

Once we had traveled back up to the moon Jane's reaction was even more extreme than Bruce and Betty's had been. The moment she realized where she was, she fell back on her butt, staring up into space before focusing on the Earth, her eyes so wide I was worried they would roll out of her skull. Thor hardly reacted at all, save to confirm the dome was safe.

After a while, when Jane recovered enough to stand and the two pairs were introduced, I started on the basic tour. Tony begged off, claiming there was still plenty left to organize, and since I had no idea how much organizing he actually was doing, I couldn't exactly contest his statement. Still, it wasn't like I couldn't give the tour myself. We started with the public areas, the movie theater, and the bowling alley, as well as the restaurants and other amenities, before traveling down to show off the lab spaces.

It was there that I discovered that Tony had put a lot more work into the building than he had let on. The massive room, which had once been empty space, were instead now full of cabinets and workbenches, lab workspaces, and dozens of other basic things that the labs themselves would be built around, all fit into divided rooms and individual labs, labeled by number and everything. It looked like a proper lab setting, rather than a massively cavernous space.

Trying my best to cover up my surprise, I demonstrated the customizable controls for the makeup of the labs, making new walls appear and disappear, as well as moving around the cabinets and shifting doors around. When that was done we moved on to the living spaces, which had also gone through a large change. Once it had been a massive cavernous area, marked off with control panels that were designated to certain spaces. Now it looked like the interior of a luxury apartment building, including areas for congregating outside people's apartments.

Both Bruce and Thor were fascinated by the controls that allowed people to modify their apartments whenever they wanted, changing out walls and basic furniture with a few taps of a screen built into the wall, just inside the apartment door. Betty and Jane were more enamored by the view, which for the outside apartments was real, while the interior facing apartments had view screens, similar to what I used on the *Void Skipper* and the new Defender and Commander class ships.

By the end of the tour I had managed to impress Thor and thoroughly shock all of the scientists with the level of development we had here on the moon. When we made our way back up to the park they, unsurprisingly, had quite a few questions. I answered what I could before giving them Peppers' number, explaining that I was really just the maker. I would make it up to Pepper later.

They spent a little longer in the park, exploring it on their own before I traveled them back down to Earth, paying for a cab for both pairs to get back to their homes. By then it was almost dinner time and Ema had returned from spreading the nurse stones. By then she had

managed to spread them to almost forty-seven percent of the world, with all heavily populated and traveled areas, save the oceans, completely covered.

As we ate dinner we idly talked about how we would cover the oceans. Eventually, we settled on just dropping them into the water, as their effects would still reach the surface in the most frequently sailed locations. It would leave some gaps, and some of them might even fail eventually, but it was the easiest and least complicated idea we had.

Initially had brushed the problem away as being unimportant, before Ema looked it up. Apparently, there were more than a million people sailing around the ocean at any given time. Ema was still saving the ocean for last, but neither of us dismissed it as unimportant anymore.

Over the next handful of days, between talking with the WSC about the ships, their progress with getting the crew for the first battle group put together and how close they were to finishing their part of the satellite, Tony and I were bouncing over the planet, recruiting people for our research center. Jane gave us the address of an isolated cabin in Norway, where Erik Selvig was trying his best to recover from his time under Loki's control. He was looking a little rough but seemed to understand that it wasn't his fault. I could only imagine how much worse he would have been if Loki had managed to call the invasion down on New York. Erik eagerly accepted the invitation when he learned Jane had already agreed.

After the jaunt in Norway, we recruited a dozen or so scientists, snatching up more than a few people from contracts and other research groups. It was hard to argue with the ability to bend reality to what you needed and a research base on the moon. Tony explained that we were personally recruiting the high-priority, high-profile scientists and that the lab assistants and understudies were already taken care of.

One of our last recruitment trips brought us to the University of Berkeley in California, where we were after another name I recognized, William Foster.

"He was on a project called Goliath with Hank Pym," Tony explained as we arrived at the campus. "If he joins the team the likely hood that Hank Pym will even talk to us plummets, but honestly with me attached to this that ship already sailed."

"Why?" I asked, trying desperately to act cool at the casual drop of one of the most controversial characters in comic book history.

"Hank hates me, or rather my name," He explained, not elaborating on his statement as he continued. "He had a problem similar to yours, but he got paranoid, ornery, and angry about it."

