoyed because there were a lot of people needing to be saved right now and Catwoman could be helping them instead of him.

A moment ticked by as Peter searched for the distinctive tag mark but Catwoman hadn't answered. He didn't pay that any mind when he spotted the gang marking and turned down a street in the hopes of finding more. When he saw another covering a stop sign, he figured that he was on the right track.

A few more seconds ticked by and Catwoman still hadn't answered. Right when Peter was about to ask her what was wrong, or maybe she hadn't heard him, he heard a chuckle that sounded a lot like a purr.

“Butlerman...,” she echoed, “did he have a British accent?” She asked, trying to keep the laughter down but not well enough to keep down a choked chuckle when Peter nodded his head.

“Yeah? And his name is Buttlerman, not Butlerman. At least until he stops calling me Master Spiderman,” Peter corrected as he turned down another street when he saw another tag. It was larger and written underneath it was a proclamation that he was in Fallen territory. It was very helpful.

“That's purrfect,” Catwoman said with a chuckle. Then with a laugh. Then she threw her head back and just laughed away and Peter felt a swell of manly pride in his chest. Unfortunately, it was quick to leave once Peter realized that they were off topic and he was wasting time. Again.

“Anyway, Buttlerman didn't send you?” He asked and Catwoman got one last chuckle in before she answered.

“No. I'm here because I had some business to take care of. Why? Did snicker Buttlerman send you here?” She asked and Peter's lips pressed themselves into a thin line. He almost made a comment about that this isn't the time for business, especially if it was the kind he thought it was, but Peter decided against it.

He didn't girls very well but he knew well enough that he wasn't going to change Catwoman's mind in a short conversation.

“Yeah. Buttlerman thinks a gang got their hands on some chemical weapons. He said it was a rumor, but-” He answered and Catwoman finished for him.

“That's not something you want to take a risk on. Alright, I'm game,” Catwoman said, volunteering herself.

"Thanks, but I've got it. With Nightwing out of the picture, for now, there aren't enough heroes to go around,” Peter declined politely but he felt Catwoman finger the burnt edges of his suit in response.

"Yeah, no," she said, refusing his refusal. "For one, I'm already here and two, you aren't at a hundred percent either. Nightwing might have taken a hit, you, though, you look like you were barbecued. Firefly gave you some trouble?” She ventured and Peter shrugged, which was a challenge considering all of her weight was on his shoulders.

“No, not really. Well, he did set me on fire for a little bit, but other than that it was pretty one-sided,” Peter explained. As Catwoman made a choking noise Peter reflected on a time when that sentence would have been noteworthy.
“He set you on fire,” she echoed and Peter nodded as they swung through the streets. Despite how fast they were going, Peter could still search for the tags that marked the Fallen's territory.

“Just for a little bit,” he dismissed easily. “Actually, it was more of I set myself on fire so I could get close,” Peter explained. “It was only for a couple of seconds and after that, I just hit him a couple of times. He was out like a light.”

“Oh...so you just set yourself on fire. God, I'm so glad I'm not a hero,” Catwoman muttered to herself. Peter didn't know if she meant for him to hear that. The wind was loud but it wasn't like she was whispering or anything.

Again, he was going to make a comment about that but he realized that they were off topic. Again.

"But, I'm fine. There are others that need help," he insisted and he just heard a loud, annoyed sigh from Catwoman.

"You need help, kid," she said and Peter was shaking his head before she could even finish.

“No, I don't. I'm fine. Here, take the ear bud and Buttlerman can give you a direction to go in. I can handle this,” Peter shot back, reaching up to grab the ear bud but stopped when he heard Catwoman groan.

"God, you're stubborn. Fine, I didn't want to do this buuuuuut...you've given me no choice. Who are you looking for?" Peter hesitated, taken off guard by the question and got the distinct impression that he was working against himself if he answered. Nevertheless, he did because Peter Parker's greatest enemy was always himself.

“Some guys called the Fallen, why?” He asked as he turned down another street and scanned the buildings. All of them were run down, if not outright condemned. More than a few had large rusted chains over the door, which served no purpose other than to say to not enter because the windows were busted in.

'If I were a chemical weapons lab, where would I be?' He wondered to himself as Catwoman took out her phone and speed-dialed a number. Peter heard it ring once with his super human hearing before someone on the other end picked up.

“Cats! What's up?” Peter heard a high pitched voice ask and he struggled to place it for a moment before it clicked. It was the woman that nearly took his head off with an oversized wooden hammer on his first night in Gotham. Harley something.

“Nothing much, just hitching a ride with Spidey.”

“Yuck! Tell that webhead that I'm going to smash him when I see him!” Harley declared and Peter was left wondering what he did to piss her off. Catwoman made a sound of acknowledgment and he could feel her smirking at the back of his head.

“I'll be sure to tell him. Anyway, I need you to tell me what you know about the Fallen. I should have a-” She started but was cut off by Harley's chipper voice.

“I'm already reading it! They're in-” Harley said but Peter couldn't make out the rest because it cut off suddenly. He glanced over his shoulder and saw it was because Catwoman cupped a hand over the speaker, grinning a sly smile at him.

“Hon, I need you to text it to me. I don't want Spidey getting any ideas that he can leave me behind when he gets the address,” she said pointedly and Peter gave her an annoyed glare. He was getting
the sense of déjà vu. She did the same thing when they first met.

Peter sighed loudly, making sure that she heard him, but he heard the phone vibrate a moment later.

“Thanks, hon! And stay off my computer,” Catwoman hissed.

“But you have so many cute cat v-” Harley was cut off with a click.

“Fine. You got me. Tell me where to go,” Peter said, caving like a house of cards. Catwoman wasn't going to budge and he wasted enough time tonight was it was. The Fallen could have chemical weapons and every second was precious.

“Take a left in a few blocks,” Catwoman ordered, pointing in front of him and letting out another sigh, he followed her directions.

…

Spider-man had no idea how rough he looked. That's the conclusion that Selina came to as she stepped over the groaning bodies of gangsters. Well, that and the fact he was the stereotypical stubborn teenager so he would have argued he was fine anyway. His suit was a complete wreck and it had been before Firefly took a flamethrower to it.

There had been where he had been shot, which somehow didn't slow him down in the slightest, along with other cuts and scrapes that accumulated over the past few days. It was obvious that he either didn't know how or couldn't fix his suit. Then Firefly killed it with fire.

Looking at him now, as he searched through a computer at speeds that would give an AI shame, he looked like someone that got in a fight with a lighter and lost. Badly. His suit was little more than a large, stretchy, rag now. His feet were left completely bare and spots peppered up his legs. His torso was fine, but his arms had a few burns and they looked much more intense. Thinking on it, Spider-man really had taken some damage over the past few days, hadn't he? He had been shot, cut and now set on fire all in his first week of being a hero.

'He doesn’t act like a rookie,' Catwoman mused as she searched for any sign of a chemical weapon. A bomb with a bunch of wires, or a small canister with a DANGER logo on it. He hadn't since the beginning. When she first met the kid, she thought he was a teenager that let his superpowers get to his head and he was trying to bite off more than he could chew because of it.

To her surprise, over the past couple of days, Spider-man proved he could duke it out with the best of them. Ravager wasn't a joke, despite her poking fun at the younger woman. She was trained by her monster of a father and she was trained well. Then, apparently, he can take getting set on fire by Firefly, who also wasn't bad in hand to hand combat, and beat him down. Not to mention he disarmed a bomb strapped to her chest when they first met and shortly after he took down the Joker.

Now she just watched him clear out over a dozen thugs in about as many seconds.

No, he didn't seem like a rookie anymore and even with his tattered appearance, she shouldn't have treated him like one. Selina wasn't going to apologize, she didn't do apologies, but she made a mental note to treat Spider-man like he wasn't a complete teenager.

Selina glanced over her shoulder at Spider-man, who was scrolling through text fast enough that it made her stomach churn. It was just so easy, though. At first, she thought he had a slouch from how he never stood fully straight but now it reminded her of a predator on the prowl.

'He's not a rookie,' Selina echoed her thought. Clearly, he was new to the hero scene, as far as she
knew, but he had experience with fighting and dealing with villains. If she was right about him being a street rat, which was looking more and more likely, then it only made sense that he had a few fights underneath his belt but he just seemed...comfortable with fighting. He could take some serious damage and power through and he already had a fairly impressive list of rogues taken down.

It was food for thought.

“Find anything,” Selina questioned and Spider-man shook his head, though he didn't look away from the computer screen.

“No, Buttlerman wasn't completely right. These guys were definitely going to make chemical weapons if the fact they googled 'how to make a chemical weapon' is anything to go by. But they couldn't get their hands on any heavy duty chemicals other than bleach,” he said, gesturing to the numerous containers gathered in the corner.

“I've been in this business long enough to know there's a but coming,” Selina commented, placing a hand on her hip and cocking it.

“But, they found out about a shipment to Star Labs and tried to rob it. However, when they got there, the chemicals they were looking for were already gone,” Spider-man explained as he continued to type away, sorting through the contents of the computer with practiced ease. “What was missing was serious stuff; Norepinephrine, Epinephrine, Serotonin, pure Hydrogen peroxide and more.”

Selina nodded, more perplexed that he was rattling off names that tied her tongue in knots just hearing him than she was with the mystery of where the chemicals went.

“So, someone else is running around with a bunch of dangerous chemicals and we don't know who,” she said lightly. “Just another day in Gotham,” some days it really hurt just how true those words were. In this city, it was just one major crisis after another. She tried to keep her head down but more often than not, she was dragged into conflict because she liked living in this city...she had reasons for it even if she couldn't think of them at the moment.

“More or less,” Spider-man said, “but wait, it gets better. Since they couldn't use chemical bombs, they went with the classics. Went to the city dump, grabbed a bunch of stuff to make pipe bombs that they then sent out a few guys to throw into their rivals homes and bases.” He continued in a painfully sarcastic tone and Selina let out a breath.

“Right. Where?” She demanded and Spider-man let out a small breath.

“I...there are a few places,” Spider-man said, some hesitance in his tone and it made a pit form in her gut. Then she felt her phone vibrate and when she checked it, she saw it was a list of addresses in Old Gotham. “That's your half but...” Selina waited a moment for him to finish but he shook his head.

“We'll meet up at the bridge that we crossed,” he said and Selina watched him exit the condemned building they were in with eyes tinted with sadness.

Denial was never a pretty thing.

…

Batman dropped to the floor without a sound as his eyes scanned the darkness. After so many years of using it as a weapon, it only took a fraction of a second for his eyes to adjust so he could see the run down interior of the building he was in. Once upon a time, it might have been a family home but time gave it a slow death.
Batman frowned as he realized that the floor was just a mess of squeaky boards and broken glass. It
didn't give him pause, but it did mean that his approach would be slowed to make sure that he didn't
alert his target. He didn't know the extent of Spider-man's abilities, so he had to assume that
heightened senses were one of them.

That was the problem with Spider-man, Batman mused as he ghosted over the floor towards a door.
He didn't know much about him. His abilities were vague, his origin was unknown as were his
motivations. Bruce wasn't blind; he could see all the good Spider-man was doing and he could see all
the evidence that pointed to what kind of man Spider-man was.

It was just so very convenient that he appeared right when one of the biggest gang wars kick off.
Maybe it was just bad timing, maybe Spider-man was already going to make his debut and the Joker
sped things up. Batman was even willing to admit that it was even probable that was the case.

But, what if it wasn't? Things were so rarely what they appeared to be and what you never expect to
happen will happen when it's most inconvenient.

Deep down in that pit he didn't let anyone else see but himself, he hoped that it was the former. He
hoped that it was another hero instead of another villain hatching a plan or being a pawn in a grand
scheme. He hoped that Gotham could gain another ally in the war on crime. He hoped Spider-man
was who he said he was, who he acted as. He was meta-human or gained his powers through other
means, and that brought its own set of problems but they could be overcome. Because he had
powers, joining was a necessity and he hoped, he hoped, that Spider-man would be another addition
to the team.

But, in the end, he didn't know if Spider-man was who he pretended to be. He was about to find out.

Batman stopped in front of the door and tapped his cowl. The film over his eyes colored into a deep
blue and his perpetual scowl deepened. He wanted to sigh but he didn't let himself as he opened the
door and revealed an empty room.

It was a decrepit bedroom. The window had been busted in an untold number of years ago and the
room weathered the elements badly. Every scrap of wood was rotting, the bed was more rusted
springs than cloth, the paint was peeling and chipped and there was a fine layer of mold on
everything.

Everything in the room was old, all except for two things.

One can of root beer and a note neatly folded next to it.

Batman scanned the room for threats before his eyes settled back on the note and beverage. He didn't
hesitate to cross the room and scoop up both, unfolding the note with one hand as the other analyzed
the drink for tampering. He didn't see any needle-like openings and it still felt pressurized. And cold.

Turning his attention to the note, he read it and his frown deepened.

I'm not that stupid. I understand you want to talk, and we totally should, but I'm not in the mood right
now. I'm keeping the earbud and the bug that Nightwing planted on my phone, though. I'll turn the
ear bud on tomorrow night so we can work together against the people that are the actual enemy.

P.S. Tell Nightwing that I think he's a dick and if he wants my forgiveness, then he'll have to bribe
me with candy and gadgets. Like those exploding boomerang things.

P.P.S I bought you a root beer since I told the Joker that I would. Wasn't sure if you like root beer
but it was either that or Grape. Enjoy!
Sincerely,

Your friendly neighborhood Spider-man

Batman read through the note another time before he glanced at the root beer. What it all meant was realized instantly and only then did Batman allow himself a soft sigh.

…

Peter was exhausted. That fact only made itself known when he neared Crime Alley and the first of the sun's rays colored the night sky. He could keep going, he worked past the point of collapsing many times before, but Peter knew he was running on fumes, both physically and emotionally.

He had been too late in most cases. Some attacks happened as soon as the sun went down. Most happened shortly before he arrived. Only one was prevented. He managed to save some but not all.

The rest of his night was spent cracking down in Old Gotham. The Fallen, all of their rivals and anyone else that he saw breaking the law was either hanging upside down or sitting in a police cruiser. Catwoman helped him out, despite all of his insistence that he had Old Gotham handled. They only parted a few minutes ago since the night was over. The search for the missing chemicals was handed over to Buttlerman and Peter trusted him when he said that they would be found. Hopefully, that meant before they could be used.

Peter let out a long sigh as he walked up his apartment building, his bag of goodies in hand. In the way of sheer salvage, he came out on top today. He got plenty of clothes, chemicals, and containers. To top it off, he gained a new ear bud/tracker, a bug in the form of a small film, and some new tech to experiment with. Even better, thanks to the Fallen, he found a new site to check out because most of the bomb components came from a dump outside the city.

He also got pictures of his fight with Ravager and Firefly. Peter would need to find a paper to sell them to, but he already had the Daily Planet in mind for that.

After that, he left a nice little gift for Batman. He recreated the ear buds frequency on a breaking down radio in that bedroom to trick him into thinking that he was about to...ambush? Peter didn't know. He hadn't met Batman before but if he was anything like he made himself appear to be, then he was expecting a lot of Brooding, capital B. Maybe some threats or something.

Hopefully, the root beer would buy him some good will when they did meet. Maybe he shouldn't have pulled that trick, but Peter just didn't have it in him to deal with any kind of bull. Maybe Batman was a perfectly reasonable person, maybe he wasn't. He'd find out at a later date because he didn't trust himself enough to not do something stupid if he proved that he wasn't.

All in all, Peter won tonight. He could start getting his feet underneath him and he could even start looking at the possibility to upgrade his gear. How he didn't know, but he could. He won.

Yet, as he reached the top of the building, he could only feel like he lost. People were dead. He hadn't been fast enough or he wasted time chatting when people needed his help.

“I need to do...better,” he said to himself. It was half an observation and half a promise. He needed to do better. He improved a lot since he first put on this mask but it was made very clear tonight that he had a very long way to go. He could do better. He could save more people he could...he could do more.

“No,” Peter heard Leslie say as she stood next to his cart and the glare she was giving him was so intense he was honestly surprised that his spidey-sense didn't trigger. “You need to go downstairs,
pick a cot and let me treat your stubborn ass.”
“Shit, bro, what happened to you?” The little leader from earlier exclaimed, making the other two look up from playing with sticks glued together in the rough shape of a person.

“Language,” Leslie snapped as she all but shoved Peter into the room. He followed obediently, knowing better than to piss off his landlord but he gave a small wave before he was put on the medical bed. Peter sat down and the little girl abandoned her doll to walk up to him. Her eyes were bleary and red-rimmed, telling Peter that she hadn't gotten any sleep. A glance told him that none of the kids did, not that he could blame them. They had a brush with death mere hours ago; odds were they wouldn't be sleeping easy for a long time.

“You're hurt,” she observed as she took a seat next to him. She looked up at his reflective eyes and cocked her head to the side. Utterly adorable. He found his secret weakness; anything that could make him go 'd'awwwww.'

She was completely right. His hand itched, his burns were driving him up the wall, and his bullet wound ached. That wasn't even counting all the sore muscles and other bumps and bruises he's picked up over the past few days. However, Peter was a hero and he had an image to maintain.

“Me? Hurt? Pa-lease! I'm a superhero,” he said, jabbing a thumb at himself and puffing out his chest. He saw Captain America do the pose once and he thought it looked cool when he did it. He practiced in the mirror, so he was sure he pulled it off.

Though, that confidence was undermined when she gave a small giggle and a look that could only be described as patronizing. Really, what was it with him and women giving him that look? She was five. Five!

“No, you're an idiot,” Leslie snapped as she gathered her instruments. She shot him a glare but Peter noticed that it didn't have any real heat to it. Like the little girls, her eyes were bloodshot as well and if the groaning he could hear in the other room, he was willing to bet that he wasn't the only one that had a busy night.

“Were you set on fire,” the potty mouth of the trio asked, sounding more fascinated than concerned as he poked at his tattered suit. Which was just another problem in a long list of them. His suit was a glorified rag now. A bloody, burnt rag that hadn't been properly washed in a few days.

What he was going to do about that, he didn't have the faintest. He could always just go out in it but that had it's own problems. The leg part was missing entirely and there were plenty of burn holes throughout or where Firefly nicked him. His suit already didn't do much to keep the cold out but in the state, it was in, he might as well not wear anything at all. Which wasn't really an option.

'I guess I know where my spending money is going,' Peter thought with a mental sigh, fingering at one of the burnt edges along with the little leader. This suit reached the end of its life, it seemed. If spandex prices were anything like they were on his...hmmm...ah, the last time he checked then they were out of price range.

He would need to buy two things, red and blue, and he wasn't even sure if he could afford one.

Peter realized that the kid was waiting for an answer, so he gave a shrug, "yeah, just a little." Leslie took a calming breath before she let it out in the form of a long sigh. Peter gave her a wary look, knowing through experience that he was about to get yelled at.
"You were set on fire," she stated and Peter saw the three kids share a look and shrink into themselves. Not because they were scared, but to make themselves smaller targets so Leslie's anger would pass over them.

"For like two seconds! Five tops," Peter defended himself, though it sounded weak to his own ears. Leslie's gaze turned flat and Peter's face flushed with embarrassment.

"The five-second rule doesn't apply to getting set on fire," she said so dryly that the only thing Peter could do was wince. As much as he didn't want to admit it, that was a fair point. It was something that would only take a day or so to heal, but saying it out loud made it seem worse than it really is. However, Leslie didn't continue in favor of grabbing a curved needle and...oh no...

"I don't need stitches," he said the instant he saw her thread the needle with practiced ease. His eyes were focused and he most certainly didn't sound nervous. He might be super human but Peter never got over his childhood fear of needles. It was for that reason he valued his enhanced durability and healing as much as he valued his spidey-sense. Not only would he have more scar tissue than skin at this point, but it made things like needles pointless. Especially when he slapped some of his home brew healing ointment on the bigger wounds.

"Your hand looks like it was nearly cut in half," Leslie said as she sterilized the needle. Peter grimaced when he looked down at his palm. The cut had stopped bleeding, but he knew he reopened it a few times throughout the night so his glove was soaked with blood.

"It'll heal on its-" Peter began to argue but the words dried up when he saw Leslie raise an eyebrow. It was then that he got the impression that this wasn't so much as patching him up but punishing him for getting hurt. She knew she could get away with it too because she knew about his accelerated healing.

"Er, right," Peter said, taking a deep breath as she took his hand and peeled away the glove. Peter removed his web shooter and the little girl shifted so she could get a better look at them. After a moment of consideration, he locked the web shooting mechanized and passed it to her. She looked surprised but she shot him a tired smile and started to play with it.

"So, what are you three still doing up," he asked to distract himself from the pain as Leslie began stitching him up. One downside of never needing stitches was that he had no tolerance for them. His pain threshold had gotten fairly large over the past two years but each time she pushed the needle through his skin made him want to curl up into a ball and die.

"May didn't want to go to bed until you got back," Johnny offered with a small shrug as he peered at the web shooter in May's hands. Peter's heart clenched painfully when he heard the name of the woman that was his mother in all but name but he quickly put that to the side. This wasn't the time or the place to worry if he'd ever get to see her again.

Instead, he looked at May, who yawned before trying to put the web shooter on her wrist, even though it was twice as big.

“Tired?” He ventured but she shook her head without looking up. He smiled when she tried to shoot a web at the potty mouths face, only for the web shooter to almost fall off.

“So, where do you guys and girls usually stay at when you're not in danger? Does...anyone look after you?” He asked, his voice most certainly not changing octaves when the needle sunk in a little too deep. He directed the question at all three of them, but like before, it was the little leader who answered.
“What’s it to you?” He demanded before he caught an elbow to the ribs by Johnny. As he shot his friend a glare, Johnny responded with an actual answer.

“In the abandoned building on the edge of Crime Alley. Batman killed, like, a hundred guys there once so nobody goes there,” Johnny explained and Peter felt his eyebrows slowly creep up.

“A hundred guys?” He echoed and he heard a snort from Leslie. Peter knew that was a lie or a story cooked up by criminals to make Batman even scarier. It happened to him too when he became more than an urban myth. Johnny was cut off from answering when the little leader gave him a look that could only be described as ‘what the fuck are you doing?!’

“Dude, he’s Spider-man,” Johnny said in a hiss, gesturing wildly to Peter. His smile grew a fraction as pride surged in him. It seemed he was already gaining a reputation and it seemed to be a good one. It was almost confusing.

“Tsk, fine. We live there and the Vice Kings used to look after us. I think most of them are dead no, so I dunno now,” the little leader gave a careless shrug as he crossed his arms. Peter's smile fell a fraction when he heard that. He knew that they were orphans but he didn’t know they had also lost the only ones taking care of them.

Sure, with a name like the Vice Kings, Peter was willing to bet that they weren't exactly stellar people but he saw what the alternative was. These three getting gang pressed and almost murdered when they refused.

“Is there no one else?” Peter questioned softly and the little leader shrugged again.

“No, but that’s fine. We can take care of ourselves,” he boasted and Leslie let out a scoff for him.

“This idiot saved you from becoming another chalk outline,” she said bluntly and her harsh look didn't let up when the two boys drew into themselves. Johnny looked upset, but the leader suddenly stuck his chin out defiantly and glared right back at Leslie.

Peter expected and argument, or rather for Leslie to shut the kid down, but instead she let out a soft sigh and cut the thread of his stitches. It was like the fight just left her as she pulled out an ointment that made Peter want to howl in pain when she put it on his burns. It hurt worse than the actual fire!

The kid just looked puzzled, clearly also expecting a fight, and Peter seized the opportunity to continue.

“I don't think going out or staying there is a very good idea,” he observed and the little leader turned his glare at him in response.

“What else can we do? You say something stupid like go back to the orphanage, and I will shove my foot so far up your a-” he began to swear but Peter cut him off with a hand.

“No, nothing like that,” he said, making a mental note to visit this orphanage. These three...they were barely surviving on the streets. All three of them were dirty, exhausted, hungry and it was only going to get worse as more time went by. They knew it. There was no way that they didn't know it.

Yet, they were choosing to stay on the streets rather than go back to that orphanage. They were choosing to risk death over going back.

There was something deeply disturbing about that.

“I have a friend that stays in the building. He's out right now, but he wouldn't mind if you guys
stayed in his room. At least until I can help you find something better,” Peter said, thinking that this was the best way to deal with this. He could keep an eye on them and gain a little more information about the orphanage.

“He's not a pedo or anything?” The little leader asked, eying Peter warily and making him sputter. If was for that reason he didn't notice Leslie's sharp look.

“No! No, he's not, god, he's not a pedophile!” Peter exclaimed, taken back by the accusation. That was near the top of the list of things he never expected to be accused of. The little leader eyed him with suspicion, as if he glared hard enough he would learn the truth. However, before Peter could continue, possibly making the situation worse, Johnny elbowed him in the ribs again.

“Dude, he's Spider-man's friend,” he stressed. “There's no way a superhero would be friends with a pedo.”

“Yes,” Peter agreed whole heartily, wanting this conversation to end now. “He's not a creep or a crazy or anything like that. He's just a guy. His name is Peter Parker,” Peter offered up his name with a calming gesture. He heard Leslie let out a dismissive huff, clearly disagreeing with one of those things. Given that she's made no secret of her thoughts on his sanity, he had a good idea which one.

“Alright. Fine. We'll stay with your friend but if he does anything weird...,” the little leader trailed off, a warning in his tone.

“Yeah, I hear you. Nothing will happen, cross my heart,” Peter reassured, making an X over his heart for emphasis. It seemed to have done the trick for Johnny but the little leader still didn't look reassured. However, when May let out another loud yawn, that seemed to seal the deal.

“Come on, I'll escort you up,” Peter said, offering out a hand for May to hold. She didn't look up as she took it in favor of acting like she was webbing everything in sight. He sent a look at the other two and saw that they were following him obediently. He looked at Leslie, who just opened the door for them and mouthed the words 'come back' when the kids couldn't see.

Yeah, he was going to get yelled at.

It was a short walk to his rundown apartment and the rest of the building was just as run down. The paint was peeling on the walls, the floors were clean but there were countless of old stains on the carpet, and the light bulbs flickered randomly and it was if he was being honest, spooky.

He spotted his door and opened it with the key he had hidden on his neighbor's door frame. He pushed it open and the first thing he saw was Mr. Mittens sleeping on his bed. Apparently, it was the first thing May saw as well because she carelessly dropped his web shooter, which he caught before it hit the ground before she walked into the room and climbed onto the bed and started cuddling with the kitten.

Mr. Mittens woke up to meow when he felt the bed shift but he was unconcerned if the fact he went right back to sleep was any indication.

Peter looked down at the little leader, “get some sleep. I'll check in to make sure you guys are settling in but Peter will be back in a little while.” he said, earning a nod from the little leader. When Peter was starting to close the door, he noticed the look of panic on the kid's face. Right when he was about to ask what was wrong, the kid cut him off.

“Thank you,” he said, forcing the words out as he shifted from foot to foot. A comment about how he did have manners deep down was on the tip of his tongue but he beat it back. Instead, he gave a
two finger salute and a smile underneath his mask.

“Just doin' my job,” with that, he closed the door with a click.

...

'You need to get some sleep,” Leslie noted as he entered the medical office again. Peter knew it was true but he shook his head.

“Can't. I need to go to the Daily Planet before they start circulating the morning paper,” he said as he doubled checked that his neon orange Hawaiian shirt wasn't visible. Thankfully, he had sleeves now so neither it nor the burns on his arms could be seen. His hand was going to be a problem for a day or two but that could be solved if he found a pair of gloves or kept his hands in his pockets.

Leslie made a noise of acknowledgment, “then what?” She asked, her voice carefully kept neutral. Peter gave her a puzzled look, wondering exactly she was asking before he shrugged a shoulder.

“Then I look into a replacement suit, check out the building the kids are staying in, look into the orphanage, maybe do some scavenging, buy some food and maybe some clothes...why?” Peter asked, glancing at his reflection in a metal bin. It was only a brief look but Peter thought he looked as exhausted as he felt.

The dark bags underneath his eyes were almost black now and his eyes were completely bloodshot. His skin was pale and add that to the fact his hair was a mess, he looked like he was in a desperate need of a shower and a nap.

Peter quickly looked away and blinked away the haze from his vision. Leslie was looking at him with a frown before she shook her head.

“And you're going out tonight as well?” She ventured and Peter nodded, thinking that should be obvious.

“And how do you plan to stay up all night when you look like you're about to drop any second now?” She demanded, crossing her arms and now Peter wished he had his mask to hide his frown.

“Coffee and adrenaline?” the glare he got in response gave him the distance impression that she didn't find that funny.

“Fine. How are you going to take care of those kids and that cat when you're barely able to scrape by and spend your nights fighting criminals? What if one of them finds out who you are and-”

“Attacks them to get to me?” Peter bit out with anger that surprised even him. Leslie blinked but that was the only sigh that she was taken back by the sudden shift in tone. Peter opened his mouth to say something but he clamped it shut because he knew whatever it was, he'd regret saying it right after. Instead, he let out a sigh and his shoulders slumped.

“I can't leave them. They need help,” he said softly. With great power comes great responsibility. The phrase echoed in his mind, making him square his shoulders and met her gaze. Those kids, that kitten and all the others he had saved and will save, they all needed his help. He wasn't going to look away just because it was inconvenient for him.

There was a tense silence between them and Peter decided that the conversation was done. He waited one more moment for her to respond, but he didn't hear her until the door had already clicked shut.
“You're the one that needs help.”

…

“Nothing? Nothing? Half a fucking block burnt to the ground and there’s not a single photo?!
Everyone has a fucking camera on their phones nowadays, are you telling me not a single one had
the brilliant fucking idea of taking a god damn picture?!” Peter heard someone scream long before he
entered an office in the Daily Planet. Silently, he opened the window and closed it behind him before
he eyed a particularly comfy chair.

“It can’t be...” Peter muttered as he neared the chair before throwing himself in it. His body relaxed
and Peter had to fight against the wave of sleep that tried to claim him. He searched for J.J Jamerson
when he was searching for the doppelgangers of people he knew and the search came up empty!
There was no way...it was impossible.

It wasn't J.J. Jamerson, thank whatever god was in that blue sky for that. It was a short man, around
five foot something, slightly overweight with thinning hair up top. Most notably, his skin was an
angry red and spit was flying everywhere as he screamed at...everyone.

It might not be J.J Jamerson but it was a little close for comfort.

Peter shifted in his chair as he heard someone stomping into the office he was in. It had been almost
too easy to sneak in; the window was unlocked and everyone else was too busy getting screamed at
to notice him slip in. With reckless anger, the head of this branch of the Daily Planet swung the door
open and spotted Peter immediately.

“W-” he started but Peter was quick to cut him off. There was very little point in sneaking into his
office if the guy announced that he was in his office.

“I have pictures of the fights of Spider-man was in last night,” he said quickly and the man proved
that he was experienced in matters like this because he closed his mouth with a click and the door
followed shortly after.

“Let me see them,” he demanded as he took a seat at his desk. Peter glanced down at the nameplate
that in front of him, Lonnie L. Luster. That was...no. It all made so much sense now...he was in hell.
This alternate dimension was hell. There was no other alternative.

'If he starts firing me and counting his words, then I'll walk out,' he swore to himself as he took out
his camera. Lonnie scowled when he all but snatched it out of his hands but Peter noticed that the
older man made sure not to touch the exposed wires.

With practiced ease, he opened up the latest pictures and he let out a grunt as he flicked through
them. However, Peter saw that glint of greed in his eyes that he saw all too often in those that were
about to screw him over.

True to form, Lonnie set the camera down and gave a shrug, “they're alright. The angles could use
some work and the camera quality isn’t all that great, but I can use these. A hundred bucks,” he
offered and, once upon time Peter might have taken that deal.

However, he’s been ripped off countless times before and only once had he been this desperate for
money. He couldn't afford to get ripped off right now, so he frowned at the man and shook his head.

“I think you mean they're great and you'll pay me five hundred,” Peter shot back, crossing his arms.
A look passed over Lonnie’s face but Peter wouldn't have noticed it if he hadn't been looking for it.
He hadn't been surprised that Peter was arguing for more money, it was only to be expected.
However, Peter got the impression that he was still annoyed that he hadn't accepted the offer.

“Punk, that’s a lot of money for pictures I can barely use. The ones with Ravager are fucking useless because some bitch uploaded the fight to that shitty website,” he cursed, shaking his head. “The internet is the worst fucking thing that has happened to America,” he muttered before he turned his attention back to Peter.

“I'll go up to two hundred, but not a penny more. That's out of pity kid, you look like shit,” he added and Peter let the insult roll over him like water. He knew it was true. His clothes were ragged and stained, he looked dirty and exhausted, and everything about him just screamed desperate for money. Lonnie was going to low ball him no matter what he looked like, but he was going for broke because he didn't expect him to have a backbone.

“No deal,” Peter said, standing up and grabbing his camera before Lonnie could react. “Guess I should have gone to the Gotham Times,” he mused aloud as he tucked his camera back in his pocket. Lonnie sputtered, clearly expecting him to cave in the sight of a mere two hundred dollars, and Peter made it all the way to the door when Lonnie found his words again.

“You fuckin brat,” he spat but he took a breath to calm himself when Peter turned around. He glared at Peter as if he would change his mind and price tag if he did. “Fine. Five hundred,” he hissed as he opened his drawer with a little more force than necessary.

“Cash,” Peter corrected, not seeing the need to point out that he didn't have a bank account. Lonnie muttered something underneath his breath but Peter didn't care to figure out what it was. J.J. Jamerson was a dick, but there had been something respectable about him. Sure, he screwed Peter over more often than not but he paid his dues and admitted when he was wrong.

This guy was just a dick.

“And leave my name out of the paper to,” Peter added after a moment of thought. Getting credit for taking pictures of Spider-man was was a mistake that he wasn't going to repeat. When it became clear that Peter was the only one able to get a half decent photo of Spider-man, he naturally earned the attention of Spider-man's enemies.

That made for some very awkward situations when he had been kidnapped to draw out the spider-themed hero.

Keeping his name out of the paper would also stop anyone from giving his background a look through. His greatest ally right now was making sure Peter Parker stayed under the radar so people wouldn't connect his miraculous resurrection with Spider-man's appearance.

“You on the run or something, kid?” Lonnie asked as he peeled off a few hundred dollar bills. Peter wasn't a greedy man but his eyes were stuck on the money. As far as he was concerned, five hundred dollars was the most beautiful string of words in the English language.

He was proven wrong a mere moment later Lonnie slid six hundred dollar bills over to his side of the desk. A look of pure disbelief must have been showing on his face because he heard the man let out a chuckle.

“That right there is a bribe,” he said in a tone that Peter could only describe as proud. “The next time you get pictures of these loonies, remember me as the one who let you get a decent meal and clothes that aren't fucking disgusting.” He added and Peter immediate shifted from foot to foot.

Bribe.
He hated that word. None too fond memories of nearly taking a bribe from Tombstone for looking the other way whenever he was doing something villainous and evil surfaced.

‘This is different,’ Peter said as he took the money and swallowed his squeamishness. This was more of a forward advance than anything but the implication of dirty money just made his skin crawl. He tucked the money into his pants and shoved his hand in his pocket, just to make sure that it wouldn't disappear once his eyes were off it.

“What makes you think there's going to be another time?” Peter asked out of curiosity as he walked towards the window he entered through.

Lonnie shrugged, swiveling his chair so he could watch Peter exit onto the fire escape. “Because I've been in this business a long fucking time. There’s always a next time for brats like you,” he said with a wave and a smile that could be mistaken as kind.

“Pleasure doing business with you.”

...

Six hundred dollars. Peter could barely believe it and he squeezed the money in his pocket just to make sure he hadn't fallen asleep and all of this wasn't a dream. He had money. He had money! Glorious, glorious money.

Peter's stomach growled loud enough that those passing by gave him a look before continuing on. Dear lord, now that he had glorious, lovely money, he could actually buy food now. For the past few days, he's been eating nothing but soup from soup kitchens that Bruce Wayne guy set up across the city. The food wasn't bad, it was actually a lot better than he was expecting, but it just wasn't enough for those with superhuman appetites like him.

As if it were fate, Peter caught the scent of something made with blueberries. His eyes drifted to a small coffee shop and saw some of the largest muffins he had ever seen. Peter didn't even realize he was walking towards them until his hand was on the door and the sharp ring snapped him out of his hunger induced daze.

“Good morning,” the barista greeted but Peter didn't fail to notice that her smile became a little more forced once she looked at him. He didn't really blame her. During his brief stint as a pizza delivery boy, he knew what it was like to live and die by the tip.

“Ah, morning,” Peter said right back, glancing at the price tags. Everything here was cheap and, well calling it good for you was a bit of an exaggeration but it wasn't as bad it could be. Apparently, everything was organic and no preservatives. Lovely. “Can I get a large coffee and...three muffins?” He asked, frowning lightly as he mentally added the total.

Maybe he should take one of the muffins off. Or maybe two...hmmm...maybe he should just go with the coffee. He had some money now but he couldn't afford to blow it on impulse purchases. He needed a new suit, he needed to look into upgrading his usual equipment, he needed to pay for rent and he needed to save some money for actual groceries.

“Sure thing,” the barista said, tapping on the cash register a few times before Peter could cancel his order altogether. “That'll be twelve dollars,” she said with an all too polite smile. Peter must have made a face because she stopped smiling but he let out a sigh and pulled out one of the hundreds.

It almost physically hurt him to hand it over. Even more so when he put two bucks into the tip jar.

With that, he patiently waited for his coffee to be made as he thought about what he needed to do
next. It was still early, barely six in the morning, so he had most of the day. Most people in the
orphanage would be still asleep, so it was out for now, but he needed to look into that today.

'I guess I can check out the building,' Peter mused as he took his coffee and change, making sure he
got the correct amount. He sipped his coffee and he wished he could say he felt it energize him like a
battery but the only thing he could do was think it needed more sugar.

He also needed to make more of his web fluid. He was dangerously low as it was. He wasn't sure if
he had enough to make it through the night, even without running into any villains. He could also
add some more details about his background but he dismissed the idea for now. It might raise a few
questions if he sat on the computer for another ten hours today.

Maybe he could take out two birds with one stone. Maybe he could set up shop in the building, the
kids said no one went there so it could do the job. If it was fit for them to live in, then he could keep
an eye on them that way too.

The only problem with that was it could put the kids in danger.

'I'll figure it out when I get there,' Peter figured to himself as he balanced his muffins on top of each
other. However, he nearly ended up throwing them into the air when he heard the loudest, high
pitched screech coming from a few feet away. His eyes snapped up, looking for trouble, but he didn't
see any.

All he saw was a little girl standing on the side of the street, trying to scream her head off.

He looked around but he didn't see anyone rushing to her to calm her down. If anything, it was the
opposite. Those that passed her by were either giving her the stink eye or outright ignoring her. That
didn't deter the little girl though because she screamed wordlessly directly at the ones that were
looking at her funny.

With a mental shrug, he walked towards her but she didn't notice. It took a couple of seconds for her
to run out of breath, but when she gulped some down, Peter spoke up.

"Is something wrong?" He asked, squatting down. The girl looked at him suspiciously before she
nodded mutely.

"I can't find my mom. She was taking me to school, but I wanted a muffin...when I turned around,
she was gone!" She said after a moment, her voice hoarse from the screaming.

"Ah...so you were screaming to get her attention?" Peter ventured and the girl nodded again.
"Smart," he said with a grin. No doubt everyone within the next few blocks could hear her. Her
mom should look around and quickly notice that her daughter wasn't following her.

"Thanks," the girl muttered before shifting from foot to foot. "Will you help me find my mom?" She
asked eventually and Peter's head bobbed.

"'Course I will," he said, straightening out. He scanned the crowd again for anyone that fit the bill of
the girl's mother but he didn't see anyone that looked particularly panicked. Leaving this spot was a
good idea on the chance that her mom was already on her way so that was out. She also didn't have a
phone or she would have just sent her mom a text.

With that, he sat with her on a nearby bench and kept a look out. Sure, it would take some time but
there was no way a parent wouldn't notice that their kid wasn't missing rather quickly. Especially if
she was walking her to school.
There was silence for a long minute before Peter heard a light sniffle next to him. Glancing down, he saw the girl trying very hard to not cry. Peter floundered for a moment, trying to figure out how to stop this train wreck before it could happen before he just let out a small sigh.

“Don't worry, you're mom's going to be back soon. She's probably on her way right now,” he reassured before he took a sip of his scalding hot coffee.

“How do you know?” She demanded, wiping her nose but the water works stopped. It seems that he knocked the nail on the head.

“Because I'm older, thus wiser and know everything,” he said with a sage nod and cracked a grin when the look she gave him told him that she thought he was an idiot instead. She topped it off with making a disbelieving noise but fell silent quickly after.

Another minute ticked by and Peter still didn't see any sign of her mom. He wasn't the only one getting antsy because the girl looked like she was about to start crying again. Another few seconds ticked by and Peter drained the last of his coffee in a large gulp before he turned to the girl.

“Wanna see something cool?” He asked and the girl gave him a hesitant nod before he grabbed his three muffins. He tossed one of them high into the air before another one joined it. Within a second, Peter was juggling them. Peter glanced down at the girl and saw that she was moderately impressed but she still looked sad.

So, naturally, Peter kicked it up a notch.

He grabbed his empty cup and started juggling that too. Then he added his shoes to the mix, not even stopping to take them off. Then the girl decided she wanted to help and began throwing everything that she had in her book bag at him, which he caught and juggled it to.

Juggling, in the end, was one of the easiest skills that he learned. Having superhuman reflexes made it so very easy that. Originally, he learned the skill to test out his reflexes. He mastered the art within the hour.

So, it wasn't much trouble when he nearly had a dozen objects of various shapes and weights flying through his hands. Before long, he needed to throw the object way up high to keep a steady circle going and his hands were little more than blurs. Slowly, a small crowd gathered or people lingered to watch before continuing their day.

Then they started doing the most amazing thing.

They started giving him money.

It was a coin or two there, maybe a buck or a five, but it was money!

The girl proved to be invaluable because she grabbed his empty coffee cup out of the circle and set it in front of the crowd. Naturally, she made sure to take every other coin as payment for her efforts. She left the bills for Peter, though, so he didn't really complain.

However, all good things must come to an end because a woman pushed through the crowd.

“Zoey! Zoey,” the woman cried out as she all but shoved a man off his feet.

“Mommy,” Zoey called out, abandoning the coins she was picking up. The woman scooped her up off her feet and hugged her. With a lopsided grin, Peter stopped juggling and deftly began piling up the girl's school books on the bench before catching his muffins and shoes.
By the time he was done, Zoey was grinning from ear to ear and her mom's expression was a mixture of relief and embarrassment. “Thank you,” she said simply, “I...” she faltered and Peter gave and lopsided grin.

“It's no problem,” he said, dismissing the issue entirely with a small wave of his hands. That seemed to do the trick because she looked smiled brightly before thanking him again. He just grinned away, feeling some pride but mostly just wishing that she would leave. He hadn't really done anything. Hell, if anything, he should be thanking her because he managed to remake the money he spent and a little extra.

The crowd began to disperse and Zoey still had school, so her mom started leading her away but that didn't stop her from waving goodbye. Peter waved back before as he recalled a snippet of their conversation. On impulse, he tossed her one of his muffins. In an indirect way, she did pay for it.

Zoey lit up as she fumbled to catch it, “Thank you mister!” she called out, waving the muffin like a trophy and Peter just smiled one more time before he began to walk away.

Only to come face to face with the most handsome guy he had ever seen before. Peter wasn't gay, he loved the female form far too much, but this guy wasn't just handsome. He was unreasonably handsome. Chiselled jaw, lips quirked up into a grin that he was willing to bet money, all of his money, that made girls legs weak at the knees and his eyes were a blue he hadn't known existed. His black hair was carefully styled to make it look like he had just rolled out of bed, but he somehow managed to pull it off.

