

Bill's eyes went wide when he spotted who I could only assume was Ava with a knife held to my neck. Tony's eyes widened as well, but he immediately calmed down, probably because the likely hood that cutting my throat would actually kill me was as close to zero as it could possibly get.

"Ava, I assume?" I asked nonchalantly. "Do you greet all your guests like this or just the ones who want to help you?"

"Ava, they think they can help," Bill said, stepping closer, though very obviously staying out of grabbing range of both Tony and me. "They-"

"Really, Bill? What did they say to convince you? I thought you were smarter than that," She said from behind me, getting closer to my ear. "I don't know how you tracked me down but-"

"Look, I have no fucking idea who you are, and I don't particularly care," I said, cutting her off. "I came looking for Bill because Tony and I wanted to offer him a job."

She scoffed and pressed the knife a little tighter to my neck. If my skin was normal it would have probably started to cut me, though not very deeply. She seemed too busy being paranoid to notice I wasn't bleeding.

"You expect me to believe that you just stumbled onto me? Please, don't be ridiculous. Now, tell me how you tracked me down!"

"Alright, I think that's enough," I said, reaching up to touch her hand, my arm encased in my armor.

When I grabbed her arm she attempted to cut my throat as she pulled away, the knife dragging against my enhanced skin. I could see Bill's eyes going even wider somehow as I reached out to snag her wrist before she could get too far. Unfortunately, her arm passed right through mine, splitting into half a dozen faded versions of herself as she stepped back, the different versions of her coalescing back into one form. As I turned to face her I got my first look at her, her posture making her look confused, clearly having expected me to be bleeding profusely at this point.

She was dressed in a white, full-body tactical suit, with armored plates and a multi-eyed mask, the sensors glowing red as she tilted her head in confusion before splintering into a dozen forms, all of them shouting at me as she charged. As all of her forms ran at me from slightly different angles, my armor formed up around me, finishing around my dominant hand just in time to catch the knife and yank it away from her. I carded the knife even as my other hand reached out and tried to grab her again, my fingers already sparking with electricity to stun her.

Instead, she spun away, only one of her immaterial forms actually where I was grabbing. I kept my eyes locked on her main grouping, however, and easily pivoted, adding a quick hop to stay in front of her. I wanted her attention on me. As long as she was attacking me she wasn't attacking Tony or running away. Even as I moved much faster than a normal human could, she managed to lash out with a kick that caught me square in the stomach.

Somehow, for some reason, her quantum-based issues had given her some sort of enhanced strength, because as all of her forms came together for her attack I was lifted off of my feet and sent back into the main room. She vanished from view for a full five seconds, even as I managed to land on my feet, now in some sort of sitting area. To one side was the beginnings of some sort of containment cell, with all sorts of equipment placed around the room.

I needed to wait for the perfect opening, as I knew that she was becoming solid each time she wanted to hit me. She would be physical enough to hit, so I could take her down as long as I was ready. I still needed to be careful though, because from what Bill had told us, some of her erratic behavior wasn't entirely her fault. I-

She appeared again directly in front of me, popping into existence suddenly as if she had always been there. She attempt to punch me across the jaw, but this time I knew better than to just take it. She wasn't nearly as strong as Thor, but she had already shown creative use of her ability, I wasn't going to take any chances.

I caught her punch easily and immediately activated my taze fingers, sending a blast of electricity down her arm. She shouted and phased out and away, appearing again in a moment about six feet away, her arm hanging uselessly, obviously in distress.

Not wanting to give her a chance to recover I spread my wings and leaped forward, using a single flap to enhance my jump speed. I crossed the distance almost instantly I grabbed her face and tore off her mask, which I crumpled and dropped to the ground.

She split apart and disappear again, reappearing behind me, scowling heavily as she flexed her arm.

"Do you have any idea what you just doomed me to?! This suit is the only thing keeping me alive! I-"

I turned and pushed one of the Hulk-rated calming lasers into my hand, pointing it at her face. Instantly she was asleep, hitting the ground in a crumpled pile.

"Huh...note to self, equip research security with knock-out lasers," I said to myself. "Should have seen that coming."

Bill rushed over to check up on her, checking her pulse and moving her into a more comfortable position. When he was certain that she was alright he stood, shaking his head.