"Similar to mine?"

"He was worried his Pym Particle would break the world," He explained, tapping on his watch as we made our way across campus. "It would have revolutionized the entire world,

almost every field would have benefited from it, but he was always worried about the consequences.”

“Do you agree with him?” I asked, studying Tony as we stopped outside Professor Foster’s lecture room.

“...It would have definitely been a double-edged sword,” He admitted with a frown. “I honestly don’t know.”

“Yeah... I can understand his worry, especially since he wouldn't have a way to keep bad people from using his tech for whatever they wanted to.”

We were silent for a moment before I continued.

“I have some small plans. Idea’s on how I can help without doing too much,” I admitted. “It’s a short list, but when the research center is up and running, the planetary shield is finished and the Earth Defence Fleet is patrolling, I’ll start working on some of them.”

Before Tony could reply, the door into the lecture hall opened, and out poured a few dozen college students. Tony looked down, covering his face as best he could while they rushed past. When the flow of people stopped I peeked in to see Professor Foster cleaning up his stuff. I nodded toward the door, before standing and walking in. The older black gentleman spotted me almost immediately, giving me a curious look.

“Can I help you?”

“Yes actually. We are here to offer you a job. Got anyplace we could talk in private?”

He looked at me with a smile, looking like he was about to deny me when Tony stepped into the room, pulling his sunglasses off. He clearly recognized him because he stopped in his mental tracks, his mouth hanging open slightly.

“I...suppose I have some time before my next class to hear your proposal,” He said after his brain rebooted, gathering up the last of his things. “If you'll just follow me to my office.”

A short walk later and we had relocated to a comfortable office, sitting in front of a large cluttered desk. I reached forward and shook his hand, Tony following suit after me.

“It’s nice to meet you, I’m Carson Walsh, I’m sure you know who this is,” I said, gesturing to Tony.

“It’s nice to meet you both. Mr. Stark, I actually worked briefly with your father before his passing.”

“Sorry to hear that, so why are you working as a professor?” Tony asked, bluntly skipping over the part about his father. “You're the kind of smart that fills in the next textbook, not teaches the current one.”

“I got sick of the competition and working with Pym made me miserable,” He explained with a shrug. “The best thing I ever did was leave that job behind. I found this to fill the gap between projects and ended up staying.”

“Right, well I think we have something that will make you reconsider,” Tony responded, and we launched into our pitch.

We had this down to a science at this point, and as usual, I passed Bill the enhanced digital microscope I had made, telling him the same details I had told everyone else. He nodded as he scanned his fingers, eyes filled with wonder as he watched his own white blood cell destroy a foreign cell.

“This... is incredible... how?”

“That's the problem. I don't know. None of my stuff should work, they break physics as easily as you and I breathe,” I answered. “That's why we are starting this research center, so I can help the people who can make understandable and replicable miracles, instead of my own weird nonsense ones.”

For a long moment, I thought he was in until he suddenly frowned and shook his head, looking up at us and putting down the scanner. He looked torn, like he wanted to say yes but couldn't.

“As much as I would love to be back at the forefront of science, I have responsibilities now. I can't just get up and go leave them behind.”

“What kind of responsibilities?” I asked, pushing a bit harder. “Look, while I don't want to spread my creations too far, there isn't much I can't do at this point. Chances are if you have a problem I can solve it.”

“While I appreciate that your... ability might be flexible, I highly doubt it's without limit,” He responded. “Esoteric energies are difficult to deal with-”

“Esoteric... I thought you had an aunt you couldn't be moved or a loanshark you owed money to,” I said, cutting him off and shaking my head. “Now I'm thinking that this is definitely something we should be involved in.”

Bill now looked uncomfortable, he clearly hadn't intended to reveal what he had. He eyed the phone on his table and the door behind us.

“Bill. I want to help, and so does Tony. We can’t do that if you flip out and start making mistakes out of panic,” I pointed out. I could feel Tony tensing up, probably wishing he was wearing his armor, but it was currently safely stored inside the Deck. “Is there anything we can do to prove ourselves? Because it sounds like you are dealing with something that you could absolutely use some help with.”

“...Let me make a call.” He said, after a long pause. “To warn the person who I’ve been helping. If you truly just want to help then you won’t have a problem with me giving them a heads up.”