He offered a hand and, on reflex, Peter shook it, “The names Dick Grayson.” he introduced himself. “Those were some pretty sweet skills.”
"Uhh," Peter started brilliantly, suddenly becoming very conscious of his ragged appearance. "Hey, I'm Peter Parker and...thanks?" He said though it came out as a question. This guy...no one should look that good. It just wasn't fair. He gets messed up spider DNA and this guy, Dick, gets genes that were handcrafted by the gods? Where was the justice?

"You're a pretty skilled juggler," he observed, and Peter started to flush on reflex. Compliments weren't something he had a lot of experience with, either as Spider-man, especially as Spider-man or as Peter. If Dick noticed, he didn't care because he just piled them on.

"I haven't seen juggling like that in years," Dick said with a smile that Peter could only describe as wistful. "How long have you been doing it?" He asked and Peter mentally back peddled. Answering that he did it once for a few hours didn't exactly seem like an intelligent thing to do.

"About two years? Give or take a month or two," Peter said with a shrug. Just like before, twisting the truth was where he thrived, and Dick seemed to have bought it because he smiled, showing off perfectly white teeth. Dude, seriously, this wasn't fair. Peter wasn't gay, but he was about to swoon, that's how unreasonably handsome this guy was. Whereas everyone else in the world got hit with the ugly stick, Dick Grayson was nearly beaten to death with the pretty one.

"Seriously? That's some serious talent," he said with seemingly genuine excitement, "It wasn't until, ah, a couple of years ago that I got any good at it, more of an acrobat myself. I'm still stuck at rubber balls, though," he explained, and Peter guessed that was why someone like Dick was talking to someone like him. An odd passion for juggling balls. Whatever, not even the weirdest thing he's seen in the past couple of hours.

"Uh, cool?" Peter said, social awkwardness returning full force. His face must have shown it because Dick let out a laugh that sounded downright musical. Seriously, puberty just wasn't fair.

"Ah, sorry, I just realized that this is kinda weird," he said with a chuckle. "But I grew in the circus, so I got a little excited to see a really good street performer. You don't see them all that often in Gotham since..." Dick trailed off, and Peter nodded, knowing what he was going to say. A good street performer could make a decent amount of money; some thug could do the same by taking the tip jar and running for it.

"Yeah it's not exactly safe in this part of town," there was a small lapse in the conversation and Peter quickly caved. "I guess that you're still not in it?" Peter ventured, gesturing to his clothing. He was wearing a gray V-neck, despite it being winter, a black cardigan jacket thing, and matching black pants along with a pair of dress shoes. Not exactly dressed to impress, but as a fellow heterosexual male, probably, but Peter had to admit he looked nice. And expensive. And ineffective since it was snowing! Looking nice wasn't worth freezing, Peter learned that lesson well when he picked up that orange monstrosity.

"No, I, uh, left when I was a kid but..." Dick paused, searching for a way to put his thoughts into words but Peter held up a hand. Right. Of course. Why would he be able to make some small talk without making things horribly awkward? Who did he think he was....ah...that one billionaire...ah! Bruce Wayne?

"You're good. I might be a train wreck when it comes to social stuff, but I know that pausing like that doesn't mean anything good. You don't have to tell me if you don't want to," Peter said, thinking it would have been a little odd to have Dick spell out his entire life story withing five seconds of
meeting him. As he expected, Dick immediately looked relieved and nodded his head in thanks.

"Thanks, well, long story short, I left, but I still love the circus. So, yeah, do you do this as a job or just a way to make some extra money?" He asked, steering the conversation away from the topic and Peter thought he seemed genuinely curious. Clearly, there was a story there, but Dick seemed happy just to chat about juggling stuff.

Now that he mentioned it, "No, it's my first time doing it in public. That little girl," he gestured in general direction the little girl left, "was about to start crying and I'm not good with girls in general but crying girls...? Yeah, no. So I just distracted her until her mom realized she was short a daughter." He explained with a shrug, brushing his hair out of his eyes and became very aware how nasty it was. And he was pretty sure he made it look weird but he couldn't fix it. That would just draw more attention to the fact that he was all kinds of gross.

Then he glanced at cup full of coffee stained dollar bills. Zoey had taken her cut, but there was still plenty of money left over. He more than made up his cost for his food and it only took him about ten minutes or so.

"Just realized you could make some serious money this way?" Dick asked, getting his attention again. He looked a little smug but Peter didn't mind because what he said was true. It was less stable than photography, but there wasn't any reason why Peter couldn't do both. All he had to do was juggle a few things for a couple of hours, and he'd make some serious cash.

It was an honest question of why he hadn't thought of it before, and the answer was just too quick to jump out at him. He had to keep his image of being 'Puny-Parker.' He had to cower when Flash stalked the halls, hand over his lunch money and held himself in check when Flash and his friends played a prank on him. Like throwing balloons filled with piss at him or breaking into his locker and stealing his assignments. He had to keep his head down so he wouldn't draw any attention to himself. A single slip up, a single mistake or standing up for himself would draw attention from his classmates. The best and easiest way to protect his secret identity, to protect aunt May and Mary Jane was to make Peter Parker the exact opposite of who Spider-man was.

It would have also raised a couple of question on why he was suddenly such a talented juggler, none of which he looked forward to answering.

Scooping up the cup of money, Peter realized that he hadn't answered Dick, so he quickly nodded, "Yeah, I just...I just never considered it before." He admitted freely, making Dick's smile grow.

"Most don't. It's not one of those things that just jump out at you, but it's an excellent way to make money if you have a skill people are willing to pay to see. There's also the circus, it's a lot more reliable in the way of consistent, if a bit smaller, pay. As a street performer, you're kinda reliant on how much you can get in tips. You can have a couple of great days in a row, or you can go," Dick let out a whistle while his hand made a diving motion. Apparently, his finances hit rock bottom because Dick made an explosion noise. Peter gave it a seven out of ten.

"Mmhmm," Peter acknowledged, Dick answering just about every question that he could think of off the top of his head. He was now considering joining the circus. Life threw some curve balls at you. First, he gets super powers, and now the circus was an appealing option.

"I can't join the circus," Peter said with some disappointment, thoroughly enjoying the mental image, though. "But I think I'm going to give the street performer thing a shot," he said, figuring out how he was going to do it.

He didn't go to school, which...hold up one second.
Peter's brow furrowed in thought, missing Dick's puzzled look. He...what was his name...Flash? No, a superhero didn't bully him...well, not in high school at least, but he could remember that jerk that made him miserable for years. However, the thing was, in those memories, Peter could swear he was in a school. It fit the bill; hundreds of hormonal teenagers, the ever present smell of BO and there weren't many places that had lockers large enough for him to fit inside. He had been in a school, he had been bullied, tormented for years, but...

Then...why...why...why...?

Peter blinked as he felt whatever he had been thinking about fade from his mind like fog. It was right there; he could feel it, but every time Peter tried to recall what he had been thinking about, the thoughts just slipped through his fingers like smoke.

"Sweet," Dick said, breaking him from his thoughts, seemingly pleased with his decision. No, he seemed like he was actually happy that there was another street performer in the world. He must really love the circus, or in this case, the next best thing. "Well, I recommend starting out in the central park. Lots of foot traffic there even though it's freezing."

'You lost your right to say that when you decided to wear a V-neck,' Peter thought, still not over that. However, he nodded along as Dick continued.

"There's also downtown, I guess, around noon. If you go just before or after the lunch rush, then you should make some cash. Not sure if it's worth staying more than a couple of hours, though," he added before he looked like he was struck by a thought. "Are, uh, you in school?" He asked, unsure how to approach the subject.

Peter shook his head, feeling a tad embarrassed, "no, but I'm getting my GED." He said, feeling a blush creeping up his neck despite his efforts to beat it off. Dick gave a polite smile and Peter honestly couldn't tell if he understood or if he was being judged hardcore.

Dick didn't seem like the kind of guy that would care. He was talking to him despite looking like he did and Dick was offering some precious advice, so he seemed like a pretty decent guy despite having poor choices in clothing. However, people were so rarely who they made themselves appear to be. He knew that from experience.

"Hey, you're good man," he reassured with a disarming smile and Peter felt a little less self-conscious. "I'm sure you have your reasons. Anyway, since you don't have school, aim for the after lunch crowd. I know it seems a little backward, but people are more willing to tip after the bought their own food or whatever. Plus, they'll be in a better mood, since food and a break from the daily grind." He explained with a shrug and Peter nodded along, committing every word to memory. It made sense, in its own way and Dick sounded like he knew what he was talking about.

"Thank you," Peter said honestly, sticking his hand back out. Dick just grinned away as he shook it. "But...why are you helping me? I mean, thank you, a lot, but...?" He trailed off, and Dick shrugged before letting go of his hand.

"Because I saw what you did for Zoey," Dick said before pausing to get his thoughts in order. "In Gotham, no good deed goes unpunished, so people stopped doing good. Well, most people. I just..." Dick shrugged again, "I don't know, I just figured I couldn't complain how bad the city is when the good guys get dumped on when the worst kind of scum lives it up like kings."

With that, Peter found himself smiling. Yeah, Dick Grayson was bumped up from an alright dude to a good guy. Even if he was unreasonably good looking and didn't dress appropriately for the season.
"Well, it was nice meeting you Peter, but I have to meet up with my little brother," Dick said with a lopsided grin that didn't look nearly as awkward as when he did it. Then he dug in his pocket for a moment and held out a card to Peter, which he took.

'He has business cards,' Peter thought, looking at the words Dick Grayson in fancy lettering and neon blue ink. Right below it was a phone number. Very minimalist. It could barely be called a business card. Odds were he left it on nightstands of girls that were well out of his league, but easily within reach of Dick's. 'I want business cards...'

Maybe something classy for Spider-man. Like a calling card or something.

"If you have any more questions, just give me a call. Or, if something changes and you can join a circus, I can put in a good word for you at Haley's Circus. They're the best," Dick added, giving Peter the impression that he might be a little bias. It seemed that him leaving the circus hadn't been on bad terms.

Put it in his pocket, right next to his money and gave Dick one last grin. "I kinda feel like a broken record, but thank you. I mean it," he said, and Dick stuck his hand out again, and Peter shook it firmly. With that, he began walking away, though, he did give one last wave over his shoulder.

Peter looked at him for a couple of seconds, going over their conversation before he began walking in the opposite direction. One thing stood out, over the fact he might have just met the only decent person in Gotham and his potential new source of income. It was something subtle that he hadn't even thought about until he was walking away.

'He seems familiar,' Peter thought with a mental shrug before he crossed a street and began heading to the home of those kids.

...  

"Kara," Barbara Gordon said before she rubbed her eyes with the palms of her hands, a headache incoming, "Bruce is going to be pissed when he finds out that you're here." She said as she swiveled around in her chair just in time to see the cheeky grin as one of the most powerful beings on Earth floated down.

The red shielded S stood out on her chest, marking her out as one of the few Kryptonians left. It matched her red cape that fluttered lightly as she descended, which extended up her neck as an informal collar and her bright red mini skirt. Her thighs were mostly exposed until similarly, red boots started just above her knee, though they were left exposed. The rest of her costume was a skin-tight royal blue color that covered her torso and arms.

Barbara, however, noticed none of that and instead noticed that her friend had gotten a haircut because it barely brushed her shoulders now. Which begged the question where she found scissors tough enough to cut Kryptonian hair because it was almost as indestructible as they were.

"Gasp," Kara said, a grin in her voice, actually saying the word gasp, "you mean Bruce doesn't already know? Here I thought that he knew everything. Ever," she added, touching the ground and Barbara managed a light smile at that. Rumors of Bruce's omnipotence was greatly exaggerated. Most of the time.

"I'm not complaining, but why are you risking Bruce's wrath? He doesn't have a reputation for being forgiving," Barbara asked as she swiveled back around in her chair to look back up at the Batcomputer. Doing so made her light headed and she rubbed her eyes to clear the haze from her vision. She needed sleep, and she needed it badly, but there was just too much work that needed to
be done.

"Because you and Dick broke up. Again," she added as she hovered over her, placing her elbows on the headrest as if she needed to. Barbara's smile fell a fraction at that, but Kara continued before she could offer up a defense. "And you haven't been able to cry into my shoulder yet as we eat unnecessary amounts of ice cream," she pressed forward, worry clear in her tone to Barbara even though Kara tried to keep it hidden.

Barbara opened her mouth to say that she was fine, but a knowing look cut her off before she began. Instead, she looked at the batcomputer pointedly and tried to ignore the fact that Kara was right. Awkward didn't even begin to cover how downright painful it was to be around Dick right now.

He was trying, he was trying so hard, to make it easier for her. He didn't talk to her, obeying her wish to be left alone. When it was necessary for work that they communicate, he was brief and professional. When he got calls from Kory, or as most knew her as Starfire, he would leave the room so she wouldn't have to overhear that stupid voice sound so freakin excited to talk to her. It almost made it worse, in its own way.

Barbara let out a sigh when she realized her hands were clenched into fists and she was glaring at the batcomputer. Wordlessly, she felt Kara wrap her arms around her, even though it was somewhat difficult since she was still sitting in her chair. Barbara appreciated the gesture, though, enough that she stood up and threw her arms around Kara's neck.

There was a brief stint of silence before Barbara let out a breath in the form of a sigh, "he's with Kory again." She muttered into Kara's blonde hair and felt her nod.

"I know."

"I want to hate her," Barbara added, and Kara let out a breath.

"I know. You can't though."

"She's just so...nice," Barbara made the word sound like an insult. Nice described Kory perfectly. Nice and bubbly. Barbara wanted to hate her, but Kory just made it so damn hard. Getting mad at her, hating her, was a lot like hating a puppy that wanted nothing more in the world to be your friend...She was just so...ugh.

To add insult to injury, she had hair Barbara would maim for, and her boobs were freakin huge. Barbara wished she got back pain but Kory wouldn't because she also had super strength. And could fly. And could shoot laser beams out her eyes...ugh, life just wasn't fair.

It sure as hell didn't help her self-esteem. When she was alone, when she was about to fall asleep after Barbara most certainly didn't cry her eyes out, she would compare herself to the alien princess. She fell short on so many points that it was so easy to see why Dick would choose Kory over her. She was an alright looking red head that grew up with him. Kory was an exotic alien princess that outclassed her physically in every possible way.

All she had going for her in that race was her mind and...well...Dick proved more than once that didn't mean much in the grand scheme of things.

"I'm so done with him," Barbara said into Kara's shoulder. The words just slipped out of her mouth, making her blink in surprise but she realized that she meant them. Kara stiffened, her muffled voice still clearly heard thanks to superhuman hearing.

"I'm done with Dick," she repeated, making a vow. Slowly, Kara pushed her back so she could look
at her. Barbara saw a look of cautious happiness, which she admitted she deserved. It wasn’t the first time she said something of the nature but this time she meant it.

"Really...?" Kara ventured carefully like she would change her mind if she pressed too hard. Barbara resisted the urge to roll her eyes and nodded firmly instead.

"Yeah. I'm done. I'm done with this back and forth between Kory and me. I'm sick and tired of it. I'm so done getting heart broken every couple of months or worrying if he's going to cheat on me every time I take my eyes off him. I'm done. Kory can keep him," Barbara said with utter certainty.

She meant every word, and it was like a weight had been lifted off her chest that she hadn't even been aware of until it was gone. She was done with him. She was moving on to bigger and better things!

"Perfect," Supergirl exclaimed before she jumped back and started pressing buttons on the supercomputer before Batgirl could even think about stopping her. "I found your rebound guy; Mr. Spider-butt!" She commanded and pulled up a photo of Spider-man during his fight with Ravager. Which she then zoomed in on his namesake. Then Kara turned around and gestured to him like he was the main attraction at an art exhibit. Odds were, for Kara, that's exactly what it was.

Barbara couldn't help herself. She laughed.

"That might be a little hard since we don't know an-"

"What? What do you mean you don't know anything," Kara interrupted her, sounding genuinely confused. "Wait, you 're saying he's not an honorary member of the bat family?" She continued, drawing her eyebrows together as she tried to wrap her head around that fact when Barbara shook her head.

"What? No, Dick's the only one that's met him so far, and he likes him, but he's not on the team yet," she said with a shrug. "Why?"

"Because everyone just assumed he was...so, wait, Spider-man is working without Bruce's blessing? For, like three days now?" Kara asked, eyebrows slowly creeping higher. Her expression was a mix of surprise and being impressed.

"Yeah? He has been a little busy, you know," she defended her mentor with a frown. "Why?"

"That excuse would work for anyone else," Kara deflected, her eyes darting over to Spider-man's most attractive feature. That Kara knew about at the moment. "Huh, that's a juicy bit of gossip. Well, what do you know about him then? A lot of people are curious since everyone knows that Gotham is Batman's turf. Except for Spider-butt, apparently," she added, looking very interested.

"Not a whole lot. The only thing we really have on him is the video and Dick's opinion," Barbara explained, tapping on the batcomputer a few times and bringing up what they knew about the hero. "He's around our age, though, give or take a year, and the only power we can confirm are his enhanced reflexes. We also know that he likes to banter from the video and Dick. Bruce thinks it's a coping mechanism since he's still new at this. His webbings can't be bought on any market, so we think he either made it himself or he has a backer that did. We also don't know what his webbing is made of since the sample we got dissolved before we got there. The scan we got off it though leads us to believe it's a love child between steel and elastic."

All in all, that was about it. Just about everything else was unknown or was based off guess work.
Spider-man's secret identity was unknown, his motivations and even what he could do. The video and Dick's thoughts gave them something to work with, but there were just too many 'maybes' for it to be relied on.

"Buuuttt," Barbara said, drawing out the word and Kara perked up before she sent her a curious glance. "He's smart. Bruce was going to ambush him at the end of the night yesterday, but he managed to dupe him. Dick put a bug and a tracker on him, but Spider-man used an old beat up radio to mimic the frequency to trick him. Instead of ambushing Bruce, though, Spider-man left a note and a root beer." She said, her smile growing as Kara's eyebrows rose higher and higher.

"He tricked Batman," she asked before blinking, "and bought him a root beer?" She added, sounding more than a little confused and amused at the mental image.

"Yeah," Barbara said, grabbing the note that was next to the unopened can of root beer and passed it to Kara. The blonde Kryptonian read through the note in a blink of an eye before she let out a snort of laughter. Then she chuckled. Then she laughed.

Barbara watched her friend clutch her stomach as she howled in laughter, drifting through the air from the force of it. She smiled, just as amused but she got all her giggles out a few hours ago.

"He-He tricked Batman?! Oh, man, I was not expecting that. Kal-El is going to love this," she said in between giggles. Barbara thought much the same. Though, as much as she enjoyed the mental image of Bruce getting teased by his peers, she let out a sigh.

"Could you keep on the down low, though? Bruce is bad enough as it is without all the extra attention," she said with some disappointment before a thought struck her. "Speaking of the League, where are they?" She asked, crossing her arms over her chest and it was Kara's turn to sigh.

"Bruce is keeping them out," she pressed forward when Barbara was about to demand why. "I don't know why. All I know is that he and the League had a behind closed doors meeting and when they came out, orders were to stay out of Gotham. It wasn't a unanimous decision if the fact that Kal-El and Bruce are having a lovers spat is anything to go by," she added, and Barbara felt herself frown. There wasn't one good reason she could think of why Bruce was keeping the League out of Gotham. No matter how much she racked her brain, she couldn't think of anything that would justify turning away help when they needed it now. If Spider-man was who he acted as then, they were lucky to have him because they were already stretched too thin as it was.

"Why?" Barbara blurted before she could stop herself. Batman was her mentor, but she could never claim to know what went on in his head, but this just didn't make any sense. Bruce loved Gotham more than words could ever describe, and Gotham needed all the help in can get right now, so why was he turning it away?

"I don't know," Kara repeated with a sigh and a shrug. "Kal-El won't tell me anything. The only detail that I got was from Diana, and she was vague enough to do Bruce proud. What I think she meant, though, was the League stepping in could make things worse." Kara had explained before she held up her hands in a 'calm down' gesture. Barbara opened her mouth to demand an explanation, but she took a breath to follow Kara's suggestion instead. A few seconds ticked by and Barbara's mind raced while Kara patiently let her think through it.

Only for seconds to turn into minutes and Barbara was hitting a wall. The very existence of the Justice Leauge was to help others when they needed it. Even when they didn't think they did. That was their directive. However, Bruce's reason was enough to convince them to ignore it, if temporarily. This was because Bruce convinced them that their presence would be a detriment to
Gotham if Kara interpreted Wonder Woman correctly. That...that was where things made absolutely no sense because she couldn't think of Bruce's reason.

"Tell Nightwing I think he's a dick?" Kara said, purposely breaking her out of her thoughts. Kara knew her well enough to know she'd think herself into a migraine if she let her. Barbara let out a small huff, the cogs slowing down. She could antagonize over it later. Her friend was here now.

"It's unlikely that Spider-man knows who he is. Catwoman's vouching for him, for what it's worth, but she wouldn't if she thought Spider-man was playing the long con." She said with a small shrug of her shoulders, forcefully pushing the thoughts out of her head. It also helped that Dick was willing to vouch for him too since it was a dickish thing to do, in his own words. Barbara also hadn't failed to notice that he glanced at Bruce when he said that.

"Mnhmm," Kara hummed as she tapped on her chin, re-reading the note. "He sounds like a good guy...why is Bruce letting him operate in Gotham? I get that it's been, uh, busy in Gotham but he doesn't let anyone do it without his stamp of approval," she said, her eyes drifting back towards the screen.

"I don't know," Barbara admitted. "But Bruce marked him as a lower priority and, after last night, only to engage if necessary or if there's an opportunity. I thought it was because we could use some help but," She gestured to Kara and Kara made another noise of acknowledgment and Barbara took that as a sign to close the Spider-man files, making the paused video go back to the largest screen.

Just in time for her to hear a cough, making Barbara go rigid before slowly turning around and saw Alfred standing there, a silver platter with two cups of coffee on it. However, she was more preoccupied with keeping the mortification off her face.

"While I am most overjoyed that you've moved on from master Dick, please keep things of this nature away from the super-computer. Master Bruce would be most upset," Alfred said in his dry English accent as he handed both her and Kara a cup of coffee, already mixed to their personal tastes perfectly.

Kara just grinned, not looking embarrassed in the slightest, "Thanks, Al," she said before taking a sip. Kara let out a sigh of contentment. It was moments like these that she wished Bruce would adopt her; so that Alfred would be at her beck and call. The man knew his way around coffee like no other.

"My pleasure Miss Kara," Alfred said, bowing slightly, before walking away. Barbra groaned into her hand before sending a glare through her fingers.

"You knew he was coming," she accused, and the crooked grin that she received as a response did nothing to argue it. Alfred must have been paying attention to all the lessons as Bruce trained her and the Robins because she hadn't heard him coming at all.

Pushing her embarrassment to the side, she gave her friend a small smile. "Thanks for checking in on me, but I'm fine. I have to go back home before my dad checks in on me but schools canceled for the next week, maybe longer, so tomorrow?" She asked and Kara nodded before giving her a hug. "Are you going back to Smallville?" She questioned, trying to get an idea of when they would meet up.

"Nah, I already told everyone I was staying over in Gotham. So, I'm going to see the sights. I don't think I've ever seen anything of Gotham not counting your house and the Batcave." She said thoughtfully and caught the look Barbra was giving her. "No powers; I'll be good, scouts honor." She said, holding her hand up while the other made an X over her heart.

Barbra stopped a sigh, but she nodded. Bruce wouldn't be happy about it, but if Kara was in Gotham
and not Supergirl, then he couldn't complain.

As Kara gave her one final wave before she began floating towards the exit, coffee still in hand, Barbara got her attention.

"Your haircut looks cute," she said, waving bye. Kara flashed her a smile, looking thoroughly pleased before she left the Batcave with a blast of wind.

...

Whisper looked down at the city as she nursed her wine. Roman hadn't known a damn thing about a good drink, but he sure could pick a view. From up here, from this angle, it made everything below her seem so minuscule while letting her see just how large Gotham was. It made her feel like she was a giant looking down at ants. Like she was above it all.

Smiling at the thought, she took another sip and a content sigh escaped her. Few things were better than a well-aged wine. The medieval ages had been a hellish time, mostly because everyone and everything had was covered in shit, but they knew how to make wine. Maybe it just needed to be aged for a couple of hundred years, but the wines of the modern era just couldn't compare.

Whisper chuckled to herself as a thought struck her. Could this even be called the modern era anymore? A mere fifty years ago, things like space aliens or magic were things of fantasy. A hundred years ago or more, it was almost unthinkable. Go back even further, and even the lesser heroes and villains would be worshiped as Demi-gods or gods themselves.

It was amusing when she thought just how far humans had come. Watching them grow from shit covered apes that beat each other with sticks to being able to build a city like this...and knowing that they could go so much further made a soft smile tug at her lips.

However, it was quick to fall when she recalled what must be done for the human race to reach its next plateau. Sometimes, it seemed that their goal was so far away with insurmountable obstacles in the way. Sometimes it felt like it was nothing but set back, after set back after set back because of incompetent minions or the Justice League or just plain bad luck.

Whisper honestly couldn't even remember how long she had been fighting this battle. Ra's al Ghul had been the one to recruit her into this fight but so much time had passed since she was that naive little girl in a backwater village. Days blurred together; months went by in a blink of an eye and years just stacked on top of each other until, before she knew it, another century ticked by.

Whisper was broken out of her thoughts she heard a sharp knock at the door. With a soft sigh, she tightened her silk robe before she called out, "Enter."

A moment later, the hulking mass that went by Kyle Abbot walked through her door into her office. Once upon a time, he had been so handsome, it was for that reason she allowed him to follow her through the centuries. Now, however, the skin around his eye was an angry, pocked marked red while his eye itself was a glazed over blue. A mistake, Whisper reflected. No matter what had angered her, it couldn't have been worth ruining one of his baby blue eyes.

"Ma'am, I have the latest report," he said in that deep voice that she just adored. Whisper gestured for him to continue with a wave of her hand as she made herself comfortable in her chair.

"Things on the legal side are progressing as expected. The housing market is beginning to collapse, especially in the inner city. In places like Crime Alley, a couple of hundred bucks can buy a building and the diamond quarter is also getting hit. Bruce Wayne's estimated worth for his mansion dipped a
couple hundred thousand dollars if that's anything to go by." Whisper nodded, twirling her wine lightly.

"The small time businesses are starting to feel the effects as well. Several have closed down either to being looted, or they were already in the red when the gang was kicked off. More should shut down in the coming week as we block insurance claims. As we expected, Wayne Enterprises is stepping in and snatching up the property for pennies on the dollar and bailing them out, but things are still well within an acceptable margin," Kyle recited, and Whisper hummed in response, sipping her wine.

"And on the other side of the coin?" She asked, cupping her cheek and resting her elbow on the desk. Her eyes roamed the length of Kyle, but if he noticed, he didn't show it. Or he had finally gotten used to it.

Whisper smiled lightly as distant memories of a too big teenager that blushed and stammered every time she approached the subject of when he was going to take her finally. How long had that been...? Three hundred years? Four?

'It's been too long since I've made him blush,' Whisper decided as Kyle continued, oblivious to her thoughts.

"The major sources of revenue are still a mess. The drug trade broke down into a million pieces. There isn't one major supplier, anymore but dozens of small ones. Prostitution still has issues. High-class escorts are doing fine, but the corner workers haven't made much. They exchange pimps almost daily now, and their cut gets larger every time. Human trafficking is up," Kyle said, shifting ever so slightly but Whisper knew it meant he was uncomfortable with the last. She didn't blame him in the slightest. It was a disgusting practice.

"Major imports are taking a step back, but exports are going up daily. They're mostly homeless, so it should take some time before Batman catches on but in the meantime, exports are going to grow to a specific market instead of a general one." Whisper nodded, a frown tugging at her lips but Kyle continued without pause.

"The major players have risen, and alliances have been made. A lot of new players entered the city; they have a lesser presence, but they're worth keeping an eye on. Going from the top of Gotham downwards; the ASP is in charge of the Narrows, Crime Alley is contested, East End is run by the Irish, somehow," he added more to himself and shifted when Whisper let out an amused huff.

Clearing his throat, he continued, "Gotham Proper is run by Two-Face, China Town by an offshoot of Triads from Bludhaven, Tricorner by a ghost. We're looking into it now, ma'am," Kyle quickly added and Whisper nodded, knowing that before he spoke. Instead, she took in a deep breath, her breast rising and falling as she tugged at the string holding her robe together.

Kyle didn't blink as he continued, "Little Italy by a newcomer named Al Capone. Midtown and Downtown are contested at the moment, so we can pick out victor if you choose, and Old Gotham is...nonexistent at this time?" He finished, and Whisper frowned in response.

"Spider-man," she deduced, knowing that there were reports of his activity in that part of the city.

"Yes, ma'am. Spider-man's proving to be a bigger threat than anticipated. He cleared Old Gotham out last night, and the other gangs are hesitant to re-enter in case the same happens to them, for now at least. I have a file you can review at your leisure on what we know, but I can sum it up with 'not much.'" Kyle said and Whisper's frown deepened.

"Yes. Defeating the Joker could have been a fluke but he's proven himself with Ravager," Whisper
said, curling her hand into a fist. Most thought it was to intimidate whoever was in the room, but it was to stop an old habit of biting her nails when she needed to think.

It didn't take her long to come to a conclusion.

"Take him out and begin phase two of the plan."
The building the kids said they stayed at looked like it belonged in Crime Alley. Most of the first story was covered in various gang tags and the little that wasn't was weathered brick. Even then, Peter spotted nearly a dozen missing bricks on the front of the building alone. The door was also covered in artsy graffiti, thought it was on a board that sealed the front door off.

The windows got the same treatment, all except a small one that hung over an arch thing. It was shattered, probably from one of the missing bricks, and Peter saw an ill-kept birds nest on the inside. The steps were missing more than a few boards, and they needed a coat of paint a decade ago. All in all, it looked like a condemned building. He didn't even need the giant sign slapped on the door to tell him as much.

With a frown, Peter entered the alleyway by moving a rusted chain link fence and stepped over a ripped trash bag. His spidey-sense tingled, making him pause mid-step. Because of that, the rat that was eating something in the garbage bag scurried out towards the house instead of chewing on his ankles.

"Lovely," Peter said sarcastically, completing his step and looking for a less obvious entrance. The windows on the side of the building were also boarded up, so Peter continued until he was behind the building. The back door was also boarded up, puzzling him for a moment before Peter saw a window on the second floor was open.

After checking to make sure no one was looking, Peter made quick work of the obstacle path that lead up to the window before slipping in. The smell hit him like a brick, making his nose scrunch up and he could only wonder what had died here. It was an unholy combination between mildew, rot, and BO that would have made him nauseous without his senses dialed up to eleven.

However, with practiced ease, Peter ignored the stench, silently hoping that he would quickly get used to it, and looked around him. It was similar to the room he used to trick Batman in, except this one looked...well, lived in gave it a little too much credit but people had been here recently. They hadn't cleaned, but people had been here.

With a small sigh, wondering why everywhere he went he always found himself in stink holes like these, he walked towards the door and grabbed the handle. Only to let it go a half second later when his spidey-sense blared.

"What?" Peter asked himself in a low voice, eyes darting for the source of the threat but his spidey-sense stopped blaring the moment he let go of the knob. Eye's narrowing, he traced the door frame, and it was then that he noticed the string attached to the door hinge. Pressing his lips into a thin line, he grabbed the end of it and pulled.

When he felt it go slack, he grabbed the door knob again, and he didn't feel his spidey-sense go off. Slowly, he turned it and suppressed an annoyed hiss when it squeaked. He paused and focused his hearing, but he didn't hear anything other than the occasional squeaking from...great. Rats. A lot of them.

Peter opened the door and came face to face with a double barrel shotgun. The string was attached to the trigger and the other side of the door knob, which explained his spidey-sense. It was a legitimate booby trap. Letting out a soft breath, he sidestepped the gun and flicked the safety back on.

He looked around the hallway and didn't see anything else that looked trapped. Even if it was, his
spidey-sense would warn him, so he began his search.

He didn't even need to go down stairs to know that he couldn't let the kids stay here. Peter didn't curse often, but he could only describe this place as a complete and utter shit hole. What wasn't filthy with mold, dirt or other fluids that Peter didn't want to think about, the walls were missing altogether. The drywall was rotted, and all along the top floor, there were holes from where someone leaned on it or a rat chewed through.

The floor was missing boards as well, exposing wire and old insulating fluff. Which, in turn, was moldy and filled to the brim with rat droppings. None of the lights worked, not that he expected them to, and the water from the tap was a black color that Peter identified as, you guessed it, more mold. To make things worse, in one of the bedrooms, the ceiling caved in so it was filled with snow. That didn't exactly help how bitterly cold it was in the building if it deserved to be called as much.

“This place is a dump,” Peter muttered to himself, his nose curling at the sight of a half frozen dead rat. He saw enough to know that he was going to have to figure something out for the kids, but his small apartment wasn't going to cut it for his nightly activities. He had been lucky he convinced aunt May that he turned the shack out back into a science lab and it was dangerous to go inside because it had been stuffed with odds and ends that he needed.

His little room wouldn't be enough for him to make more web fluid and have a work bench for potential upgrades he was toying around with.

Thinking of web fluid, Peter frowned, mentally marking it as a high priority. He hit empty late last night, and he wouldn't have anywhere near enough to make it through the night. The stairs squeaked and groaned underneath his weight, but Peter didn't feel his spidey-sense tingle, so he continued down unperturbed. It would take a few hours to start distilling the soaps and stuff into it's baser chemicals, so he needed to get started now.

As Peter came to a stop at the bottom of the stairs, his frown deepened considerably. The bottom floor was just as bad as the second floor, possibly even worse because this was where people lived. Ratty sleeping bags were scattered around what once was a living room and kitchen. A few bobbles were next to each sleeping bag, the few things that those who slept here owned.

At the center of it all was a fire, or rather the remains of one. It was in a beat up barrel. Some drifted up from it steadily, meaning it hadn't been all that long since it burnt itself out. The embers also gave off some light, but if Peter didn't have his superior vision, he doubted he would be able to see in this darkness.

However, it was for that reason that his hearing sharpened to the point he could hear a heart beat coming from the closed entertainment center. The squeaks from the rats and the howling wind masked it earlier. It also didn't help that he was trying to avoid focusing on his sense because of how awful this placed sounded and smelled.

“I'm not here to hurt you,” Peter called out, hearing the heartbeat lurch and quicken. “My name's Peter Parker; May, Johnny and,” Peter realized that he didn't know the little leader's name. “The kid with the potty mouth are staying in my apartment right now, but they mentioned they live here. I'm just checking it out if they can actually stay here.” Peter explained, focusing on the heartbeat.

“You're breaking the rules,” the voice of a kid said, somewhat sullenly. He didn't sound as young as May or Johnny, but he was still experiencing the wonderful world of puberty if his voice cracking was anything to go by.

Peter's eyebrows drew together at that, “rules?” He questioned, and the heartbeat picked up when the
kid realized that he had moved forward a little bit or he knew that Peter knew where he was at.

“This shit. Breaking and entering, stealing out shit; you're breaking the unwritten rule,” the kid explained, only confusing him further. However, then it clicked in place.

'I guess that's why the gang war waits until night,' Peter realized with a frown. While it was very convenient to know when a crime was going to take place, it just was puzzling how a rule like that came to be.

It was basic common sense to do a crime when people weren't expecting it. Admittedly, that fact seemed to go over some of the criminals heads he's busted in his time, but the point still stands. Someone, either a person or an organization, made that rule and they, who ever they might be, had enough sway that people followed it instead of their best interests.

That wasn't ominous at all.

“I'm not here to steal anything. I'm just checking out the building. It didn't pass, so I guess I'm going to have to figure something out for them,” Peter explained, squatting down with the doors the kid was hiding behind. Like Peter expected, his heart pounded in response, but as a few moments ticked by, his heart rate slowed.

In that time, Peter wondered just how he was going to do that.

“So, uh, you got a name?” Peter asked, glancing around the room again. He counted nine sleeping bags in total, but he hadn't seen the rest of the bottom floor yet.

“Alex,” Alex answered after a couple of seconds before he slowly pushed the door open, revealing a teenager around the age of fifteen or so. He looked at him with cautious eyes as he left the confining space. When he straightened out, Peter saw that he was a head and shoulders shorter than him, making him appear younger than he was.

“I'm Peter,” Peter introduced himself again, “do you live here too? With the, uh, Vice Lords?” He questioned, noting the kid looked just as rough as he did.

“Yeah, I guess you could say that. I'm what's left of the Vice Lords. The Southern Skanks came in last night and just,” Alex shrugged suddenly. “You know how it goes. Doesn’t matter now. The Vice Lords are gone, and I'm just here to get my stuff before one of the brats nick it.” Alex said in a resigned tone, shrugging again.

"Yeah," Peter said, ignoring the ache in his chest. "I know how it goes. Before you go, how many people live here? I thought it was just the three of them, and the Vice Lords, but I'm seeing more sleeping bags than I was expecting.” He asked, gesturing around the room.

Alex shifted uncertainly, "thirteen? Maybe more? I don't know. With the Vice Lords gone, the numbers going to be smaller but once we move out, it's just going to be a matter of time before someone else moves in.” He answered and Peter drug a hand over his face.

"How old are they? Does anyone look after them-after all of you?” Peter asked, his mind racing.

"The fuck do you want to know? Are you some kind of-" Alex spat, getting defensive but Peter cut him off.

"I'm not," Peter let out a sigh. This was the second time today he was being accused of that. "Spider-man dropped the off at my apartment, and I told him I'd look after them. I'm not the kind of guy that can just ignore this,” Peter stated, keeping his voice calm.
Alex's eyes narrowed, but he didn't press the accusation, even if he didn't seem to believe Peter fully. Not that he blamed him. It sounded doubtful to his own ears.

"Yeah? So? What are you going to do about it?" Alex asked, striking right at the heart of the matter. Peter could tell that he had plenty more questions, whether he cared enough to ask them was another matter entirely, but he asked the one that Peter had been asking himself since he looked at this building.

He had to admit; it was a good one.

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Peter tapped his phone and his foot bounced impatiently as he waited for the page to load. That, and to keep his blood moving when a stray breeze blew snow in his face. He wanted nothing more than to go back inside, except, maybe, doing away with the seasons of winter altogether. Unfortunately, that just wasn't possible because his spot was the only one that had free wifi and a decent view of the orphanage.

From his view of the park, he saw a whole lot of nothing. A lot of kids, more than there should be, enjoying their day off from school or on their beds in utter silence. The caretakers ran around the building, being pulled in a hundred different directions from kids of all ages.

It was...nice? It wasn't anything like he prepared himself for. He was expecting old ladies that hate kids and punished them for any perceived wrong. He was expecting kids that had the life just sucked out of them to the point adoption was their only hope.

Thankfully, the orphanage didn't meet those expectations.

Sure, it had it's fair share of gang members if the clothing was anything to go by, but Peter was coming to realize that was just to be expected now. In New York, joining a gang was a way to live, to thrive even in the worst sort of way. In Gotham, joining a gang was one of the few ways to survive.

Which was why he was currently looking through the orphanage's financial records for any hint of nefarious activity. He found it pretty quickly, but it wasn't anything directly connected to the caretakers. There was some missing money, but he couldn't follow the trail too far with the tech he had. However, he was sure that the money wasn't being pocketed by the caretakers. A quick look at their balances told him that.

The question became where the money was going, but Peter couldn't follow it. At least he couldn't follow it and not get caught. It was difficult enough hacking on an iPhone on free wifi, but hacking in the upper crusts bank accounts? That was a bad idea all around.

“Maybe hey were just exaggerating?” Peter wondered as he read through the numbers. It was possible. They were young, and they were in the orphanage, so they lost their parent. Maybe they did something similar to Peter-2 and just left because they weren't getting the attention they needed?

So many questions, so little time and no ways to get answers.

With a sigh, Peter resolved to ask the kids when they woke up to get a better idea what he should be looking for. As of right now, he wasn't doing anything productive when he didn't have any time to waste. After brushing off the snow that gathered on him, Peter began making his way back to his apartment building.

He needed to start making his web fluid now before it was too late.
Peter's thoughts drifted towards that building as his feet carried him. It had the room that he needed to set up shop, even if it was a bit run down. The rats would be a problem for sure, but he could take care of them easy enough.

But what was he going to do about those kids?

“What are you going to do about those kids,” Leslie said, appearing from nowhere and startling him out of his thoughts enough he nearly jumped a foot in the air. He looked at her, then around him and saw that he was already in Crime Alley. Apparently, the orphanage was closer than he thought, for better or worse.

She must have taken his silence as an answer because she let out a breath and crossed her arms. “They're still asleep for now, but they'll be up soon. You need to figure it out before then,” she continued, pinning that dull stare of hers on him yet again.

“I'm trying-” Peter began, but Leslie was quick to cut him off.

“Trying isn’t good enough. This isn’t something you can try and fail at. This, those kids, if you fuck this up then it's them that pay the price. They look up to you, to Spider-man. You were all they would talk about all night, and they trust Peter Parker because Spider-man told them to,” she said, jabbing a finger in Peter's chest.

Peter tried to stand up tall, but each word was like getting hit by the Hulk.

“I understand you're trying to help,” she said after a moment. “Damn it; I'm happy that you are. There are too many kids like them, and there's no one that cares about them. Those kids either fall into gangs, or they're going to freeze to death this winter,“ Leslie continued, taking a breath. She closed her eyes for a moment before she looked back at Peter with a expression that seemed kind.

“But, Peter, you can't take care of yourself. You haven't showered in days, everything you own came from a garbage can and there no need to even mention your nightly activities. I understand you want to help these kids, but you can't. Maybe,” she said quickly when Peter's expression turned stormy, “maybe you need to start thinking about putting them in the hands of someone who can.”

“Who?” Peter snapped, both out of anger and exhaustion. “You just said that they're not enough people who care and if someone doesn’t then they'll die. I already had to save them from getting murdered! Who's going to take them? The orphanage? They left that place, and if I send them back then they'll just leave again,” Peter shot back, running a hand through his hair so quickly he pulled a few stands.

“Some billionaire isn’t going to swoop in and adopt them because he's just a good man. I can't let them just go off and do their own thing! That building shouldn't even be used as firewood, and there're more rats than I want to count. I…” Peter cut himself off, trying to find the words, trying to get the point across that he was it. He was the one responsible for those kids.

“I...They can stay in my apartment for now. I'll pay their rent,” Peter said, his hand dipping into his pocket and pulled out a hundred before passing it to Leslie. “Do you have another room available,” he asked, and Leslie pressed her lips into a thin line. That wasn't the answer she wanted or expected, but he didn't care.

“I don't. I have the cheapest rent, so my apartments are snatched up pretty quickly,” Leslie said, rubbing her eyes with the tips of her fingers.

“That's fine, I'll figure something out for myself,” Peter said with a nod. He looked away before
Leslie could look at him again. Odds were she was going to have opinions about that, but Peter figured she couldn't initiate that unwanted conversation if he wasn't looking at her. Girls did it to him all the time, and it worked every time.

It was for that reason he saw a man in a business suit walking down Crime Alley. He seemed to realize that was a horrible, terrible dreadful and other -le words Peter couldn't think of at the moment because he looked like he was about to take off running every time someone looking at him. Nevertheless, bad idea or not, he had a mission, and he was going to see it done.

Peter watched in fascination as he took out a sign from underneath his arm and stapled it to a wooden pillar in front of an abandoned building. He glanced at a similar sign, or rather a pile of similar signs, and sighed loudly before he began walking towards another building at a brisk pace.

Peter didn't believe in fate. Not anymore. However, it did seem like a pretty big coincidence that he had a perfect view of the sign and its price tag was less than the money he still had in his pocket.

Peter never considered himself brilliant, not matter how often he was called such. More often than not, he felt like he wasn't smart enough. However, once he saw that three-digit price tag, the idea appeared immediately. All that they just talked about, all the reasons no one would look after a couple of street rats and all the problems of why he couldn't look after them properly just clicked into place with a solution.