"... I didn't think she would react that poorly, but you have to understand, she is in near constant pain," He explained. "Please, try and understand..."

"It's fine, I mean I'm not just gonna let her go after we are done, we need to verify that she isn't a threat to anyone, but I get it."

Together we moved her from the floor to a nearby couch, laying her down gently before I summoned the all-purpose scanner built into my armor. A quick scan showed that much of her mental instabilities were caused by the quantum energies she had been exposed to creating instabilities in her neural chemistry, but there was also quite a bit of trauma from her Shield or Hydra training.

Once I scanned her Tony handed me his amulet, which I fixed around her neck. I scanned her again after waiting a few minutes. The good news was that the damage the quantum energy had caused was healed, the bad news was that she was still quantum instability was still there, meaning the damage would reoccur eventually. She would still be in near constant pain, slowly dying as the instability slowly tore her from our phase of reality permanently, scattering her across multiple quantum phases. The amulet was fixing the damage, but couldn't touch the source.

"So what now?" Tony asked, reading the scanner over my shoulder.

"Now we try mixing in some of the stuff he was using to help her to build her a containment room," I said, gesturing to the framework that was half built a few dozen feet away. "If that doesn't work... I have another option, I'm pretty sure they will be able to help."

If there was anyone who could solve this, I was pretty sure the Ancient One could. They specialized in dimensional energies after all, and I could only assume that this quantum dimension would fall under that purview. It was just a guess though, which is why I wasn't bringing her to them now.

Tony and I spent a half hour going over the parts that Ava and Bill had gathered, or rather stolen, to put together her containment chamber. We picked a handful of them, copied them a few times with a UCM, and combined them together with a few magic rods, a few divine essences, and a dozen healing amulets. The result was a necklace that, once put around Ava's neck, completely fixed her problem, permanently stabilizing her quantum state. She was now a baseline human, but she wasn't slowly being torn apart by exotic energies either. I doubt I would ever have a use for it again, but I stored the new amulet in my cabinet of tricks anyway, after running Ava through a few scans to make sure the problem didn't return.

When the fourth scan over an hour showed no change, Bill wanted to wake her up, but I stopped him.

"I understand that there are some pretty intense extenuating circumstances," I said, digging through my cabinet. "But I'm not willing to just let her go free. I'm not going to lock her up or anything like that, but I need assurances that she isn't going backslide and go on a rampage, or spontaneously regain her connection to the quantum energy source."

I pulled out a copy of the restraints that I had made for Loki since improved and better suited for human use. Tossing them to Tony, before using my pocket knife to cut the suit off of Ava's left arm. Once I had cut through I pulled off the sleeve, armor plates and all, before locking the restraints on. The bands and wires shrunk perfectly to her skin, locking themselves onto her.

"Alright, now you can wake her up."

"What is that?" He asked, looking at me with a furrowed brow before getting closer to Ava.

"They are restraints that can teleport her to me, put her to sleep, shock her like a taser, make her easier to handle, prevent her from lying, the whole shebang," I explained, looking at the control unit for the restraint, making sure everything was off save its automatic functions. "The first two of those will activate if she tries to seriously harm anyone in anything other than self-defense. It's also impossible to remove."

The next hour was filled with a lot of emotions, starting with anger and eventually shifting toward happiness. Ava was grateful that we had healed her but annoyed that I had locked the restraints on her. Eventually, after a long discussion, I laid out the bottom line.

"Look, I know it sucks, but your history, recent and past, is just too much for me to just wave as you leave. Since you haven't killed anyone since escaping Shield, you have two options. One, you can just disappear. I won't stop you, and I won't come after you. Move somewhere quiet or find someone willing to pay for your expertise, I don't really care. But the restraining bands are going to stay on you forever, in case you backslide," I explained, Ava scowling slightly in response. "Or you can stick around. You obviously have some sort of bond with Bill, so come with him, assuming he is still interested in the job..."

I turned to Bill who seemed more than a bit dazed by the last few hours. When he figured out what I was asking he nodded slowly.

"Yes, I would like that. Helping Ava was my primary drive for the past few years, but I would enjoy trying to... Well honestly, I would like to attempt and crack the Pym Particle."

Internally I sighed, but outwardly I nodded.