I gave Tony a look and he shrugged. I could tell Bill was telling the truth, but there was no way of knowing how the person on the other side of the line would react.

“Only if you can swear that if the person panics and runs that they won’t be a danger to themselves or others.”

Bill hesitated for a moment, and Tony shook his head.

“Yeah, that’s reassuring. Listen, Bill, we are asking to be courteous, I could have every location you’ve been to in the past five years in about two minutes,” Tony pointed out, making me roll my eyes at his aggressiveness. “So spill. What’s going on, what did you get yourself into.”

For a long moment, I thought he was going to do something stupid, but after a long pause he slumped, leaning heavily on the desk.

“An old coworker... after being fired by Hank, tried to continue his research on his own,” He explained, shaking his head. “Something went wrong, catastrophically wrong. I was still working with Shield at the time, and got sent down to investigate a quantum anomaly. His daughter, Ava, was the only survivor of the event.”

“I’m assuming she was who you wanted to call?” I asked, Bill nodding in confirmation.

“She was affected heavily by the energy released by the accident. She... is out of sync with this reality on a quantum level, constantly sliding back and forth between, sliding in and out of phase. She is in near-constant pain and struggles to touch anything without a special suit. I’m in the process of rebuilding a chamber that Shield designed to help her stabilize but it’s slow going and... in the end, it will only help for so long.”

“Why isn’t Shield helping now?” I asked.

“Because she... she is on the run,” He said, dropping to a whisper for the last part. “She ran when Shield was cleaning house from...”

“Hydra, yeah, we know,” I finished for him. “Why did she run?”

“Because Shield turned her into a child soldier,” He answered, heat rising in his voice. “I tried to protect her but they just saw an asset that could pass through solid objects. They promised her a cure and then trained her to be their assassin. She was only a kid!”

I stayed silent, but I’m sure Tony was thinking the same thing I was. While Shield had plenty of questionable practices, this sounded more like a Hydra plan masquerading as a Shield project.

“Then let’s see if we can help her,” I said. “I have something that might work, but even if it doesn’t, I can most likely put something together from whatever you have on hand from building the containment vessel.”

“I... You really think you can fix her, just like that?” He asked incredulously. “After years of me doing research and finding nothing but a temporary solution, just like that?”

“My ability is...potent. It has its limitations but they don’t come up very often, at least not anymore,” I said, standing up from my chair. “Now come on. I think it’s time you called in sick and we visit this poor girl.”

Not long after that Tony and I were packed into Bill’s small car, with Tony getting the front seat and myself sitting in the back with a rather large pile of paperwork and ungraded tests. Bill was full of nervous energy, but I could tell he was trying hard to keep from being too hopeful.

“So why did you think she could be dangerous to herself and others?” I asked as we turned off the paved road.

“Ava... She was clearly affected by the accident,” He explained. “And by the forced training Shield put her through. It’s not immediately obvious, but she can behave childlike sometimes. She... she hasn’t fully regressed by any measure but she does backslide sometimes. And because of the Shield training, when she gets scared...”

“She gets dangerous, right,” I said, rubbing my face. “Does she have any other abilities?”

“Just the ability to phase in and out of our quantum state,” Bill answered before quickly adding. “But please, don’t hurt her, she is just a victim in all this.”

“We won’t, don’t worry,” I assured him. “Tony I know you want your suit but...”

“She will just bolt if I come in armored up,” he finished for me, nodding in agreement. “Give me an amulet and I’ll be good.”

“Good idea,” I agreed with a nod.

As we talked Bill started to slow down, before pulling into the parking lot of a rather nice, if a little abandoned-looking, house. We exited the car and I pushed out my cabinet of tricks, handing Tony a healing amulet. It wouldn't de-age him too much as long as he only wore it for a few minutes, and if he wore it for longer I would just offer it to Pepper as well.

Bill lead us led us to the front door of the house, Tony putting on the amulet as we walked. Silently, Bill unlocked the large doors with a key, gesturing us to come inside as they opened and he stepped in.

“Ava? Are you here? I have a few friends here, I think they-”

Before he could finish we all froze, as suddenly, seemingly from nowhere, a combat knife was pressed cleanly against my neck, just barely indenting my skin from the pressure.