“Actually,” Peter said, turning away from Leslie, “I think I just figured it out.”
If you look up, you can see rock bottom

James Gordon was being punished for his many sins. At least that’s what it felt like as he looked down at his plate with a frown on his face. Barbara threw on another scoop of vegetables and hanging off the side was a baked potato. Not only did his potato not have melted marshmallows on it but his steak, the thing he was looking forward to the most since Barbara told him she was making was barely fit to be called as such.

Gordon poked it with a finger and his frown deepened. It wasn't even the tender kind to justify it being the size of the palm of his hand. He looked at his daughter, or rather the much larger steak on her plate, before quickly looking away and meekly eating a piece of broccoli.

“Five packs,” Barbara said, cutting off a piece of her steak...ahh...it was medium rare, just the way he liked it. “In four days, you’ve smoked five packs of cigarettes,” she said in a tone that Gordon could only shift guiltily in his chair.

He couldn't even protest because that number was scarily accurate. 'I have a mole in the department,' he deduced, sipping his water. It had to be someone close enough to him that they could monitor his habit, so that cut down the list of potential suspects a fair bit. There were only a handful of people in the building that spent more than a couple of hours with him...

'Renee,' Gordon figured, cutting into his 'steak.' How Barbara got to his right hand was a mystery in itself, but Barbara had her ways.

“You can have the other one,” Gordon picked up at that, “if you eat all of your vegetables. It won't undo all the damage you did to your lungs, but it'll balance it out.” Gordon didn't think it worked that way, but he knew better than to argue with Barbara. She took after her mother in that regard.

Almost out of reflex, his eyes darted to the empty chair at the table. There was a time that he tried removing it from the table a few years after her death, but he hadn't managed to make it through the meal. The grief got easier to handle after time, but the hole was always there. It didn't help knowing the why and the how she was murdered. Not when he also knew the who.

As if she could see his downward spiraling thoughts, Barbara spoke up, “dad. Why haven't the Justice League come to Gotham?” She asked, snapping his attention up and he looked at her in surprise for a moment before a grin settled itself on his face.

Naturally, Barbara's eyes narrowed, “what's so funny about that?” She questioned with a risen eyebrow, making him chuckle in response.

“It's not often that I know something you don't anymore,” he commented, taking a bite of his steak and keeping an eye on his daughter As expected, a pout of annoyance passed over her face before a cocky grin replaced it a moment later.

“Enjoy it while you can. Who knows when it'll happen again,” Barbara said haughtily, turning her nose up at him for added effect. Gordon just chuckled away as he chewed on his steak, knowing that she would cave long before he did. Seconds turned into a minute and then he heard it. The little squeak in her chair that told him her foot was bouncing.

“It's a bunch of reasons, but the main one is because Batman's keeping them out,” he began, and he didn't miss the surprised look from her. “As for why he's doing that, it's for the same reasons that I'm keeping out the Coast Guard. Well, me and those crooked politicians,” Gordon added after a moment
of thought. It made him feel a little dirty saying that he shared a common goal with the corrupt upper crust.

“Why?” Barbara blurted, “why would Batman keep the Justice League out of Gotham? Don't we kinda need them right now?” She pressed, sounding both a mixture of confused and angry.

“There are a lot of little reasons, but I guess it boils down to that the Justice League would do more harm in the long run than the good they would do in the short term. If, say, the Flash came to Gotham for a minute, and he rounded up every criminal he found; what do you think would happen?” He asked, taking another bite of his steak.

He never believed in giving answers. It had pissed him off something fierce when his dad did it to him, but he wouldn't be half the detective he was now if he hadn't been so used to trying to make connections with almost random details.

“The prisons overflow even more? Some get released on lack of evidence? The ones that he misses-,” Barbara blinked, stopping suddenly and Gordon gave her a proud smile, promoting her to continue. “They would go to ground,” she finished, her brow furrowing.

"Exactly. There's a lot more to it than that, but, even with the Justice Leagues help, we can't get every criminal. When the rest realize what's happening, they'll go to the ground, and they won't leave until they're sure the same thing won't happen again. However, the big names? They'll use that time to build alliances and, worse, plan. That's not taking into consideration the outside influences that'll see half the criminal population disappear in a single night," he explained, wishing he could smoke another cigarette as he thought about it all.

"That sounds like exactly what's happening right now," Barbara commented, and Gordon bobbed his head.

"It is. The only difference is that right now, things are chaotic. Gangs are just fighting each other every night to carve out a larger chunk of territory. Things are too messy for alliances to be made, or even a solid plan to be formed because people don't know who's going to attack them or who's attacking the guys they're about to attack. If they plan, if they're smart, then they won't do it like how it is now. They'll do it in large, organized, motions that'll leave more casualties than the past couple of days combined," Gordon explained, taking another reluctant bite of his vegetables.

"Then the Justice League could do the same. There's no reason that Batman can't accept a little help, especially when people's lives are on the line," Barbara said with anger that would have surprised anyone else.

"Can they? There's a threat that can destroy the world every other week and it would be bad if they stationed another member in the city. Plus, if I were a criminal, I'd wait to wage my gang war until I know the Justice League won't be able to step in. That way, it'd be too late for them to do anything about it.” Gordon continued, his hand twitching to the pack that he had stashed on him.

Barbara let out a soft breath, her tell that his words struck home. “You said it would be bad if they stationed another member? What about Spider-man?”

Gordon shrugged, “that goes a little above my head, but Batman represents something in the Justice League. He a human, an extraordinary one, but just a human. Yet, he's going toe to toe and fighting shoulder to shoulder with beings so powerful that calling them gods wouldn't be too far off the mark. He represents the human race and shows everyone that we can still compete with the best of them.” Gordon said, taking a sip of his water. “Or something,” he added after a moment.
Barbara nodded, likely because she heard the same seminar on the Justice League that he pulled all of that from.

“Spider-man?” She asked, eating her food and chewing it thoughtfully. She didn't seem shocked by what she was hearing, but Barbara did seem like she was having some trouble swallowing it.

“Let me ask you this,” Gordon began, “why does Poison Ivy stay in Gotham when her mission is to protect mother nature?” He asked before picking at his potato.

“I’m guessing it's not because Gotham is one of the leading sources of pollution,” she commented before her brow furrowed as she thought about it. A moment later, he saw that spark in her eye when she figured it out. “It's because of Batman? She wants to take him down. To prove a point?” She ventured before she cocked her head to the side and thought about it some more.

“It’s the same with all of Batman's, any heroes rogues! If they left the city and robbed a bank in some town then they'd get away with it,” she said with a realization that sounded a little too forced for him to believe it. However, he nodded all the same. “But they don't, so it's not really about their primary goal anymore...huh...I guess that’s why step one of all of their plans is getting rid of the Batman.” She mused aloud, faintly amused.

“And how would you know what super villains plan entail?” He asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Because they always shout their plans at the top of their lungs and sometimes they do it on live television,” Barbara deflected easily, earning a conceding nod from him. “So, Batman wants to keep Spider-man out of Gotham because...what? He's afraid that the villains will escalate since there’s an actual superhuman hero in the city? That just seems a little...” She trailed off with a sigh.

“I had thought of that before I asked, but I figured I was wrong,” Barbara admitted before she began cutting up her steak again. “It’s not like he doesn’t already have a team. Batgirl, Robin, and Nightwing they all help him, and you protect Gotham. I understand that the villains would escalate to the threat, but throwing Spider-man out just seems so...just...dumb,” she said at last.

“Yeah, your right. It is, and it's not fair. However, despite what I said earlier, most villains view Batman as just a man. He can't fly, can't soak up bullets, can't shoot laser beams out of his eyes. When you compare him to people like Superman, or Wonder Woman or the Flash, Batman just doesn’t seem all that impressive. Whether they realize it or not, villains don't view him as threatening in comparison and treat him as such. Mind you, they still pull out all the stops when they try to kill him, but they don't go as far as they would if they were trying to kill Superman,” Gordon explained.

“So, with Spider-man entering the scene, things will change. The kids tough and he's stubborn. His reflexes are insane, and he can beat Ravager while he's mocking her. The villains are going to see that video too, and they're going to take it into account when they scheme. Batman's proven that he can operate at the same level as super humans, but he can't dodge bullets like Spider-man can. The villains are going to escalate in the firepower that they bring and they're going to aim in Spider-man's direction. However, Spider-man might not be the one that they hit.” Gordon continued before he let out a sigh and pushed his glasses up with a finger.

“I can't really say for sure it that’s why Batman's so territorial when it comes to Gotham, but I’m sure those reasons play their parts,” he finished, taking a sip of his water before his phone started ringing. It barely finished it second ring before Gordon answered.

“Renee?” Gordon asked, missing Barbara's downcast eyes.

“Sir...we have a situation. Half of the police department is about to be brought up on charges of
“Well...shit,” Gordon said, the words slipping out before he could stop them.

“Good morning, are you Mr. Parker?” A woman in her early thirties asked, glancing around for anyone else. Half out of nerves and half because of Peter's age.

“Yeah, that's me,” Peter said, brushing a hand through his freshly washed hair. Leslie let him use a shower since it was an important meeting and he brought down some of the shampoo from his shopping cart. Peter didn't realize just how filthy he had been until he was clean. Now that he was, he was never going to go more than a day without a shower. Ever. Alien invasion, ancient doomsday cults, or magic assassins be damned.

"Hello, I'm Alice Wake, and I'm with Gotham Real-Estate. Is this the building you were looking at purchasing?” She asked with a well practiced polite smile. It didn't convince him that she was happy to be here because she kept glancing at every sign of movement like she expected some gangster to attack her at any moment. Which, to be fair, wasn't an unreasonable fear.

"Yeah, it is. I saw the sign and I'm looking to buy, but I was wondering the price is a hard line figure or is there some wiggle room?" Peter asked, and he could see Alice's smile become more strained. She let out a laugh that only sounded a little fake before she gestured to the sign hanging on the pillar next to the door.

"It's three hundred dollars for the entire building and the rights to the plot of land it's built on," she said, putting emphasis on the price of the building. Peter nodded at that since that was what the price tag proclaimed, but there was just one little problem with that.

"That building isn't worth three hundred dollars," he said bluntly. "If anything, you should be paying me for taking it off your hands," he added after a moment, following up his blunt jab with a metaphorical right hook.

"Um, sir, I-," Alice began, taken back by that. However, Peter cut her off with a hand and a look.

"Exhibit A," Peter began in a theatrical voice and pushed the door. Two things happened at once; an ungodly screeching could be heard as the rusted hinges moved. That, he intended. What he didn't intend was for the rusted hinges to give out finally and the door to fall into the building with a large crash. They both looked at it for a long second before they looked at each other.

Alice flushed while Peter struggled to beat back a grin.

"Watch your step. The floorboards to the right don't look to safe," Peter said, stepping inside. He already knew where the trouble spots were thanks to his tours of the house. After Peter had decided that he was going to buy it, he pried off the wood cover to the door and searched more thoroughly for structural weaknesses. Once he finished that, he set up shop in the attic of the building since there wasn't a way to get up there at the moment. Well, not counting climbing the walls.

The first thing he did was install that chip he got out of the escrima stick into one of his web shooters. It was a bad fit, so odds were it was going to short out after a single use, but he didn't have the time
or money to replicate it at the moment. It would be harder to replicate it, but it could still be done when he had the time.

He was going to have to find a better place later since it wasn't safe for the kids, but it would do until he refurbished it. Possibly rebuilt it.

"...right," Alice said, following where Peter walked. When she was inside, she turned up her nose and looked around. It didn't take her long to notice the sleeping bags and makeshift campfire. "Have you already moved in?"

"No. That's exhibit B; the building has squatters. That, and I'm pretty sure there's some mold somewhere in the building that gained sentience and is going to make me patient zero," he added and got a distracted laugh from her.

"I see. Well, there certainly is, um, structural decay and squatters are a problem, I don't think I can lower the price even more. Three hundred dollars for an entire building and the land? That's even less than what the current market value for anything in Crime-Park Row," she corrected quickly, making Peter nod again.

He knew that was true. For most buildings, the asking price was closer to a thousand dollars than not. However, he still had one more point to make.

Focusing on his hearing, he made sure the source of the scurrying a squeaks hadn't moved before he walked over and planted his hands on the wall. He regretted it almost immediately, but there was a point to be made.

"Fair enough, but I refute that with exhibit C," without another word, he kicked the wall and his foot broke through the decayed drywall like tissue paper. Peter took two quick steps back and watched as rats poured from the hole like water from a faucet. Alice made a noise that couldn't really be described, but it nearly deafened him, before she scrambled away from the flood of rats. Dozens of them ran out, some veering off from the rest, but most ran towards the doorway and into the streets.

Peter watched as the last rat lagged behind its brethren before he sent Alice a look. She looked like she was trying very hard to figure out a way to spin this, but she was floundering like a fish. Naturally, Peter took that as a sign to walk over to another wall and kick it. A strangled gasp escaped Alice as more rats came out the hole. It wasn't anywhere near as many, but it was more than enough to get the point across.

"So, yeah, the building has a rat problem. Then there's all the wiring problems because of them and rust in the piping. Oh," Peter snapped, "and the roof caved in on the second floor. My guess is on rotted wood," he said and gave Alice a winning smile.

Alice just stared at him for a long moment before she let out a long sigh, "the very lowest I can go is two hundred dollars." She said, rubbing her eyes, not even caring she was smudging her make-up.

Peters smile just got bigger.

"Awesome! That leaves me just enough to buy the building next door. Wanna go check it out too?"

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"Batman...I'm sorry. I can't. I made a vow never to tamper with another beings memories, and it is my greatest shame that I allowed it to happen to Doctor Light...," John Jones paused before sighing softly, "and yourself." He continued, either unable or unwilling to meet Batman's eyes.
Mostly likely because he was glaring at the last Martian.

Batman's fist tightened, and a muscle in his jaw spasmed at the reminder of one of the greatest betrayals he suffered to date. It had been years ago when the Justice League had been in its infancy. When they hadn't settled on the ground rules and what lines they couldn't cross as an organization.

Sue Dibny, the wife of Elongated Man, had been raped and murdered by Doctor Light. He left her in the refrigerator, so Elongated Man would stumble upon her corpse quickly but in a twisted manner that would shock him. He succeeded.

However, Doctor Light was quickly caught and that was half the problem. Tempers were frayed, and emotions clouded the Justice Leagues judgment. It was far from the first time that a loved one had been targeted to get at one of them, at one of the heroes that defended Earth. However, it was the first time that a villain succeeded, especially considering what had been done to her before her death.

There were those that called for his death among the Justice League. Batman...he didn't blame them. Not anymore. He couldn't after Jason.

Others thought he should be confined in a maximum security prison, as all villains are after being captured. That option was quickly shot down when Doctor Light stated he would show every prisoner what he had done to Sue through a mental broadcast. Failing that, he'd tell them using vivid imagery. That stirred the pot even more, so the leaders of the Justice League reached a compromise.

They would go into Doctor Light's brain and remove the memories of Sue's rape and murder...and make sure that he wouldn't do something so heinous again. Zatanna performed the operation, her magic uniquely suited to the task.

And he had been right next to him, subdued by his fellow Justice League members after he tried to help Doctor Light avoid his fate. He wouldn't go unpunished, he would have seen to that, but altering someone's personality crossed a line. Batman understood their reasoning. He even agreed with them to an extent. However, it wasn't the Justice Leagues place to play judge and jury because if they did, then they'd set foot on the slippery slope to becoming the things they fight against.

In the end, he had been right to protest because the magical brain surgery didn't work as intended. Doctor Lights intelligence had been severely hampered, and he couldn't scheme his way out of a wet paper bag. It had taken Batman months to figure out why the sudden change happened because his memories had been wiped of the event.

It had nearly broken the Justice League before it could begin. They ended up stronger for it because that event helped define what they could and couldn't do. Which decisions weren't theirs to make and, if they wanted to call themselves the Justice League, what lines they couldn't cross. However, the effects of that event were still felt today.

Batman didn't trust anyone. To those that betrayed him, he eyed with suspicion and planned their eventual downfall.

Now, here he was. Asking someone to do the same thing he fought against years ago.

"John," Batman...no, Bruce said softly. "Please."

John's eyes snapped up, and he opened his mouth to say something. It took a second for him to find the words after hearing the very last thing he, anyone, ever expected to come from Batman.

"I'm sorry."
It wasn't what he wanted to hear.

"I understand." Batman said, turning around and heading for the door. He felt something shift in their relationship, a distance that hadn't been there before appeared and both doubted it could ever be closed. It was only when the doors slid shut behind Batman did he allow himself to frown.

John Jones had been his one option if he filtered his list of beings with mind wiping abilities, which was disturbingly long, that he could vaguely trust. Now he had to go with the one he couldn't trust but knew she wouldn't tell a soul.

Batman's frown deepened as he tapped on his ear piece and he heard it ring twice before a voice as smooth as silk answered.

"How can I help you, Batman?"

"I need a favor, Zatanna."


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Peter knew he looked ridiculous, but there just wasn't any helping it. His entire bottom half had been scorched away, and unless he wanted to go barefoot, and get frostbite, he needed to cover them with something. What ended up replacing the lower half of his suit was a mixed bag. One one hand, having knee high red wool socks was absolute bliss.

On the other, he looked stupid. Like really stupid.

“The memes are going to be brutal,” Peter mourned, thinking it just might not be worth the payday of taking pictures. People could be as creative as they were cruel on the internet and he did not look forward to surfacing the net to see what they would do to him.

Peter sighed loudly as he swung to the agreed upon spot where he was meeting Catwoman, “at least I'm comfy.” He said, trying to look on the bright side. The sun was just about to dip below the skyline, but they had another twenty minutes or so before the fourth night of the gang war began.

He landed on a transformer and gave the roof top a quick look around and saw that he was alone. Sitting down, he pulled out his freshly charged phone and pulled up a home improvement site and began surfing through it. Peter knew precisely nothing about glazing windows and stuff, but he could figure it out with a little help from Youtube.

What he was more interested in was how much it would cost him and how long it would take. So far, every price tag he saw was making him wince and the estimated installation times were far too long. Buying the building wasn't an impulse buy, but there was a lot more to getting it up and running than he thought about.

“I can go through the dumps for wood...hmmm,” Peter muttered to himself, his legs swinging back and forth as he waited. “I guess I could use my web formula to cut corners,” he figured, already tweaking his formula to make it more stable and last longer. It would be difficult for now because of the quality of the chemicals he had, but it could easily be done. Having his webs dissolve was a design choice, rather than a side effect, to avoid a villain figuring out the formula. If he removed that aspect, he could just spray the boards down and end up with steel-like strength, regardless of the quality of the wood he sprayed down.

That would save a lot of time and a lot of money. If he could just strip the building to its bare bones and sprayed on the...uh...building fluid, then he wouldn't have to tear the entire building down.
Then he started looking at interior bedrooms and stuff, trying to make heads and tails of what they were talking about. As a man, his color pallet were the primary colors you painted with in preschool. All that periwinkle, baby blue, azure stuff was just baffling because he couldn't tell the difference between them. They were just blue to him.

“Gross,” Catwoman said from over his shoulder, appearing from nowhere. “Those drapes with that carpet? Can we say tacky?” she commented, scrolling through the pictures, ignoring Peter's pointed look. “I like the color, though. Royal violet ties the bed and the floors together,” she continued before sending him a cheeky grin.

“Redecorating?” She asked and Peter shrugged, quickly pocketing his phone. The odds of her connecting the dots of him looking at interior decorating to Peter Parker buying and refurbishing a building was nonexistent, but Peter learned the hard way never to underestimate the Parker luck.

“Something like that,” he answered, and he didn't miss Catwoman rolling her eyes at him being vague. “You ready for tonight?” He asked, trying to switch the topic far away from the one connection she could make to his secret identity.

"I am," Catwoman said before she made a show of giving a look over. Even through her tinted goggles, he could see the amusement dancing in her eyes. "You're not, though. Cute socks, by the way," she added and laughed as if she could see him flush beneath his mask.

"Hey, at least my feet are warm," Peter protested as Catwoman flipped off the transformer onto the building's ledge. She held her hands out like she needed to, but it brought his attention to the bag in her hand. "Yeah, until the snow soaks them and your toes fall off," she said with a scoff, making Peter wiggle his toes on reflex. Now that she mentioned it, they did feel a little numb... "really, you've been doing this for like a week and your suit is already trashed. Did you not make another one when you decided to spend your nights punching bad guys?"

"Do you know how expensive spandex is? I need a red and blue pair, so that's like a hundred bucks!” Peter said with a shake of his head. His savings were back in the double digits again, nearly in the single, but it would be money well spent once he got the building back in shape. It did mean that his upgrades were put on hold, but he's gotten this far with just his web shooters so a couple of weeks wouldn't hurt.

Catwoman nodded before she sent him a crooked grin, "poor baby." She teased, "luckily for you; it'd damage my reputation if I let my sidekick swing around in...that," she pointed at him, gesturing to his tattered remains of a costume. Then Catwoman tossed the bag at him, and Peter nearly forgot to catch it.

He was struggling to process her words, his mind already coming to a conclusion but he didn't believe it until he opened the bag up and he saw a white spider emblem looking up at him. Almost shakily, he pulled the costume out of the bag and held it up in front of him. Peter almost missed what Catwoman was saying since he was too busy marveling at the costume.

“Sorry, but the whole red and blue color scheme had to go. Those are Metropolis colors. Black and white is the way to go in Gotham, especially if you want to sneak up on anyone,” Catwoman explained, gesturing to the suit.

It was almost startlingly similar to the symbiote suit, but that was only in color scheme. Most of the suit was a solid black that would make him all but invisible in the shadows. However, down to his hips, to his armpits, directly over and under his shoulders, the white spider stretched its legs. It was
mirrored on the other side.

The only other spots of color where his signature creepily large eyes and the white web pattern on the inside of the hood. The hood seemed like it was mostly for aesthetic purposes but it would definitely help with the snow and cold.

“It doesn’t have the good stuff like high-tech eyepieces or bullet proof carbon fiber whatever, but it's made of sturdier stuff than spandex. I'm not saying it would stop a bullet or anything like that, but it will last a lot longer than three days, that’s for sure. That, and it'll keep you warm,” she added as an afterthought.

“Do you like?” She asked him, placing a hand on her hip and he looked at her, intending to answer, but he just couldn't find the words. His throat was clogged with emotion, and he wouldn't have been able to say anything even if he could find the words that conveyed even a fraction of his gratitude. He managed to tear his eyes away from the suit, but his mouth hung open uselessly.

“What, speechless? I never thought I'd see that happen,” Catwoman teased as she neared him. She opened her mouth to say something else, but she was quickly cut off when Peter hugged her once she entered range. Catwoman went stiff in his arms, and Peter had a very hard time controlling his strength because he wanted to hug her with everything he had.

However, a moment passed before she relaxed and wrapped her arms around his waist with a chuckle. “I didn't peg you for a hugger,” she commented, but Peter didn't have it in him to banter at the moment.

“Thank you,” he forced out in a soft, strangled voice. There was so much more that he wanted to say but that was all he could get out. It didn't matter; he was always better at showing how he felt instead of telling. Catwoman seemed to understand because she gave him a squeeze and rested her chin on his shoulder. She was practically radiating self-satisfaction.

Peter hugged her for a long minute, slowly collecting himself before he said something that was on his mind.

“So...whats with the cat ears on the spider?” He asked, taking a step back and saw a downright predatory smile.

“You clearly haven't been on the forums lately. The SS SpiderCat has set sail, so I figured I'd give the shippers something to talk about. I have to keep my number one spot as the most shipped heroine/villain after all,” she explained, and Peter flushed in response. Shippers wasn't one of the problems he had as Spider-man because of the smear campaign Lonnie L. Luster waged on him.

“I didn't buy this so you could look at it,” Catwoman said, shoving the suit into his chest as she stepped back and set on the transformer behind her. Peter didn't waste a moment doing exactly that and began pulling up his top. Only to pause when he noticed that Catwoman hadn't looked away. In fact, she doing the exact opposite.

“Uhhh...do you mind?” Peter asked, his face turning red beneath his mask.

“Hm? Did you say something? I couldn't hear you over the sound of your eight pack,” she said, smiling a wicked smile. Peter flushed down to his toes as all mental brain waves flat-lined for a moment. She must have known what her words did because Catwoman rolled her eyes before turning around soundlessly.

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Selina turned back around the moment Spider-man did the same, just in time to see him take off his top. She wasn't going to learn his secret identity, that was a line she intended to respect from now on, but the temptation was too great for her to resist peeking. Just a little. Some might condemn her for peeking at a younger man, but she hadn't gotten as far as she was because she cared what others thought. Selina did what she wanted, took what she wanted, and she did it when she wanted.

Though she would admit, he was below her preferred age range, but that was more of a maturity issue. Who would have guessed that teenagers became love-struck when you show a bit of leg? However, Spider-man was mature where it counted and immature where it was fun, so he was put on the list of 'if it happens, it happens.'

Spider-man's old suit hadn't concealed much in the way it had hugged his muscles like a second skin, but now that he was free of its embrace she could see all the little ones that the suit had just covered. It was far from her first time seeing a super human half naked, but she never got tired of seeing their muscles ripple like water every time they moved.

When he freed himself from his top, Selina admired his back. His shoulders were broader than she thought and, just like the front, it was made of nothing but lean muscle with defined lines. He needed a tan, but with every little movement he made, his muscles flexed and bulged as if they were straining to escape the pale flesh confining them.

'He's going to make a woman happy,' Selina thought, tilting her head as Spider-man took off what was left of his pants and those ridiculous socks. Unfortunately, he didn't go commando, but the boxer briefs were tight, so she got a very nice view. Selina wished she had some loose change on her so she could test if she could bounce a dime off it.

Selina turned back around as Spider-man put his new suit on, mostly because her show was over and she wanted to see what it looked like on him in full. Selina twiddled her thumbs, idly imagining the sounds of Spider-man dressing as him undressing before she got the okay to pretend she hadn't been ogling him.

She liked what she saw. The red and blue was a nice homage to Superman, after all, Spider-man had a lot more in common with the boy scout than he did with the Dark Knight, but you needed dark colors to work in Gotham. Dressing up like a target could serve its purposes, but, more often than not, sneaking into a criminals base made up most of the crime fighting in this city.

His eyes were still creepily large, but it fitted the suit. It looked sharp and Spider-man filled it out well. There was just enough white to make the suit stylish, and the web pattern on the inside of the hood outlined his head. All in all, it looked impressive.

“Aw, man! I can feel my toes! This...I love it. Thank you,” he said, and Selina couldn't stop her smile becoming a little softer in nature. Spider-man sounded like a kid on Christmas. Either that, or this was his first time getting a gift and, once she remembered his possible origins, she realized it might be.

But, that was one of the reasons she liked Spider-man. Bruce...Bruce loved this city more than words could say and he would give anything, absolutely everything...and anyone, to keep this city safe...but he really couldn't connect with the people in Gotham.

It wasn't his fault, and it wasn't for lack of trying, but Bruce didn't know what it was like to go hungry. Not the 'I could eat' kind of hunger, but the kind that your stomach curls into itself and says 'eat something. We're dying.' He didn't understand that sometimes your back is against the wall and you have to pick yourself over someone you don't know. He didn't know what it was like to live on these streets and having to do things you're not proud of just to survive.
Bruce couldn't. He grew up with so much money that he could build crazy shit like the Watchtower, or his moon base, or even the endless supply of gadgets and no one was the wiser in Wayne Enterprises. He had his traumas, and he suffered when he underwent his training to become Batman, and he suffered as Batman. However, he hadn't suffered in the same ways as the working class, or even the street rats did.

But Spider-man? He got it. He understood and, unlike so many, he had his meal ticket handed to him through some crazy event that would leave her head spinning. And what did he do? He became a hero in the worst city in America.

And that said a lot about him.

“I'm glad,” Selina said honestly. “Are you ready for tonight now?”

“Er, not yet,” he said, making her raise an eyebrow before he pulled out an ear bud and put it in. Hmm, he had brown hair. It seemed a bit long for her liking, but nothing a good cut can't fix.

“Hey, Spider-man and Catwoman here! Got anything for us Buttlerman?” Selina couldn't stop herself from snickering at that. His immature sense of humor was more endearing than annoying. Spider-man listened for a couple of seconds, nodding all the while, before he said, “Got it. They won't know what hit 'em,” he said before he tapped his ear.

“Ready to roll?” Spider-man asked, and Selina resisted the urge to snort in favor of throwing herself onto his back. She never expected piggyback rides to become a thing, but she wasn't complaining that it had. She even got use to his insane amounts of flips and acrobatics that would turn Dick green with envy.

“Born ready. Let's get this show on the road,” Selina said before the familiar feeling of wind hitting her face started.

With that, the fourth night of the gang war began.
As per tradition

James Gordon glanced at the cigarette in between his fingers and saw it a long trail of ash. He had frowned for a moment before he let out a sigh as he extinguished it in the ash tray, stacking it on top of the dozen others. Gordon hadn't even smoked any of it. He lit it out of reflex and got lost in his thoughts.

Renee hadn't been kidding when she said half of the department was being brought in on charges. They ranged from police brutality to planting evidence to working for the people that their job was to arrest. For better or worse, some of the cops that were incriminated were already dead due to the gang war, but there was more than a few that were being marched out of his building in handcuffs. More than he was comfortable with.

Corruption was a problem that had always plagued Gotham's police. However, Gordon thought he had a handle on it. Gordon knew there were a few that he missed when he was cleaning house, and he was aware that there would be a few that would flip. In a city like Gotham, he'd have to be an idiot not to expect it. He had his inner circle, the ones he knew and trusted, but everyone else?

Well, Batman wasn't the only one with trust issues in this city.

Unfortunately, he had been wrong. Those few crooked cops he tried to weed out weren't a few. They had multiplied and spread and infected until half of his department, and an entire squad of SWAT had to be marched out in handcuffs. They were going to prison, too much evidence for anything else to happen.

The timing couldn't be fucking worse but, in the end, Gordon was almost happy that they were gone. They didn't deserve the badges they wore, and they were worse than the criminals they arrested. He could finally know for certain that the officer he was talking to wasn't going to report his every word to a crime boss or Black Mask. He didn't have to worry that his every operation was going to be compromised before it could even begin because of a leak.

Gordon always saw himself as a realist, but that saying 'everything will go wrong when it's least convenient' had so much truth in it that it hurt. It seemed he need to look into becoming a pessimist so that he wouldn't be blindsided when everything did go wrong because it always did.

Because, not only did he lose half of his department when he needed every single man and woman, but they had found out in the worst possible way. Some punk named Anarky uploaded the evidence to the internet and everyone saw it. Well, not yet but it was well on its way to being one of the most viewed videos. The PR team was tearing their hair out, trying to do damage control but Gordon honestly didn't know why they were trying.

There wasn't any way to keep this quiet, not when it was already being shoved in everyone’s faces. The police shat the bed, and the kid was waving their dirty sheets to anyone that would look. Gordon didn't like it, especially when it painted the entire department in a bad light, but he could hardly complain when he let the house get so dirty again.

His work phone started ringing again, almost like clockwork, but he ignored it in favor of throwing on his coat. He walked out the door, a decision heavy on his mind, and. As expected, Renee fell in step behind.

“What are we going to do, sir,” Renee asked after a moment of silence. The office was practically empty already, the remaining police already in position to act on the information that Batman sent
them. The only sounds now were their footsteps and the low murmuring from the paparazzi outside. Apparently, the war on the streets wasn't enough to stop them from doing his job. While it was still his job.

That wasn't the question she should be asking. It should be, what could they do? The military stepping in would be disastrous. The Justice League stepping in would be disastrous. Him doing nothing would be disastrous. Gordon was backed into a corner, but if he failed it wouldn't be him that paid the price. It would be the citizens of Gotham.

“I need to have a talk with Batman,” Gordon said in a grave tone, feeling a decade older than he was.

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"I have it all. For hand-helds', I have everything from revolvers to nine millimeters to the good, trusty, desert eagle. Shotguns too, you want a sawed off? I have ‘em. Pump action? I got it. Tactical grade military shit that will knock off your shoulder with a never ending barrel drum? I have that,” the gun dealer said with enthusiasm, clapping his hands together as a cocky smile spread from ear to ear. He stood in front of a van, though the three gang leaders could still see all the hardware inside.

“"You want rifles? Take your pick! Single shot bolt actions, semi-automatics or fully automatic. I have it all man, and I guarantee that it's all top of the line quality.” The gun dealer said, picking up weapons of each class and throwing them at the gangsters in front of him.

The three men gave the weapons a look over, aiming them and fiddling with the magazines and pulling the slots. They seemed impressed, sharing looks, which made the gun dealer grin smile grow.

"This is a once and a lifetime opportunity! These are military grade weapons, whole goddamn leagues ahead of the peashooter your competition has! Think about it guys, the big shots of Gotham are behind bars, their territory is just begging to be snatched up," he said, earning nods from the gangsters. That was why they were here, but hearing it said got their blood moving.

"And you guys are smart. That's why you're here! You see the opportunity; you know that you aren’t the only ones who see it, so you came to me to buy an unholy amount of hardware to show those upstart pricks that you're the new bosses of Gotham; am I right or am I right?" The gun dealer cheered, earning more enthusiastic nods from the gangsters. They gripped their weapons tighter, wanting to give them a try.

"But before all of that, before your ascension to the tippy-top of the food chain, you have to buy your ticket," he said, pulling the weapons from the gangster's hands. They didn't seem to like that.

"How much we talkin'," one asked, gesturing for one of his lackeys to step forward.

"Depends on what you want," the gun dealer said, holding his hand out wide.

The three gangsters traded looks before turning back to the gun dealer, "all of it." They said at once.

"Hmmm, that should tally up to about-" the gun dealer began, but he never got to announce his price. A web covered his mouth before six other webs, one for each gangster and their muscle, attached themselves to their backs before pulling them upwards. All of them let surprised shouts, going for the weapons they carried in case the deal went south, but as they rose to the rafter a hand wrenched the weapons from their hands.

After webbing the guns together, Peter dropped down to the dust covered floor with a plum of smoke, swinging the guns attached to the web like a yo-yo. The gun dealer fell backward, trying to
pull the sticky mask off his face before he suffocated, and looked at Spider-man with fearful eyes.

“Okay, I tried coming up with a witty one-liner; something about guns and shooting your eye out, but, eh, I couldn't make it work,” Peter explained as he lifted the man to his feet, his hands still attached to his face, with one arm. “Now, I'm going to undo that new look you have going on for you, and if the first words I hear aren't where you got these shiny new guns, I'll be very disappointed.” The man nodded his head yes so fast that Peter worried that he might whiplash.

A quick spurt of dissolver later and the gun dealer was gasping for breath. Spider-man let him get a few mouthfuls before he gave him a playful pat on the cheek, reminding him that he wasn't alone.

“I don't know,” the gun dealer exclaimed, sucking down gulps of air. Even though he was aware that the gun dealer couldn't see it, Peter rose an eyebrow in disbelief.

“You don't know? I doubt that a van full of guns just fell from the sky into your lap,” he sarcastically. “Though, this is Gotham, so maybe that is a possibility,” he added with a shrug. It seemed like this city was actively trying to tear itself apart so maybe it wasn't so crazy.

“No! No! I-I was some two-bit dealer in Crime Alley, nothing serious! Just some pot, you know? I don't mess with that heavy shit,” the gun dealer quickly forced out and Peter just stared at him for a moment before he very slowly turned his head to look at a van full of guns.

Boxes upon boxes of ammo and enough high powered guns to give Frank Castle a wet dream.

Then, just as slowly, he looked back at the gun dealer. As if he could see his disbelieving look, the gun dealer let out a shaky laugh.

“Yeah, I, uh...look, man, I was dealing some pot when some asshole in a suit came up to me. Asked me if I wanted to make some real money instead of a couple of bucks. I said yeah, 'cuz I figured why not and he showed me the van! I asked him what the deal was and he told me just to sell the guns! Didn’t matter to who or for how much, just that I sold them and I got to keep half the profits,” the gun dealer explained and Peter felt a sinking feeling form in his gut.

If he was telling the truth, and his heartbeat told Peter that he was, then making money wasn’t the goal of the people who gave him the van. It would cost too much for no payoff unless they were going to kill the guy afterward but, even then, there were a lot easier methods of selling illegal weapons. They were jumping through unnecessary hoops and selling at a loss, especially considering that one of these guns could have been sold for what the three gangsters could afford put together.

No, money wasn't the goal.

'They want to make the gang war worse?’ Peter deduced, his brain furiously thinking of what they, whoever they were, could hope to achieve. Most people were stupid. Some people were dangerous. Put a gun in their hand, and then they're both. To themselves and others.

Gun like these would...there were grenades and heavy duty machine guns. Half of the guns he couldn't even recognize, but they looked like they could do some serious damage. He saw bullets bigger than his fingers in a box, and he didn't even want to know what fired them. It was bad enough with a bunch of criminals shooting at each other with pistols and the occasional assault rifle. Guns like these would turn the city from a war zone into a blood bath.

“It could be the bay water, but something smells fishy about this. Somebody's scheming something~,” Catwoman said in a sing-song tone as she pulled out a pair of fuzzy handcuffs and began slapping them on one of the criminals she took down.
Peter nodded, “any idea who?” He asked, knowing that Catwoman would know the criminal underworld in Gotham better than he ever could. Catwoman shrugged as she pulled out another pair of handcuffs from her seemingly endless pouch on her belt.

“No, but they want to pour gas on the already burning city. This doesn't fit the M.O of anyone that I know, well,” she paused before inclining her head at him. “Anyone that's out of Arkham, but I know that a lot of people don't want the gang war to end. We're all busy with the loud stuff, so the quiet white collar criminals are just raking it in since the pressure is off of them. It could be one of them, or it could be a big player from out of town moving in.”

“And they're using the guns to soften the city up?” Peter guessed, trying to puzzle out what was the end goal of this plan. It was difficult because it wasn't one of his usual villains plotting. After fighting against them for so much time, he could easily slip into their shoes and think of their goals, but he didn't even know who's shoes he was trying to put on.

“As good of a guess as any,” Catwoman said with another shrug. That’s what she said, but a good guess wasn’t what they needed. They needed answers, and they needed them now. They came by this gun deal purely by chance, if they had missed-

“Are you the only one?” Peter asked suddenly, turning his attention back to the gun dealer, who was trying his best to disappear. A look of panic passed over his sunken in features before he shrugged almost apologetically with twinges of fear. He had forgotten how intimidating the black and white suit was because the guy was tensing up, expecting to get hit. Peter couldn't say he was enthused with the color scheme, but he didn't feel cold at all. Well, he could, but it didn't cut through him like it did before. What the suit was made of was a mystery he was going to solve because it was awesome. And it explained how Catwoman could have most of her cleavage exposed and not be freezing all of the time.

“I don't know...? Look, man, I'm sorry, but I didn't ask any questions. I just took the keys and put out some feelers for a buyer. I wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth, you know?” He said, shifting uneasily underneath his featureless gaze, only his own nervous expression looking right back at him.

Peter was frowning beneath his mask, and he went to tap on his ear bud to inform Buttlerman what was happening, but when he did he saw something out of the corner of his eye. Shining like a beacon in the dark night, a bat emblem was splayed out on the clouds heavy with snow.

“I know you're thinking that you'll just stop by, have a quick chat then get right back out there but that's not how Batman does things. You'll go there, one of you will start a pissing contest, and then you'll fight. That's how it always goes down with you heroes,” Catwoman explained in a knowing tone.

“It'll be all right,” Peter dismissed, knowing better than to argue that they wouldn't fight. It seemed to be some kind of tradition for superheroes. It always happened in New York, like with Daredevil and Luke Cage, so he wasn't going to lie and say it couldn't happen. It also didn't seem promising when Catwoman described Batman as a control freak.

“He just wants to make sure I'm not a super villain or anything. And it's not like he’s going to fight me where there's so much going on, right?” Peter said though it came out more like a question. Catwoman huffed at that, and he didn't need to see her to know that she rolled her eyes.

“Plus, half of the cops in the city were just canned. Things were bad enough before, now we have fewer cops on the streets and the criminals are stepping up their armory,” Peter said, picking up one of the guns scattered on the floor. He gave it a quick look over before he threw it into the van with all
“It’s a bad idea,” Catwoman warned again, cocking her hip. “By all means, go, but I’m reserving the right to say that I told you so when Batman lets you go.” Well, when she said it like that, it almost sounded like a bad idea.

“Fine, but don’t rub my face in it. That’s just rude,” Peter said with a sigh, not knowing if she was right. Who was he kidding? She totally was, but it needed to be done anyway. It was bad manners to operate in a heroes city without introducing yourself after so much time.

"Your funeral. Go ahead and hand over the earbud and I'll let Buttlerman know about the guns. Enjoy your 'talk' with Batman," Catwoman said, throwing up air quotes around talk. Peter frowned before he pulled out the ear bud and tossed it over. He didn't argue in favor for swinging away towards the bat signal because he didn't have a leg to stand on.

“This is going to suck.”

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“You got here fast,” Gordon commented, hearing the light ruffling of Batman’s cape. It had been purely intentional of course. Both to make sure he stayed sharp and because Gordon had nearly put a bullet in Batman’s head once when he just appeared behind him without any warning, as he does.

“I was already on my way,” Batman said, standing next to the bat signal. The stray light from the side of the flood light only illuminated a part of his head and chest, leaving the rest of him shrouded in darkness. That got Gordon to nod, figuring that had to be true as he pulled out his pack of cigarettes, only to scowl when he saw it was empty.

“The house got dirty again,” Batman said, starting the conversation that Gordon called him out for. A frown etched itself into Gordon's features before he let out a long, exhausted sigh as he pushed up his glasses to rub his bloodshot eyes.

“Try filthy. I'm down to half of my number of people, and some of them are injured. I have reinforcements coming in from Metropolis and Central city, but they're not going to be ready for this. SWAT took a hit too; I'm down a team because they were moonlighting as a hit squad for drug lords and another because of injuries,” Gordon said, the words just falling out of his mouth and each one made him feel older and older.

“And you're under investigation,” Batman added, making Gordon sigh. They both knew that report would come back squeaky clean on him, but half of the police department had been arrested on numerous charges. This was the exact same reason that he had been made Police Commissioner over a decade ago.

“Yeah. That too,” Gordon agreed. “I'm going to cut to the chase since we both have a lot to do. Can you handle this with what the police have left to offer?”

“No,” Batman replied instantly. Every member of the Bat family was highly trained and well equipped, but they just lacked the numbers to fully cover a city like Gotham. It was just too big with too much going on.

“And if you coordinated with Spider-man and *huff* Catwoman?” Gordon asked, and Batman frowned ever so slightly.

“We have, to a degree. Hmph, Buttlerman has been focusing them on medium priority crimes, but they don't have a patrol,” Batman added, and Gordon opened his mouth, wanting to know who in
the hell Butelman was, but he thought better of it. There was a time for a question like that and time wasn't something they had.

“And if you worked something out? I don't know the kid, but he seemed too earnest to be an agent for whatever ancient secret society that you've been fighting,” Gordon said with confidence, making Batman's frown deepen.

“Possibly. Spider-man has talent, but he's reckless. He's actively targeting high profile criminals when he's only been active for a few days. His entire fighting style is...messy. Without his enhanced reflexes or fighting against someone who has similar reflexes, he would lose every time.”

“He stopped the Joker,” Gordon pointed out.

“A fluke. Joker didn't know of him and hadn't accounted for his appearance or abilities. If he had then, Spider-man would have died,” Batman rebuked bluntly. “Now Spider-man's a known entity, and he's going to be treated as such. If he keeps aiming for super villains, his career will be short-lived,” Batman declared, and Gordon narrowed his eyes lightly. That seemed a little harsh, but he would never claim to know more about superpowers than Batman.