"That's a conversation for another day, but I'm glad to hear you interested in joining us." I said with a smile, before looking back at Ava. "If you stay with Bill, and more specifically around

us, we could find you something to do, maybe a role in security or maybe you could find a way to follow in your father's footsteps in quantum research. Either way, if you around me and others, I would eventually feel better about removing the bands.”

She seemed to internally debate it for a while, staring down Tony and me for a full thirty seconds before speaking.

“And you won’t sell me out to Shield?”

“No. Shield and I have our projects, and I am working hard to maintain a working relationship with them, but they have no jurisdiction over the research base.”

Both Bill and Ava gave me odd looks at the mention of jurisdiction, and I simply smiled.

“On that note, how would you like to see where our research base is located?”

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Over the next few days Tony and I made trips to a few more high-profile researchers, engineers, and inventors, recruiting quite a few of them. During that time Tony released the date for a press conference, in which both of us would announce the project. It would essentially be an open house for the media to interview and experience part of the research base. After that, we would begin the process of moving those who would be living on the moon, as well as getting the scientists started with their own projects.

Pepper assured me there would be a lot of meetings, a lot of handshaking and a whole lot of picture-taking. She also admitted she wasn't exactly sure how the government would immediately react, and that we should be ready for some interested parties looking to ask some serious questions.

Of course, this nearly sent me into a spiraling panic. It was hard to really count the number of times “the government” was pinned as the bad guy in the Marvel universes. Ignoring the catastrophe of the Civil War registration, the treatment of Marvel mutants in general was enough to make me paranoid. To keep myself from spinning into full-blown paranoid panic I used my tried and true coping mechanism, making sure I was prepared for everything.

After getting Tony’s permission I spent a day with the building modifier, which I pumped up with Uru, divine essence, and whatever tools Odin had sent me home with, improving Stark Tower to a frankly insane degree. When I was finally done, I was satisfied that it would be the safest place on the planet. I was pretty sure that if the Earth was destroyed, the tower and the people in it would be perfectly safe. Though at this point most of the buildings I built would be capable of that. The important part was that by the end of the week the tower would be safe, especially with all the specially designed security measures that were already being installed.

With our access point hardened to the point that I was no longer worried about it, I decided it was time to protect the moon. My shield dome for Earth was on hold until the WSC was done producing their contribution, but I had no such constraints on the moon. A day later and I had three dozen UCMs printing out finished, unrestricted versions of my shield satellites that would encompass the moon, all of them modified versions of what would protect Earth. Not only were these versions near indestructible, but they also contained stealth emitters to keep them invisible. The Earth satellites would have these emitters as well, but I was worried about adding that function before it they were complete.

This project was now both a proof of concept and an actual worthwhile endeavor to test its functionality. It would take just over three days for the system to fully saturate the space around the moon, but each satellite was automatically added to a control system in my special bunker, before it flew up off the surface of the moon and into space, locking itself in a precise position.

With those projects locked down and progressing well, I was finally able to have a few days off to myself. I spent it relaxing and preparing for the next day, my second date with Natasha. I had already picked a bowling alley, settling on a location that was on the west coast. It was a bowling alley that was big enough to have all the amenities without having to worry about any of the crowds and wasn't too far from a landing pad.

I also spent a few hours setting up the after-date special, letting that project finish itself as well. The next day I made my way down to her apartment, meeting her on the roof. I dropped my stealth field just as I was landing and Natasha was stepping out from the roof access and into the afternoon light.

With a smile, she walked across the roof and gave me a hug, which I returned happily. When she stepped back her outfit shifted into something casual but nice, a dark green jacket with a black blouse underneath, her pants shifting into jeans and running shoes.

“So...Bowling?” She asked with a raised eyebrow. “Am I going to be dealing with a ringer or?”

“Well... Ordinarily, I would say no, I don't play it enough to be any good. But with all my enhancements that might not matter,” I admitted with a frown. “I honestly hadn't thought that through...”

“It's fine, I think I can hold back my competitiveness for some friendly bowling,” She said with a smirk, before reaching out and taking my hand. “So, ready to go?”

I quickly flicked out a landing pad onto the roof, before nodding with a smile. With that I traveled us away, leaving the rooftop empty again.