“Umm, ouch,” said a third voice off to the side. Gordon looked over and saw it was Spider-man. His arms were crossed, and everything about his posture screamed that he was very much annoyed with Batman's assessment of him.

“Didn't your parent every tell you that it's rude to talk about people behind their backs?” Spider-man questioned and uncrossed his arms when Batman turned to face him.

“I'm more than willing to tell you to your face,” Batman responded instantly, and Peter's eyes narrowed.

“You...that was banter,” Peter said, sounding surprised. “I figured you'd do the whole 'I'm Batman, and I brood in dark corners' thing. Huh...I guess not all surprises are bad,” he said, sounding amused. The guy did strike him as the sullen type, more so than he had been expecting.

There was only one clear picture of Batman in existence. It was just over a decade ago when the Justice League had just been formed, and the founding members shook hands with the leaders of the world. He was standing next to the president of the United States, dwarfing her, and Batman all but glared into the camera. There were other pictures, but they were a lot like the ones of Spider-man before Peter started taking selfies. They were blurs; shadow figures obscured in the darkness that you weren't sure if anything was actually there.

That picture hadn't prepared Peter for seeing him in the flesh.

They were nearly the same height, with Batman only being an inch taller, or two if you counted his ear things, but he seemed larger. He was decked out in black and gray, with an odd splash of yellow around the bat emblem displayed across his chest and his utility belt. However, Batman had an aura of power and authority that Peter just lacked and he'd be lying if he said he wasn't intimidated. Dark and foreboding described the Dark Knight perfectly.

His most notable feature, however, was his glare. Which was aimed directly at him.

“Why are you here,” Batman demanded.

“Because you sent Nightwing after me so we could have a chat. You don't strike me as the giving up type, so I'd figure I'd come to you before you sent the whole Bat-family after me.” Peter replied, doing his best to hide that he was tensed and ready to fight. Diplomacy didn't seem like this guy's
Batman stared at him for a long moment, as if he was trying to look through him and see his every thought. Right when Peter was going to say something to break the silence, Batman spoke.

“Nightwing is vouching for you,” Batman said gruffly, surprising Peter with that fact. Last he checked, Nightwing had bugged him because he hadn't trusted him. “I don't trust you. You're an unknown in a time of crisis and Gotham can't afford for me to give you the benefit of the doubt. However, this can be rectified,” Batman said with a pause. Peter thought he saw his sigh, but he honestly wasn't sure. Batman's body language never shifted away from ‘ready to fight,’ and any emotion in his voice was masked by the fact it sounded like gravel.

“Reveal your secret identity to me, and after I perform a background check and I'm certain that you don't have criminal ties, I will do the same for you. Then you will join my team and work with us in a more effective manner than you have. You'll have access to significantly better technology, and I can train you on how to use your superhuman abilities.” Batman said, and Peter was left speechless. That...he hadn't expected that.

“No,” Peter heard himself say. His secret identity...that was off limits. He almost had a panic attack when Leslie found out, and it was his greatest fear for damn good reason. Maybe Peter would have gone with the deal since he didn't have anything to hide and it would be the easiest way to clear up any misunderstandings. Maybe he would have because he'd get significantly better tech and the prospect of learning how to fight properly was appealing. Maybe he would have if it wasn't for what happened...what happened to Gwen.

Peter felt his heart throb painfully against his ribs but with practiced ease, he swallowed his agony. Gwen was killed because she knew his secret identity and because she could bring herself to stay back. It wasn't the same Batman was a trained superhero, and he could take care of himself, but that didn't mean anything to the fear. All it cared about was the fact that Gwen was killed—...murdered because she knew who he was.

No one could know who he was beneath this mask. For their own good.

“My secret identity is off limits. Could we work something else out? I'm not too big on teams, but I'll join if it's for the best,” he said, knowing it was pointless when he saw Batman's eyes narrow.

“No. Not when all of Penguins assets were liquefied and vanished, you're in a new suit, and you refuse to reveal yourself. Definitely not when it's far too convenient that you appear right after the Joker's botched scheme. I want to believe that you are who you say you are and Gotham...needs more heroes, but I can't risk it. Not with so much on the line.” Batman said, and Peter straightened out, taking a bracing breath because he knew what was about to be said.

“I'm taking you in.”

Peter hastily dodged the batarangs that were thrown his way, ducking and flipping over two of them while the third lagged behind. As he landed on his feet, prepared to dodge the third one, it exploded in a flash of light.

Peter's eyes stung behind the flash bang, the reflective lenses not doing enough to shield him from the blast completely. His eyes watered and for a moment, Peter clenched them shut to get rid of the white haze. In that instant, his spidey-sense tingled sharply, warning him of danger that was coming to the left.
Thinking that it had to be another batarang since Batman was across the building, so he leaned out of the way. He felt the wind pass him by and he realized that his spidey-sense was still tingling a moment too late when something struck him across the face. Peter felt his teeth rattle and blood was quick to fill his mouth as his head was snapped to the side. It felt like he was punched by the Lizard.

Peter was knocked to the side from the force of the blow, but he was far from out. He lashed out with a roundhouse kick that hit something solid. When he felt something grab his ankle, Peter knew it was Batman and kicked with his free foot. Peter heard a grunt as his foot made contact with the Dark Knight's chest, but the grip around his ankle tightened as a result.

Batman yanked forward before he planted a fist in Peter's stomach, making him grunt at the wind was knocked out of him before silencing him with a punch to the cheek. For a brief moment, Batman thought he was already unconscious, but Peter caught himself with a hand and swung himself forward, hitting him behind the knees and involuntarily Batman leaned back before Peter did a quick 180 with his hands and slammed a heel into the Dark Knights stomach. At least he would have if he hadn't anticipated the move and blocked it with his forearms, though the blow carried enough force that Batman slammed into the ground.

Trying to make a quick recovery, Peter leaped away as Batman rolled to put some distance between them. Blinking rapidly, Peter cleared his vision and glared at Batman. He was fighting smart. Far smarter than he anticipated. Since he knew that he had faster reflexes, Batman was hindering his senses and attacking in ways that were hard to dodge or pinned him into a trap so he had to pick his hits.

"So, wait, you're going to take me in when you're still letting Catwoman out and about? She's the one that stole the money! I didn't know about it," he exclaimed, rubbing his stomach, knowing there was going to be a fist shaped bruise in the morning. He suspected it when Catwoman went MIA during the fight with Penguin and Ravager, but he never heard anything about it after that and he had more pressing issues to deal with.

"A possibility. Even a likely one. However, I know Catwoman. I know her motivations, her connections and the lines she won't cross," Batman responded as he threw down a pellet at Peter's feet and a cloud of smoke enveloped him.

Peter coughed, trying to avoid inhaling the smoke before he was forced to duck under a kick. His spidey-sense was blaring, warning him of danger on both the right and left. He jumped into the air and spun, avoiding the two batarangs that flanked him. However, he wasn't in a position to dodge the kick to the face that hit him.

Peter grunted in pain, but he grabbed onto the Dark Knights ankle as he had done to Peter seconds ago. However, Batman spun and tried to kick Peter in the face again, but Peter wasn't having it. He ducked, and when the foot sailed overhead, he threw the leg up and flipped Batman carelessly.

Batman grunted as he felt his leg stretch, pulling a muscle at least, before he regained his balance in mid-air and landed on his feet. He noticed he fell well outside the smoke cloud. Peter was clearly stronger than he looked.

"I like Catwoman too, but she is an unapologetic thief. Is this sexism? Am I being discriminated against?" Peter questioned from within the smoke. He tenderly checked his new bumps and bruises because this guy did not hit like a normal human. He's had worse, but Batman gave him more than love-taps.

"No. You're a potential threat to Gotham. Both for her good, and your own, you need to be brought in," Batman stated, and Peters annoyance grew into anger.
"I'm not asking for your permission," Peter shot back, frustration leaking into his voice.

"Neither was I," Batman declared before deftly dodging two strands of webs that nearly hit him in the chest. Peter jumped from the smoke and towards Batman. The Dark Knight ducked under a kick to his head, and as he rose, he threw an uppercut but Peter leaned his head back, and it missed by an inch. He retaliated by throwing a knee, but Batman jumped backward, putting some distance between them. However, as he did so, Peter tried to web him to stop him from getting away. Batman dodged the web, but the bottom of his cape was caught.

He went to cut the strand with the blades on his gauntlets, but Peter tugged the strand.

"This is why I don't have a cape," Peter yelled as Batman did a backflip to stop his head being pulled backward as Peter pulled up. However, when he landed, his cape was pulled over his face, and Peter didn't waste the opportunity.

He punched the Dark Knight in the stomach and landed a few hits in his ribs. He pulled his punches, but Batman let out grunts with every solid hit. He lashed out with a fist, a blind strike to push Peter away, or so he thought, but Batman cut the strand of webbing. Not wanting for Batman to recover, he grabbed the hand by the wrist and kicked Batman in the stomach, lifting him off the ground. However, he was knocked backward when he relaxed his hand, and it slipped out of the gauntlet.

Batman rolled to his feet, throwing his cape back over his head and settling into his combat stance. The punched didn't do too much damage thanks to his armor, but that kick was going to leave a mark. Spider-man was certainly pulling his punches. That was made abundantly clear.

"I buy you a can of soda, and this is how you repay me? I'm totally trustworthy!" Peter said, sounding betrayed. He threw the gauntlet to the side, far out of reach.

"I didn't drink the root beer," Batman informed and for whatever reason, that pissed Peter off. Maybe it was because he was dirt broke and lived in a rundown studio apartment on the wrong side of town but the idea that Batman didn't drink the beverage that he spent his limited money on just got to him.

"You are such a dick! I paid like a buck fifty on that! That could have gone to my rent, you jerk," Peter snapped at him with surprising anger.

Batman frowned at the outburst but didn't comment. Instead, his hand dipped to his utility belt, but Peter charged him, trying to stop him from whatever useful tool that he had.

Peter jabbed at his face, but Batman leaned back as he countered with an uppercut that Peter barely dodged. However, he couldn't dodge when Batman grabbed his wrist and elbowed him in the diaphragm, knocking all the breath Peter had out of him. Peter gritted his teeth as he grabbed Batman's wrist and yanked his hand off before he attached a web to his exposed hand. Then Peter pressed down on his web activators twice, and Batman let out a shocked scream as his body was flooded with ten thousand volts of electricity, using his one shot secret weapon that he was hoping he wouldn't have to use yet. Peter heard a light sizzling sound as the battery he installed in his web shooter shorted out, rendering it useless but he ignored it for now.

Seizing the brief window, Peter drew back and attached two webs to the bat-signal behind him as he planted his feet against Batman's chest. With that, he pulled on his webs and drug Batman with him before flipping sharply, so Batman was between his feet and the signal.

Batman, knowing what Peter was intending, slashed one web with his gauntlet but he lacked a way to do so with the other. He slammed into the bat signal, destroying the glass and the light bulb, making the darkness intensify, and Batman let out a low groan.
Peter flipped off him and didn't waste a moment. He webbed Batman to the signal, covering his entire body with the webbing that was strong as steel. When Batman was in a cocoon, only then did he stop.

Taking a few deep breaths, glad it was finally over so he could get air back in his lungs, Peter hunched over. “Ohh man, that's going to be tender tomorrow,” he observed, clutching his stomach. When he straightened out, he saw Batman looking at him with piercing eyes.

“Now that you're not in a position to be a total asshole, I'm going to drop some facts. Numero uno; you aren't the only one who cares about this city you colossal asshat. Numero dos; I get that you're looking out for Gotham, but you can't stop me from going out and busting bad guys. Do you comprende you brooding jerkface?” Peter spat out, still annoyed about the whole situation. And the fact he didn't drink the root beer. One more than the other.

"Why do you think you deserve to be the one to protect them? You're not trained; you're impulsive and quick to anger...Gotham will chew you up and spit you out. Depends on who gets their hands on you, your fate could be worse. Much worse." Batman said in a grave tone, but Peter heard an undertone of...something. His voice was still gruff, but it lacked that judging anger that he expected.

A muscle twitched in Peters jaw, "I know." He stated, and Batman frowned in response.

"And you insist on doing this? Why?" He demanded to know, his voice carrying an authoritative edge to it.

"Because...I have power, and with that power comes great responsibility," Peter answered in a heavy tone, but Batman was shaking his head.

"I know your quote. That's not what I'm asking," Batman said, telling Peter what he already knew.

Peter paused, considering if he should tell him. It would be a gesture of trust, one that Batman clearly needed but he...he never actually told anyone why he became Spider-man. Gwen knew. She was smart enough to guess, but he never told her. Never got the chance to...if he ever would. Aunt May didn’t know his secret identity, so she couldn't know. Harry hadn't cared why, only that he was.

"I...got these powers in a freak accident...and, back then, I didn't deserve them. I thought it was me getting my dues for all the shit the world threw my way. I used them to make money so I could buy a car that to impress a girl, I used them to humiliate my bully, I..." Peter trailed off, forcing himself to begin. He had been an idiot. A stupid, blind, whining idiot that couldn't see how much he already had. Instead, he only cried and moaned over what he didn't have.

"I started fighting for money, and one day a manager cheated me. The prize for surviving in a cage match with some guy was three thousand dollars, but he only gave me three hundred. I wasn't supposed to beat him, so I technically didn't fulfill the requirements for the full reward, is what he said. I needed...I thought I needed that money, but the manager just said it wasn't his problem. I was pissed. So, when a thief stole the ticket box and ran right past me, I did nothing. I even said it wasn't my problem when he demanded why I didn't do anything to stop the guy," Peter trailed off, looking away from Batman. He gazed at the city and tried to control his voice.

"My...guardian was out looking for me. I told him I was going to the library and I would be back later...I think he knew I was lying, knew something was going on. It was before I left that he told me about the responsibility that comes with power...so, he was out in the city looking for me. It was then that he saw a man trying to steal a car...he wasn't the type of guy that could ignore that. It didn't matter if the guy was half his age and twice as big. He tried to stop him...and he was shot. He died." Peter's voice cracked at the last part, but he tried to disguise it as a cough.
"The thing is, that thief? It was the same guy I let get away. Crazy right? If I had been less of a self-absorbed teenager, the man I respected and loved most would still be alive. I..." Peter wished he could take off his mask to run his stinging eyes.

"It's my fault. I had the power, I had the opportunity, I had every chance in the world to stop it from happening...but I didn't. And he's dead because of it..." Peter trailed off and let out a breath, feeling a weight off his shoulders. It felt good, finally voicing his guilt. He wasn't looking for reassurance or pity. He just wanted others to know what he had done.

"So, I can't just stop. I can't ever stop. I have power, and I have to respect the responsibility that comes with it. Because if I stand by and do nothing while something bad happens then whatever bad thing that happens is my fault. I have to. Not because it's a good choice, or even because it's the right thing to do. It's my responsibility," Peter explained, steel entering his voice as he squared his shoulders.

He was Spider-man. No matter how much it hurt, no matter how much it cost him...he would never turn his back on his responsibility.

"Does that-AHHH!" Peter screamed as he turned around, coming face-to-emblem of Batman. He stepped backward, not expecting that in the slightest, and he tripped over the railing of the building. He swung his arms forward, trying to pull himself forward but he failed. Peter started to adhesive himself to the ground when Batman suddenly grabbed his wrist and pulled him forward.

Peter straightened himself and looked directly up at Batman, who stared down at him with a look that could cut diamonds, even with only the bottom half of his face showing.

"...are you mad about the asshat comment?" Peter asked, trying not to show how intimidated he suddenly felt. The guy was a freakin' giant. A scary giant. "Because I meant it. And the jerkface thing too. And I'm still upset that you didn't drink the root beer," Peter began to ramble but trailed off when Batman let out a breath like he had been counting to ten.

Suddenly, Batman pulled his hand forward, so his palm was facing upwards and dropped something into it. Peter gave it a look and saw it was an emergency beacon in the shape of a bat. He looked up at Batman, a puzzled expression hidden beneath his mask.

"You obey my rules, and you stick to the patrol that I lay out for you. When you see a villain on the list that Butlerman provides for you, you call me and withdraw. When I tell you to withdraw from a situation, you withdraw. You do everything that I say, and I will let you operate in Gotham City," Batman stated, going to move his arm away.

"Nope," Peter said, grabbing Batman's hand and dropping the beacon back into his hand. "For one, I know better than to let you put a tracker on me now. And two, I told you I can't just ignore someone that needs my help. I'll stick to the patrol, though. Mostly."

"You're going to get yourself killed," Batman declared, and Peter grinned in response.

"So are you," he shot back, and he swore he saw a ghost of a smile on Batman's face before it returned to its default scowl. He then pressed the beacon back into Peter's hand. He didn't say anything, but he knew that Peter would disable the tracker until he activated it. However, that wasn't the purpose of it anymore.

He turned his back to Peter and faced Gordon, who had watched the fight with dull annoyance, "call in the reinforcements. I'll tell the rest of my team," Batman said as he walked to the police commissioner. Gordon nodded, a look of acceptance on his face before Batman turned to the ledge.
Without another word to either of them, he jumped off the edge.

Peter jumped across the building in one leap, shocked by the action. However, when he looked over the edge, instead of seeing a bat cake on the sidewalk, he saw no trace of the bat-themed hero.

“He does that a lot. You get use to it,” Gordon said as he lite another cigarette. “Now, are you going to pay for the light you just broke?” He questioned sending Peter a flat look.

Peter managed to hold his gaze for all of five seconds before he cupped his ear. “Sorry, I couldn't hear you over the sound of innocents needing my help,” he said before he jumped off the building as well, the sound of Gordon chuckling in his ears over the rushing wind.
Kara was beginning to understand why her cousin was so reluctant to allow her anywhere near Gotham City. Why he tried to keep her cooped up in Smallville and smother her with overprotectiveness. It still annoyed her, but she was beginning to understand.

Gotham was...filthy. Compared to Metropolis, the city of tomorrow, Gotham City was a pile of hot garbage. Trash littered the streets, broken glass, boarded up windows, bullet holes in buildings, dried blood on the pavement, graffiti marking a gangs turf but it was illegible due to hundreds of layers. In the street she walked down, taking in her surroundings, the lights flickered, the few cars on the road looked like they hadn't moved in a decade or were stripped for parts until only the frame remained.

The crime...dear lord, the crime.

'I shouldn't have made that promise,' Kara thought to herself, gripping her handbag a little tighter. Now that she was in the city, walking its streets when the sun was down, she felt why Gotham was known as 'The Crime Capital Of America,' all capital letters. After a few years on earth, one of the first things she learned was how to reduce most sounds into white noise or she would drive herself insane by hearing billions of heartbeats across the world. Her hearing was almost as good as Kal-El's, but he had a few decades on her when it came to being exposed to the yellow sun.

However, even reducing as much as she could to the point she could barely hear anything happening a few blocks over, it was disturbing just how much crime was going on around her...and heartbreaking hearing how scared people were.

It hurt seeing a city like this and knowing that she couldn't help. If not because of the promise that she made to Barbara, but because of the consequences from the Dark Knight himself. No one could hold a grudge quite like Batman and she heard horror stories about those that broke Batman's number one rule; don't work in Gotham without his say so.

However, that didn't mean she couldn't work around that rule.

Which was how she found herself walking in the most infamous alleyway in the most infamous city in America. Crime Alley. There wasn't a crime under the sun that this alleyway hadn't seen and odds were, it's seen all the ones that happened in the dark as well.

Barbara made her promise not to use her powers, and she wouldn't...but, if some thug tried to punch her and broke his hand, then that was hardly her fault, now was it?

Grinning to herself, she heard someone walk behind her. She glanced over her shoulder and saw a man dressed like a typical thug with a smile playing at his lips that made Kara feel uncomfortable. She recognized it, she even expected it. However, despite all her superpowers, there was something unnerving about being eyed up like she was a piece of meat.

Kara heard three others come out of the shadows as she looked over her shoulders. Turning back, she gave them an utterly unimpressed look. They seemed to find that amusing, thinking that she was just some blonde bimbo that was acting tough.

Soon enough they would learn.

"Hey there girly, was a beauty like you doing in a place like this at this time of night?" The one in the center asked, putting his hands in his jacket pockets as he stepped forward. As he did so, Kara heard a click. It was faint, but she heard loud and clear. A quick use of X-ray vision and she saw it
was a taser.

"Same reason why they always come here. She wants to take a ride on the wild side," one of his lackeys said, seemingly pleased with his wit and where he thought this was leading. Kara resisted the urge to sneer; they weren't making any secret of their intentions.

"That so? You up for some fun with us?" The leader asked, taking another step forward and Kara got a better look at his face. What she saw surprised her. Kara expected to see lust in his eyes, like she saw in the other three, but instead she saw...greed. He was looking at her like she was a paycheck.

"No," Kara said, folding her arms over her chest. She glowered at the man, letting him know that his advances were unwelcome.

Undeterred, the thug took another step forward, so he was in striking distance. "Fair enough. What we had planned wasn't going to be fun for you anyway," he said as he yanked the taser out of his pocket. Kara watched the movement as if it was happening in slow motion.

Almost lazily, she watched it crackle to life as he lunged at her. She stared unconcerned as the taser came closer and closer.

"You're going to be worth a pretty penny," the thug said as the taser made contact. Kara felt electricity flow through her faintly, but that could have been a trick of the mind she doubted that any commercial taser packed enough of a punch to make a Kryptonian feel it. The thug laughed for a moment, expecting her fall to the ground twitching like every other victim he attacked. It was short lived.

Slowly, making sure that he understood perfectly, Kara grabbed his arm and pulled the taser away from her. The thug's jaw dropped, and the others looked just as surprised, apparently not expecting any kind of challenge from her. She squeezed down, using a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of her true strength, and the thug let out a pained cry before he dropped the taser.

It was then that a new player made his presence known.

"Oh...seems like I'm not needed here," Spider-man said as he looked down at the confrontation from his perch on the fire escape. They all looked up at him, surprised by his sudden entrance. However, Kara and the thug's reactions were very different.

Kara gave the teenager in black and white tights a megawatt smile while the thugs took off running. At least the ones that could. The one Kara had in her hand tried to yank his arm out of her grip, but it was like steel. All he managed to do was bruise himself. However, she gave him a quick kick to the groin so he would stop being annoying and couldn't ruin her meeting with the newest hero of Gotham.

"And there they go...why do they always run?" Spider-man asked himself before he shot twin webs out of each wrist, the ends attaching to two thugs before Spider-man yanked their feet from underneath them. Their heads smacked into the pavement with a thunk, knocking them both out. Spider-man webbed their feet, keeping them from running before he stood. With an inhuman jump, he flipped through the air and landed in front of the third thug.

Kara watched him, idly thinking she liked his other costume more. Red and blue were the way to go for costumes. Then she blinked, not sure if she was seeing things. "His spider has cat ears," she muttered to herself, her lips quirking up into a smile. It looks like someone's shipping SpiderCat.
"Shit," the man cursed before frantically reaching into his pocket. With a dramatic flip, he held out a pocket knife.

"Oh my god," Spider-man cried out, shocking Kara out of her amusement, throwing up his hands. "Is that a real knife?" He asked in a high pitched shrill, falling to his knees at the sight of the two inchged weapon.

"Yes, it's a real knife!" The thug spat, feeling empowered by the superheroes reaction. Kara just watched the scene, knowing exactly what was happening and she could stop the chuckle that escaped her.

"My only weakness! Small knives!" Spider-man wailed before he webbed the man's hand to the wall behind him with a jab. The thug cried out as he slammed into the wall, looking utterly shocked by his sudden defeat. It took a moment before he realized what happened.

"You were making fun of me!" He shouted at Spider-man and Spider-man just laughed as he stood up.

"Yes. Yes I was," he said before he turned to Kara, who was immensely amused by the way he handled that. She smiled widely, still holding the thug absentmindedly by the wrist after kicking him in the crotch.

Spider-man hesitated taking another step before he squared his shoulders and kept moving forward. She heard his heart lurch in his chest, but he seemed fine. Kara rose an eyebrow, her smile widening a fraction when she realized he was trying to impress her. She didn't want to say that it happened often, but it did her pride some good knowing others found her attractive. Superhero or not, Kara was a teenager.

"Sorry for stepping in there, I thought you needed help dealing with these guys," Spider-man said as he walked. Kara blinked in surprise before she realized that he didn't know who she was. The thugs were understandable since she lacked the signature S on her chest and it was dark and the last thing anyone in Gotham would expected was Supergirl walking their streets. However, it wasn't like she was trying to hide her identity much. She didn't even put on the glasses that Kal-El gave her!

"He thinks I'm human," Kara thought dully. Not an average human since she didn't need help dealing with a couple of thugs, but a total badass that could take care of herself. It was a nice change from having Kal-El always hovering over her shoulder when she was dealing with villains she could take on in her sleep.

It was a welcome change to be acknowledged that she could take care of herself. After all, she was only one of the strongest beings in existence.

"Eh, no biggie, Spider-butt," she said and saw Spider-man go rigid before he relaxed.

"Finally someone appreciates how many squats I do," Spider-man said dramatically, placing his hands on his hips and cocked them to the side. "I even wear spandex and not one compliment until now," he added, adopting a sassy tone.

Kara laughed. She couldn't help it. It was refreshing to meet someone that didn't take themselves seriously. Especially considering that his personality and his suit were completely at odds.

She saw Spider-man grin under his mask, but he dropped his hands and in a more serious tone asked, "are you sure you're alright? I thought I saw him get you with the taser." He seemed worried, so she gave him a cocky shrug to put him at ease.
"I caught his hand before he touched me. I'm good," Kara answered, lying easily enough but she still felt a little guilty about it. It took her a moment to figure out why, though.

Kara, unlike Kar-El, didn't have a secret identity. Kara was Supergirl and Supergirl was Kara. When she wore her uniform, then she was Supergirl in uniform. When she wore casual clothes, then she was Supergirl in casual clothes, like she was right now. Kara was always Supergirl, but Supergirl was never Kara.

However, at this moment, she kinda wished she had a secret identity. Spider-man had no clue who she was; that was made clear when he was worried if a taser of all things had managed to hurt her. To him, Kara was just a normal girl with some kickass moves. A strong, independent woman.

Not Supergirl.

There was no comparing her to her more famous cousin, no thinking that he knew her because he knew Conner and heard enough about her through the grapevine, no intimidation of meeting one of remaining Kryptonians. Right now, she was just Kara Zor-El to him, she was making her own impression on him through her own actions and words instead of having her character painted for her through other sources.

And...she kinda liked that...

"Good," Spider-man said, sounding relieved. "If you wouldn't mind, could you call the police? Or someone to walk you home miss...?" He trailed off, and Kara realized what he was fishing for.

"Kara Zor-El," Kara said smoothly, trying to pull off that her last name was just foreign. Spider-man seemed to buy it easily enough. "And sure, I'll give them a quick call," she said, pulling her phone out of her handbag. Then she recalled what the thug had said. Kara looked down at the man, who looked like he was doing his best to become invisible, which explained why he had been so quiet during their conversation.

"But, before that, you might want to interrogate him...or something," she added, thinking that a normal teenager wouldn't be used to the idea of getting answers out of a bad guy. "Before you came in, he said 'you'll be worth a pretty penny.'" She repeated feeling disgust rising in her chest. She glared at the thug, who shriveled up in response, his hand cupped around his groin as if that would protect his family jewels from her wrath.

Out of desperation, the thug turned to look at Spider-man.

Spider-man's hands curled up into fists as he walked to the fallen thug. Kara watched the transformation with fascination, like a flip of a switch, Spider-man went from jokes and lightheartedness to stalking the criminal and fury.

"Is that so?" He asked as Kara stepped out of her way and tapped on her phone. However, instead of notifying the police, she sent Barbara a text letting her know what just happened. A moment later her best friend told her that she was on her way.

"You are going to tell me where you take the people you kidnap," he stated. He didn't tack on a threat at the end of it. He didn't need to.

Perhaps it was how effortlessly he was beaten before by Kara, or perhaps he heard something in Spider-man's voice, or maybe the thug was just a coward. However, when he looked into Spider-man's large reflective eyes, seeing nothing but his own terrified expression, he caved instantly.

"The old train yard! We take them to the old train!" He shouted, squirming in Spider-man's grip.
When he wasn't let go, he assumed that more was needed. "In the control center, there's a red switch that opens up the storing room! That's where we take them! Now let me go!" The thug cried as he kicked, but his feet bounced off Spider-man like pebbles off a wall.

"Gladly," Spider-man said before tossing the thug into the air and weaving a web behind him, suspending him in the air. The thug thrashed, but no normal human could break free of his webs.

Kara watched the exchange with a raised eyebrow, feeling impressed despite herself. To tell the truth, she expected for Spider-Man to dangle him off a building or something. You know, the Batman way. However, the guy just caved like a house of cards the moment Spider-man got in his face. Maybe it said more about the thug then it did about Spider-man, but it definitely said something about the spider-themed hero.

"Sorry, but it looks like I won't be able to walk you home," he stated, bowing at the waist in an overly gentleman fashion. Kara giggled in response, but when he went to raise, despite his superhuman reflexes, Spider-man felt something press against his cheek before he could react. Dumbly, he realized that it was Kara's lips as she pulled away.

She flashed him a smile, "That's okay. Go get'em, tiger," she said before turning away and walking out of the alley, a pep in her step. She did one of the things she came to Gotham to do, and Spider-man did more than impress. As she left Crime Alley, her mind was turning over dozens of plans.

Some might ship SpiderCat, but she was determined to make SpiderBat a thing. Barbara needed a rebound guy desperately to get over Dick, but her best friend was stubborn and wouldn't seek one out on her own. Which meant it fell to her to find her a decent man. However, that was for later. For now, she needed to find some more lowlifes to trick into breaking their hands on her and placing them under citizen's arrest.

Catwoman wondered if Spider-man was alright. He was a good kid, and he could trade fists like nobody's business, but Batman had well over a decade of experience with dealing with both heroes and villains that hopelessly outclassed him. More often than not, it was Batman that was left standing at the end of those exchanges. Usually with whoever he was fighting underneath his boot.

So, Selina didn't exactly put her money on Spider-man for that fight. Maybe if he had more that four days worth of experience being a hero, that could change, but Spider-man was a rookie. Batman had that fight in the bag, superhuman or not.

Selina let out a sigh as she ran along the rooftops, searching for trouble. That didn't mean she had to like it. Her sidekick had lasted for all of two days before Batman was going to snatch him away from her. Once Bruce figured out that Spider-man didn't have a mean bone in his body or heard his origin, the few soft spots that Bruce had were all going to get hit. Next thing they knew, Spider-man was going to change his name to something bat or bird themed. Knowing Spider-man, he'd try to change it to Bat-man and claim that the hyphen was silent.

With her lips quirking up at the thought, she dropped from a roof onto a fire escape before flipping onto a thugs shoulders. He let out a loud scream as his collarbone caved in but Selina just rolled her eyes as she flipped off him. Some people just didn't have any pain tolerance and, more often than not, it was the ones that barked the loudest. As the thug collapsed into a ball and squirmed in agony, she flashed a smile at the prostitute that was cupping her blackened eye.
"Hon, the kind of customers that are out tonight aren't the kind that are going to pay. Stick with your regulars until this all blows over, 'kay?" She said as she kicked the thug over onto his back, rolling her eyes when he groaned. "Oh, suck it up, you big baby. If you hadn't been such a sleazeball then this would have never happened, now would it? Think about your life choices next time, preferably in your cell in Blackgate," she said unsympathetically as she roughly pulled his uninjured arm and hand cuffed him to a drainage pipe.

One perk of going solo was that she didn't have to pull her punches anymore. Spider-man had kicked up a big fuss when she broke some gangbangers legs and made her pinkie swear not to do it again. Which she did, though her fingers were crossed behind her back so it didn't count. As the thug whimpered in pain, she noticed that she didn't hear the sounds of footsteps from behind her and saw the corner worker shifting from foot to foot.

With an eyebrow rising, Selina asked, "is something wrong? Other than the shiner?" She asked, crossing her arms.

"You...help people right? I mean I know you help people, but you can help find people? Or, uh, is that Batman's thing?" She asked, and Selina nodded slowly, this conversation taking a turn that she hadn't been expecting.

"I can help you, or I'll put Batman on it, but have you gone to the police yet?" Selina asked in a tone that could be described as out of character by those that didn't know her. However, she grew up on these streets, and she had a special soft spot for prostitutes and kids. She knew better than anyone that when one of the two went missing in Gotham, then the odds were bleak that you'd ever find them again. If they were ever found, they were either dead or wished they were.

The woman let out a breath, and it looked like a weight had just been lifted from her shoulders, even though she was shaking her head. "No. Thomas hasn't been missing for more than a day and the cops..." she shook her head, and a frown passed over her expression, but she didn't say anything else. She didn't need to. "But he just disappeared! There wasn't a note, and he didn't tell me he was leaving before...! I-Thomas is a good kid. He doesn't do drugs, he doesn't run with gangs, he-he never gets in trouble," the mother said, her voice steady growing thicker with emotion. By the end, the words were just falling out of her mouth in a rush to get out.

"Hey, hey, I believe you. How old is he? Do you have any idea where he could be? Friends, places he likes to hang out, that kind of stuff," Selina reassured, closing her eyes briefly when the thug cursed at her underneath his grunts of pain. When she opened her eyes, the mother was shaking her head again.

"He's fourteen," she began, and Selina wanted to curse. That was the age when kids got into trouble most often, and by then, they knew how not to get caught. For the most part. So, the information she had became a lot less reliable than she thought it was. "He hung out in Downtown a lot, though, around the coffee shop on Fifth? His friends said they don't know anything, so I'm not sure how much help they would-" Selina cut her off with a hand.

"Every little bit helps," she said in a gentle tone and the mother rambled off some names that Selina memorized with a nod.

"I can't promise you that we'll find your son," Selina said after a moment of silence when the mother was done giving her any relevant information. The mother's face became blank, but Selina easily saw the fear deep within her eyes. The fear of not knowing that you'll ever see someone again, someone that you love was radically different than being afraid of...bats, for instance. Your heart didn't race, and you didn't sweat. It was the exact opposite.
That fear was like something grabbed your heart and froze it solid. When there was a sign of them, either real or imagined, the relief was freeing in ways that couldn't really be described. However, if it was false hope…? There were few hells worse.

"But, we're going to do everything we can, okay? Until then, go home and stay safe. It's not going to do Thomas any good if we do find him and you're dead because you were out at night looking for him," Selina said gently, giving the woman a firm squeeze on the shoulder. Selina felt like a hypocrite telling her that the best thing she could do was wait when every time she was told to the same, she unsurprisingly didn't listen.

As she expected, the mother frowned like Selina shoved poison down her throat, but Selina pressed on. "I know, but it's the best thing you can do for your son and yourself," she said, giving her another gentle squeeze before walking deeper into the alley and vanishing into the shadows. There was nothing else she could have said, and it would have sounded fake if she tried.

"You got all that Harley?" Selina said into her earpiece. Alfred was refusing to answer her questions on what Spider-man looked like, and if Bruce was already pushing through the adoption papers, so she was giving him the silent treatment.

"Yep! Lookin' through your search engine thingamajig for anyone that fits the bill now. You heroes really get all the cool stuff! Me and Mistah J had to use Ding," Harley chatted in her ear. Selina frowned at the mention of that monster, and she could only hope that Bruce was making good on his promise to do something about the Joker's memories. However, shewisely didn't mention anything to Harley about that, though. Harley was a good friend; fun, funny and loyal right up until that…

Selina let out a breath as she ran across the rooftops. 'No point stressing out about it,' she thought to herself, 'you'll give yourself wrinkles. Bruce will handle it.'

"Any word on Spider-man?" She said, trying to steer the conversation away from the Joker.

"Yuck," Harley said in response and Selina waited for a moment, but her friend didn't continue.

"Oh, don't be like that! What did Spider-man ever do to you?" Selina asked, a grin in her voice. Ever since Harley first crashed at her place, she turned her nose up every time the news or she mentioned the spider-themed hero.

"He made all my hard work go to waste! Do you know how tedious it is to remember every gang's rivalries and that stuff? My cheat sheet was like miles long, and it took me all day to call all the criminals. And for what? Mistah J's plan didn't even get to start because of some rookie! It was a funny one too," Harley muttered, and Selina could imagine the pout she wore with ease. However, she couldn't bring herself to smile at the mental image.

"Ahhh," Selina hummed, frowning at that little revelation. "Let's keep that on the down-low Harl's. Batman will get his panties in a bunch if he hears that you had a more direct hand in making this mess," she advised. By that, she meant Batman was going to be furious and make extra sure that Harley's next trip to Arkham was a long one.

"Kay," Harley agreed easily enough, thinking nothing of it.

"Right. Just let me know if you get any pings on the kid but, in the meantime, do you have anything else for me?" Selina asked before the sounds of gunshots got her attention a few blocks away. "Scratch that, I found trouble," Selina said, tapping on her ear. She let out a yawn as she raced towards the sounds of gunfire and loosened up her back with a couple of cracks. There really wasn't any rest for the wicked.
The sounds of gunfire continued until Selina jumped across an alley onto the building that the gun fight was happening. Now that she was closer, the guns themselves seemed a bit...heavier. Instead of the pops of pistols, she heard the sounds of shotguns and assault rifles.

"Damn it," Selina cursed as she looked into the building from the skylight and she cursed again. As she expected, Selina saw a little over a dozen guys scattered out in the building, all firing in the same direction. The thing was, Selina meant that in a much more literal case when she saw a severed arm and a spray of blood on the wall like some kind of horror movie.

She recognized them as Yakuza, which made sense since she was in Chinatown, in a racist sort of way, but she also recognized the weaponry in their hands. It was the same hardware that she and Spider-man stopped a deal earlier tonight. It seems like Spider-man's suspicion that it wasn't an isolated incident was true, unfortunately. That meant more work for her. Great.

However, that wasn't why she was cursing. Sure, it meant more work for her, and this gang war was going to get kicked up a notch before going out, but that was wholly less threatening than what they were shooting at.

Selina watched in muted horror as Rose Wilson jumped over a desk as she swung her sword through a gunman's neck with ease like it wasn't even there. As his head flew free, in the same motion, Ravager kicked it and sent it straight into another gangsters head that was behind a counter. All the while, she was firing shots off from one of her pistols with disturbing accuracy.

Despite her lack of depth perception, every time she pulled the trigger a hole appeared in the center of every gangster's forehead that she happened to be pointing their gun at. Selina had watched the video of Spider-man taunting Ravager, making a fool of her, a couple of dozen times and she almost forgot that Rose Wilson was a killer. Through and through. Selina forgot just how good at it Ravager was too.

Ravager flipped over the counter and from her birdseye view, Selina saw Ravager put her gun against the head of the gangster she had 'headbutted' and ignored his short plea for mercy that Ravager silenced with a bullet. The remaining gangsters began firing at the counter and splinters of wood, broken glass and alcohol rained down on Ravager.

Now that Ravager wasn't a blur of motion and violence, Selina saw that the baby terminator wasn't in great shape. Her white hair was dyed red with blood, and her skin was smudged with smoke, grease, what looked like oil and more blood. Blood dripped down from a wound on her shoulder, but Selina saw that it wasn't a bullet wound. Whatsmore, it had been stitched shut, but Selina guessed that the wound reopened when Ravager started her little killing spree.

Selina frowned when she saw Ravager grab the head and kick over a mop before she began unscrewing the head of it. While she was curious what she was doing, Selina was debating if she should even step in. Ravager was a clever and dangerous girl, so odds were that she was going to make it out of this but only after she killed all of the gangsters.

Now, Selina was giving this hero thing a try but fighting Ravager? There were easier and less painful ways of committing suicide. Spider-man could fight her while cracking jokes and Batman could do it by dismantling how she fought with perfect counter attacks. If she tried then the best she could hope for was a bullet to the head because she sure as hell couldn't dodge bullets like Spider-man could and she didn't have Batman's decade-long combat training from some long lost monk or something. She was just a thief. A fucking great one, but her abilities weren't meant for combat with people like Ravager.

The only reason she hadn't slowly backed away and got far, far away was that she had questions.
The most glaring were how Ravager managed to escape police custody, but what she was doing here was a close second.

Shoving her questions to the side, Selina watched Ravager fit the mop head roughly over the severed head and dipped it into the blood of the poor guy's head she blew off. Then, she threw the head up ever so slightly, just so the top of the head could be seen over the counter before Ravager moved in the opposite direction she threw the head. As expected, the gangster saw the flash of movement and began unloading all that they had in that spot, but it didn't matter.

While they were wasting their ammo, Ravager slipped away from the counter and lifted an assault rifle from one of the many corpses she created. Taking cover behind a pillar, she aimed up her first shot before she fired. Again and again and again and again and again. Every time she pulled the trigger, one of the gangster fell dead with his brains painting the walls.

The first few didn't realize what was happening until three of them were dead. By the time they found Ravager, another two had been killed. When they started firing, another two were dead until it was only one.

The gangster let out a scream as his leg gave out from underneath him when Ravager kneecapped him. Still, stupidly, he tried to raise his gun to shoot at her, but his hand was reduced to...meat when Ravager shot him in the hand as she calmly approached him.

"Where did you get your hardware," Ravager demanded in perfect Japanese, pressing her sword against his neck. Her tone was...not quite emotionless, but it was damn close. Professional described it the best.

"Fu-" The gangster started, but he was quickly cut off when Ravager plunged her blade into his only hand,

"None of that. I'm not in the fucking mood. I've been shot three fucking times, I've been stabbed twice, I haven't bathed in twenty-four hours and my blade's nicked to fucking hell because dumbasses like you think you have what it takes to claim my bounty. Now, you're going to tell me where you got your guns and where the rest of them are at, or I'm going to start chopping pieces of you off before feeding them to you," Ravager snapped in that calm tone before she twisted the blade and earning a howl from the gangster.

"I-I won't tell y-you shit," the man cursed, spitting at her for good measure. Ravager didn't even flinch, though she looked up at the ceiling, making Selina duck her head back quickly to avoid being seen, and let out a long-suffering sigh.

"Fine. Dealers choice; would you rather keep your only hand or your dick?" Ravager asked, pulling her sword out and kicking the gangster over. "You have three seconds to choose before I pick for you," she continued, pressing the blade to the gangster's crotch, letting him know what she was going to pick.

The criminal went white as a sheet and only stammered as Ravager counted down. When she got to one and her blade began slipping through the gangster pants, he broke.

"One of our contacts! One of our contacts got his hands on a shipment meant for the Russians and sold it to us! I-the van! The van's at our hideout, on Bakers Street! Now l-" the gangster was cut off when Ravager cut his throat with a flick of her wrist.

"Works like a charm every time," Ravager mused to herself, swiping her blade to the side to get the excess blood off of it.
Selina slowly began backing away from the window, but a bullet passed through the glass just next to her head, making her freeze in place. Muttering a curse to herself, Selina looked back into the room and gave the little serial killer a smile and a wave.

"Hey'a there Ravager! Fancy seeing you in this part of town," she greeted, and Ravager's lips didn't so much as twitch.

"Where. Is. Spider-man?" Ravager bit out, and Selina started cursing internally. She should have ran. She should have run the moment she saw this little psycho's face. How was she going to get herself out of this one? Seduction didn't seem like an option since her gaydar wasn't getting any pings.

"Either in the back of the Batmobile or in the Batcave. He and Batman had a little chat, and I think we both know how it's going to end," Selina said smoothly, making Ravager curse in annoyance before another bullet was fired next to her head when Selina began to move away, preparing to run.

"Stay where-no, come down here," Ravager ordered, and Selina hesitated. "Do you really think I can't put a bullet through your skull before you run away?" Ravager added, and Selina had to concede on that point. Unhappily, she jumped into the bar and was hit with the strong smell of alcohol and blood. It was almost enough to make her gag.

"No need to get all murderous. I like living too much," Selina commented as she approached Ravager with an air of confidence that she didn't feel.

"Good. So, when I say you'll loot all of these bodies and get the van for me, you'll do it, right?" Ravager asked rhetorically, her gaze unwavering even as blood dripped into her only eye. Now that she looked at her, Selina saw just how exhausted Ravager looked, injured too. Her outfit was torn and burnt, wet with her blood in large patches. Her mask had been discarded long ago because her forehead had been cut open from something.

It was evident that Ravager hadn't been lying when she said she had some tough nights.

"Happily," Selina lied, knowing that she'd be dead before she knew it if she refused. "So...you mentioned a bounty," Selina began as she began picking up guns, trying very hard not to look at the severed limbs or corpses that littered the room. She had been wrong in her initial assessment of how many people had been in this fight by a long shot.

"Are you thinking about trying to cash it in?" Ravager shot back, pulling up a chair and sitting down. Out of the corner of her eye, Selina saw Ravager tending to her wounds.

"Ha, funny. No, just wondering who put it on you. I figured your dad would have taken some issue with that," Selina commented, gently prodding for some information. If she was going to have to loot corpses, then she at least wanted to learn something interesting.

"You don't seem to understand the situation you're in," Ravager observed, pulling out a mini-surgery kit. She wasn't going to...?

"Curiosity killed the cat," Ravager said before she let out a hissed curse as she put the pliers into her side. Selina gave her a bug-eyed look for a moment since she didn't see the baby terminator use any
kind of anesthetic or take a couple of swigs of alcohol. However, Selina quickly schooled her expression. She needed to appear like she wasn't actively afraid for her life.

"And satisfaction brought it back. I could find out if I really wanted to, but I'm just curious if your side of the story would be any different," Selina said with a shrug as she threw another wallet into a pile. Ravager let out a grunt, earning her attention and Selina watched as the younger woman pulled a bullet out of her side and dropped it on the floor. Then she let out a low hiss when she poured some whiskey over the profusely bleeding wound.

It took her a couple of seconds to get her breath back, but she did answer Selina, even though she wasn't expecting her to.

"I was a bodyguard for some warlord in Africa. The prick got it in his head that he could get handsy with me, so I told him if he grabbed my butt again I was going to cut his hand off. He touched my butt again, so I cut his hand off but on my way to the states my dad tells me I have a bounty. Five million dollars," Ravager added, and there was no way that she didn't notice that Selina froze at the number.

Selina's bank account was already overflowing after taking everything that the Penguin had, but there was never such thing as too much money. The number wasn't big enough to make her forget what surrounded her, but five million dollars wasn't a small amount by any means.

"So, as punishment for botching the job, my dad cut me loose. He told me I had until the next time he saw me to make my bounty go away or he was going to cash it in," Ravager said, stitching up one of her bullet wounds.

"Shit," Selina said, the word just slipping out. However, Ravager let out a chuckle that was as bitter as poison.

"That sums it up pretty well, doesn't it? I screwed up once, and now my dad's going to hunt me down and cut my head off," Ravager spat, earning a look from Selina. She expected the teenager to be a little upset that her father was going to hunt her down and kill her if someone else didn't do it first but Ravager just seemed angry. If she was upset that daddy dearest was out for her head, then it was buried underneath a lot of anger.

"So, these guys were trying to claim your bounty then?" Selina asked, though she already knew the answer.

"Does it matter?" Ravager asked, stitching up another wound that the bullet went through.

"Yeah. I'm not a killer, but I can understand picking you over the other guy when push comes to shove," Selina said with a shrug and Ravager made a dismissive sound.

"Aren't you supposed to be a hero now? Thou shall not kill and all that other bullshit?" Ravager asked, hissing as she disinfected the wound with more alcohol.

"Just until I can steal to my little heart's content without some idiots trying to hit the same place. I lost a three million dollar necklace to some amateurs because they just blew the vault up," Selina let out a long sigh at the memory. After she covered her tracks and made a couple dozen new identities, she thought she'd pick some stuff on her Christmas list while Batman was busy. Not only did those idiots nick her necklace but they ruined plenty of other baubles she had her eye on because they figured the bigger the explosion, the better.

"Huh...so you're not going to try something stupid like take me in?" Ravager asked, unable to keep
"I told you, I like living. Now that I think about it, living is probably my favorite thing to do," Selina said, and their conversation lapsed into silence as she worked. That had been surprisingly...tame? A lot fewer death threats, cursing and menacing tones that Selina expected of the Deathstroke's daughter. And she hadn't been murdered yet, always a plus in her book.

Selina gathered up the last of the guns and dropped them into a pile right next to the wallets. "There, all-" Selina began, looking at Ravager while dusting off imaginary dust from her hands but she paused when she saw the younger woman.

Ravager had passed out. Her head hung limply to the side, and the only reason she hadn't fallen over was the counter was keeping her propped up. The tweezers were still in hand but lying in her lap, covered in blood. Selina saw the wound she had been working on because it was dripping in a steady stream down her arm from her shoulder. Enough so that it must have gone all the way through.

Pursing her lips, Selina's eyes drifted to the few stitches she had and saw that they were sloppy. Ravager would have a lot of experience with stitching herself up at this point so it couldn't be hesitation. No, add that to all the blood loss and exhaustion? Her hands must have been shaking too much.

Selina looked at her a long moment before promptly turning on her heel and began marching towards the exit. The sense of relief that she knew she wasn't going to get iced once Ravager used her to pick up some weapons and money was palatable and the further she got away from the little psychopath the better.

"Awesome, see'ya Ravager," Selina said, waving to the unconscious girl over her shoulder. You know, unless she bled out. Something she was already well on her way to doing since she must have passed out from blood loss. Or, maybe reinforcements would come, or a cop would take an opportune shot. After all, five million dollars wasn't anything to sneeze at for the average Joe. Failing that, if she did manage to wake up in time to get out of here, it was cold outside. All that blood loss was going to give way to a nasty case of frostbite so she could lose some fingers and toes. Maybe a foot...

"Don't do it," Selina told herself, coming to a stop and staring at the door. This was a bad idea. No, it was a downright terrible one. This was, without a single doubt, the worst idea that she'd ever had in her entire life, which was chock full of bad ideas. This was Darwin awards level of a bad idea, and if she did die doing it, Selina could honestly say that she deserved it. Not only that, Ravager was a murderer. There was no other way to say it. She killed these people to protect herself, but what about that guy she just tortured? Once she got her answers, Ravager cut his throat without a second thought.

Ravager had no interest in redeeming herself and Selina honestly doubted that she could. However, Selina knew that if she left her here, then the best she could hope for was the teenager was killed before she woke up. This was Gotham City, though, so that best case scenario for Ravager wouldn't happen.

There was absolutely no way this wasn't going to come and bite her in the ass one way or the other. There wasn't going to be any kind of profit or net gain that she could use to justify this stupid, terrible idea. It was a stupid, stupid, stupid thing to do and she was stupid for even considering it.

Yet, her feet wouldn't move.
"Batman...Spider-man...you two are the worst influences."
Twisted words

There were times that Peter forgot that he killed Gwen Stacy. Those horrible moments that seemed to play in slow motion, knowing that he had been too late but hoping that he wasn't. That crack haunted him every night since then. It tormented, tortured, him in ways that words just failed to describe.

However, sometimes, he would forget. He would look over, some stupid joke on his tongue that only she would find funny, or laugh at out of pity, only for no one to be there. When he woke up, he would look on the other side of the bed and be puzzled why she wasn't there. When he looked at his phone, he would give her a call for no real reason other than he wanted to hear her voice.

It didn't even have to be that. Sometimes, Gwen faded to the back of his mind as he fought a villain or he had other drama going on. It wasn't that he was trying to forget her, but he just...stopped thinking about her. Right until he caught the scent of her perfume. Or saw blonde hair tied in a messy bun. Or heard a laugh that sounded captivating.

In these moments, to him, Gwen Stacy was alive. His better half, the woman he loved more than life itself, was alive.

Then reality reared its ugly head, and he would remember.

You see, grief is a cruel and terrible thing. It waits until you're most vulnerable to strike and hits you where it hurts the most. When you think you can finally move on, pick yourself from the dirt, grief would rip the wounds open and rub salt in them. Grief would tear you down until you're nothing but a self-loathing pitiful wreck and, if you let it, it would keep you there until the end.

Gwen had crossed his mind a few times over the past few days, but it had been momentary. With practice, he could ignore the agony that was remembering what he did and focus on the matters at hand. With the gang war, those kids, trying to settle in and his money troubles, those moments were brief.

Before all of this, he would go to her grave to remind himself that she was gone and she was gone because of him. So that he wouldn't have those blissful moments that he got to forget that his better half was gone and the soul-crushing realization that followed. When he was there, what he did changed from time to time.

Sometimes he would just stare at her grave, his mind blank, like he was trying to sear the image into his mind so he would never forget again. Other times, he would replay those awful moments in his head on repeat. That one moment of fear that he wasn't going to catch her in time. The moment of relief and triumph that followed. The moment of absolute dread that came when he heard her neck break from the whiplash.

Sometimes he would talk. He would tell her how his day had gone; the usual hijinks from Flash, what MJ and aunt May were up to and his latest adventures as Spider-man. Sometimes he would reminisce about them and what they had. Sometimes he talked about the future that could have been. It all just depended on how he was feeling at the time.

Sometimes...most of the time...he would just cry.

So, when he had looked into those bright blue eyes that danced with fierce intelligence and amusement? Seeing familiar blonde hair cut in the same style? Knowing that she was so far out of his league, it was an honest wonder that she was even looking in his direction, much less smiling a smile.
that could light up a room?

Peter was in hell. It felt like someone sucker-punched him in the gut and ripped his heart out of his chest before stomping on it. It had been all he could do was square his shoulders and hope she couldn't hear his heart being ripped to shreds by grief.

She wasn’t Gwen’s doppelganger, but the resemblance was there, and it was hell. Not only did it feel like grief was stabbing him in the gut and twisting the knife but the idea of what could have happened to her was happening to Gwen. That girl, Kara? What would have been done to her if she couldn't take care of herself or he hadn't been there? Who would have she been sold to? What would they have made her do?

It wasn't often that Peter felt his blood boil anymore. Two years and three tragedies tempered his anger and his fuse to the powder keg became a long one. However, the whole fight with Batman, the lack of sleep for three days, the sudden punch in the gut by grief and now this? What was left of his frayed temper was burnt right through and he was honestly afraid that he might forget to pull his punches. To make matters worse, he couldn't get in touch with Catwoman because he didn't bring his phone out with him since he had the ear bud.

Which was still with Catwoman because she expected him to get his ass kicked by Batman. So, he couldn't meet up with her and get a little backup or advice or someone to keep him doing something he would regret.

Peter didn't have much experience dealing with human trafficking. There was the occasional kidnapping that wasn't related to a super villain trying to get his or another hero's attention, but when it came to organized human trafficking, he never dealt with it often. That was mostly because Daredevil put it on the list of crimes that were his jurisdiction in New York. It was one of his attempts to shelter him from the uglier parts of crime since Daredevil failed to convince Peter not to go out all.

It also meant that he had no tolerance for them. Someone was kidnapping people and selling them. Someone was selling them to sick, twisted individuals that thought they could own a person and do whatever they wanted to them.

It was one of the few times he was grateful to have someone looking over his shoulder. Obediently, Peter always passed any information on human trafficking or sexual slavery to Daredevil unless he thought he needed to act on the information quickly. It was one of those crimes that kept him up at night. The idea that someone could be bought and sold was just...it made him sick.

And it only got darker and worse from there.

With a sigh, Peter landed on a snow-covered rooftop. The last building near an abandoned train station on the outer edge of Gotham Proper. Snow crunched underfoot as he walked to the edge. The train station looked like he expected an abandoned train station to look like. It didn't seem particularly villainous; the main building was gated off with a thick chain and the few train cars left on the rails were rusted to them. It might have looked romantic in a hipster kind of way with all the snow, like one of those pictures people take then slap some vaguely depressing or uplifting sentence on top of it.

Despite the claims it was abandoned, it was anything but. From his view, he spotted at least three guards hidden in various train cars, and he was guessing there were more that he couldn't see. Which made this difficult. He couldn't afford to announce his presence and beat the bad guys up. The victims would be held hostages and the situation would become vastly more complicated. So, he needed to get them out, or at the very least get to them before he could afford to be loud.
Peter limbered up, only wincing slightly at a flare of pain from his fresh bruises, before he took a step forward and free fell off the building since there weren't any others to swing off of. He landed with a soft thump, his knees bending to absorb the impact of falling three stories. With a soft sigh, he crossed the street and headed towards the train yard.

'This is going to be tedious,' Peter thought to himself. There were plenty of abandoned trains left rotting away on the tracks, so he had plenty of cover, but that also meant that the bad guys had a lot of nooks and crannies to hide it.

'Finding them all will take too long, and they'll notice something’s up. I'll just go straight there.' Peter decided, picking a route that was the most direct.

Peter made his way to the first lookout that he had found, who was hidden in a train car with a rusted opening. The man peered into the darkness, sipping the steaming coffee with one hand while his other rested on the assault rifle next to him. He was the ideal lookout, even in the dead of night and when he was bored out of his mind, he stood vigilant. Though, he was suddenly put to sleep when a fist entered the small opening and flattened his nose. Peter, not taking the chance that he could still be awake, nimbly fitted himself through the opening and landed on his feet. The boxcar was a mess, but Peter noticed that it was well used. Little things like chairs, wrappers, and cups that built up over time.

'They've been here for weeks,' Peter thought, grinding his teeth. That was assuming that they didn't clean up every once and awhile. They could have been here for months, years maybe. Even if they only took one person a week; in six months that was thirty-six people. Thirty-six people. Husbands, mothers, sons and daughters.

Peter webbed the man's mouth shut and his limbs to the floor, making extra sure that he couldn't make any noise.

He was going to make sure these guys rotted in prison.

Peeking his head through the hole, Peter made sure there was no one looking before he leaped through it. The snow crunching as he landed seemed so impossibly loud. He froze, his head whipping around as if the entire place would go up in arms and alarms. After a second that seemed to stretch on for minutes, Peter realized that no one was coming...and he was standing out in the open.

He really needed to work on this whole 'stealth' thing.

To avoid walking on the snow, Peter jumped onto the side of the train cars and stuck to them. Crawling forward by just using the tips of his finger and toes, he moved almost soundlessly across the train car as he focused his hearing on finding any others. Unfortunately, the human traffickers weren't utterly incompetent and, while they spaced out their guards and hid them, they placed them in areas that could still see the entrance.

That way, even if Peter did slip by one of them, the others could still catch him entering the building. That was smart and frustrating. Pressing his lips into a thin line, he approached one of the other sentries. The plan needed to change. He needed to take all of them out as fast as he could before a patrol came or their shift ended.

So, without further ado, Peter crawled forward to another boxcar, but he heard a pair of voices that started up as he neared.

“I get that we need to keep our heads down because of the Bat, but I'm still not getting why we can't have a little heater in here,” one of them complained inside the boxcar.
“Because, idiot, this place is supposed to be off the grid. Batman would find it a little suspicious that electricity is being used in this place,” the other pointed out and, based on his tone, Peter guessed that this was a reoccurring conversation. He searched for a quiet way in like before but the only one he was seeing was through the hole they were both looking through. To make matters worse, if he ignored them and went straight to the door, then there was no way that they wouldn't see him.

“See, you say that, but there are these battery powered ones now. They ain't as good, but it's a lot better than freezing my balls off in the middle of winter,” the other pointed out and the unhappy one, which Peter was dubbing Grumpy, grunted in response.

“Then why don't you buy one instead of complaining to me? You haven't stopped since winter started,” Grumpy said, and Peter's blood froze. Winter was well underway, and Christmas was right around the corner, so if these guys had been here before winter...?

“Because I want you to go halfsies with me. Those things are expensive, and your butt freezes right next to mine,” the first sentry said, who Peter was dubbing as Stingy. Grumpy scoffed, and as Peter crawled beneath their noses, he saw him roll his eyes hard enough that Peter almost worried that they would fall out of his head.

“Tough. Winter will be over soon enough, and I'm not going to waste my money on something I'm only going to use for a couple of weeks,” Grumpy said, and Peter wondered if he should rename him.

“Translation; you want to spend your cut of the next shipment on blow,” Stingy said, sighing loudly and grunted when Grumpy hit him for it. “I don't know why you sniff that crap, man. Not counting all the reasons not to do it they shoved in our faces at school, coke ain't so cheap either...and it won't keep you warm.”

“Fuck you,” Grumpy said simply. “When's the next shift coming? I'm tired of sitting here and having you judge me for how I like to spend my evenings,” Grump muttered, and Peter's ears perked up.

“Dude, you're so sensitive and in like,” Peter heard him push back his coat to look at his watch, “ten minutes. Though, knowing those losers, it's going to be a little longer. So, you'll just have to grit your teeth and bask in my presence for a little longer,” Stingy shot back, and their conversation lapsed into silence. However, Peter had what he needed to make a...well...calling it a good plan might be an exaggeration but it was just stupid enough that it could work.

Peter sucked in a breath before he knocked at the door lightly. There was a tick of silence, and the only thing Peter could hear was the sound of his heart pounding in his chest.

“Huh...they're early,” Stingy mused in some confusion, getting out of his chair. “I guess they felt their ears burning,” he said, and Peter heard Grumpy get up as well. As they walked towards the door, Peter jumped to the side and lightly touched the corner of the box to swing himself around. With both of their attention on the door, Peter swung through the opening and landed lightly on his feet. He must have made some noise because Grumpy turned around and Peter saw his eyes go wide before his mouth opened to shout. In a blink of an eye, Peter crossed the room and decked him. However, Peter had what he needed to make a...well...calling it a good plan might be an exaggeration but it was just stupid enough that it could work.

Not wanting to make a sound, Peter webbed his body and connected it to the ceiling with one hand while he swept Stingys legs from underneath him. However, instead of knocking him out, Peter clamped a hand over his mouth and brought his face uncomfortably close to his. He didn't say anything but the message was clear.

Don't scream.
“How many of you are there?” He asked in a low whisper and slowly peeled his hand away to give him a chance to talk. There must have been a miscommunication because the moment Peter stopped covering his mouth, he screamed. Hissing a curse, Peter covered his mouth again, muffling it, but the damage had been done. Peter heard a shout from one of the other guards throw their door open with a loud bang and a shout.

“Shit,” Peter cursed as he knocked him out. That hadn't been apart of the plan. He wanted a little more information, so he wasn't going to walk in there blind since he had been too angry to interrogate that other scumbag more thoroughly. He wasn’t bringing his A-game for this, and it showed.

Peter’s head snapped to the side as he distantly heard the sounds of footsteps. Abandoning stealth, he grabbed the handle to the boxcar door and threw it to the side hard enough that it flew off the hinges. As it bounced off the ground, formally announcing his presence, Peter leapt to the next boxcar before he launched himself towards the building.

He needed to get to the people before they became hostages. Fighting his way with all of them was going to be a problem, but he could handle it. If he took out enough guys on his way in then, it should make things a little bit easier on him.

Letting out an annoyed breath, Peter attached two webs to the building and pulled himself towards it. Like a speeding bullet, he passed through a window with a loud crash. When he landed, glass showered on him, but he didn’t feel their edges cut at his suit. If he had been in a better mood, he would have loved that.

However, Peter only looked up at the dozen or so men and women that looked at him with a mixture of shock and fear. Peter didn’t waste a moment and seized the opportunity by shooting out twin webs and stuck it to two of their chest. They had just enough time to look down at it in confusion before Peter pulled on the webs and sent them both into the wall behind him with solid thunks.

That seemed to break the shock because all of them raised their weapons and began firing away. Peter launched himself into the air and stuck to the ceiling as he contorted out of the way out of bullets. The rest of the windows exploded into shards as the bullets struck them and drywall rained down on them. Some looked away when it got into their eyes while other continued to fire, making Peter run on the ceiling.

The firing continued for a few short seconds, but Peter noticed that the bullets weren’t landing near him anymore. He leaned his head back and realized that the people couldn’t see him. The train station didn’t have any working lights to maintain the image of being abandoned and the few flights they had couldn’t penetrate the thick inky darkness. Add that to the fact he was wearing almost all black in the middle of the night?

Peter felt a smile tug at his lips for the first time since he met Batman. It wasn't the same kind that he felt when Catwoman gave him his new suit. Let's see if he could pull a Batman and use fear to his advantage.

Peter pulled himself up until he was crawling on the ceiling, he crawled until he reached the wall. Ignoring the human traffickers call to speed out, Peter tracked the two that were approaching him. They broke off in pairs, searching for him in the shadows and Peter felt the tension between all of them.

He didn’t even feel a scrap of guilt when the two screamed at the top of their lungs when Peter webbed their ankles and pulled their legs from underneath them. Nor did he feel particularly bad when he quickly began dragging them towards him like he was the monster in a horror movie. Once
they reached him, he crushed their flashlights and knocked them out before attaching them to the ceiling. Bullets were fired in the direction that the flashlights disappeared in but Peter was long gone.

“F**k! Who was that? Who’s-” Peter cut the one off that was speaking and his partner by webbing his back and then pulling him, making him curse. Peter shut him up by smacking him in the back of the head hard enough that he was knocked unconscious. That made the other panic. They saw enough movies to know that he was picking them off one by one. It was an honest wonder why they even spread out in the first place. That never went well for anyone ever.

“Group up, group up,” another called out, and Peter watched the lights scramble to find one another. “Back to back in a circle. Robby, glow stick the shit up.” The same man said, and the others accepted the orders easily enough. The formed a tight circle, shoulder to shoulder, as the one named Robby began throwing green glow sticks around them.

“Backup is going to be here in a second so, until we hear them, shoot at anything that moves.” The new leader said, making Peter frown as he crawled along the ceiling. The remaining guards outside were a given, but they had actual reinforcements? That wasn’t a good sign. Not just because he had more people to fight but this operation was bigger than he anticipated.

Science was always Peter’s passion, but he was no slouch when it came to math. He didn’t even need to be any good at it to put it all together. This human trafficking ring had at least twenty people, both the guards and those few thugs that were going to kidnap Kara. From there, it was basic addition to figure out that this operation needed a fair bit of money and considering their source of revenue...well, it was becoming very clear that his hopeful one person a month prayer wasn’t true.

‘This is going deeper than I thought,’ Peter thought to himself as he looked down at the circle of human traffickers. Attaching a web to the ceiling, Peter began sliding down to the center of them, tuning out their nervous murmurings between them. An operation this big had to have someone at the top. This was much more than a bunch of criminals thinking that they could make a quick buck selling people.

“Is this punk seriously trying to pull a Batman? Where is he?” The leader demanded and yet again, Peter smiled. When he reached their level, he stopped and leaned in.

“Behind you,” he whispered into the leader's ear. The leader nearly jumped a foot in the air before he started to turn around, but Peter punched him before he could complete the motion. As Peter flipped to his feet, he heard the sound of teeth clacking against the floor before he launched into action against the others.

As the leader went limp, he reached out with two hands and grabbed two guards standing opposite of each other before slamming them together. The back of their heads smacked with a loud thunk, but it was okay. They were wearing helmets. The others finally began to react and turn around, but they couldn’t exactly start firing without hitting someone else, so they hesitated for the briefest moments.

Peter didn’t waste that opportunity. He pulled the gun out of one of their hands before hitting them with it in the gut, making them double over before he grabbed them by the shoulder and shoved them with his considerable strength. He slammed into two others, knocking them off their feet, and Peter followed it up by webbing them together. As they tumbled across the floor, his webbing stuck them together in a mess of limbs before keeping them down on the floor.

Turning on his heel, Peter faced the last human trafficker before he leaned out of the way a moment before a bullet whizzed past his skull. Peter didn’t say a word as he yanked the gun out of his hand and threw it across the room, making it break against something. The guy tried to take a swing at
him, but Peter dodged it as well before punching him in the head. Even through his helmet, the man dropped to the floor like a sack of potatoes.

Scanning the room, he saw that there wasn’t anyone still on their feet, so he let out a soft sigh before he began heading towards the train station central office. Thanks to large signs, he found it quickly and ripped the door off the hinges since he didn’t have a key. He entered the control room that once upon a time was used to direct trains and shift the tracks but now was used as a hideout for a human trafficking ring.

Peter searched the control panel for the red switch, but he noticed a laptop resting on a desk with a plug-in internet adapter. The only reason it caught his eye was that it was top of the line quality and it definitely wasn’t the kind that was sold commercially. Frowning to himself, he flipped it open and saw it needed a password.

“I don’t have time for you,” Peter said to himself, shutting the computer again. This was important. That was very clear if it was in the most important room in the building. There could be, there probably was important information on this computer. However, he didn’t have a password, and this thing looked just complicated enough that it’d blow up if he entered the wrong one too many times.

‘I’ll come back for it,’ Peter thought to himself as he looked away from the computer. He could get the password out of one of the scum and find out who their backer was.

Spotting the red switch that the lowlife told him about, Peter pressed it and heard something click far to the right. Glancing at the door, he frowned as he approached, hearing something that tied his stomach into knots. He opened the door and saw another box car. Without the extra layer to muffle the sound, Peter heard the shaky breaths and muffled sobbing.

It was rare that he was going to get a heads up to something that was going to traumatize him, so Peter took a deep breath to brace himself. Letting it out, he pushed the sliding door to the side, and he saw exactly what he didn’t want to see.

The boxcar was filled to the absolute brim. Nearly two dozen women were packed into the boxcar like sardines, all huddled together and drawing into themselves when he pushed the door open. Some of them sobbed louder, expecting another to be added to the boxcar or worse, that one of them was going to be taken out.

None of them were properly dressed for the weather, not for this cold. They wore low-cut dresses or short skirts, telling Peter that they had been at a party or a club when they were taken. Some...most of them looked like they had been here for awhile. Days at least.

The few that looked up at him couldn’t look away, but Peter didn’t see hope in their eyes. Just fear.

In times like these, usually he would say something that would make them feel better. Make them laugh either because it was a good joke or a really bad one. Something...but what could he say to this? What could possibly make them feel better after being stuck inside a boxcar for days on end so they could be sold like animals?

“I’m sorry it took me so long to get here. I’m Spider-man, and I’m here to rescue you,” he said, dropping to a knee and tentatively held out a hand. “I know the costume gives off ‘dark and scary’ vibes, but I promise that I’m a total marshmallow on the inside.” He tried, but the girls only huddled closer together away from him.

Peter’s lips twisted into a grim smile as he heard the distant sound of footsteps. The guards from outside were coming in or maybe it was the reinforcements that they had been talking about. Either
way, there was about to be trouble.

The smart thing to do would be to close the door and tell them that he was going to be back in a second. He was already in between the human traffickers and the victims so that they couldn't be used as hostages. However, how would that look? He comes in dressed in all black, scares the living daylights out of them, says he is getting them out of here but closes the door a second later? That image didn't exactly inspire trust and Peter wanted them to trust him. He wanted them to know that this nightmare was over and he wasn't going to let anything else happen to them.

So, he withdrew his hand and grabbed at the edges of his mask. Peter hesitated a moment, his heart trying to bust its way out of his chest but he reminded himself what was at stake here. These people had suffered a traumatizing experience and had a brush with a fate worse than death. They had been packed into the boxcar, cold, starving and afraid for days.

His fear didn't matter. Not now. Oh, Peter was terrified that one of them couldn't be trusted, that one of them had some kind of connection to some super villain because that's just how the Parker luck worked. However, his traumas and fears didn't matter. Not compared to theirs.

“Sorry, but I'm not exactly tall, dark and handsome,” Peter said, pulling up his mask to reveal a lopsided grin. “But I am here to help you. All of you,” he said, speaking up and glancing around the room. For the first time tonight, something happened like he planned because the tension and fear in everyone slowly began bleeding away. They exchanged disbelieving looks and wide-eyed glances but the fear was disappearing before his very eyes. They looked nervous, and some of them even looked afraid, but that fear wasn't because of him anymore.

That made taking his mask off and revealing his greatest secret completely worth it.

Ever so slowly, one of them reached out to his outstretched hand and gave it a squeeze before she let Peter help her up. The woman, who was in her early twenties, gave him a small, if tired, smile before she helped another up. Pulling his mask back down and feeling much more comfortable with it covering his face, he helped another few onto their feet.

There were a few scarce thank yous and one of them gave Peter a hug, but the mood in the room never shifted away from tense and somber. Peter didn’t expect anything different. However, when he flipped on the lights just to see if it worked and to make it a little easier on them to walk, all of them flinched and squinted.

“Okay, now these guys said that they had reinforcements coming. I don’t know how many are coming but all of you guys-er, girls need to stay quiet, okay?” Peter said and earned a few nods, but that fear began creeping back up. They thought that they were in the clear, that the nightmare was over, but he just told them that it wasn’t.

“I’m not going to say that everything’s going to be okay because I don’t know that. But I do know that if anything happens to any of you, it’s going to have to get through me....and I’m totally stronger than I look. Like, a lot,” he said before feeling lame. That didn’t have the persuasion power that he hoped it would.

However, one of the girls cracked a grin more out of pity than amusement; he suspected, “The whole black and white scheme really doesn’t suit you,” she observed, her smile growing a smidgen. Peter could only shrug in response, thinking that was the truth.

”Yeah...well, I didn’t pick out. Catwoman did, but I don’t think she gets my style, you know,”” he said as he walked, keeping an ear out for the reinforcements. “Not that I’m complaining or anything. I love this suit! Absolutely miles better than spandex,” he continued to ramble and heard one of them
let out a small huff of something that could be laughter if nurtured properly.

“I was wondering about the cat ears,” one of them admitted. Peter shot her grin but realized that she couldn’t see it through the mask, so he gave her a thumbs up. For whatever reason, her eyebrows shot up, but before he could ask about it, a noise caught his attention.

It was a sharp crack and Peter recognized it as the sound of bones breaking. Peter held up a hand, a sign telling them to stay put. He peeked around the corner, preparing himself to jerk his head back when the shooting started but when he looked, there was no gunshots. Instead, he saw an unreasonably huge man standing in the center of the room, who was then flanked by two other similarly huge guys.

“Well,...I’m guessing you’re not the reinforcements,” Peter observed, stepping out while his hand gestured for the girls to shoo behind his back. He gestured at the corpse of one of the human traffickers in the too big hand of the guy in the center. Apparently, the sound he heard was him breaking the guy’s neck.

“No. We aren’t,” the man said in a deep, almost booming voice. Which was impressive because Peter was sure that was just him talking regularly. It really didn’t fit with what he was wearing either. All black clothing that almost looked Japanese. Now that he thought about it, with the whole face mask hood thing, the guy looked like a very large ninja. An unreasonably large ninja.

“So why are you here then? Taking out the competition?” Peter ventured, buying time for the girls to put some distance between them and the fight that was about to take place. The human traffickers had been scum, the lowest lowlives, but they had the right to a trial before being sentenced. He didn’t have the right to be the executioner and neither did these guys.

“No. We’re here for you, Spider-man,” the man said, tossing the body to the side almost casually before he began striding forward with large steps. Peter watched in dull fascination as the already huge guy started to grow even bigger as his arms and legs became thicker. The material stretched with him but the mask was pushed back as his nose and mouth became longer. As they began to peek out, Peter saw the...snout was covered in brown fur and his teeth became wickedly sharp in a snarl.

“Dude…,” Peter began, not missing the wolf-like features while the two behind him resembled a gorilla and a tiger. “You’re...a werewolf ninja…? That’s...whoa...that’s actually kind of cool. I’m not going to lie,” Peter said, and he thought he saw the werewolf ninja smile, but it was a little difficult to tell with the snout. However, with one last glance over his shoulder to make sure the girls were in the clear, he began marching forward to meet them.
“So, what’s this all about? Have I already pissed someone off enough that they skipped the whole hiring amateur assassins bit and jumped straight to animal themed ninjas?” Peter asked as he ducked underneath a swipe from the Werewolf ninja. He really couldn’t get over that. It was just two things that he never thought to combine, and the result was utterly hilarious. Not counting that whole murder thing.

“The same reason this is always about,” the Werewolf ninja said as he followed his swipe with a knee that Peter leaned the way out of. Only for him to follow with his momentum and reverse roundhouse kick that Peter narrowly ducked under. However, the pillar didn’t have that luxury and Peter was showered in dust and bits of concrete as his foot passed right through it like it wasn’t even there.

“I’m a threat to someone’s super secret plan to take over the world?” Peter said, jumping away from him. Apparently, he also knew kung fu. That should have been a given considering that he was a flipping ninja, but it was just really odd seeing an absolutely massive werewolf doing it. The guy was at least seven feet tall and built like a tank.

“Someone has a high opinion of themselves, but you are warm,” the Werewolf commented a moment before Peter felt his spidey-sense tingle and he dodged out of reflex from something coming behind him. Sailing overhead was another animal themed ninja like a speeding bullet, but his spidey-sense was tingling. He saw why when the ninja turned around mid-air and aimed an axe kick at his head.

Peter jumped back, and he frowned when he realized his spidey-sense was still tingling. He had to dodge again when the Gorilla tried to grab him in a bear hug by grabbing one of his hands and throwing him into the Tiger ninja. They both let out quite grunts as they collided but they both managed to right themselves in air and land on their feet. Peter didn’t get the chance to press the advantage because the Werewolf attacked him to make him back off.

“That’s annoying,” Peter commented as he jumped further away from them. He couldn’t focus on one because the others would team up on him and he couldn’t press any advantage he got because the others would force him back. It was almost like his fight with Ravager, except with animal themed ninjas.

No. Peter wouldn’t ever get over that.

‘I need to hit them hard and hit them fast,’ Peter deduced. He didn’t have time for a long, drawn out fight and those girls needed to see a doctor and the police in short order. The night was still young, and he had the sneaking suspicion that tonight was going to be even longer than normal if the start was anything to go by.

Peter shot a web at the Gorilla and, despite the fact that he tried to dodge it, the web managed to tag him in the arm. With a yank, Peter pulled him off his feet and rocked him towards Peter’s fist. However, to his frustration, a flippin shuriken of all things sliced the web before the Gorilla got within striking distance.

Though the Gorilla still had his momentum, and instead of stopping, the Gorilla let it carry him so he could make a desperate kick at Peter’s head. Peter ducked underneath it, but he managed to grab his ankle before he slammed the Gorilla ninja into the ground, making the tiles crack. The Gorilla let out
a grunt, but Peter was forced to back off when the Tiger attacked him with matching sets of razor sharp claws.

Peter leaned out of the way of the swipes, paying no attention to the fact that the claws were sharp enough to earn little ‘swishs’ as they missed his face and stomach by inches. When he saw an opening, Peter threw a jab at the Tiger's jaw more just to break his rhythm, but he didn’t expect for his tail to wrap itself around his wrist before sending him flying into the wall.

“You have a tail too?” Peter asked as he flipped himself, so he stuck to the wall instead of slamming into it. Thankfully, it was brick instead of drywall, so he didn’t crash right through it. His spidey-sense hadn’t helped him there. It only warned him that some danger was happening in front of him and he thought it was the very, very sharp claws. “Of course you have a tail. Why wouldn’t you have a tail?”

The Tiger didn’t seem to be one for banter because he just helped the Gorilla up while the Werewolf stood guard incase Peter attacked. Peter had to give it to them; they had teamwork. His few clashes with the Sinister Six were almost comical if they hadn’t been so challenging because they’re greatest weakness had been that they couldn’t work together.

Unfortunately, that also meant that he couldn’t use his well-tested strategy of using their attacks against their allies. A shame that since it was his favorite way of dealing with nemesis.

Flipping off the wall, Peter landed in a crouch as he plotted his next attack. It was proving a little harder than he expected but the plan could still be carried out. So, rolling his shoulders, he strode forward towards the trio. The Werewolf met his pace while the other two flanked out.

Acting fast, Peter shot out a web, but the Werewolf dodged it by rolling to the side while the Gorilla threw more shurikens at it, cutting it. However, it served its purpose. Peter dashed at the Gorilla while sending another two webs at the other two to force them further away before he struck out with a kick to the Gorilla's head.

Peter smiled a triumphant smile when the Gorilla tried to block it instead of dodging it, so he put a little more ‘umph’ into it. The Gorilla cried out as he was knocked to the side, but Peter continued the onslaught. While he was recovering and since he was so close, Peter webbed him in the chest before pulling the Gorilla back to him, making him jerk back, and planted a right hook into his jaw.

He felt his spidey-sense tingle yet again, warning him that the other two were attacking, but he ignored it in favor of getting one more hit in. Landing, he pulled the web one more time, and the Gorilla made the mistake of grabbing the web and trying to pull Peter off his feet. However, when he wouldn’t budge thanks to his adhesive abilities so the only thing he managed was sticking his hand closed.

To make things just a little bit harder for him, Peter grabbed the excess web as he punched the Gorilla in the gut, knocking the air out of his lung before he yanked on the web and sent the Gorilla flying over Peter’s shoulder and right into the face of the Tiger. The two let out grunts as they collided yet again but Peter noticed that his spidey-sense was still tingling.

It was telling him that the danger was coming from directly in front of him, but his vision was obscured by the two. It was only when he felt it shift from directly in front of him to his left, he looked over to see it was the Werewolf. Peter tried jumping back, but he ignored his spidey-sense too long.

“Gah!” Peter cried out as he felt the Werewolf’s claws dig into his side. Whatever his suit was made of protected him from the brunt of the damage, but he still felt his skin get pierced by them.
However, his suit was tough enough that it didn’t give out when the Werewolf jerked his hand to the side but his skin wasn’t.

Hot blood quickly began soaking as his skin was torn rather than cut. With a flash of anger, Peter punched the Werewolf in the snout and heard a satisfying crunch when he let out a howl. Peter followed it up with trying to kick him in the side, but he felt something wrap itself around his ankle. Glancing down, he saw it was the Tiger’s tail a mere moment before he felt it tighten before the Tiger started to fling him away with surprising strength.

However, Peter stopped that by webbing the Werewolf in the chest to add some more weight. Apparently, he severely underestimated just how strong the Tiger was because Peter still felt himself sail through the air like the Tiger intended, though the Werewolf was tagging along with him.

Seeing the chance, as they sailed through the air, Peter pulled the Werewolf closer to him while throwing up another arm to block his attempt to sever the web. Just to rub a little salt in the wound, Peter headbutted his already broken nose-snout thing and earned another howl of agony for his efforts before Peter’s spidey-sense warned him that they were approaching the wall.

With one last punch to the ribs, Peter grabbed the Werewolf’s hand and pulled him so that he slammed into the wall instead of Peter. The brick fractured, but it they didn’t break through. Though, the Werewolf did when Peter punched him through it.

Dust hit Peter in the face along with a blast of cold air, but he ignored it and followed the Werewolf through the hole that he made. Hopefully, he did enough damage to the Werewolf to force him out of the fight so he could focus on the other two. And, outside he would have more opportunities to ambush the other two.

To his surprise, and dismay, the Werewolf had rolled to his feet in the snow. Blood dripped from his crooked snout, which must have been absolute agony because it was pulled up in a snarl as he crouched low before pouncing as Peter exited the dust cloud. Tucking into a small ball, Peter flipped backward before he sprung his legs out and kicked the Werewolf in the gut.

“Maybe one of you should have thought about being bird themed to avoid this,” Peter noted as the Werewolf was sent into the air. Peter had completed the flip before he dove forward when his spidey-sense warned him danger was behind him. Just as he did so, shuriken flew through the opening and sailed overhead.

Peter saw them pierce the rusted wall of one of the train cars with a frown before he rolled to his feet and shot twin webs into the hole. One of them went limp almost immediately, but he felt a bite on the other, so he pulled sharply. In response, the Tiger slammed just above the hole, making it even bigger, with a shower of brick and dust.

However, that must have been according to whatever plan the Tiger had because he didn’t seem fazed in the slightest. He threw more shuriken at Peter, making him flip out of the way, as he severed the web with his claws.

“I need to look into making these things cut resistant,” Peter mused to himself as he landed on top of a train car. That seemed to be his webs most glaring weakness, but he never managed to perfect the formula to make it retain his elasticity and stickiness to be worth it. He might as well look into it again while he was trying, and failing, for the most part, to upgrade his tech.

His musings were cut short when he knew that the Werewolf was attacking him again, forcing him to jump away as the Werewolf slammed where he had been crouching. Instead of pressing the attack, Peter was forced back when the Gorilla began throwing, even more, shuriken from his seemingly
endless supply as the Tiger began flanking around.

Knowing they were trying to box him in, Peter decided to break the trap by webbing one of the boxcars and pulling himself away. After dodging another handful of shuriken, he landed with a painfully loud thump.

'Okay, that didn’t work,’ Peter decided as he began crawling on one of the abandoned trains. They weren’t just stronger than he thought but they were tougher too. He got some good hits in and he did some damage, but they kept getting back up. Especially the Werewolf, but Peter guessed that made sense since he was the leader.

Pressing a hand against his wound, he saw that the suit must be water, or in this case blood, resistant because his suit wasn't soaked. The wound was bleeding a fair bit, tearing the stitches from where he had been shot before, so he webbed it closed as he kept an ear out for the animal themed ninjas. No doubt they would be looking for him because, apparently, they were here for him. For what reasons exactly, Peter didn’t know. Maybe he had stumbled into some greater plot without even realizing it or maybe some criminal, in particular, didn’t like that there was a super powered vigilante in Gotham instead of a super rich one.

“Stop hiding Spider-man. Let's not waste each other's time,” the Werewolf said, his voice muffled with distance and his snout being broken. Using his voice, Peter began zeroing in on where he was. Two trains away was his bet but Peter had to assume closer.

“I've never understood why the bad guy says that. I'm not going to abandon my hideyhole and serve myself on a silver platter,” Peter said before he quickly began crawling away from his position. Crawling as quietly, but as fast, as he could, he leaped to another abandoned train car and went underneath it, watching the spot where he just was.

“You have a point,” the Werewolf admitted, surprising him. Peter couldn't see it, but he heard one of them jump atop the train car in front of him. “How about this then; if you don't come out now, we will begin killing those women that you're trying so hard to protect.”

At that, Peter's heart went still before he began silently crawling back, getting ready to attack. He saw another pair of legs crunch across the snow, looking for him before they paused. It was only thanks to his spidey-sense that he was prepared when the owner of the legs crouched down to look underneath the train.

Just as he did so, Peter webbed the Tiger’s face before he dropped from underneath the box car. Then, as he pushed himself from underneath it, he pulled with a savage yank. The response was instant, the Tiger headbutted the side of the boxcar, the sound echoing across the train station, and it was followed by a loud grunt. However, knowing that they could take a hit, Peter kept pulling.

With a muffled roar, the Tiger was dragged underneath the boxcar and, acting quickly; Peter webbed his hands so he couldn’t cut the webs again. Turning on his heel, Peter slammed the Tiger into another boxcar and, because it was well rusted; the Tiger went right through the wall. His spidey-sense warned him someone was behind him, so he completed the turn and slammed the Tiger into the boxcar that he had been hiding under.

However, it seemed to be made of sterner stuff because it just rocked on its rails and teetered on the edge of falling. A balance that was tipped when Peter dropped the webs holding the Tiger and webbed the side next to him since he was attached to the boxcar and pulled himself forward. Peter’s feet connected with the Tigers chest, earning a grunt from him and Peter felt a rib or two give way underneath his feet.
The boxcar began tipping over with a screech that almost deafened Peter, but he gritted his teeth and endured it so he could press the attack against the Werewolf, who had been standing on the boxcar. As he tried to regain his balance, Peter took two large steps up the falling boxcar and attacked.

“Gotcha,” Peter exclaimed, knocking the Werewolf back. He had to duck under a swipe from the Werewolves claws, but he left himself wide open to a kick to the ribs. The Werewolf grunted, but he managed to pin Peter’s foot between his ribs and arm, dragging him down.

Snow went up as the boxcar completed its fall and the metal collapsed underneath its own weight and the Tigers. For a moment, Peter's vision was obscured, and he knew the same must be for the Werewolf, so he twisted in his grip and kicked him in the side of the head with his free foot. Peter felt the grip on the other foot weaken, so he was quick to yank it back before hand springing away from the Werewolf.

Exiting the small cloud of snow, his spidey-sense blared warning him to turn around, and he came face to face with the Gorilla. Peter started to jump back to dodge the attack, but that proved unnecessary when a whip wrapped itself around his neck and stopped him in his tracks.

Seizing the chance, Peter punched the Gorilla in the face and another time in the gut before he tried to kick him but the Gorilla threw up an arm to block it. He must have also slipped the whip because he rolled away from Peter and jumped back until he was with his allies again. The Tiger was back on his feet, and the Werewolf was looking at him warily.

“I heard a little ruckus- Spider-man?” Catwoman started in a confident tone before she glanced down at Peter, sounding absolutely floored by his presence. “I thought you swung off to have a talk with the big bat. What are you doing here?”

“I did, and I’m fighting animal themed ninjas to breaking up a human trafficking ring,” Peter answered easily enough as he eyed the three. The Tiger was in the best shape out of the lot of them, but that was mostly because Peter had been focusing on the other two more. The Werewolf was the leader, and the Gorilla was the strongest, making them the bigger threats.

“Wait...so, you and Batman just...talked?” She pressed, sounding surprised by the idea and even more confused.

“No, you were right. We fought, but I think we’re cool now. Coolish. Lukewarm...we won’t fight again...probably,” he corrected repeatedly a moment before shrugging. The trio were spreading out, letting the Tiger take point while the Werewolf was trying to disappear behind a boxcar.

“Then...wait one second, you beat Batman,” Catwoman exclaimed a little louder than necessary, taken back by the revelation. However, much more interesting, Peter saw the Werewolf freeze in place before sending him a sharp look.

“Wow. Your confidence in me is overwhelming,” Peter deadpanned, never taking his eyes off the ninjas. They stopped where they were at least but they weren't making any moves to attack either. However, he didn't even need to look to know that Catwoman was utterly unashamed by her lack of faith.

“Sorry, but my money was on Batman for that fight. Actually, I was so certain that you were going to get adopted by the bat, I, kinda, got myself a new sidekick.” Catwoman admitted, not sounding ashamed of that fact at all. “Though, she is still unconscious and getting her to sign the dotted line is going to be an absolute pain in the ass, or worse.” She mused and, despite himself; Peter rose an eyebrow.
“Huh. Not exactly sure when I signed the dotted line, but I am annoyed you replaced me so easily! Did the two nights we spent togea-” Peter cut himself off, knowing better than to finish that sentence, especially to Catwoman. However, it was too late because she let out a snicker and Peter flushed on reflex.

“Who is it,” Peter pressed, his eyes darting to the Gorilla, who’s hand was twitching in some kind of sign language. His muscles tensed, preparing for whatever attack was about to be thrown his way and he saw that Catwoman was doing to same.

Even still, she continued with their conversation, “Ah, well, you know how you beat up Ravager and sent her all wrapped up to the police? Yeahhh...” She trailed off, and Peter gave her a sharp look, stunned by what she was saying.

“What-” Peter started, but he was cut off by Catwoman before he could begin.

“Spidey-” she started, but she was also cut off. Peter looked over just in time at the animal themed ninjas to see them reach into their pockets before throwing whatever it was on the ground. Apparently, it was a smoke bomb if the fact that the clearing between them was filled with smoke.

“Don’t breath it in,” Peter ordered, holding his breath as he leaped towards where he last saw the Gorilla. However, his kick that he aimed at his chest passed through nothing but smoke. Landing on the side of a boxcar, he focused on his hearing to search for the three, but he didn’t even hear the sounds of crunching snow and the one heartbeat he did hear was Catwoman’s.

Cursing to himself, Peter jumped up and exited the smoke cloud, and he scanned for any sight of them, but he only saw snow gently falling from the sky and the train station. His jaw dropped, which he closed, but only for it to drop again as he tried to understand what just happened.

“Th-they ran away?” Peter exclaimed, not believing it. It was hardly the first time a villain had done so to Peter, but it was the first flipping time that it worked, and with a smoke bomb no less! It’s like the ripped it right out of the ninja disappearing handbook! He didn’t even know which direction he should go in to pick up any tracks if there were any.

Peter doubted it because they were ninjas.

“Maybe they heard that you beat up Batman and got spooked?” Catwoman offered as she joined him on top of a boxcar. “I know that seems a little silly, but Batman put the fear of him into the League of Assassins, so it’s not as crazy as it sounds. Speaking of which, what’s were you doing taking on the League?” Catwoman asked lightly, but Peter recognized that tone. Aunt May used it on him often enough.

“They were looking for me,” he explained before he jumped up higher to get a better vantage. However, he still wasn’t seeing a hint of them. Heck, he didn’t even see a trail of footprints in the snow no matter where he looked.

“Don’t bother. The League of Assassins is good for one thing and one thing only; disappearing without a trace when they need to with their tail tucked between their legs. We won’t find them. Now, what did you do to piss off the League of Assassins?” Catwoman demanded, crossing her arms.

Peter frowned as he searched the skyline for animal themed ninja shadow things, but he was still coming up empty. It was times like these that he wished he had better senses so he could track things with scent or had heat seeing goggles or something. The animal themed ninjas, or assassins rather, were gone without a trace. He let them get away.
“Damn it,” Peter cursed before he took a deep breath to calm the flash of anger he felt. He fucked up. He was too busy talking to Catwoman; he gave them the opportunity to escape. If he had been paying attention to the fight, like he should have, then they wouldn’t have gotten away. He jumped off from his vantage point, intending to give chase or at the very least find a trail, but he paused when Catwoman jumped on his back as he was swinging by.

"Cat, it's really not the-" Peter said, jumping from train car to train car but he was silenced when Catwoman covered his mouth with a hand.

“Hey, don’t brood. That’s Batman’s thing. Now, onto more important matters, why were the League of Assassins trying to kill you? Did you do something already? Because, really Spidey, pump the brakes. You’ve been a hero for less than a week, and you’re already trying to take on a secret society? The one that specializes in murder?” She scolded in an almost playful tone, but she was scolding him.

Peter’s lips twisted into a grimace before he let out another long sigh. Everything about that sentence bugged him, but there was something in particular about it that he just couldn’t put his finger on. Maybe it was because she was talking to him like he was a kid. Maybe it was because the sleep deprivation was making headway into chipping at his temper. Maybe he was just annoyed in general and it wasn't helping, especially after he let the baddies get away. Regardless, Peter had to bite back a sharp retort.

“It’s fine, I can take care of myself,” he defended before he sent a look at Catwoman. “And I’m not the only one with some ‘splaining to do. What was that about little miss murder and sunshine being your sidekick?” He shot back, and Catwoman gave a careless shrug, but Peter didn’t fail to notice that her expression was carefully blank.

“She’s not a stray cat! She’s a murderer,” Peter pointed out, taking her on that dare. “Are you forget about all the other people she’s killed over the years? Ravager’s body count is in the hundreds already!” He had learned that little tidbit of information when he googled her just to learn about his newest nemesis. Ravager had only been active for a couple of years, but she always had work as her father's apprentice. Her confirmed kill count was nearing two hundred while her unconfirmed was suspected to be much higher. Much, much higher.

“So, I should have just left her to die?” Catwoman challenged a frown tugging at her lips.

“Of course not! I’m just saying that taking her in unless you're actually serious about seeing it all the way through is not a good idea. If she can be...rehabilitated,” Peter said, searching for the word. “Then you can’t joke around about it Cat. She needs good influences and someone to guide her, teach her right from wrong since her dad apparently didn’t do it.” He began and was relieved to see that Catwoman was nodding.

“Yeah, I hear you. I was treating this teaching a puppy not to bite once it’s already gotten a taste for blood,” She said with a nod.

“Not the words I would have used, but close enough I guess. I just...I don’t know Ravager, so I’m not going to act like I know she can be redeemed or reform or whatever, but it sounds like she’s in a bad place right now. I’m not saying you shouldn’t take her in; I’m just saying that you can’t half-ass this. She could end up worse because of it at best or she’ll murder you at worst.” He finished as was
thoroughly surprised when Catwoman was still nodding...agreeing with him...it made him suspicious.

It was well deserved.

“You’re totally right Spidey. I’m still on the morally gray sides of things and, maybe, I’m not the best mentor for her.” Catwoman said, a sly smile tugging at her lips. Now Peter was nervous.

“I’m...right?” The words were almost foreign on Peter’s tongue. This had never happened to him before, and he didn’t trust where this was going one bit.

“You’re right, she is in a dark place, but she needs a bright, shining, beacon of hope to guide her back to the path of righteousness and justice and...stuff. She needs...she needs someone like you, Spider-man.” Catwoman said, making her voice sound more dramatic than necessary.

“What?”

“You’re not going to turn her down, are you? That wouldn’t be very heroic! No, of course, you wouldn’t. You-er, we heroes, would never turn up our noses at a damsel in distress. I know because I’ve saved Batman, a bunch of times. He never fails to pucker up, unlike some,” she said, giving Peter a look.

“What.”

“Perfect,” Catwoman exclaimed, apparently translating his confusion to whatever answer she wanted. “Now, I got a text from Harley earlier about the sleeping one-eyed murder hobo so I’m going to have to deal with that now. So, here’s the earbud,” she said, tossing it at him and Peter caught it out of reflex more than anything.

“Wait-wait! No, Ravager wants to murder me! That's not even an exaggeration! You were there when she made those threats, and she really doesn't seem like the type that won’t carry them through,” Peter quickly pointed out, snapping out of his shock at the mere thought of trying to mentor Ravager alongside Catwoman. That was the stuff of nightmares. Very short, but violent nightmares.

“Hmm, point. She was interrogating me about you before the whole surgery thing,” Catwoman mused to himself and Peter was left lost. Surgery? Integration? He took his eyes off Catwoman for a few hours, and she landed herself in all kinds of trouble. “Fine then, I’ll look after her then, but you’re getting visitation rights.” She decided with a nod and Peter landed on a boxcar, knowing that he lost the ninjas and bitterly accepting that they got away. instead of showing his annoyance and disappointment, he turned his attention back to Catwoman.

“Pass. Hard pass,” Peter said, throwing his arms up in a great big X to emphasize that point. Catwoman chuckled at that, but with two quick steps, before Peter could even think to react, he felt her lips pressed against his cheek with a loud, exaggerated kissing sound. Peter went stiff, his mind suffering a hard crash and it only barely managed a reboot when Catwoman pulled back and gave him a smile that was downright predatory.

“You can’t fool me Spidey; I have your number already. You might complain and moan about her trying to kill you, but you’re going to help me all the same. Because you,” she poked him in the chest as she leaned back in and Peter’s heart tried to jump out his chest. “Can’t bring yourself to ignore someone that you think needs your help.”

Peter opened his mouth to argue, but nothing made it passed his throat because he knew she was
right. Catwoman also knew it because her smile grew as she gave him a playful pat on the cheek.

“Don’t be too shocked. You haven’t exactly been subtle about it, and understanding men is my superpower,” she said with a chuckle and Peter heard something vibrate in one of her pouches. With a sigh, she pulled it out but kept it at an angle that he couldn’t read the text.

“Wow, I don’t understand why anyone would want kids,” she muttered to herself before she shoved her phone back into her pouch. “I have to go deal with Ravager but, before I do, I have to tell you that you were right about someone trying to flood the streets with military grade weapons since I busted another van. Oh, and good job beating Batman. Can’t wait to rub that one in his face.” She said with some excitement and Peter could only nod dumbly, his hand going to his cheek. Then her words sunk in, snapping out of his surprise.

“Wait-why-,” Peter began, another dozen questions cropping up but Catwoman took a step back and let herself fall. By the time he took a few quick steps to the side and looked over the edge, she was already gone. Feeling the urge to groan in annoyance, Peter cradled his head in his hands and pushed back his hood.

Tonight had been an utter disaster. He fought with Batman, fought animal themed ninja assassins that got away, high-quality guns were on the streets, the police department’s force was cut in half, and now he was apparently roped into helping Catwoman mentor a bloodthirsty mercenary that actively wanted to kill him. All of this when he hadn’t slept in days.

The word exhausted didn’t begin to describe how he felt at the moment.

Nevertheless, Peter sucked it up and turned towards the train station to check on the girls and to grab that computer.

“And the night is still young,” Peter muttered to himself, really not looking forward to how bad this night could get.
“Are okay?” One of the girls asked when she saw Peter poking at his wound. They were all gathered at the entrance of the station; the girls huddled together for warmth while Peter sat a respectable distance away. They were waiting for the police to arrive since Peter didn’t feel comfortable leaving them here alone and there were too many for him carry without making several trips.

“Hm? Yeah, I’m good,” Peter said, applying another layer of webbing to stop any more bleeding and to hide the fact that the first layer had bleed through. “Just a scratch, nothing to worry about,” he said giving himself a pat on the wound to show that it didn’t hurt and nearly yelled out in agony because of it. The one that asked him the question still looked a little doubtful, so he gave her a thumbs up to seal the deal.

“Wait, am I going to turn into a werewolf now?” He asked aloud, realizing what happened to him. “It’s a bite that turns you into a werewolf, right? Or is that just vampires? I’m okay with just a scratch, right? Puberty is bad enough; I don’t need any more hair in questionable places!” He wailed dramatically and earned some light chuckles for his efforts. However, most just gave him smiles that were quick to fade as they waited for the police.

“I think you’re good,” the one that spoke earlier said before she paused. “Sorry, but I didn’t believe you when you told me you were stronger than you looked. I don’t think any of us did,” she continued after a moment, wincing when Peter looked her way.

“Don’t worry about it. I might not be Mr. Noodle arms, but I’m lanky and awkward. I’d be shocked if you did,” Peter said, dismissing the issue with a wave of his hand and he knew better than to take offense. The girl was a talker, like him, when she was nervous. Instead of making jokes or snark, she just made conversation. Much more pleasant than screaming or anger that he’s dealt with in the past.

There was a small lapse of silence as Peter listened to the sounds of the city, wondering when he was going to hear police sirens. It had already been a few minutes since he gave the call and the police said that they were on their way, but it was taking longer than it should. Peter guessed that was because the cops only had half their needed number tonight.

“Is that your computer?” She asked, gesturing to the computer next to him, breaking him away from his musings. Peter rested his hand on the military grade laptop next to him on reflex as he shook his head. He glanced down at it with a frown because this thing was top of the line quality, possibly cutting edge. Peter didn’t even want to know what the price tag on it had been but he could only imagine what it had on it.

“No, it was the uh-” Peter paused, searching for a word that wouldn’t upset them.

“Assholes,” she supplied, and Peter let out a chuckle, agreeing with her.

“Yeah, it was the assholes. I need to hack it to find out...to know where the ones that they sold are at and who they sold them to.” Peter said after a pause. He wasn’t one for bluntness, but there was little point in tiptoeing around the issue. They would know what he needed it for and what was on it. Treating them like they were made of glass wasn’t going to help anyone.

“So, you have, like some super computer at your, er, Spider Cave?” She questioned hesitantly, but there was a determined glint in her eyes, despite how her words came out. Peter let out a snort of laughter at that, enjoying the mental image
“I wish, but no. Sorry to ruin your image of me, but I’ll be hacking this in my apartment on my-” Peter said with a laugh, but it was short-lived when he realized one painful truth. He wasn’t going to be able to hack this beast with an iPhone. It lacked the processing power to tackle the firewalls the computer was going to have. The programs would be okay, as would the scripts, but the difference in firepower was too great for a mere iPhone to handle.

If the firewalls adapted, or the defense programs changed according to his attacks, which was a possibility considering it was military grade hardware, he would get locked out. Peter needed something with a little more ‘umph’ to tackle the firewalls the computer was going to have.

Umph that he didn’t have.

“Shit,” Peter cursed and bit back another, both because he didn’t want to worry the girls and he realized he’s been doing a lot of it lately. He brought a hand down his face as he tried to think of an easy solution to this problem.

He couldn’t bring it to the library. Peter imagined it would raise a few eyebrows when he brought in a computer and used the dinosaur desktops they had. Any other places with the kind of computers he would need faced the same problems, he couldn’t use them without some serious questions that he couldn’t answer without making himself look like a criminal or a superhero. He also couldn’t ask Leslie for help, both because she was annoyed with him in general and he didn’t think the computer she had would cut it either.

Now that he thought about it, the sooner he hacked the computer, the better. Whoever had anything to lose would try to delete what was on it remotely once they heard that their operation had been busted.

‘Should I ask the Bat Family for help?’ He wondered to himself, considering the option. His relationship with them was...alright? Batman seemed like a dick while Nightwing was alright, though he was still annoyed about the whole tracker thing. He hadn’t met Batgirl or Robin yet, but he heard good things about them from Catwoman.

‘Do I have a choice,’ he asked himself, his hand going up to the earbud to call for a place to drop the computer off. Peter didn't see another one. Unless he turned his phone into a supercomputer he…

Peter stood up suddenly, surprising the few girls that were paying attention to him as his hand went to his pocket, only to remember that he didn’t have his phone on him. Peter bit back another curse and resisted the urge to groan in annoyance. Of course, he wouldn’t have it on him. That would make things too simple, wouldn’t it?

So, he needed another phone or something to do the job. That was just the question of where he could find one.

Almost as if his gaze was drawn towards it, he glanced at the few bodies that were carelessly thrown around the interior of the train station. The ninjas had killed everyone in the building, but Peter was willing to bet that some of them had a phone on them. It was just the fact he was going to loot bodies that gave him pause.

“Is something the matter?” The girl from before asked almost timidly. Peter looked at them, wondering what he should say, but he quickly decided on the truth.

“Sort of. I don’t have the tech to hack into this computer at my apartment so I was going to jury rig my phone to do it, but I don’t have it on me. So, I have to use on of theirs,” Peter explained, jabbing a thumb in one of the bodies direction. He saw understanding mixed with confusion enter some of
the women’s gazes, which was an odd combination, while others just kept their gaze down, still waiting for the police to come.

“Ohhh…,” the girl said, nodding her head but Peter could tell she didn’t understand in the slightest based on her tone. “What do you mean you’re going to jury rig a phone?” She pressed after a small lapse of silence. Peter scanned the bodies, hoping to see some visible sign or, better yet, one just lying around from if they tried to call for help, but he wasn’t having any luck. Which he should have expected.

“The short version is that I’m going to hook up a bunch of CPUs together, create a program that’ll harness the power of all of them. Maybe rebuild the ios, but I should be able to use that to hack the computer,” Peter explained as he took a deep breath and walked over to one of the bodies and reached into his pockets. As he expected, he found a phone, but it was a burner. Not a great start but he could work with it if he had to.

“So...you’re going to turn a bunch of phones into a tiny computer?” The girl said, standing up, sounding faintly amazed. “You superheroes are something else,” she muttered to herself, thinking that Peter couldn’t hear her and he didn’t give her any hint that he did. However, he managed a smile at the compliment.

“That makes it sound a lot more impressive than it is, but more or less,” Peter said as he moved to the next body. He tried to ignore the unnatural angle of the guy's neck, but it was kind of hard to since he could see his spine straining against the skin. Feeling more than a little queasy, he looked away as he went through his pockets and it was because of that he saw the talker stand up.

“How can I help?” She asked, crossing her arms in what she thought was a brave stance but it looked like she was hugging herself insecurely. It also didn’t help when a shiver wracked her body when the wind picked up and went through one of the busted windows. Peter also saw that the question got the attention of some of the others.

“It’s fine. I got this ju-” Peter began, trying to dismiss the idea outright but he was cut off.

“Let me help...please,” the talker said, stressing the words at him before she grimaced and added the plea. And, just like that, any defenses that Peter had crumbled like a sandcastle.

“Alright. I’ll grab the phones, but in the central office, there’s going to be a bunch of old computers. If you can, open them up while laying them down over there. Some of them are going to be too damaged by rust and stuff, but that’s fine too. Grab the wires from them and strip them down,” Peter said, gesturing to the corner near the girls and as far away from the bodies as he could manage.

The talker nodded and, to Peter’s surprise, she wasn’t alone when she began walking towards the control station. He watched a few of the girls walk down the hallway before he turned his attention back to the task at hand.

It only took a minute for Peter gather the rest of the phones, all of them burners, and another minute to pop the tops thanks to a little super strength. Lining them up, he pulled a few wires that weren’t necessary for the task and began striping the wires by pinching them between his fingers and using his adhesive abilities. The protective covering gave way with ease, and from there it was a simple task of hooking up all the phones together to one slidey phone with a small keyboard.

“You must be the god of texting,” the talker said, but Peter didn’t look at her as his fingers continued to fly over the keyboard. Code was a finkey as all hell, and he was recreating one from memory, so he couldn’t divide his attention. However, he did a nod to show that he heard her while he gestured for her to set one of the computers next to him.
The computers were old. Like, woah levels of old and Peter saw that most of them couldn’t really be salvaged. There was over a decade worth of dust and gunk in there along side an unhelpful portion of rust. Peter expected that, but he had been hoping for more.

“Thanks,” he said, still typing away, “now, if you could connect the wires to that lot right there,” he said, gesturing to the line that all of the phones were tied into. She didn’t say anything else, but Peter saw her start working out of the corner of his eye. He had to show her how to do it once or twice, but she was quick to pick it up. After that, the rest of the computers were hooked up quickly when the few other girls pitched in.

“So…,” she started but lapsed, trying to think of a topic of conversation. “Do you like being a hero?” She asked and Peter’s thumbs paused as he looked at her, the question taking him by surprise.

“I like helping people,” Peter answered with a shrug as he turned his attention back to the code. His enhanced reflexes were a god send because he would have taken him ages typing the code out otherwise. It was nearing done already.

“That’s…not really an answer? I mean, I like helping too, but I don’t get dressed up in a costume every night and fight crime, you know?” She rambled, and Peter felt his irritation growing, but he didn’t let it show. She was scared, and she just wanted to talk. He could relate to that, so he wasn’t going to be a dick about it. At least, Peter intended to try to not be a dick about it.

“I…when I got my powers, I was a stupid, selfish pot of resentment and I thought the world owed me something. Because of that, someone close to me died. I…he had a motto that he liked to say, with great power comes great responsibility. I’m just trying to live up to that, I guess,” Peter explained quickly, ignoring the ache in his chest and stubbornly focused on the phone.

“I-” the talker started, but she stopped herself before she let out a soft sigh. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have pried. I just…was curious, you know? I hear about you superheroes on the news all the time but I just never really thought about why you guys go out and do what you do,” she said, and Peter wondered if that was what she intended to say the first go around.

“You’re fine. I understand,” Peter responded simply as he tapped the final few keystrokes. “And, voila! One overly complicated bit of code at the ready,” he exclaimed, drawing the attention of the others. Peter tried to ignore the intense looks he was getting from the girls. Peter was use to being in the center of attention by now as Spider-man, but it was a little unnerving because it seemed only one of them had any interest in actually speaking.

“Will it actually work?” The talker asked, sounding doubtful as she looked down at it. For that, Peter didn’t blame her. It did look a little rough. Three dinosaur computers that were caked with dust and a bunch of crappy burner phones all messily wired together. The term makeshift didn’t even begin to cover how rough the creation looked.

“Yeah, it will. Probably…you might want to take a step back,” Peter said, not exactly inspiring confidence. The talker and her helpers did exactly that by taking three huge steps backward. After double checking everything and make sure that it had power, Peter booted up his superphone…and immediately took a few steps back as well.

Peter watched it warily as it booted up and, after a few seconds, he noticed the distinct lack of tiny explosions or it short circuiting. Closing the distance between them, Peter picked it up and pulled up the script. The phone responded instantly and, just like that, Peter knew it was working.

“We’re in the clear,” Peter said as he gave a thumbs up and heard some chuckles for his efforts. Now that he had the tech, he quickly opened the computer and turned it on. From there, it was a simple
task of latching on to its internet signal and begin exploiting it to let him into the computer.

However, also as Peter expected, the firewall...well, to put it into perspective; it was the great wall of China, and he was the Mongol horde. He’s encountered worse, like when he faked an application for Wayne Enterprises, but it wasn’t a slouch either.

‘It’ll be worth it,’ Peter thought as he typed away, adapting his script to chip holes in the firewall. All of this just proved his thoughts right that there was something important on the computer. It was just a matter of getting to it. Which was going to take a little time, but considering that the police still hadn’t arrived, Peter guessed that he had some. Not too much; after all, there was still plenty of crime happening that he needed to deal with.

Peter’s eyes began to ache as he looked at the tiny bright screen and he kept having to blink rapidly to keep his eyes from glazing over. Now that he wasn’t moving and his blood wasn’t pumping, it was getting harder and harder to stave sleep off. Peter stifled a yawn, not wanting to hint at the fact it had been actual days since he last slept, and straightened out his back as he continued to type away. Like before, it sounded like a machine gun going off, and he couldn’t stop the groan of relief, even though he tried.

“Gross,” the talker muttered before she let out a small huff of laughter. “You know, you’re really...normal,” she commented, leaning over his shoulder and watching him type.

“That’s probably the first time anyone has ever said that about me. And probably the only time,” Peter shot back as he blinked harshly, welcoming the opportunity to talk. It would help keep him awake.

“I read a lot online about heroes—not that I’m a fangirl or anything, but why wouldn’t I want to know a little more about people that can shoot lasers out of their eyes or fly? But, anyway, everyone always describes heroes like Superman as ‘larger than life’ or Wonder Woman as ‘godlike.’ No one ever says anything about Batman since apparently, he’s camera shy,” she added as an afterthought and Peter snickered at the mental image of the Dark Knight running away from a camera.

“I read a little about you too. A lot of people can't decide if you're a jokester or if you have a mean streak a mile wide after the videos with Ravager and what happened in Old Gotham.” Winced at the reminder of what happened in that part of town but tried to disguise it as a huff of laughter, though it sounded suspiciously like a yawn. “Yeah, after meeting you, I think it’s funny too. I mean, after...what you did, I don’t believe that you have a mean bone in your body,” she declared with a hint of a smile and Peter opened his mouth to correct her.

Whether it was that he totally did have a mean bone or give her a warning about the other dangers of know what he looked like, both for them and him, but he was cut off when he noticed the flow of the script had changed. Before, it had been steadily chipping away at the firewall, creating an endless loop of subroutines that would build and build into it brute forced its way through any security measures the computer had. It was hardly eloquent, or subtle, but he thought it would do.

However, the script changed. The subroutines were becoming the equivalent of a pile up on the interstate highway.

Someone was counter hacking him.

“Wait one second,” Peter muttered to the girl as his fingers danced along the keyboard, his brow furrowing while he fixed his code and began probing his adversary. He guessed that someone noticed his attempt to hack the computer and were barricading the door to keep him out. Also by shutting him out of the internet connection on the computer, so Peter guessed it wasn't just a normal
“What’s going on?” The talker asked, sounding a touch nervous as she watched Peter work.

“Um, well,” Peter started as he created a subroutine to fortify his own position, putting his foot in the doorway, while he began probing for their exact location, sticking his arm through the crack and waving it around blindly, and, at the same time, he searched for another entry point, looking for a window. “Something happened,” Peter mumbled as he continued to alter his script to recover from his opponent’s attacks.

They, whoever they were, struck out with a fist and batted away his flailing hand while stomping on his foot.

Peter’s lips pressed together in a thin line, knowing that in a drawn out battle he would lose. Without a doubt, his opponent had the same level of tech as the computer he was trying to hack while he had a bunch of phones and dated computers that he tied together. Of which he was pretty sure it was going to explode at some point.

“How about this then?” Peter asked them, though he knew they couldn’t hear, as he began creating fake routines as a diversion while, simultaneously he began to create an entirely different script. Peter did the equivalent of shaking the door, screaming incoherently, and waving his arm around violently while he created a clone of himself that began to circle around the house. His clone glanced at the windows, considering busting one in, but he saw that they might have well been made out of diamonds.

Knowing that he wouldn’t be able to bust it in before his opponent noticed, so Peter’s clone continued around the back while the original tried to deal with the fact his arm had been cut off. While the original Peter regrew his arm and tried to brute force his way through the door, screaming insults so horrible that aunt May would have thrown a bar of soap in his mouth and left it there, Peter’s clone found a backdoor.

“What’s happening?” The talker asked, but Peter didn’t answer. He was too busy creating a key for his clone and making a ruckus out front to keep their attention away from his clone. It seemed to be working because they were chopping off more of his body parts, but they couldn’t get his foot out of the door.

“Counter hacking,” Peter answered after a few moments, his fingers beginning to ache and he felt blood trickling down his palm from where the stitches tore on the palm of his hand. He created his clone’s key and wished he could cross his fingers that it worked. His clone slipped it in, and Peter couldn’t stop the smile that appeared on his face when his clone managed to slip in.

“Gotcha,” Peter said as his clone walked into the house. He considered just clobbering his opponent over the head, but he decided against it. It would be far safer to do something different. Announcing that he found the back door was a real good way to get himself booted out, or worse, have them start deleting the files. So, instead, he had his clone go to the desk and begin looking at the data.

“You have to be kidding me,” Peter said to himself and he felt the girl look over his shoulder, trying to figure out the source of his frustrations. All the files were encrypted. All of them. Letting out a breath, Peter made his clone begin shoving the files in his pockets as stealthily as he could. It wasn’t ideal, far from it, but it changed things. What was in the files was important and, if they didn’t know that he had them, then he had time to spare acting on it to decrypt them.

“What’s happening now?” She asked again, and Peter shoved down the swell of irritation he felt and focused on downloading the files as quickly as he could. The only problem with that was his
connection was tentative at best, and the slidey phone only had so much space. Making a split
second decision, he began downloading the information on the other phones why he kept his
adversary’s attention.

As he was doing that, he had his clone go to the closest thing he could find to a suicide button and
have him fiddle with that.

“What’s going on?” The talker pressed and Peter gritted his teeth, biting back something he would
regret saying the moment it left his mouth and sighed instead.

“I can answer your questions in a second, but please…!” He said, stressing the plea and the message
got across because she flushed and backed away. Peter felt like a dick, and he almost apologized out
of reflex, but he just turned his attention back to the phone. His clone was done messing with the
suicide button, and he was ready to begin the final phase.

After double checking his script, Peter had his clone exit the house and circle back around the house
before Peter killed him. After destroying any evidence of his existence, Peter started the program that
had been building since the little battle had begun. With the code equivalent of a spartan kick, Peter
all but knocked the door down and stormed inside.

His adversary saw that he, or she, lost this particular battle and hit the kill switch. However, thanks to
the backdoor he installed into the suicide button, he didn’t just see all the files being destroyed with a
hard crash on the computer, but he saw the trail all the way to the source. He couldn’t track it, not in
the time he had left, but he had a backdoor into their computer systems and access to everything on
it.

Letting out a breath of relief, he laid back and let the cold floor sooth him for a moment.

“...did you win?” The talker asked hesitantly, and Peter nodded.

“Yeah, I got the files,” Peter answered, pushing himself back up quickly. It had been a bad idea to
lay down. He almost didn’t have it in him to get back up.

“Good. I guess you’re off to throw them in prison?” She asked, standing with him and Peter nodded
again.

“Yeah, as soon as I can,” Peter said, deciding to stretch the truth a little. It wouldn’t do to ruin the
one silver lining that they had in this whole situation. “I’m just waiting for the police to get here.” He
continued, taking off a glove and checking the stitches on the palm of his hand. The ones near his
thumbs had torn, but the rest were still good.

“I’ve been here for the past five minutes,” Peter heard a gruff voice say behind him, and he
recognized it instantly. Whipping around, Peter saw the police commissioner standing behind him, a
lite cigarette between two fingers as he glanced at the layout of computers and phones.

Looking back at him, Gordon brought it to his lips and breathed in deeply, “looks like you found
those innocents you heard....and they said something about ninjas?” He asked, raising a graying
eyebrow with a smirk on his face.

…
“What happened?” Whisper demanded, standing on reflex as Kyle walked-limped through the door to her office. His nose was broken badly, and his blind eye was swollen shut along with some heavy bruising to his jaw. He was holding his ribs as well, and the action told Whisper that some of them had to be broken because Kyle would have left them alone otherwise. His baby blue eye, the only one that could actually look at her, had some hesitance in it but, after bracing himself, he answered in a croak.

“Spider-man. Tried to kill him. Didn’t trust rookies to do it. Agent T and G are just as bad,” Kyle forced out as he pushed himself through the door and Whisper heard him stifle a groan, though he tried to hide it.

“Lie down on the couch,” she ordered, her mind turning over the new furiously. This was...unexpected. Kyle wasn’t the most powerful being in existence, nor was she, but he had centuries of experience killing as an assassin, and his abilities were mid to upper-low tier on the scale of strength the world now operated at. He was by no means a pushover and neither were agents G or T.

“We underestimated him,’ Whisper summarized with a grimace as she grabbed a fist aid kit. Gravely, if the fact her partner was limping to the couch was anything to go by. However, they, or rather Kyle, hadn’t acted on the assumption that Spider-man was weak. The three of them should have been overkill. Enough so Whisper would have questioned why Kyle bothered with the other two if he hadn’t come back a bloody wreck.

“Have we been compromised?” She asked, her tone deadly serious as she began scooping ice into a plastic bag before she walked over to Kyle at an urgent pace. Kyle let out a small groan as he sunk onto the couch, it straining to carry his weight, but he shook his head.

“No. Wore League gear to cover tracks,” Kyle answered, and Whisper let out a breath of relief. None of her agents were captured, and any suspicion would be thrown to the League of Assassins. It wasn’t ideal, but this wasn’t an ideal situation. If it were, Spider-man would be a corpse somewhere, and Kyle wouldn’t be giving his report with a broken jaw.

“Well done Kyle,” Whisper praised as she pressed the bag of ice against his eye and placed his much larger hand over it to hold. As he mumbled a thank you, Whisper went to work. Most of her medical skills were outdated by a couple of decades, but the basic first aid hadn’t changed much since she had been born. “What happened? Let me fill in the gaps,” she ordered, not wanting him to aggravate his jaw any more than necessary.


“She said he defeated Batman. Matches spies report of a disturbance on police roof. I think it’s true,” he added, for the first time in what felt like ages, Whisper was taken off guard at the news. She didn’t show it. Something as petty as surprise had no chance of breaking her composure, but the news felt like an unexpected punch to the gut.

“He defeated Batman?” She muttered to herself, her tone doing nothing to hint at how her brain was failing to wrap itself around the idea. How many could claim that? Batman’s record wasn’t unblemished, but there was a good reason why people put Batman in the same weight class as Superman. With enough time and with the right preparations, Batman could defeat anyone. Magical beings, superhumans, gods or cosmic threats.

He’s proven it time and time again.
Yet, some rookie managed to defeat him?

No. That simply didn’t make sense. It didn’t matter how powerful Spider-man was, Batman’s level of technology that he carried on him at any given time should have been more than enough to deal with him. With ease, even. His decades of experience fighting on the front lines very battle the Justice League was involved in should have carried him through the fight. He mastered hundreds of martial arts styles and was proficient in hundreds more while Spider-man fought like a thug.

Batman defeated Ra's al ghul, her former...employer, regularly. He fought beings in the same league as Superman, hell, he defeated Superman on more than one occasion! He...

No. There was more going on her, some angle she wasn’t seeing. There was no denying that Spider-man was tougher than he seemed, Whisper was looking at evidence of that, but defeating Batman simply didn’t make sense. The issue of both of them being heroes aside; perhaps it had been a test? Some right of initiation? Maybe Batman was holding back against the web head for whatever reason?

Maybe-

“Damn it,” Whisper muttered to herself, her hands moving on autopilot. She was reaching. Whisper knew it, but just the idea of Batman being defeated by anyone was a shock, much less a total rookie with less than a week's experience being a hero. It just-...

Letting out a breath, Whisper continued treating Kyle's wounds after helping him pull off his jacket. Again Kyle proved his worth. He put on his regular suit, even though he had broken ribs, just so no one would be able to connect HSC Banking on the incredibly off chance someone actually saw him enter.

“What are we going to do?” Kyle forced out as Whisper helped him lay back down.

“If Spider-man really did beat Batman...then we need to take him out of the picture as soon as possible,” she said, grabbing some bandages and antiseptic. Her lips twisted into a frown because she knew exactly what that would take. “We can’t risk any more exposure, so we can’t use our people for this…” she said, thinking out loud.

Secrecy was the utmost importance or the plan. HSC was going to be scrutinized by Batman because of past criminal ties so giving him more chances to discover the truth was just a bad idea all around. So, if she couldn’t use their people then that meant they had to use someone else’s.

“That Bitch won’t help us,” Whisper said to herself, feeling Kyle’s wince rather than hearing it. “A shame, because it would have helped the image you created,” she said, giving Kyle a small smile and his only eye softened in response. That would have been perfect. Having been with the League of Assassins for centuries herself, she knew that none of it’s agents would speak of their motivations to kill Spider-man and it would have completely covered their tracks.

“I’m thinking we pull out all the stops. Spider-man’s proven himself more capable than anticipated, so, we send someone where it won’t matter,” she said, putting her hands on the sides of Kyle’s nose. With well-practiced ease, she shifted the cartilage back in place and Kyle didn’t make a sound as she did so. After making sure it was set properly, she stood up, knowing that his healing factor should take care of the rest.

Kyle would be out of commission for a couple of days, maybe a week, but he would be on his feet in no time.
“Who are we going to send?” Kyle asked, settling in as Whisper went for her phone.

“Who else?”
Hey y'all. So this is the point of the story where the original author, IdeasGuy, stopped writing due to personal business and where I took over for him. This is the first chapter I've written so far, hopefully I'll be able to update at least once a month.

Feel free to give me constructive criticism and point out any mistakes I made, it'll help me become a better writer and deliver better quality stories.

Enjoy!

Holy crap! Was the commissioner secretly part of the Bat-family?

"Uh yeah, one of them even transformed into a werewolf, believe it or not." Surprisingly, Peter received a nod, as if that wasn't the most insane thing Gordon had heard in his life.

"Hm, and what's that you got there?" Gordon questioned, glancing at the laptop, causing Peter to immediately panic. If the police got their hands on the laptop, there was definitely no way that they were going to let him tinker around with it, the slavers would get away. He had to convince Gordon to let him keep it.

With that in mind, Peter immediately blurted out the first thing that came to mind.

"Spider stuff."

Crap.

The commissioner seemed more amused than angry though, and for a brief second, Peter let himself hope that he could still leave with the laptop in his possession. A hope that was immediately crushed when Gordon held his hand out expectantly.

Peter let out a sigh before handing it over. He could just run off with it, but his relationship with the GCPD was tense enough as it was. They clearly didn't like a vigilante unaffiliated with Batman operating in Gotham, him running off with the laptop would paint him an even worse light.

Ah well, hopefully, they could get something out of it.

"That...werewolf ninja, any idea who he was?" Gordon questioned, handing over the laptop to a nearby forensic officer. Now that Peter took a look around, the station was suddenly full of GCPD officers, was he seriously that distracted by hacking?

“Nope, him and his goons were wearing masks, couldn’t tell who it was."

“There were others?"

“Oh yeah, two others, one was a gorilla and the other was a tiger.” Peter then took a moment to ponder on the absurdity of that sentence.
“Is it always this weird in Gotham?” Peter questioned, stuff like this wasn’t exactly uncommon back on New York, he’d fought weirder stuff, ranging from a giant man-eating lizard to a clingy alien with rejection issues. But events like those were always rare, he could go weeks without fighting anything that wasn’t an average mugger armed with a knife or gun. Gotham was a different story, within his first week he had fought a giant zombie, a flying musical arsonist, a black-ops bat furry and now ninjas that turned into giant animals. He had gained a new respect for the Bat-family, he would have gone insane by now if this was a daily occurrence.

The commissioner let out a deep sigh in response to the question, and a tired look appeared on his face that made him look twice his age. “Kid, you have no Goddamn idea.”

They spent a few more minutes talking, he tried to answer as many of the commissioner’s questions as he could, but it was painfully obvious that he had no idea what had happened here. All Peter knew was that he came here to fight slavers and rescue some prisoners but ended up in a fist-fight with animal ninjas.

Gordon let him off shortly afterward, and he decided to say goodbye to the rescued women before he left. They were being gently questioned by an officer, who let him by when he asked for a moment alone.

The women were looking a lot better now, some of them were even smiling at him. The realization that this living nightmare was finally over left them relieved beyond doubt. Many still had grim looks on their face, their experience was undoubtedly going to haunt them for years to come, but now that they were finally safe the healing process could finally begin and they could get on with their lives.

That chatty woman who was talking to him earlier wasn’t with the group strangely enough, but he just imagined she just getting treatment or whatever they did to kidnapping victims, he wasn’t exactly an expert on police protocol.

“Now that your all safe and sound it’s about time I get going. You gals take it easy from here on out, okay? You all deserve a long break after all this.”

One girl in the group stepped forward and gave him a tired smile. “Thanks for the help Spidey, we really owe you one.”

Peter waved his hand dismissively. “Nah, you guys don’t owe me anything. Just doing what needs to be done.” He couldn’t help but feel embarrassed at the praise, two years of being a vigilante and he still wasn’t used to it. But still, it was always to be appreciated, and seeing the relieved faces of the girls made him quite happy. It was moments like these that reminded him why he donned the mask and kept fighting.

With all that said and done, Peter walked away from the station and swung out into the night. As much as he wanted to continue his patrol, his injuries were a bit too severe to ignore and the webbing could only do so much to prevent blood loss, so with that in mind, he made his way to Dr. Leslie’s clinic.

(...) 

Peter nonchalantly strolled into the empty clinic. He had left his suit back in his apartment, questions would have been raised if someone saw Spider-Man walk into Leslie’s clinic, she’d already done so much for him by giving him an apartment and patching his wounds up, the last thing he wanted to do was cause her any more trouble.

Which became a bit complicated when Catwoman and Ravager stepped out of Leslie’s office. A
shocked expression appeared immediately appeared on his Peter’s face and he immediately tried to back-pedal to the entrance without being seen. Tonight was just not his night.

That attempt was immediately dashed when Catwoman saw Peter, let out a bright smile and walked over to him with Ravager in tow.

“Hey there, Peter, right?” How’s Mr. Mittens doing?” Catwoman asked, with Ravager snorting in amusement at the name. Screw her, Mr. Mittens was a perfectly masculine name in his opinion. Besides, a girl who chose Ravager as an alias had no right to judge his choice of name.

“Oh-uh, he’s doing fine, got settled in and everything.” Peter was only half-sure that he had fed Mr. Mittens this morning, but she didn’t need to know that.

The mini-terminator didn't seem to recognize him at least, the only thing she was did was give him a once-over and turn her head in disinterest immediately after. Peter couldn’t but feel a bit insecure about that, it had been a while since he last washed up...

Speaking of appearance, she didn’t have that bandana she was wearing the first time they fought, and he now had a clear look at her face. The most distinctive thing about her was the eyepatch, which surprised him considering how close she came to hitting him with her pistol at their fight, she had better aim with one eye than most marksmen he fought. There was also the white hair, which coupled with her lone blue eye gave her an uncanny resemblance to Black Cat, if it wasn’t for the eyepatch, he would have mistaken her for Felicia at first glance. Of course, she would end up with Catwoman of all people...

“Something on my face jackass?” Ravager was glaring at him now. Oh, he had been staring, hadn’t he?

“Wha-no, I mean not that you don’t look good, even with the eyepatch-” She glared even harder at that, the eyepatch seeming to be a sore point. He wisely decided to stop talking when Spider-Sense started flaring up lightly.

Smooth one Pete, real smooth.

“Sorry.”

Catwoman looked amused at the two’s antics before continuing. “Good to see that your taking care of him, Gotham’s isn’t exactly the most nurturing place for a cute little kitten,” Catwoman said, flashing him a happy grin that would have made any teenager attracted to the female form a blushing mess.

Peter cleared his throat and avoided eye contact as he felt heat rising to his face. Damn it, he thought his time with Felicia would have made him immune to stuff like this. “Eh, it’s no big deal, just felt right taking him in.”

“Well good seeing you again but we gotta go, you take care of yourself,” Selina replied, and turned to Leslie. “Again, thanks for the help doc, you’re a real lifesaver.” She nudged Ravager and whispered. “Say thank you, Rose.”

Rose? Was that seriously her actual name? A pretty name like that wasn’t what he imagined a psychotic and unrepentant killer would have.

Rose looked mildly annoyed before letting out a sigh. “Thanks.” She reluctantly muttered.

Leslie nodded. “Come back if the stitches open up.” She said to the pair as they made their way to
the entrance. Huh, now that she mentioned it, he noticed a patch of stitching on Ravager’s temple, explained why they were here at least.

The two left after that, with Rose sending him one last glare. With them gone, Leslie gestured Peter to follow him into her office. Once they arrived Peter sat down an operating table Peter removed his shirt, with the inside of it being covered in blood. That would undoubtedly be a pain to wash out. He ripped off the webbing that covered his wound so the doctor could get a clear look.

Leslie appeared by his side and starting looking over his wounds. He was surprised by the lack of scolding over his wounds, but he wasn’t about to complain. But he did wince once he caught sight of the needle in her hands.

A few minutes passed in silence as she worked, with Peter trying his best not wince as she stitched over a particularity large cut on his. Eventually, the awkward silence started becoming unbearable and he tried to strike up a conversation. "Sooo, I see you've met the mini-terminator."

Leslie looked at him with a confused expression, a needle paused halfway through her stitching. "What are you on about?"

"Ya know, Deathstroke's daughter."

"That girl was an assassin?"

"Yup, but don't worry too much, Catwoman says she has a chance of getting better." Peter than recollected every moment he spent with Catwoman. "Uh, you know what? Maybe you should be a little worried."

"So how did you two meet?" Leslie asked, only to immediately regret it when a mischievious expression formed on Peter’s face.

"It's a tale as old as time doc. Boy meets girl, girl tries to shoot boy in the face, boy covers girl in his white sticky goo and- ow!" Peter cried out when Leslie slapped one his bandaged cuts, judging by that and the displeased look on her face, she clearly didn't appreciate the joke.

Peter rolled his eyes as he started rubbing his now stinging arm, some people had no sense of humor. "She was the Penguin's bodyguard, I fought her when I busted him. Looks like she escaped and got adopted by Catwoman, apparently her crazy dad is hunting her down for some bounty she has on her head."

Leslie frowned at, an expression he had become used to at this point. "Deathstroke is a very dangerous man Peter, even Br-Batman knows well enough to stay clear of him. You’d be an idiot to mess with him." Leslie reprimanded, but Peter didn’t miss that slip-up. Did the doctor and Batman have history?

"Hey now, it's not my fault bad guys can’t resist coming after me. Do you think it’s the spandex? Maybe if I lay off the squats for a few weeks they’ll go after Nightwing instead.” Leslie only shook her head in response, but he knew he was totally right.

The conversation died off after that, and Leslie worked for few minutes in silence before she moved to his back and saw the large claw marks left his attacker, which had mostly scabbed over by now but still stung a bit.

“What in God’s name caused this?”

“Werewolf ninja.”
“You vigilantes are going to drive me insane one of these days.”

(...)

Barbara Gordan walked into the Batcave and was greeted with the sight of Bruce sitting at the Batcomputer and going over the results of that webbing he had brought in last night.

“Interesting reading?” Barbara questioned as she walked over to him.

Bruce didn’t look up from his research or even look surprised at her unexpected appearance. "You could say that.”

Any previous attempts to study the strange substance resulted in failure with the webbing dissolving within an hour. But his recent encounter with Spider-Man had allowed him to obtain a generous sample of the stuff with ample time to bring it to the bat-cave for further study. It had dissolved away like expected, but he had received a nice amount of information from the brief study.

They were an amazing creation, they had the elasticity of nylon and the durability of steel, and what little information he had received of the base chemicals used to create them were surprisingly simple, things that one could find in a normal household or shop.

It was only a matter of time before he could replicate the webbing and add it to own utility belt, along with also creating a counter to it if he ever came to blows with Spider-Man again, this time he would be better prepared.

Along with that, he was planning to introduce it to the GCPD, the webbing would undoubtedly be an amazingly useful tool to take down criminal non-lethally, it was breathable and strong enough to temporarily hold down the likes of Killer Croc and Bane. They could also be used as a medical tool, paramedics could simply place it over an injury to prevent blood loss long enough for them to receive proper treatment.

He didn’t know if Spider-Man was the one to create the web fluids he used, but if he was then maybe he could be convinced to share his creation with others. He seemed altruistic enough to hand out the formula for free but likely hadn’t by never considering their use by anyone else aside from him. But if he did share than he wouldn’t be able to receive payment for it unless he revealed his identity and patented it, considering his reluctance on the matter, he doubted that would happen.

Bruce pondered using Wayne Industries to buy it off of him, that way he could protect his identity and receive a cut of the profits, but Spider-Man would have to agree to that first.

“So, I hear you and Spider-Man had a heart-to-heart.” Barbara lightly teased. Her dad had given her the basic run-down of what happened, and she watched the recording from Bruce’s cowl just to make sure it was all true. “Does this mean you finally trust him?”

Bruce briefly looked away from the batcomputer to answer her. “Until this mess with the gangs is sorted, we can trust him for now. After all this is done, we can take the time to further investigate his background.”

“Bruce, seriously? He doesn’t know yours or Dick’s identity, but he still has no trouble working with either of you.” Barbara couldn’t help but feel a bit annoyed at the Dark Knight’s suspicious attitude, while he was right most of the time, this case was a bit different.

Spider-Man had been operating within their rules ever since he showed up, no killing, minimal collateral damage, and no violent incidents with other members of the Bat-family or GCPD. Last night’s case of Bruce’s and Spider-Man's rooftop meeting being the only exception. And it was clear
that that case was self-defense on Spider-Man's part. Along with that, he had saved Kara from a couple of thugs, even though she was in no real danger they had both developed newfound respect for him.

“Are you just sore about losing that fight?” She spat out, which she slightly regretted once she got the infamous bat-glare leveled at her.

“I wasn’t expecting to encounter Spider-Man on that roof Barbara, if I was then I would have better prepared myself. I won’t make that same mistake”

Yeah, he was definitively still sore.

Bruce didn’t reply after that and she took that to be the end of the conversation, but then he pulled up a new report on the batcomputer. “Take a look at this, Spider-Man was attacked by what Gordan believes are the League of Assassins.”

Barbara groaned as she read the report, this really wasn’t Gotham’s best week. “Great, so they’re back in town too. Do you think they have something to do with the weapons coming into town? A way to weaken Gotham before striking?”

“It’s possible, but that doesn’t fit their Ra’s M.O, and I don’t recall ‘werewolf ninjas’ being a part of his fighting force. We’ll need to investigate further, right now we need to focus on the gangs, the GCPD is still overwhelmed at the moment.”

“Gotcha, I’ll take the North patrol with Tim tonight.” Barbara turned around to go deeper into the cave and prepare her gear, but hesitated and briefly turned around. “And Bruce, please take it easy on Spider-Man, I know what it’s like to be the new kid on the block that nobody trusts.”

It was subtle, but she saw Bruce’s eyes soften by a fraction “I’ll try Barbara”.

Barbara nodded, and left, leaving him alone once again. As Bruce continued his study of the webbing and the alleged return of the League of Assassins, his thoughts drifted to the mystery that was Spider-Man.

Spider-Man was approximately 5’10, a white male, possibly in his teens or early 20’s, and had the physique of an athletic gymnast. The first three were too vague to specify a single person in a city where hundreds of people filled that criteria and the fourth could be well-hidden by something as simple as layered clothing. All in all, it would take a lot more for him to uncover Spider-Man’s identity.

But at the same time, he couldn’t help but feel a bit of unease at the thought. Gordan had vouched for Spider-Man’s character, as had Dick, and even Selina. That encounter on the rooftop last night has shown him exactly why.

Spider-Man, despite his joking and irresponsible manner, tried to do the right thing. They were both driven by personal tragedy, his story of his guardian’s death reminded him of his own parent’s deaths, and how it inspired him to become the Batman to fight against crime. He couldn’t help but feel a kindred bond with the man because of it.

But as much as he wanted to believe that Spider-Man’s earnest nature was true and he really was trying to be a force for good, it could all be a trap, for all he knew Spider-Man could be planning to destroy the city at this very moment.

(...)
“~ Spider-Man, Spider-Man, he just opened a tuna can. ~” Peter sang merrily, placing the now open can of tuna at Mr. Mitten’s feet, who let out a happy purr before diving in for a feast. He couldn’t help but be in a chipper mood, his injuries from his fight with Batman and those animal ninjas had mostly had scabbed over by now, and for once in what felt like forever, he had finally gotten a full eight hours of sleep.

Peter ruffled the cat’s ears before turning back to his desk, a shabby thing that he had found abandoned in an alleyway, it was cluttered with various devices he had salvaged from the dumps and an assortment of freshly-bought chemicals he had just used to refill his web capsules. But the most noticeable things were his web-shooters and a destroyed escrisma stick that belonged to Nightwing. It was pretty banged up from his fight with Solomon Grundy, but the battery was still salvageable, hopefully, with some tinkering, he could find a way to apply it to his web-shooters.

Peter smiled at the thought, electric webs would undoubtedly be handy fighting the likes of Dr. Octopus and the Firefly. Why bother punching them if you could just short-circuit their equipment and render them defenseless?

Speaking about his webs, he was still racking his brain trying to figure how to alter their formula in order to reinforce the wood of the buildings he had bought.

The three buildings he had bought were as run down as a crack house. The walls could be broken down by a single kick, the water violated more than a few health and safety codes, and rats were running around rampantly chewing through the circuitry. He had a lot of work to do before they could become proper homeless shelters.

So far, he had managed to clean up a few rooms so the kids had a place to stay for the night, but he had to do more. Crime was an immense problem in Gotham, and none of the buildings had any decent security to fend them off, but he didn’t have the funds to hire or install proper security. He could try patrolling the buildings as Spider-Man, but then that would leave him unable to fight crime elsewhere. There was also the issue of buying food for everyone...

The money from the photos he had sold to the Daily Planet had run out by now, what with the combined costs of purchasing the buildings, purchasing the necessary chemicals and equipment to refill his web shooters, and buying food for himself, the kids and a cat. Now he only had a few dollars to his name.

Ugh, he had a lot of work to do.

He had to do better if he failed there would dozens of homeless people starving or freezing to death in the middle of the night...

Maybe he could try selling some more pictures of Spider-Man to the Daily Press, as much of a jackass as that Lonnie guy was, the pay was decent enough. Alternatively, there was also that juggling performer suggestion that that Dick guy had suggested. He wasn’t sure how good the pay was, but being his own boss sounded nice, he could work whenever he had the time and could work at any location. Maybe when he was done tinkering with his webs, he could explore some other options.

Aunt May always told him to-

RING RING

His train of thought was immediately ruined when his phone began to ring. Retrieving his phone out his pocket, Peter took a look at the caller-ID only to see Catwoman’s name.
Peter was surprised that she was calling him at this hour, the morning had barely ended and he had only seen her active at night. Whatever it was she wanted, it must have been important. With that in mind, Peter answered the phone and pressed it against his ear.

“Heya Catwoman, that mini-terminator try to stab you yet?” Peter nonchalantly greeted, expecting a snarky response in turn, and becoming worried when the only reply he received was some pained breathing.

“Catwoman? What’s going on? Are you okay?” Peter questioned, put off by the lack of response.

Just as he was starting to panic, Catwoman’s voice finally reached him. “Hey Spider! I could use your help, Deathstroke’s here and he’s very angry right now. Sooo, if you could get your ass over right now, that would be just swell!” She said with a surprisingly chipper tone. Was she not supposed to be freaking out right now?

By the time she was finished, he had retrieved his suit from under his bed and was half-way through putting it on. “Tell me where you are and I’ll tell get there as soon as I can.”

“We’re at the south of Gotham, right of the steelworks, just get your gear and-”.

Peter cursed as the connection was severed, likely not by her choice. He had warned her that taking Ravager in was a bad idea, now she was a target for her crazy dad.

Pocketing his phone, he finished suiting up and quickly grabbed his web shooters before exiting through his open window.

As he began swinging from building to building towards the south of Gotham, his day off had suddenly become a bit more complicated. “Is this city trying to screw me over or something?” Peter muttered.
Chapter 19

Rose Wilson let out an annoyed groan as she felt something tapping against her head, opening her eye she saw the grinning face of Catwoman staring back at her.

"Morning Rosey." Catwoman cheerfully greeted.

"What the fuck do you want?" Rose groused, shoving her head back down underneath the covers. She hadn't had a decent bed for days now, she would cherish whatever time she had left with it. Not to mention she hated leaving her bed when she didn't have to. Being a professional killer took time and effort and she deserved her rest dammit! And sure she did owe Catwoman but she never promised to be miss Manners to her. Not to mention she had time to think and that only made her realize how much she had screwed up lately. Her father never needed having a thief taking pity on him to save his life after all.

"Well now that you're all rested up, I think it's time we talked about that proposition I mentioned last night," Catwoman said, ignoring Rose's bad mood and taking a seat the edge of the bed. "You've seen how bad crimes been in Gotham, right?"

Rose's head popped up from the covers and nodded, she knew Gotham was labeled as Gotham's most crime-ridden city in America for a reason, but even she knew it wasn't this bad. "Yeah... it's been worse than Hub City during an election campaign and that's saying something."

Catwoman continued. "Well me, Bats and his jolly group of helpers in tights have been trying to keep things from escalating too badly, but the truth is we're barely handling things as it is. And well, someone with your skill-set you would definitely help even the odds a bit."

Rose's brow rose in confusion, what was she getting at? It almost sounded like she wanted her to... no fucking way.

Rose's head snapped backward in shock, and before long a repressed smile appeared on her face as her shoulders shook in repressed mirth. But despite her best efforts to keep her composure she ended up letting out a huff of laughter.

"You-you want me to be a hero? Me." She asked skeptically.

Her as a hero? That idea was so absurd she almost broke into a round of laughter. She killed people for a living and Catwoman expected her to put on some colorful tights and go around beatingcriminals up and doing the police's job for free?

Catwoman waited as she recovered from her shock with an unamused expression on her face. "Now, now, I get that you're used to a... different line of work. But it won't actually be that different, minus the killing. I give you a target, you go over there, beat 'em up, and throw their ass into jail, and then I pay you. Easy enough, right? Plus it gives you a way to pay me back for saving you."

Rose shot her a skeptical look. "Are you high, lady? I'm an assassin, an assassin. I murder people for money. Saving lives is the exact opposite of my job. If you want someone to kill, I'm your gal. Heck I'll even do it for free so we're even, but I am definitely not hero material."

"Kid, I'm a thief, not exactly a prime candidate for heroics either. But regardless I've been doing just fine for the past few weeks. Don't get me wrong, I'm still planning to go right back to robbing museums and rich fat bastards after this mess in Gotham is over, this was never permanent for me and it doesn't have to be permanent for you." Catwoman replied. "Just think of it as... paid"
"...You're completely insane... Then again... People have said the same about me."

"Not exactly surprising in a city like this. So what's it gonna be? Is it a yes or a no?"

Oh fuck, she was actually being serious. Rose Wilson rose from her bed into a sitting position, giving Catwoman her undivided attention. "Just... just give me a damn minute yeah? This is a lot to take in."

Catwoman nodded in response rising from the bed and leaving the room, closing the door behind her and leaving Rose alone in her thoughts.

She slumped back into her bed and stared up at the ceiling in thought as she contemplated her current position. She was currently in one of Catwoman's safehouses, she apparently had multiple ones scattered around Gotham in case she ever needed to lay low after a heist. She had brought her to this one after Dr. Leslie had patched her up.

The thought of becoming a Goddamn tight-wearing vigilante was so insane and funny at the same time she almost fell into another fit of laughter, but as much she hated to admit it, it was logically the best choice for her right now. That video of her humiliating defeat was still circulating around the internet- two million views in a single day, fucking wonderful- she wouldn't get much more work in Gotham now, or in any part of the USA if she was unlucky, she really had lucked out with that fatass Penguin.

Once she found the asshole who had recorded and uploaded that video she would shove a crowbar so far up-

She was getting off track.

She could leave Gotham, but then what? Her reputation was in tatters and the fact that she was stuck with a massive bounty on her head that any moron with a gun would try to cash in on meant she would never be safe for now. Everywhere she went, bounty hunters and her father would follow shortly after. She needed protection. Catwoman had close ties with Batman, and by looks of it, with Spider-Man as well. If she worked with her then she would have their protection by proxy. Her father was one of the most, if not the most efficient killer on the planet, but even he knew when the odds were against him. As ridiculous as this all seemed it was clear that Catwoman's proposition was too good to pass up.

Not to mention she had a debt to pay and she always paid her debts.

"I can't believe I'm actually going to do this." She grouched.

Rose let out a sigh, before calling Catwoman back into the room, who soon stepped back into the room, sending her an expectant look. Rose reluctantly nodded her head at her. "Alright, fine. I'll be... a vigilante. It's just temporary, and you sure as shit better pay me well."

Catwoman clapped her hands once in delight. "Great! Then get your gear on, we'll start your first day right now."

Rose blinked once in surprise. "Wait, you want me to start right now!?"

"No time like the present kiddo. Harl-er, I mean one of my contacts, just reported in. There's currently a warehouse full of munitions that the Bloods and Crips are fighting over. We can take 'em out while they're distracted trying to plan against each other, plus its morning, we'll have the element of surprise at our hand." Catwoman abruptly turned around and made to stroll out the room.
"Hey, hold up," Rose said as Catwoman made towards the door. "Why are you doing all this?"

Catwoman paused midway through opening the door, sending her a quizzical look.

"What's your angle in all of this?" Rose demanded. No matter what, she just couldn't think up a reason why Catwoman had been helping. It wasn't for her bounty at least, she could have cashed in on it back at that bar.

"What do you mean?" Catwoman asked, with one eyebrow raised in confusion.

"You could have cashed in on my bounty, instead you took me back to your home, got me patched up, and now you're offering me a job. Why the hell are you being so... nice?" She had questioned. By the time they had gotten to the safe house last night, she had been far too exhausted to question why Catwoman had been helping her, choosing to collapse into the nearest bed as soon as possible. Now that she was awake this whole thing seemed suspicious.

Catwoman looked to the side in contemplation for a moment before shrugging her shoulders. "Bad influences."

Rose blinked once. "What?"

A reluctant expression appeared on Catwoman's face before she sighed and sat down on the edge of the bed and looked her in the eye. "Look kiddo, a few years ago I would've left you back in that bar without looking back. But now... I just can't. Bats and Spidey have admittedly made me a bit soft." Catwoman said with a self-deprecating smile. "Seeing the condition you were in back in that bar struck a chord in me, you know? I had a pretty crappy dad growing up too so I can sympathize with your position, leaving you to die was just kind of... depressing."

"So what, this is all out of pity?" Rose asked with her only eye narrowed. She wasn't sure if she should be offended or not. Her pride was already crushed after that shitshow with Spider-Man, the knowledge that she was still breathing purely out of pity didn't sit right with her.

" Pretty much, yeah." Catwoman bluntly stated.

Rose raised her head and was about to angrily retort before a crestfallen expression appeared on her face and her lone eye fell to the ground in thought.

Well... crap.

Catwoman clapped her hands once, the sudden noise startling Rose and dispelling the gloomy atmosphere from the room.

"Alright! That's enough doom and gloom for today. Put your gear on, grab a bagel, and let's get going. And no guns!"

"And what's I am supposed to use then? A shovel?" She asked sarcastically.

"Sure, why not? We... just need to get one first."

Rose resisted the urge to facepalm.

(...)
across the streets as part of their daily commute to work, and the general stench one would associate with city life. All in all, a fairly normal city.

The illusion would always be broken if one took a closer look; Blood stains in unmarked alleyways, bullet holes in more than few buildings, old and new, as well the shifty gazes of seemingly innocuous passers-by who tended to stick close to specific buildings. All clear signs that showed the true nature of the city.

But regardless, mornings in Gotham tended to be on the peaceful side. Criminals knew better than to come out during the day, they would wait until they were under the cover of darkness to make their move.

It was in a morning like this where two members of the Bloods stood guard in an abandoned warehouse.

A comfortable silence filled the room, neither men bothered to make conversation, content on enjoying the peacefulness of the moment. But eventually, the first guard eventually grew bored with the silence. “Hey.” He called to his fellow guard.

“Yeah?” The second guard responded.

"Do you ever wonder why we're-UGH!" The guard was cut off as something struck the back of his head with enough force to knock him out and throw him to the ground in an unconscious heap.

His partner startled at the sound of his partner hitting the ground. He looked at his now unconscious partner and hastily tried to pull his gun from the waistbands of his pants.

But he was unsuccessful as a pair of arms soon wrapped around his throat, cutting off his air supply. He frantically trashed his body around to escape the grip, but the arms wouldn’t budge, only tightening in response, and he was slowly running out of air. His eyes rolled back into his sockets and he soon dropped down to the ground, having met the same fate as his partner.

Rose Wilson stood over the two unconscious goons with a smile on her face as she admired her handiwork.

She was interrupted when her comm began to ring. Sighing, she flicked the device on her left ear to pick up.

“Everything okay on your end?” Catwoman asked, having just finished things on her side a few floors beneath her.

“Peachy,” Rose replied sardonically.

“...Nobody’s dead right? I really don’t need Batman and Spider-Man giving me crap for that.” Catwoman asked cautiously.

Bristling slightly at the mention of that asshole, Rose replied back harshly. “No. Now are you done yet or what?”

“Just gimme a sec, I need to look through these guy’s stuff and see if they have any more info on them so just hold tight,” Catwoman said, cutting her comm off after.

Rose stepped away from the two unconscious goons and took up a seat in the pseudo-lounge area of the warehouse, which was really just a bunch of tables with some cards, poker chips, and cheap beer on it.
Welp, her first day as a vigilante had officially begun, and Catwoman had been mostly right about it being similar to mercenary life. Scope a place out, pick a good time to attack, and beat some fools to the ground, the major difference was the lack of killing. Adhering to that stupid no-kill rule that heroes were adamant about was a pain in the ass, it was like those people wanted criminals to keep running around and going on murder sprees.

Ah well, at least she was being paid well for an easy job.

Still, something about all of this made her uneasy. It was all just too...easy. They weren't as many guards as they had predicted, now that she got a look there weren't even that many weapons stored here, which was the entire reason they were even here.

Catwoman suddenly called in and interrupted her musings. “Alright Rosey, we’re just about done in this district. My contact radioed in and told me about some Irish activity up west, we'll–”

BZZZTTT

Rose winced as the transmission suddenly cut off, leaving nothing but static screeching in her ear. She fiddled with her comms for a moment, trying to reach to Catwoman, but it became clear that something was wrong on Catwoman's side.

She ran over a window and peered outside. The warehouse’s parking lot was empty, meaning that there were no reinforcements. That meant whoever had attacked Catwoman was inside from the beginning. She let out a curse in frustration, they had been set up like a couple of chumps.

She did a quick sweep of the building, but the other floors held nothing but unconscious gangsters. But then she saw it, a smashed window. She peered out of it but there was nobody in sight.

She exited the warehouse to investigate further. Kneeling down beside the shattered glass, she saw they were bloodstained. There was only a small amount of blood and the shattered window was only on the second story of the warehouse, so it mustn't have been a very hard landing.

There was a subtle blood trail she almost missed, following it led her to a nearby alleyway. As she got closer, she saw more signs of a fight; knocked down garbage cans, a broken window, and more blood. Focusing her ears, she found out why.

“And what the hell do you want with hi-URGH.” Catwoman’s pained voice reached from within the alley, and Rose sprinted towards the noise. Like hell, she was losing her meal ticket within a day.

Only to stop dead in her tracks at what she heard next.

“Call him, now.” A hauntingly familiar voice replied with a tone that promised violence.

Creeping up on a corner, she slowly edged her head and got a look of what was on the other side. Her worst fear was confirmed when she spotted the familiar orange and black armor and she hastily ducked her head back to avoid being seen.

Her father, Deathstroke the Terminator.

He was armed to the teeth even more so than he usually was, with an assault rifle and a set of twin swords on his back, along with a Desert Eagle and a variety of grenades and flashbangs strapped to his waist.

She let her back rest against the wall she was leaning on and tried to control her terrified breathing.
He was here, now?! Did he want her dead that bad! Damn it, this was bad, with all her injuries and lack of proper weaponry she was in no way prepared to fight him.

But why was he interrogating Catwoman? Did he know that she was working with her? Looking back, she saw that her father had Catwoman on the ground, with a phone in hand and held to Catwoman’s face.

She saw the phone ringing and saw Catwoman turn her head from it. Her father stomped a foot into Catwoman’s stomach in response, knocking the wind out of her and causing her to wheeze painfully as she clutched her bruised midsection.

“You will call him here, otherwise I’ll have to start getting violent.” Her father said, and though she couldn’t see his face through the helmet, she imagined his lone eye glaring at her with perfect clarity. She had become quite familiar with that expression during her time as his student.

Catwoman glared at him, before sighing and reluctantly speaking into the phone with a fake chipper voice. “Hey Spider! I could use your help, Deathstroke’s here and he’s very angry right now. Sooo, if you could get your ass over right now, that would be just swell!”

She was calling Spider-Man? Did she seriously think he could beat Deathstroke the Terminator? Her father had fought various Justice League members, Gods amongst men, and had come out the victor, she had just doomed him to a painful death. Despite his victory against her, a greenhorn like him wouldn’t stand a chance against her father. Why was he even interested in Spider-Man?

“We’re at the south of Gotham, right of the steelworks, just get your gear and-”. Deathstroke abruptly cut the call off and took his foot off of Catwoman.

Catwoman stood up and dusted herself off, sending Deathstroke a wary glance before backing away slowly as if dealing with a large and dangerous animal. “Alright, well this has been great and all but-”

Deathstroke raised a hand, stopping her motions in shock. “You’re not leaving.”

“What!?”

“I’ll need you as leverage. Now hold still and I won't hurt you.” Deathstroke said as he quickly began approaching Catwoman who had been begun hastily backing away.

“Wait, you can’t just-UGH.” Catwoman was cut off as Deathstroke lashed out with a fist, striking her in the face faster than she could react. She unceremoniously fell to the ground, her shattered nose leaking blood to the grimy floor.

“I told you to stay still.” Deathstroke bluntly stated, pulling out a pair of handcuffs from a pouch on his belt. He grabbed a leg that kicked towards him, grabbing the other one immediately after. Catwoman's arms were soon handcuffed as well, all she could do now was struggle pointlessly.

Rose backed up into her cover, not wanting to see anymore. She didn’t care. It wasn’t her problem, Catwoman should have been more careful, she shouldn’t have to put her life on the line to save her. She'd be fine anyway, dad wouldn’t kill her, wouldn’t risk having a vengeful Batman coming after him. Catwoman would be okay, she had to worry about herself right now.

Sure, she had taken her to safety when she passed out next to bodies of those Yakuza members, and sure, she had taken her to a doctor and given her a place to stay with some profitable work to do, but
that didn’t mean she had to-

...God fucking damn it.

Leaping out of cover, Rose unholstered her gun that Catwoman had reluctantly allowed her to keep. ‘A last resort’ she had said, this definitely counted. “DAD! Let her go, now!” She screamed, startling both her father and Catwoman.

“Rose?” Deathstroke called out, actually seeming to be surprised to see her. Turning away from Catwoman, who had passed out from the pain, he faced his daughter, staring at her with a bemused expression behind his helmet. “You’re still in Gotham? Did Spider-Man knock all my lessons out of your head?”

Rose bristled at that comment but kept her gun pointed straight at him.

Deathstroke wasn’t perturbed at all at his daughter holding a gun at him, continuing his little speech as if she wasn’t threatening to kill him. “I was planning to deal with you when I dealt with Spider-Man and restored our family’s name, a name that’s been dragged into the mud ever since you embarrassed us with that video.”

“Screw you! You try fighting a guy that can dodge point-blank bullets. Let’s see how you do!” Rose shot back. “So what, you didn’t come all the way Gotham to cash in on my bounty?”

Deathstroke shrugged in response. “If anyone asks, I’m here to cash in on Spider-Man’s bounty, but the truth is the reason I’m here is a bit more...personal.” Despite the helmet he was wearing, Rose could practically feel that disappointed glare she was so used to seeing when she was younger. “My job list took a hit after yours and Spider-Man's embarrassment of a fight, not enough to put me out of business of course, but enough to leave me annoyed. I intend to change that. First thing I’m going to do is cut off Spider-Man’s head, then I’m taking you home and training you up so that you never embarrass us again. But you know what? I suppose I have time to do that now.”

Rose fired off a warning shot at her father’s feet as he made way his towards to her, which he completely ignored. “Stay the fuck back! I swear I’ll blow your head off if you don’t stop!”

“You want to shoot me, Rose? Then just shoot me.” Deathstroke said as walked up and grabbed her trembling hands, placing the gun to his forehead. “Do it. If you want to kill your own father so badly then take the shot!” He dared her, her hands trembling all the while.

Rose stood uncertainly, the gun still pressed against her father’s head. She could end this now, all she had to do was take the shot. He deserved it! She had even fantasized of doing this for weeks now! But despite it all, she couldn’t bring herself to pull the trigger.

"You can't do it, can you? We're both the only family we got left.” Deathstroke said, his voice reaching a soft tone that she had only heard enough times in her life to count on one hand.

"You sold me out. The last time we met you told me you kicked me out and told me that you'd turn me in for that sick fucker's bounty.” Rose accused. A single, angry tear slid down her cheek as her grip on the gun tightened.

Why the hell was he being so nice now? For weeks she had been evading him since their last meeting where he had threatened to cash her bounty in if she didn't deal with it. She vividly remembered the weeks of hiding out in crappy motels and roughing it out in the streets, unable to even sleep properly in fear of waking up to a familiar orange and black helmet and being dragged back to Africa to become that warlord's personal plaything.
"I told you I would look after you when your mother died. Didn't I?" He softly said. "I taught you to kill, to endure, to survive. All to protect you. I wouldn't have taken that warlord's offer, you're my daughter, I wouldn't ever do that to you. I was just trying to motivate you to be better, to avoid making the same mistake."

He slowly reached for the gun pressed against his head, gently guiding her hands to lower it, before placing a hand on her shoulder.

"Let's stop fighting Rose, we can deal with Spider-Man together and leave. As a family this time."

And just like that, whatever longing she had to be back with her father was instantly crushed to dust as her one eye narrowed in rage. She angrily slapped her father's hand away from her, and backed up and raised the gun back to his head.

"Why!? So I can end up like a drugged up zombie again and gouge out my other eye!?!" Rose screamed. Did he really think she would forget about that? Every day when she looked at herself in the mirror, the empty socket behind her eye-patch would always stare right back. A permanent reminder of what he had done to her.

Deathstroke scoffed once, and then quickly shoved the gun out of her grasp. It clattered uselessly to the ground and he followed up with a quick jab at her throat. Her gift activated and she saw it before he even made his move, quickly twisting her body to evade the blow, she spun around once and followed back with a kick to his midsection, knocking the wind out of him and shoving him back. She backstepped back so she was a comfortable distance away from him.

With his attention away from Catwoman, all she had to do now was stall until Spider-Man showed up. While they were busy fighting each other, she would have the opportunity to get herself and Catwoman the hell out of dodge.

Kneeling down she drew the knife that she kept strapped to her and quickly closed the distance between her and her father. She slashed at his throats, which he avoided by leaning back so the knife harmlessly passed by. She followed up with another slash intended for his leg, but that was met with failure when he reacted by swiftly grabbing her arm mid-swing and twisting it painfully, resulting in her dropping it.

With her last weapon out of her reach, she was forced into hand-to-hand., her injuries still slowed her down slightly, as a result, he caught up to her in no time and she had to quickly avoid a flurry of furious punches and kicks. She managed to avoid most of them, but a well-placed to kick to her ankles made it past her defenses, causing her to collapse to the ground on one knee. Her father didn’t let up, kneeling her in the face with enough force to launch her to the ground on her back, leaving her disoriented.

Deathstroke knelt down, placing a knee on Rose’s midsection to keep her pinned down.

“Alright, no more playing nice. Now Rose, first I’m going to kill Spider-Man and get our family's reputation back from the gutters. Then I’m taking you back home so I can train you right back up to shape so this never happens again.” He grabbed his daughter's hair in hand and harshly yanked upwards, forcing her to stare him right in the eye. "I was too soft when with you when you were younger, I won't make the same mistake. By the time I'm done with you, you'll wish I left you with that warlord. Do you understand me?" Deathstroke questioned intensely.

Rose didn’t grace him with her words, instead opting to angrily spit on his helmet.

Shaking his head, Deathstroke raised his fist and prepared a blow that would render her unconscious.
Catwoman let out a frustrated scream as she trashed against her restraints.

But just before he could strike, a black blur suddenly crashed into him from behind that launched him off Rose and sent him flying to the opposing wall with enough force to loosen the brickwork.

Rising to his feet, Deathstroke came face-to-face with the man he had been hunting ever since he came to this city; the infamous Spider-Man himself.

Surprisingly, Spider-Man seemed to be frozen in shock. Despite the lack of visible facial expressions, he seemed to be gaping at him, judging by the lenses covering his eyes being widened to an almost comical length.

But he recovered quickly, getting into a sloppy fighting position that almost made Deathstroke snort in amusement.

“Right, well I hate to interrupt this touching father-daughter moment not-Deadpool, but where the hell is Catwoman?” He demanded, his eyes narrowing in rage. Messing with him was one thing, messing with his friends was an entirely different matter.

Deathstroke raised a brow behind his helmet at the Deadpool comment but pointed behind him all the same, Peter glanced behind him for a moment and saw Catwoman restrained on the ground with a sheepish expression on her face.

He frowned at her bloody nose, but aside from that she seemed fine. "Tsk, tsk, Catwoman, a damsel in distress? This isn't like you at all." He said, wagging his finger at her.

Catwoman opened her mouth to respond but her eyes widened instead just as his Spider-Sense started tingling. He flipped to the side just as Catwoman yelled out a warning, a barrage of bullets narrowly missing his head.

"Hey! Most people I fight are at least polite enough to warn me when we're going to fight!"

Deathstroke ignored his outburst and continued to fire in short focused bursts that Peter continued to narrowly dodge. He had to give it to the guy, his aim made guy's like the Punisher and Bullseye look like newbies by comparison. But it wasn't enough, he danced around the bullets; ducking, sidestepping, and even jumping on and off walls to evade the barrage of bullets fired at him, being careful that Catwoman stayed out of the line of sight.

Peter wired off a web-line at Deathstroke, which the mercenary blocked with his rifle, which was exactly what he had been anticipating. With a strong pull, he forced the rifle out of Deathstroke's and to himself. Raising the gun over a knee, he promptly snapped the weapon in half, rendering it useless.

Deathstroke wasn't let defenseless however, he quickly yanked a grenade out of his belt and unpinned it before hurling it straight at Peter. He had plenty of experience of dealing with those, however. He quickly webbed up the grenade, spun in a circle once and hurled it overhead in a practiced motion with it exploding mid-air leaving him unharmed. Deathstroke hurled another grenade at him, which met a similar fate.

Deathstroke, not seeming to realize what happened with the prior two hurled a third grenade. Peter repeated the motion once more with some annoyance. What was this guy playing at? Just as he finished webbing it up and started spinning, his Spider-Sense's ringing intensified, it was already ringing back when Deathstroke threw the first two grenades but now it was suddenly much louder. He realized too late what was happening, and just as he realized he had failed to release the 'grenade'
in time.

Peter let out a pained cry as harsh light exploded from the flashbang, leaving his eyes burning in pain and his vision showing nothing but white. His Spider-Sense suddenly started ringing like mad, screaming at him to move his head to the side, Peter obliged and let out a pained grunt as he felt a blade cut his cheek and ear, just narrowly missing his throat. Deathstroke had taken his temporary blindness as the perfect opportunity to try and cut his head off it seemed.

"Okay, now that's just cheap!" He said, backing up a few steps while frantically rubbing his burning eyes.

With his vision still gone, Peter decided to give up on opening his eyes and let his Spider-Sense guide him instead, ducking and sidestepping ever subsequent slice. A slash to his chest had managed to connect that he hadn't dodged out of the way in time, leaving a long bloody cut in its wake that stung like hell, causing Peter to cry out in pain.

Realizing that things weren't going his way in close combat, Peter quickly jumped back into the air and clung to the nearby wall, taking a break for a few seconds for his vision to return. Deathstroke couldn't engage him in melee like this, and his Spider-Sense would warn him to dodge any incoming bullets.

Deathstroke didn't seem to be a fan of his move, Peter could barely see him, but there was no missing the annoyance in his voice. "Only a coward flees boy, come down here and fight me like a man!"

"Could I convince you to come up here and fight me like a spider?" He painstakingly opened his eyes, barely being able to make out Deathstroke's shape. He saw that the blurry figure of the mercenary's hand going to his belt, and Peter quickly realized his intent.

Thinking quick, Peter launched himself off the wall and nimbly flipped over the mercenary as he prepared to draw his pistol and landed in a handspring, his legs lashed out into a double legged kick just as Deathstroke whirled to face him, hitting him square in the chest.

The force of the kick forced him onto the ground, and Peter quickly took the opportunity to separate the swords away from the man. He closed the distance between them within a second and swiftly kicked away one sword from the man's hands. It momentarily soared across the alley and landed a few feet away from them. Deathstroke didn't let that distract him, however, and with his other blade, he tried to slash Spider-Man while he in the process of recovering from the kick. Instead of blocking the blade, Peter bent his body backward in an unnatural angle and let the blade harmlessly pass him, his hand shot like a viper to grab the sword's handle, twisting it away from its owner, Peter hurled it across the alleyway where it embedded itself into a wall.

With both his swords out of reach, Deathstroke rose to his feet and aimed a swift punch for Peter's throat, which he managed to barely dodge by ducking. Peter took quick notice of how ineffective his previous strikes had been, Deathstroke was obviously augmented beyond the capabilities and endurance of a normal human. With that in mind, Peter allowed himself to hit harder. He threw one punch, then another, and another, until he was punching so fast that a normal person would have trouble following the motions of his arms. But Deathstroke was no normal human, he was able to keep up with Peter's punches, even managing to block and dodge a few. But it wasn't enough, a few ended up impacting against his breastplate, causing spiderweb-like cracks to form. Eventually, the hits ended up being too much and he hastily fell back.

Back-stepping a few feet away from Spider-Man he stopped to scoop up one of his blades on the floor, the other one being impaled on a wall on the other side of him.
Deathstroke looked at Spider-Man with a new perspective, he had thought the boy simply lucky when he had beaten his daughter. Unskilled, and too reliant upon his powers. While his skill was still lacking, judging by the way he sloppily threw his fists and feet around during their fight, it was clear he had underestimated him.

"Not bad, boy, but now it's time to end this," Deathstroke said as he holstered his blade and drew the Desert Eagle strapped to his hip.

Spider-Man lenses blinked momentarily, his vision seemed to have returned. Hm, that was too quick, a healing factor perhaps?

Spider-Man glanced at the gun. “After all this, you really think you can hit me with that buddy?”

Even though Spider-Man wouldn’t be able to see it, Deathstroke couldn’t help but smile behind his mask, his single visible eye crinkling in delight. “Of course not.” He replied, then abruptly turned his gun towards Ravager, who had just tried to wake up and was groggily standing up, she froze when she saw the gun pointed at her. Peter's eyes widened when he realized his intent. He wouldn't, would he?

“But I can hit her,” Deathstroke said coldly, pulling the trigger on his own daughter.

The world suddenly slowed down in his eyes. Colors sharpened, the sound became clearer, and he could make out every flow of air and particle of dust with perfect clarity. He just fired off a web-shot directly at the gun, aiming to knock the gun out his hands, but it was clear he was too late.

He watched as the Deathstroke's fingers pressed the trigger, his web flying towards him slowly, too slow, by the time his web-shot would hit him the bullet would already have been fired. With that in mind he something very, very stupid. Despite his Spider-Sense screaming at him not to move, he quickly closed the gap between himself and Ravager, throwing himself onto her and knocking her to the floor. That left her safe from the bullet, but the alleyway was too narrow, Ravager might have been saved but as for himself...

BANG

“UGH!” Peter cried out as the bullet lodged itself into his upper chest, just narrowly missing his heart. His nerves flared up in pain, with crimson blood from the wound quickly matting onto his black suit. Damn it, he had run out of time to dodge.

He didn't have any time to recover however, Deathstroke had begun running at him the second the bullet had fired with an inhumane level of speed. When he had reached the downed hero he lashed out with a kick, Peter was too damaged to dodge out of the way, all he could do was raise his arms to try and block the blow.

The force of the blow knocked him a few feet away and he fell to the ground with a pained cry. Deathstroke didn't let up, quickly closing the gap between them and stomping a foot at Peter's chest, keeping him pinned to the ground and causing red hot agony to flow through Peter as his wounds were pressed down on. Deathstroke aimed the gun at Peter's head and prepared to pull the trigger.

"I must admit, boy, you were much better than I was expecting," Deathstroke said, causing Peter to let out a pained groan in response. "For putting up such a good fight I'll let you die a warrior's death." He promised as he tightened his grip on the trigger.

BANG

A bullet caught Deathstroke in the face, going through one cheek and coming out the other.
Deathstroke stumbled in shock and pain momentarily causing him to drop the pistol in his hand in shock, which landed beside Peter's head, miraculously not going off. Whirling around he glared at the source of the bullet.

Ravager stood defiantly, a smoking gun in hand, glaring at her father with a single hate-filled eye. She raised the gun once more and made to shoot again.

Deathstroke let out an enraged yell and sprinted towards Ravager - Spider-Man being forgotten - every subsequent bullet fired at him being dodged or bouncing off his body armor. When he got in close range, he tackled Ravager to the ground and they both began to struggle against each other.

Peter tried to get up to assist, but collapsed mid-way, his injuries being too severe to move. He watched helplessly as Ravager trashed against her father, the much larger and stronger man overpowering her easily.

"Spidey!" A voice called out to him for behind.

Turning his head he saw Catwoman's prone form looking at him with a worried expression.

"Kid, you have to get up now. If you don't then he'll kill us all." She said, desperation clear in her tone. His mind flashed back to the night at the bridge. The sound of the snap, Gwen's limp body in his hands, and the Goblin's deranged laughter ringing in his ears.

No, never again. He was done failing people.

With a pained grunt, he forced himself to his feet, his body screamed with pain and his limbs felt like they were going to fall off in response but they didn't fail him.

From the corner of his eyes, he could vaguely make out Deathstroke slamming Ravagers against the alley's wall, her limp body once again falling to the ground. With his daughter incapacitated the mercenary stood and made to turn to him. Seeing his back exposed Peter hastily took his opportunity, he fired a web-line at Deathstroke, hitting the mercenary's back causing him to tense up in shock. He yanked the web-line causing the Mercenary to sprawl backward, hitting his head on the ground with enough force to almost crack a regular person's skull.

Peter closed the gap between them when he saw Deathstroke try to rise. He tackled him to ground and swiftly pinned his right arm to the ground before attaching it to the ground with his webbing. Deathstroke tried to counter him by trying to punch him off of him with his other arm, but Peter easily caught the hand before it could make contact and pinned it to the ground and webbing it up. With his hands restrained he got off of the mercenary and covered the downed mercenary's legs with webbing as well. Taking a moment to further restrain the downed mercenary, he fired off some more webbing until one of the only visible parts of Deathstroke was his head.

Little excessive, but one could never be too careful.

Deathstroke let out an angry scream as he trashed against the webbing, but no matter what he did it wouldn't budge. With the mercenary restrained Peter backed away. Letting out an exhausted sigh he limped towards the visibly relieved Catwoman.

He abruptly paused when he noticed how much his wounds were burning.

Wait, this - this wasn't right. He had been shot before, he shouldn't be feeling like this. He had suffered far greater injuries in the past, and yet he had never felt quite so exhausted and pained. His Spider-Sense was ringing wildly, despite the fact there was currently no threat around. A quick glance at Deathstroke showed that he was still rendered immobile.
The cut on his cheek and chest was particularly painful, stinging like mad, leaving the bullet wound to seem painless in comparison. They should have at least scabbed over by now. Wiping the cut on his cheek with his thumb, he saw something peculiar. There was a green substance mixed in with his blood. Peter's eyes widened in realization before his body finally gave out, Catwoman giving out an alarmed cry in the background as his head hit the floor.

He had been poisoned.

(….)

Rose let out a pained groan as she came to. Cradling her bloodied and bruised head, she began to look around, examining the alley where the battle had taken place.

She was half expecting to see Spider-Man's and Catwoman's corpses and her father standing over her with a gun aimed at her head. So she was quite surprised when she instead saw her father in the middle of the alleyway pinned down with Spider-Man's webbing and desperately trying to force his way out. Spider-Man himself laid unconscious a few feet away from him, with a worried Catwoman calling out to him.

Her father noticed her awake and momentarily stopped trashing against the webbing. He couldn't speak now, his tongue had been damaged from the gunshot she had fired. They stared at each other for a moment, both of them knowing their former bond would never recover from today.

"Need some help from that dad?" she asked, gesturing to the webbing that kept him trapped. She deliberately looked like she was actually considering helping him for a moment. "Hm...nah. Have fun in prison." Waving her hand in dismissal and turning away from him.

Screw him, trying to shoot her just to get at Spider-Man...prick.

Speaking of Spider-Man, he wasn’t exactly in a better state, his suit currently being more red than black. Two guesses why. His chest was still rising up and down in weak breathes, so he was still alive at least.

Her mind flashed back to the moment where he had stepped in front of the bullets meant for her. Why the hell had he done that? She had just been trying to kill him a few days ago.

The sounds of distant police sirens snapped her back to reality. She quickly looked around and saw a discrete car that she could make her getaway in. She didn’t waste any time. Quickly smashing a window she opened the door through the opening and quickly began hotwiring the engine in trained motion.

Once that was done she stepped out of the car to pick up Catwoman, only to be surprised when she saw Catwoman free of her chains and kneeling over Spider-Man.

"How did you get free?" Rose questioned.

"Trade secret," Catwoman replied without looking away from Spider-Man. "Thought you were going to leave me behind for a second."

"Course not, you still haven't paid me yet." Judging by the look she gave her, Catwoman couldn't tell if she was serious or not. "We need to get out of here, back to the safe house?"

Catwoman shook her head. "No, Spidey's in a pretty bad position, that medical kit I have back at my
place won't do the job. We'll have to take him to Leslie's."

Ten minutes ago she would have objected to the idea of saving his life, but taking a bullet for her had changed that. Catwoman gingerly picked up Spider-Man in her arms and carefully laid him in the back of the car before sitting at the front passenger seat with Rose retaking her position in the driver's seat.

As she started the engine and hastily drove to Leslie’s clinic, with police sirens blaring close by, she only had one thought on her mind.

My first day on the job and I already hate it.

(...)

Peter awoke with a scream. Jumping up, he frantically looked around his surroundings, his eyebrows rising up in shock once he processed what he was seeing.

The room he was in if it could even be called that, was white. And that was pretty much the only thing that he could describe it as. Everywhere he looked there was nothing but white; no floor, no walls, not even a ceiling. Just a snow white, empty void. Looking down, he saw that his suit had even turned from black to white. How the heck did that happen?

Where was he? And how did he get here? Peter thought long and hard for a moment, thinking back on where he had previously been.

The memories came rushing back to him at once. Deathstroke, Catwoman restrained, and the life-threatening injuries he received which made his usual injuries seem like paper cuts by comparison. He became confused when he remembered that last once considering the lack of pain he was in, groping his body he found it to completely devoid of wounds. What was going on?

Wait...the white void he was in, the lack of injuries on his body, and the state he was in after his fight with Deathstroke. All the evidence pointed to one unsettling answer.

Was he-

"Ahem."

Peter let out a gasp, his existential crisis immediately forgotten in his shock. He couldn’t even remember the last someone had snuck up on him, his Spider-Sense usually alerted him when someone was behind him. Spinning around, he came face-to-face with an amused looking woman.

The woman in question was young, only a few years older than him it looked like. She was pale, unnaturally so, almost like a corpse. Her black frizzy hair and clothes were a stark contrast against the paleness of her skin and the whiteness of the void they were in, as was the dark tattoo underneath her left eye. A goth fan it seemed.

Even more bizarrely, she was holding an umbrella, despite the lack of weather in the white void they were currently in.

She idly spun the umbrella around a few times before resting it against her shoulder. “Hello, Peter Parker. Nice to finally meet you face-to-face.” The pale girl greeted him with a friendly and familiar voice. Where had he heard her before?

Peter blinked in confusion. Wow, okay, he had a lot of questions right now. But he tried to stick to the most important ones. “Who are you?”
The girl smiled at that as if amused at a joke he wasn’t in on. “I’ve had a lot of names throughout the years, but most people would know me as Death.” She casually said, causing Peter to gape in response.

Death? She couldn’t be serious. Death wasn’t a person, disregarding all the bizarre stories Deadpool had told him, which he had probably thought of while drunk. But if she really was the personification of death, as insane as that sounded, then...

“Where are we?” Peter questioned, desperately hoping his previous theory was wrong.

Death, if that actually was her name, gave him a sad smile “Isn’t it obvious?”
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay folks, I'll try to upload at least one chapter every month from here on out.

“He’s been gone for over a week now Mary Jane! A week! He could be hurt or lost, or-or-" May Parker couldn't even finish that sentence and soon she found herself sobbing into her hands once more.

Mary Jane Watson sat beside the elderly woman with a hand gently rubbing her shoulders. "Hey now, I'm sure he'll show up eventually Aunt May." she softly said, trying to calm down the nearly hysterical woman. Her heart lurched in her chest at the sight. The poor woman had lost her husband two years ago and now her nephew, the sole remaining family member she had left, was missing. None of Peter's friends, family members, or even work associates had any clue where he was. It was as if he had seemingly vanished from the face of the Earth. No matter how many times they contacted the police for any updates or how many missing posters they put up no one could find him. They both felt horrible at the fact that nothing they did brought them any closer to getting Peter home.

They were currently inside the Parker house, the usual homely and comforting presence that the house always had on her prior visits was completely gone, now only a melancholic silence filled the house that was only broken by Aunt May's cries. It was as if Peter's absence had completely drained the life out of the building.

Having a missing loved one was such a terrible thing, not knowing whether they were alive or dead somehow made it worse than knowing that they were dead, at least than one could get closure. There was always the slight hope that they would return safely one day, a feeling that would slowly shrivel up and die as the days passed by and their absence grew larger. Hope could be such a cruel thing sometimes.

The elderly woman briefly looked up before wiping her tears away with the back of her hand. "Oh sweetie, I wish I could believe that Peter always had a habit of disappearing without telling anyone, but for this long is just..." she went quiet, a distant look appearing on her face.

"Yeah, I mean...he's always busy when he's not in school or at home, I've lost count of all times he had to cancel our plans to hang out. Exams are coming up soon, maybe he just studying in the back of the school library for an entire week and forgot to tell everyone." she weakly chuckled. Peter was always canceling his plans, usually work and studying would take most of his time or at least that's what he had claimed.

Aunt May shook her head. "This is all my fault! I-I should have paid more attention to him, I thought he recovered from Gwen's death!" The poor woman cried out.

Mary Jane suppressed a flinch at the reminder of her friend's death, months later it was still fresh on all of their minds. She had been visiting May as often as she could these past few days after realizing
Peter's absence was far longer than all of his previous ones. She had been a little uncertain about it at first, not quite sure what she could do that could help the poor woman out. But she had promised Peter to help his aunt if something like this ever happened.

"Hey MJ, do you mind if I ask you a favor?" Peter asked, reluctance clear in his tone.

Mary Jane clicked her tongue in annoyance, dabbing the remaining blood from his split lip with a piece of cotton. "Do we really have to do this while you're bleeding all over my new clothes?" she replied, annoyance clear in her tone. All she did was call him over for a study session and of freaking course, he had gotten into another fight on the way here, the third one this month in fact. Honestly, how did a guy as shy and kind-hearted as Peter Parker always end up getting dragged into so many fights? Maybe he was taking a bit too much pride in his newfound muscles...

Peter's cheeks lit up as he regarded her bloodied blouse with a wince. "Uh, sorry. I'll get you some new ones when I get my next paycheck. It's just that...this is kind of important."

Mary Jane sighed as she tossed the bloody piece of cotton down unto the table they were seated at, closing the medical kit (It was seeing far too much use lately) on it soon after. "Sure, go ahead."

Peter suddenly looked agitated, twisting his head away so he wouldn't have to look at her face."Can you maybe keep an eye on Aunt May if something ever...happens to me" he said.

Mary Jane looked up to him with a shocked expression."Woah. Hey, where did this come from?" she worriedly asked.

He let out a nervous laugh, his habit of deflecting pain with humor had always annoyed and worried her to no end. "It's nothing, really. I just...worry about her sometimes, ya know? After Gwen I can't help but think what would happen to her if I was...gone." his normally jovial and carefree voice was noticeably somber by the end, as it always was whenever Gwen was mentioned.

She quickly marched up to him and grabbed his chin, tilting it up to force his eyes to meet hers."Don't. Don't you dare talk to like that, okay? No one is dying anytime soon." she said sternly. She knew that he was still blaming himself for Gwen's death even months later. The days of depression that had followed were still fresh in her mind, she doubted that the memory of the vacant and heart-broken look he had in his eyes during Gwen's funeral would ever leave her mind. But the thought of him considering...death was just chilling. Surely he wasn't thinking about...

He raised his hand in surrender, breaking her train of thought. "Alright, alright. No need to panic, I'm not planning to die anytime soon. It's just..." he looked up at her with a somber expression. "I don't want her to be alone because of me, so could you just...look after her if it ever does happen? Please? It would give me a lot of piece of mind."

Aunt May had always been sweet to her, sometimes more so than her own father. She would help her out with anything without Peter's request. "I...alright Pete, if anything ever happens to you then I'll stick with Aunt May, always," she promised, not sure whether to be happy or worried at his relieved expression. She quickly swatted him in the shoulder, causing him to yelp out in surprise. "But don't take that as an excuse to go and die on me and May, yeah? I swear if you do I will drag you back from the dead just to kick your ass."

Peter laughed as he rubbed his shoulder. "Yes, ma'am."

As she stared at the sobbing woman she couldn't help but feel like a complete and utter failure.
'Right, 'take care of her' he said. Good job you're doing there MJ.' she sarcastically thought as she fruitlessly tried to comfort the poor woman.

She knew something was up with him that night he had asked her to make that promise, but she had naively hoped it was just him being a worrywart over May like usual. The thought of him...committing suicide was just unthinkable, but now it was a very real possibility especially considering everything that had happened with Gwen and Harry. Every day since Peter had gone missing she woke afraid that the morning news would be reporting a body being found that matched up with a familiar face. She desperately tried not to think about it, Peter was her best friend and she would be damned if she wrote him off as dead so quickly.

Aunt May had stopped crying by now, her eyes were puffy and red but tears were no longer falling at least. But now an uncomfortable silence had taken its place. Mary Jane's eyes fell on the TV remote laying on the coffee table in front of them. Some white noise would definitely be preferable to the awkward and solemn silence that permeated the air, with some luck, it would at least temporarily distract Aunt May from Peter's disappearance. God knows she needed it right now. With that in mind, Mary Jane grabbed the TV remote and clicked the 'on' button.

She immediately regretted it when the first thing that popped up was J. Jonah Jameson's frothing face in the middle of an interview.

Jameson slammed his hand against the table he was seated on, startling the interviewer next to him. "It's a trick I tell you! Spider-Man goes missing for a week and suddenly everyone gets concerned. That's exactly what he wants people! He's sick of people rightfully criticizing him for all his illegal behavior. So what does he do? He just disappears on us - and doesn't even bother updating that godawful Twitter page of his or anything!- just to make all his fans worry to sate his disgusting ego! It makes me sick how that masked menace could manipulate us all like that just to bask in people's worry! Not to mention how irresponsible it is! Ever since word got out that Spider-Man's gone crime has risen by 10% because all the local criminals get it in their heads that no ones around to stop them anymore!" he shouted to the camera, a vein appearing on his forehead. "Just last night Mysterio breaks into the Bank Of New York, and does Spider-Man swing in to stop him? No! It was Daredevil -Daredevil!- who came to stop him. That bank wasn't even in Hells Kitchen, it was miles away! Spider-Man's little 'vacation' is forcing the actual heroes to come out of their territory just to make up for his slacking!"

Mary Jane slapped a palm to her face as she witnessed his little tantrum as he continued slandering Spider-Man and talked about how he was increasing crime into the city and how it was likely his intention. Could he just talk about something that wasn't Spider-Man for just ten minutes? Ah well, looking back to Aunt May the elderly woman was at least distracted from her thoughts of Peter so she would call this a success.

Actually...a little too distracted. The look she had on her was face was of complete shock, as if she had just seen a ghost.

Mary Jane shot her a curious look at her sudden change in demeanor. "Everything okay?" she asked in concern.

Aunt May startled as if noticing her for the first time but quickly shook her head after. "No, I just...isn't it a bit strange that both-?" she cut herself off, staring at the picture of Spider-Man on the corner of the TV in silent contemplation.

"What is it?" Mary Jane questioned.
May sighed. "It-it's nothing dear, nothing at all..." she glumly said, her eyes leaving the TV and lowering to the ground in a depressed manner.

Not quite understanding why but seeing that Jameson and the news about Spider-Man were having a negative effect on her, Mary Jane hastily shut the TV off. "Aunt May..." Mary Jane hesitated for a moment before sighing and wrapping an arm around the distressed woman and holding her close. "Hey now, I'm sure it'll be okay. Peter's the smartest guy I know, I'm sure wherever he is he's safe."

(...)

Peter slumped to the floor with a resigned expression on his face. "I died, didn't I?" it was posed as a question but felt more like a statement. Then again, with the life he had been living ever since he had gotten his powers, death was something he knew was likely to come to him sooner rather than later. Spider-Sense or not, all it took was one well-placed bullet, or death ray or one... whatever the local supervillain of the week was using to put him down for good. But still, to happen this soon was just depressing.

"Yes." Death casually agreed before waving a hand in the air dismissively. "But don't worry, it's only temporary. Doctor Tompkins is bringing you back as we speak. She'll succeed." at his shocked face, she continued. "You're not brain dead but your heart did stop beating for a few minutes, it's technically close enough that I can talk to you without breaking the rules."

Putting a hand over his chest Peter was unnerved when he couldn't feel the familiar rhythm of his heart beating. Now that was freaky. "What rules?" he questioned.

"The rules of a wager between my siblings and I." she cryptically replied.

The hell? Siblings? A wager that involved him? "And what exactly is this 'wager' about?" He asked narrowing his eyes suspiciously at her.

"It's a...family matter." Death replied.

Well, that was annoyingly vague.

Hm, now that he was giving her his full attention he couldn't help but notice that she sounded familiar. Kind of like...oh. It couldn't be.

Peter stiffened up in shock as he recalled his first moments in Gotham. "Wait...your voice. I heard the same voice when I got tossed into this place, were...were you the one who sent me here?"

"Yeah." She casually stated as if kidnapping someone from their dimension and shoving them into a completely different one was a normal thing to do.

Peter blinked. "Wha-why!?" He questioned angrily after getting over his initial shock.

"I needed an ace, Peter, and so I chose you." She said, absentmindedly twirling her umbrella around.

He snarled in response, taking a threatening step towards the 'girl'. "What the hell for? You dragged me away from my home without my say-so and tossed me into a freaking different universe without telling me what I'm supposed to be doing. What exactly was it all for!?" He hadn't intended to be yelling by the end but the frustration of the entire week had finally caught him and he couldn't stop...
unleashing it all on the person responsible for it all. Not to mention that while he was not the only superhero in New York, him being gone meant some of his usual nemesis would be able to get away with their usual crimes! Bank robberies were one thing but what about the more crazy ones, the ones who just didn't care if innocent people ended up dead like Venom, Rhino, or Doctor Octopus? What if him being away meant more people would die?

Throughout the entire rant, her the tranquil expression never left her face or even showed an ounce of fear, even as the larger boy looked like he was going to attack her in his rage. After a moment of silence, she spoke again. "I'm sorry."

Peter froze up. "What?" of all the things he expected her to say, a sincere apology was not one of them.

"I'm sorry about dragging you here without your consent or giving you a proper explanation." a sheepish expression appeared on the girl's face. "I admit I tend to forget how time effects... 'normal' people like yourself. A week is practically a few seconds from my perspective but from your point of view a week in a place like Gotham may as well feel like an entire year." She shrugged. "So, uh, yeah. I know it doesn't change all the crap you've been through but for what it's worth I am sorry for everything that's happened, I never meant for it to get this bad."

Peter stood still as he took her apology in. Did she seriously think an apology made any of this okay? He was still in Gotham and still 'dead' because of her. He took a deep breath to calm himself and see this rationally. There was no point in getting angry he decided, all that mattered now was getting home. But there was one thing he couldn't look past...

"Why me? Why not the actual heroes like Iron Man, or Captain America, or literally anyone else!? How am I supposed to do this if none of those guys can't?" he softly asked. What did he, Peter Benjamin Parker, have that none of the actual big shot heroes in his world had?

Death shook her head. "That's the thing, this situation requires a more... gentle approach. There’s no world-ending threat for you to face, no big bad to face in the end or loved one in trouble. No, this situation is pretty... inconsequential to the world if I’m being honest."

"Then why bother?" Peter asked.

"I always did prefer happy endings," she replied. "Plussss I may also be betting a lot that you can win this one."

Peter stared at her aghast. "Is...is that seriously it?" he asked incredulously.

"It's...a bit more complicated than that, but that's pretty much the gist of it." She said. "Anyway, since we're being honest I figure you should know that you were getting pretty close to getting home a couple of times. No point in bringing you here if the Justice League sends you back. That's why I had to alter your memories."

"You messed with my memories?" He asked incredulously. Scrunching his face up in thought he thought back to every moment he could remember since coming to Gotham. He tried his best to remember but just couldn't recall forgetting anything important or any sudden bouts of forgetfulness during his time here. He felt the same as he always did. "I don't feel like my head was tempered with... but... that would be the point, right?"

Death nodded in confirmation. "I made sure it was subtle," she said. "Anyway, getting back on
"Woah, hey! Hold up a sec here lady. You can't just admit to brainwashing me and continue like it's nothing," Peter scolded, the realization that his memories were being altered without his consent was unsettling, to say the least. Were any of his actual memories real or were they all just lies implanted by Death?

"It's not as bad as you think," Death quickly said. "Whenever you were in a position that could have gotten you home I altered your memories so that your knowledge of your world and this world merged together to make you believe that this was your world and that you were never...'displaced' from your actual world. And after I would make you forget that you ever thought that so you could think normally."

Peter opened his mouth once and then promptly closed it."So...basically you would make me forget that I wasn't in my universe and then make me forgot that I forgot that?" he asked after a few moments, getting a nod in return. Peter shook his head in frustration, this was getting confusing. Now that he thought about it, there some blanks in his memory. "Did you ever alter my memories outside of those moments?"

Death shook her head. "No, never. I'm not a monster Peter, so don't worry, alright? All your memories of your world; your Uncle Ben, Aunt May, and all your friends are and will always be real." she said, causing Peter's shoulders to slump in relief.

Well, at least he didn't have to worry about his entire life being a gigantic lie. He wasn't sure what he would do if that were the case.

"Anyway, as I was saying. It would be pretty cruel to force you to continue after all of...this," she said, gesturing to the empty void surrounding them. "So tell you what, if you really want to I can just send you home right here."

A shocked expression appeared on Peter's face, whatever anger he was still feeling being washed away in his surprise. "Just like that?" he asked cautiously, prepared for a trick.

Death nodded. "Yup, just say the word and I'll send you back right now."

"I..." Peter absentmindedly chewed his lip as he thought it over. A few days ago he would have jumped at the chance to leave this hellhole of a city, but now...

He wanted to go home; to see his friends again, to sleep in a warm bed in his clean room, to hug Aunt May and promise to never leave her alone ever again. But then he also thought back to the kids, who were currently hiding out in a dirty and rat-infested building waiting eagerly for his return. To Leslie's tired eyes as she recalled all the deaths of the homeless to Winter's merciless cold and criminals looking to prey on the weak. To Catwoman, who the last time he had seen was tied up in an alleyway to Deathstroke's mercy, her terrified expression as life left his body was still repeating in his head.

"Back in my world...how-uh how is it going over there without me?" Peter cautiously asked. The thought of staying here was terrifying but seemed like the right thing to do at the moment. But at the same time, New York wasn't exactly crime-free either, who knows what had happened during his absence. It could be something as trivial as a few Bodega robberies to an entire army of symbiotes appearing in New York. Who would stop them while he was in Gotham? Sure there were plenty of other heroes in New York but the big players like the Avengers just used the city as a base of
operations and mostly operated internationally, street crime was rather low on their priorities in comparison to the world ending threats they often faced. The few superheroes that did fight street crime usually only operated in specific areas due to their lack of mobility compared to how he could patrol large areas of the city with the speed of his web-swinging.

"You don't need to worry about that, things are going fine in your world. I specifically chose that moment in time to pull you because it was the most peaceful. Sure there's the occasional supervillain, but you can't walk a block in New York without running into another superhero. So don't worry, your friends can handle your usual villains while you're gone." Death said.

Huh, well that settled that problem at least. Part of him knew that everything Death was saying could be nothing but lies, but as he gazed into her eyes he couldn't see a single shred of deceit within them.

Peter closed his eyes in resigned acceptance. "In that case...I can't leave. Not yet." He couldn't just abandon everyone in trouble here, it would be spitting on everything Uncle Ben's mantra stood for. He had to power to help those people, so he had the responsibility to do it and make sure they didn't suffer anymore. "No, not yet. first I have to help the people I promised myself to help. And then I can go."

Death didn't reply with words, opting to nod her head in acceptance at his choice with a small smile on her face as if she approved.

Peter held up a hand. "But...since I'll be doing what you asked, you stay out of my head from now on. Got it?" he said pointing an accusing finger at her.

Death tilted her head to the side for a moment in thought. "Alright, since you won't try to get home early any more than there wouldn't be a point anyway."

Peter released a shaky breath and nodded, hoping to whatever God out there that he hadn't just signed his death sentence. Well...again anyway. "Alright then. So...what exactly do you need me to do?"

Death shook her head with an apologetic grimace. "Sorry kiddo, but I can't tell you your exact purpose, I'm already bending the rules just by talking to you."

Peter threw his hands up in frustration. What was with this lady!? "Than what am I supposed to do!? Just wander around cluelessly?" All this and she still wouldn't give him some straight answers.

"Just do what you've always done, help people who need help and eventually, you'll get there and can go back home. By the looks of it, you're already doing just fine without me telling you that." Death said.

Peter let out a frustrated sigh at the lack of information but reluctantly nodded anyway. Helping people, easy enough. He had two years of experience in that area.

"How will I know if I'm on the right track?" he questioned.

"Don't worry about that, just do what comes naturally and you'll get there. I'll contact you again when you've done it."

A sudden awkward silence enveloped the void they were as the two had nothing more to say to each other, for some reason they were both still here...oh right, he had to wait until Leslie resuscitated him
before he could leave.

To keep the awkward silence from continuing he decided to bring up a certain mercenary that had actually mentioned knowing Death prior to this meeting. “Deadpool talked a lot about you ya know, although he described you as a skeleton.” he had also been disturbingly detailed when it came to the curves of said skeleton but Peter decided against mentioning that bit to her.

Death shook her head. “That’s your universe’s force of Death, believe it or not, but we’re actually two completely different people. I’m much more stylish for one. I mean seriously, a skeleton? Ugh, such a stereotype.” she rolled her eyes.

Peter's brow rose at that. Two different Deaths? That was pretty hard to wrap his head around, almost as much as the fact that there even existed a personification of death or universes in general, it was all just superstition and theory respectively at his worlds point in time.

He perked up when remembered something from the first time she had spoken to him. "When you first spoke to me you said that once my work was done that I would have a choice. What did you mean by-"

The white void they were in suddenly flashed just as Peter felt a jolt in his chest. Placing a hand over his heart again he almost jumped up in joy when he felt the familiar rhythm of his heart. He glanced over to Death only to be surprised when he saw her almost entirely obscured by the white void, her clothing, and dark hair being the only things to stand out.

Death regarded her fading presence with a calm look. “Looks like our times up kiddo, we’ll meet again later when you’re done. And for the record...” She shot him a small smile. “I knew you were the right guy for the job.”

The brightness in the void suddenly intensified to an almost blinding brightness white, with a flash of light Death quickly disappeared from his sight.

(...) "Jim."

Commissioner Gordon stiffened in shock momentarily, almost choking on his cigarette, before letting out an annoyed sigh and rolled his eyes. Just once he could greet him like a normal person instead of scaring him half to death every damn time.

The Batman stood before him, what was different than usual was the fact that he was out during daylight. The Dark Knight was a strange sight to see when the sky was still blue, one that Gordon had seen enough times to count on one hand. "It's rare to see you during the day." he remarked.

"This is an unusual situation, it warrants an exception," Batman said with a grim tone. "Deathstroke, he's in your custody?"

"Yeah, he currently sitting in a nice cozy cell in Blackgate. We got a report of shots fired down at the south yesterday. By the time we got there, we found him webbed up in a wrecked alleyway. I think we both know who's responsible for that," he paused momentarily to take a drag from his cigarette before shaking his head in astonishment. "Gotta say I'm impressed. Kid's only been in town for a few days and he's managed to beat both the world's greatest detective and assassin in a week."
If Batman was offended he hid it well. "Do you know what Deathstroke was up to?"

"Forensics team found a few fired bullet that didn't match up with the calibers of the weaponry we found on him," he placed his free hand on his chin in thought. "Considering he's still alive it seems like the kid didn't turn into a gun-toting killer overnight, so it looks like he interrupted him in the middle of one of his contracts. We also find two different blood samples that didn't match up with anyone in Gotham's blood register, likely Spider-Man's and our mysterious target. But here's the thing, one of the blood samples we brought in linked with Deathstroke's, take a guess who it was."

Batman frowned. "Ravager." he deduced. She had been a secondary target, one that was thought to be settled when Spider-Man had beaten her. She had suddenly gone missing soon after, no trace of her aside from reports of her fighting and killing several Yakuza members. She had tried to kill Spider-Man earlier, and now suddenly it seemed as if she was teaming up with him against her father? He was missing a lot of pieces to this puzzle and if there was one thing he hated it was being left in the dark, she would require further study. But that was unimportant right now. "Have you gotten anything else from Deathstroke?"

Gordon shook his head. "The bastard's been quiet as a mouse since we took him in, though that didn't stop him from breaking one of my guy's arm when we shoved him in a cell. Hopefully, you'll have better luck. you'll have to wait a bit though, we're still going through the legal process."

Batman nodded before speaking up about the true elephant in the room. "I've been investigating the recent shipment of weapons in Gotham, how have your people been handling it?"

Gordon let out a sigh, one hand rising up to massage his forehead. "Not well, this was a really bad time for half our department to be exposed as dirty. We were already understaffed beforehand, but now we're barely scraping through. The areas you and Spider-Man cleared out gave us some breathing room, but we're nowhere near getting control of the city back."

"I'm starting to believe that this wasn't a coincidence."

Gordon shot him a curious look. "You think they were exposed by the same guy bringing in these guns?"

Batman nodded solemnly. "Most likely, guns start pouring in as soon half the police department gets outing. The timing is far too convenient to be a coincidence." he pointed out. "Someone is trying to raze Gotham to the ground, and if things keep going this way then they'll eventually get what they want."

Jim let out a deep sigh, sometimes he couldn't help but wonder if Gotham truly was a cursed city. "...So what the hell do we do?"

"We take out the source, someone outside of Gotham is supplying all this weaponry, my people and I will find them eventually. But right now we have to focus on minimizing the damage and-" Batman suddenly stiffened for a moment, a hand rising to the side of his cowl. He abruptly turned and walked away, Jim wasn't able to make out what he was muttering. The conversation was a short one and within seconds Batman had hung up and approached him again.

With the way he stared at him Gordon could tell he wasn't going to like what happened next.

"Jim, about that favor I asked, I'm ready to begin now."
Yeah, he really wasn't going to like this...

(...)

Peter opened his eyes only to immediately shut them with a pained groan when bright light burned his vision. God, he felt like crap. Most of his body felt numb and he had a terrible migraine to boot. His mind flashed back to that white void and the girl who called herself Death. Did that actually happen? Maybe it did, maybe it didn't. But he could worry about that later when he wasn't in so much pain.

A quiet 'meow' caused him to break his train of thought and nearly jump up to the ceiling in shock, glancing down he saw that Mr. Mittens was curled up by his side. Despite the soreness of his body, he couldn't suppress the giant grin on his face from appearing. "Aw, hey buddy," he cooed. "Were you waiting for me?" he asked as he began gently running a hand through the cat's soft fur, earning a pleased purr in response. "Sorry, didn't mean to worry you."

He glanced around the room he was in, his vision was still a bit blurry but he could easily tell from the familiar plastered walls that he was in Dr. Leslie's clinic. There was an IV next to his cot that had a tube feeding some fluid to his arm. Glancing down he saw that his suit was replaced with a medical gown. Despite the pain he felt, he couldn't help but let out an annoyed groan when he recalled the ruined state of his suit. That would need so much stitching...

He tore off the bandage covering the IV tube on his arm and promptly removed it. With his hand now free, he made to get off the cot and only managed to rise off halfway before the door opened and Leslie herself walked in, reading from a clipboard in her hand.

She froze up when she saw that he was awake, her face undergoing several emotions within a few seconds -for a second he thought she actually looked relieved - before she quickly settled on an annoyed glare when she saw him trying to rise from his cot. She abruptly walked over to him and firmly shoved him back to lay down on the cot. "Lay down, I don't need you tearing my stitches apart." stepping back she regarded him with annoyance. "This is a clinic you know, a clinic. Clinics are not meant for critical surgery. I was half-tempted to throw you in a hospital so you could be someone else's problem."

Whatever sarcastic retort he was about to make died on his lips as he got a good look of her face. She looked terrible, her eyes were red and puffy with heavy bags underneath, her hair was unkempt, and her posture just screamed 'sleep deprived' with the way she looked like she was going to fall over from a light gust of wind.

"Oh, wow Doc. When was the last time you got some sleep?" he asked in concern.

She glared at him. "Making sure you didn't die didn't exactly leave me much time to sleep." he was about to apologize before she cut him off. "Catwoman came in yesterday morning with you, she and that young girl, Rose, and left after."

His mind flashed back to when he had last seen them in that alleyway. "Were they both okay? They were both in pretty rough condition last time I saw them."

Leslie waved a hand dismissively. "They're both fine, nothing a few days of rest won't fix by itself. I was too busy keeping you alive to treat them since neither were in critical condition, so they left after."
"And the kids are they also okay?" he had told them that he would only be gone for a few hours, they were probably freaking out that he disappeared for over a day.

"They're fine, I gave them some food that'll last for the week." she gave him an accusing glare. "That 'shelter' you put them in isn't much better than a crack house, I've seen fewer rats in a sewer. I hope you're not planning on just keeping them there."

An offended look appeared on Peter's face. "Of course not! I was gonna fix the place up but than Deathstroke showed up and well..." he gestured to the medical gown he was wearing.

Leslie shook her head in response, a gesture he had become very familiar with by now. She stared down at the clipboard in her hand and began reading its contents out aloud. "A broken rib, two lacerations marks, a bullet wound that was inches away from your heart, and to make matters worse there was a highly lethal poison in your system that would have killed a grown man in minutes. On top of all that, your heart stopped beating for a few minutes before I managed to revive you." she glanced up from the clipboard with a thunderous expression on her face. "What part of 'stay away from Deathstroke' did you not understand!? If you didn't have enhanced healing you would be dead ten times over by now."

Peter felt his face lighting up. "Hey now! It's not like I asked him to suddenly show up and start beating the crap out of me. I mean he freaking kidnapped Catwoman! What was I supposed to do, just leave her to him? Hope he was just gonna use her as bait for Batman and not just pull a bullet in her head after he was done with her?"

Leslie clearly didn't sympathize with his position. "What you should have done is called Batman instead. I told you Deathstroke was dangerous and you refused to listen."

Peter threw his hands up in frustration. "Catwoman didn't have enough time for that! You really expect me to just call up Butlerman and call it a day when one of my friends are in trouble!?"

A look of confusion momentarily appeared on Leslie's face at the nickname. "Butlerman? Why would you- no, don't try to change the subject on me, young man! Deathstroke is an assassin, an assassin known most heroes avoid just because of how dangerous he is. It's a miracle you're even still alive." she gave him a pleading look. "Peter, Your luck won't hold out with the way you're going. Just... stop this nonsense."

Peter turned his away, unable to face her desperate face. He really wished that she didn't remind him of Aunt May so much right now. "...I'll be fine, doc."

Leslie's lips pressed into a thin line. "Peter, you died."

Peter sheepishly rubbed the back of his head. "Only for a few minutes..." he weakly muttered.

Leslie's gripped her clipboard with enough force that Peter was genuinely concerned that it was about to snap in half. She took a deep breath before fixing him with a level stare. "You're going to stop this."

He raised his eyebrows. "Stop what?" he questioned.

"Don't play dumb with me you brat. I've let this nonsense go on for far too long," she said. "You are going to stop being Spider-Man and stop digging yourself into an early grave."
"I can't just-"

"You will!" she all but shouted. "If you don't I will reveal your identity," she said with utmost seriousness.

Peter felt his blood go cold at that statement. "You wouldn't."

Leslie didn't budge. "Oh, but I would. If I can't convince you to stop this nonsense then I'll just force you to. I'll contact the authorities and tell them who you really are if you won't stop."

Anger ran through Peter and he forced his body up into a sitting position, ignoring the pain that flared through him with the motion. "You- I trusted you!" he shouted, furious at the breach of trust.

"And I trusted you to handle yourself out there, instead you come back poisoned and with a bullet in your chest. You're only seventeen, seventeen. You should be in high school worrying about girls and your grades. Not fighting insane criminals every night and coming back with wounds that would kill a normal person in minutes." her anger momentarily faded as her eyes suddenly dimmed, as if reliving an unpleasant memory. "I was forced to watch as your heart flat-lined a little while ago, do you know how that felt? Being forced to watch a child die and knowing you could have stopped it?"

Peter winced. If there was one thing he understood it was feeling guilty for your failures. "But you weren't-"

She held a hand up, cutting off what he was about to say. "Don't. Don't you dare say that none of this is my fault. I let you go out there and fight those Godamn loonies out there, and you...you died because of it. I was the one who could have stopped it all from happening, instead I...I just let you. And because of that, you were left dead on my table just like..." she didn't finish, instead choosing to glance towards the picture of her younger self and the young dark-haired boy he had seen on his first visit to the clinic.

Peter swallowed, the connection between them was clear. Despite his earlier anger he couldn't help but sympathize, it was clear that the boy was dead and Leslie was worried that he would follow the same path. He had felt the same when Uncle Ben had died, and it had only gotten worse when Aunt May's health slowly started deteriorating over time.

"Fine," he said after a moment of silence.

Leslie looked at him with a relieved expression. "Than you'll finally stop?" she softly asked, as if she couldn't believe it herself.

Peter hesitated for a moment before slowly shaking his head, his heart twisting at her broken expression. "No, Reveal my identity, do whatever. It doesn't matter, it won't stop me in the end. Having my name out to the public and the police trying to arrest me won't change anything. I'll still be Spider-Man and I'll still be helping people no matter what." His reason for keeping his identity a secret was primarily to keep Aunt May safe, and well...that wasn't exactly a problem when he was stuck in another universe. His identity being exposed would be problematic, but nothing that would force him to stop. "I'm sorry Leslie, but I just can't give up being Spider-Man, not now."

If this was a crappy movie he imagined that this was the moment where they both put aside their differences and fix their broken relationship to work together. But no, his life never worked like that. It was more like a stupid mix of action and drama.
Leslie closed her eyes and was silent for several uncomfortable moments. "..." her eyes suddenly snapped open with a cold gaze. "Get out."

Peter blinked. "Wha-" he was forced to duck when she tossed her clipboard at him, Mr. Mittens letting out a high-pitched cry at the sudden ruckus.

"GET OUT I SAID!" she screamed hysterically, tears suddenly pouring from her eyes in a mixture of sadness and anger that caused guilt to seep into Peter's chest.

She marched up to him and grabbed his arm and with a surprisingly strong grip forcefully pulled him from his cot. "You want to get out there and get yourself killed? Fine! But I'm not going to be a part of it anymore. I've seen enough dead children for one lifetime, I'm not going to keep enabling your suicidal behavior!" she screamed, shoving him towards the exit. His injuries stung painfully with each push. Even injured it would be so easy to push her away with his superhuman strength, but he just couldn't bring himself to do something like that. After everything he had put her through he deserved this.

As he was forcefully shoved out of the clinic Peter turned around and looked at her with a pleading expression. "But what am I supposed to-"

The door slammed shut in his face.

Peter stared at it for a moment with a pained expression before sighing and turning away. He looked at his surroundings, Gotham looked as dark and unwelcoming as when he had first arrived. It was also, unfortunately, snowing again and he couldn't repress the shiver that ran through his body as the cold suddenly hit him with full force. He was still in his medical gown and nothing else, he'd have to find shelter soon or risk freezing to death. His apartment? Belonged to Leslie, so that was a no-go, as soon he got his stuff from back there he doubted that he would be welcome there anymore. That only left the buildings he had purchased.

The dirty, rat-infested buildings with no electricity or even beds. Great.

Mr. Mittens had followed him out and sat on the snow-covered ground, he was staring up at his owner with a look that seemed almost sad. Peter knelt down and scooped the kitten up, cradling him close to his chest and scratching his ears half-heartedly. The young boy let out another sigh and began limping through the cold city.

"Way to go Pete..." he muttered dejectedly, wiping away a stray tear that slid down his cheek. Then again he had been the idiot who decided to not go back home when he had the chance, so he deserved it.

(...)

Zatanna Zatara adjusted the hat on her head for the seventh time that hour. A nervous tick of hers. But anyone sane would be nervous in the presence of the Joker, the self-titled clown prince of crime.

They were currently in Arkham Asylum inside of the Joker's white padded cell. She had been rather surprised when Bruce called in for a favor and even more surprised on learning what it was, but had been eager to agree to it. Their two-decade-long friendship had been almost entirely destroyed after that incident with Dr. Light and she was more than eager to fix it. But as she stood there now facing the Joker, doubt began gnawing in the dark-haired magician's mind.
J'onn had once gazed into his mind, had even managed to leave him sane for a short time, that unfortunately was only temporary. The haunted look on J'onn's face when he had finished had always stayed with her. He was always so composed, almost beating out Bruce for sheer stoicism, but after gazing into the Joker's mind she had never seen him so...vulnerable before. Whatever he had seen in the insane criminal's head had left him shaken for days. And here she was about to attempt the same thing.

The clown gazed at her with a sick demented smile on his face on the other side of the table they were sitting on, letting out a short laugh occasionally and eyeing her from to top to bottom, not with the gaze she was used to by men, his gaze was more akin to an animal stalking their prey. His arms and legs were restrained with a straight jacket, but it did little to make her feel safer.

At least she wasn't alone, Bruce stood behind the Joker, casting a menacing shadow over him and the table, ready to intervene at even the slightest movement. But even the Dark Knight's presence did little to calm her nerves.

She shook her head. God, what was wrong with her, she had fought and defeated literal demons, what was one insane clown in comparison? Summoning up her courage she momentarily closed her eyes and exhaled before opening her eyes with newfound determination. She could do this. With that in mind, she slowly walked towards the Joker.

The Joker's permanent rictus widened by a fraction as she approached him. "Well now, aren't you-"

He was cut off as she suddenly clamped a hand to the top of his head. "peelS." she commanded. The spell was successful, and soon the clown's eyes drooped before his head hit the table. The only sound that could be heard in the room now was his soft snoring.

Bruce looked at the unconscious clown for a moment with a scowl, before glancing at her in concern. "Are sure you want to do this Zatana? It isn't too late to back out."

God did that sound nice, but no, she owed him this much. "I'll be fine Batman, you don't have to worry," she said, faking a smile as she stepped closer to the slumbering criminal.

Okay, this was easy, just take a look in the insane clown's head and erase the memories of Catwoman's identity. She had done this once before with that monster Dr. Light, this couldn't be much different, could it?

As she pressed both palms on the Joker's head and gazed into his mind she soon realized just how wrong she was.

She thought Dr. Light's mind was demented, but he had the mind of a saint in comparison to the Joker's. Memories of horrendous crimes assaulted her mind. A crowd of screaming infants, a club owner skinned alive, men and women laughing and wheezing to death with a grin forced unto onto their tearful faces. If that wasn't enough the order of memories was bizarre, she had trouble sifting through ones that were real and ones that were fabricated. More than once she had come across a memory that had felt both real and fake at the same time.

...if I'm going to have a past, I prefer it to be multiple choice!

Okay. All she had to do was-
A chorus of boos and jeers played in her ears as she recounted a particularly painful memory.

"All it takes is one bad day..."

Find the name and she could-

She harshly bit down on her tongue as the phantom pain of acid bleaching bare flesh passed through her.

"You complete me..."

Damn it! Where the hell was-

Selina Kyle.

Found it! With a frantic pace, she grabbed the memory. "tegroF" she whispered. With a few whispered words and a breath of magic, the memory disappeared into oblivion. With a relieved breath, she shakily staggered back from the table. Resting her back against the cell's door and trying to control her frantic breathing. What in God's name caused a mind to become so demented!?

"Is it done?" Bruce's deep voice reverberated through the room, breaking her from her thoughts.

"It's-" She cut herself off as she thought back to his mindscape. She had seen something in there, something dark and ominous that dominated his thoughts without challenge. "It's not done yet, I still have to take another look." she lied, ignoring Bruce's frown as she walked back to the Joker and reluctantly placed her hands on him once more. Her stomach turned at the fact that she was lying to Bruce, but there was no way he would approve of what she was going to do next. With steady concentration, she entered his mind once more.

Everything was still a mess, demented smiling images appeared everywhere, horrifying images of the Joker's various crimes, she almost forced herself to stop right there and then when she saw the memory of poor little Jason's mangled body.

After a few minutes of this madness, she contemplated just giving up, but then she saw it, in the center of it all. A bat. More specifically a giant, dark-colored bat cloaked in shadows towering over everything else in his mindscape with dark, uncaring eyes. Was this it? It was clear who the bat was supposed to represent. Was his obsession with Batman the source of his insanity? If it was then all she had to do was erase it from his memory, that could potentially fix him, or at least take his aggression away from Bruce. But as she prepared the spell she was suddenly hit with a wave of dread.

Could she actually succeed where J'onn failed and turn the Joker sane? He was much more experienced when it came to altering the minds of others and even his expertise had failed to heal the Joker's mind. For all she knew, without Bruce as a fixation, the Joker could potentially lose it even more. Was it really worth the risk?

...No. This monster had caused an untold amount of suffering to one of her closest friends and his entire family, he had gone so far as to murder his adopted son. If she could get him to stop than it was worth the potential cost. Bruce might not appreciate it but she couldn't just let this bastard continue to torment him when she had a chance to permanently stop him without breaking Bruce's one rule.
With a renewed resolve, the magician went back to work.

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